

# **Exploring the fragments of spatial justice and its relevance for the global south**

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## **Abstract**

For the past two decades, the South African government, through various initiatives, attempted to undo the apartheid spatial landform existing in the country. Only in 2013 was the real ‘spatial justice turn in planning’ formally introduced in planning legislation. Little is known about the spatial justice concept and how it should be applied to planning and development activities. This article proposes positioning spatial justice within the wider justice and social justice discourse. Using a meta-synthesis, this article proposes a working definition of spatial justice in an attempt to unravel the properties and nuances within it. The meta-synthesis frames the concept of spatial justice to possess equity, diversity, democracy, just distribution, benefit of the disadvantaged, and access to necessary resources to meet basic needs. This working definition could be used to develop a framework to operationalise spatial justice, helping policy makers and practitioners undo spatial injustices that exist in our geographies.

**Keywords:** spatial justice, diversity, equity, democracy, just distribution, socially valued resources.

## **1. Introduction**

During the past two decades, following the transformation in South Africa, many efforts have been made by the South African government to transform the distorted spatial landscape that resulted from past apartheid planning, policies and legislation. The various policies and legislations that were developed post-1994 did not fully achieve the transformation and development results that were promised by the government in 1994 (Coetzee, 2005; Coetzee, 2010). In 2013, a new era of spatial planning and land use management came about with the signing into law of the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, 2013 (hereafter referred to as SPLUMA, 2013). This Act emphasises a number of development principles, which are: sustainability, spatial resilience, efficiency, good administration – and a practically new principle focusing on spatial justice. The aim of these principles is to guide and inform planning at all levels. The National Development Plan 2030 also emphasises spatial justice as one of its overarching principles for spatial development and states that “all spatial development should conform to the following normative principles and should explicitly indicate how they will meet the requirements of these principles” (Republic of South Africa, 2012:277). While the inclusion of spatial justice as a new principle is appreciated and supported by many people, it has raised questions as to what exactly spatial justice means, what this is intended to achieve, what the requirements would be to achieve it, what is meant by a spatially just city, and lastly what is necessary to ultimately develop such a city. These questions bring the dialectic back on the agenda as the questions need to be answered in order to correctly apply spatial justice in our cities.

Attempts to conceptualise spatial justice date as far back as 1983 when Pirie used concepts from territorial and social justice, but this conceptualisation did not really provide clarity on spatial justice. Soja (2010) took the concept of spatial justice further, but still did not provide a concrete definition of what spatial justice is, instead presenting some empirical examples of spatial justice in action. Although some discourses attempted to hint in the direction of spatial justice practices, and more so on practices relating to (in) justice, no real definition for this construct could be found in the literature. Apart from some vague and broad references to spatial justice in some policy documents and acts in South Africa, no real policy or position statement dealing with this construct could be traced in South Africa. This sentiment is also echoed by Budlender and Royston (2016:7) in a report published by the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI), which states that “the concept of spatial justice has the potential to be politically powerful in South Africa, where both a justiciable state obligation and activist commitment to the concept may be used to transform apartheid-era spatial forms”. Budlender

and Royston (2016:7) further argue that “...practical definitions of the concept remain elusive, which simultaneously renders the state unaccountable to this principle and hinders attempts to use the concept to concretely set policy agendas”.

In view of the lack of understanding and lack of a proper definition or position statement on this seemingly very important construct (as discussed above), this paper attempts:

To seek or move towards a definition of spatial justice through a meta-synthesis of spatial justice related studies and discourses.

In line with the above, the study proposes a working definition of spatial justice, specifically in the field of urban and regional planning, in certain areas highlighted in the study as key to achieving spatial justice in a city. The framework for operationalising the definition would be the topic of another paper. The following sections of this paper provide an overview of the methodology applied and the selected theories and discourses that contain themes, constructs or ideas relating to spatial justice, social justice, and the broad and varied meanings of justice in general. The main purpose of meta-synthesis in this study is to find common threads and related and supporting meanings of these constructs in an attempt to clarify and define ‘spatial justice’, or a possible new construct.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 *Meta-synthesis***

Meta-synthesis is a qualitative kind of analysis that attempts to consolidate and synthesise results from various but similar studies (Zimmer, 2006). This method of inquiry has an interpretive intent rather than aggregative. Stern and Harris (1985) first developed the term qualitative meta-synthesis with reference to the consolidation of a group of qualitative studies. The goal of their study was to develop a descriptive model or theory that could interpret the findings of a body of similar qualitative studies (Walsh & Downe, 2005).

In general terms, meta-synthesis is seen as a type of qualitative study that utilises data from findings of other qualitative studies that have topical similarity. Theorising is made possible through this process by consensus identification, development of hypothesis, and investigation of difference in patterns of experience across studies, usually at a higher level. This assists in contributing qualitative findings to the production of a better knowledge that would be more useful to the discipline (Zimmer 2006). Noblit and Hare’s (1988) seminal publication on ‘a synthesis of linked ethnographies’ describes the method as meta-ethnography, and their work has become a guide for researchers attempting to carry out

synthesis. This meta-ethnographic approach would be used in carrying out a meta-synthesis for this study.

### *2.1.1 Objectives of qualitative meta-synthesis*

The objectives of qualitative meta-synthesis are theory development and generalisability in a bid to make qualitative findings more available for application in practice and higher-level abstraction (Estabrooks *et al.*, 1994, Jensen & Allen 1994 Sandelowski *et al.*, 1997). Schreiber *et al.* (1997:315) have identified three theory-associated intentions for meta-synthesis. “The first is theory building – findings from various sources can be used to advance the level of theory above the level possible if data from one sample were to be used. The second intention of meta-synthesis is theory explication – filling out an abstract concept in a study through the synthesis of findings gotten from other studies through a lateral and deductive analytic process. The third intention is theory development – the synthesis of findings into an output that is heavily descriptive and comprehensive, and as a result more complete than any of the principal studies alone”. Schreiber *et al.* (1997:35) also state that any of the three purposes could be complementary or overlapping. Likewise, Paterson *et al.* (2001) highlight that the main aim of qualitative meta-synthesis is mid-range theory and/or theoretical framework development. Paterson *et al.* (2001) also state that results produced by this method can form the basis and justification for health and social policy.

### *2.1.2 Approaches to meta-synthesis*

Sandelowski *et al.* (1997:367) proposed three approaches to meta-synthesis. The first involves the combinations of findings by one researcher’s different studies in a similar field. This approach is argued to be the most transparent because it recognises the central belief of constructed knowledge. However, its main setback is that it does not allow for the investigation of various points of view. The next approach is the synthesis of studies by different investigators in a related field. This approach is the most frequently used approach and the approach used in this study. The third approach, the quantitative summary of key elements across qualitative studies, is more methodological rather than heuristic and can be applied in any meta-synthesis process, albeit it would be a superficial analysis.

### *2.1.3 Constructing a meta-synthesis study*

Synthesis is typically a process of bringing together studies that are very much alike in terms of contents and findings. Researchers who want to learn more about a specific issue or topic generally collect various studies concerning the topic. Upon collecting these studies, the next phase is how these studies will be put together. The synthesis of studies should not be independent of the meaning of the studies. As the topic is being analysed, the areas of

likeness, overlap and connection are determined. Studies can be related in four ways. Firstly, studies could be about dissimilar things; secondly, they can be about roughly similar things; thirdly, they could be studies that are in opposition to each other or refute each other; and lastly, they could be studies that build a line of argument (Noblit and Hare, 1988). There should be little reason to synthesise studies that are different.

*Reciprocal translation.* Reciprocal translations take place when studies are about relatively similar things and are translated into each other. The focus in this type of translation is on metaphors, themes, organisers and concepts that the author uses to explain what is going on; these are the things that would be used in translation across studies. The process of translation requires cautious reading and focus on the concepts used in the studies in order to fully express the interpretation in a reduced form (Noblit and Hare, 1988).

*Refutational translation.* According to Kuhn (1970), science is not a simple aggregation of knowledge. Instead, it involves disagreements over paradigm revolutions. While social science might not thread the same path as the physical and natural science, it is obvious that most research carried out is not just aimed at promoting a perspective; it is also aimed at refuting other perspectives. In refutational translation, the studies must show the relationship between the concepts, and the implied refutation is then analysed and incorporated into the synthesis (Noblit and Hare, 1988).

*Line of argument.* This approach to synthesis deals with inference; it argues about what can be said about the whole based on selective parts of the studies. It is similar to basic theorising in qualitative research and is usually referred to as ground theorising or clinical inference (Noblit and Hare, 1988).

#### 2.1.4 *The 'meta-ethnographic' approach to meta-synthesis*

Noblit and Hare's (1988) seminal publication on 'a synthesis of linked ethnographies' describes the method as meta-ethnography, which has become more or less a guide for researchers and scholars attempting to carry out a meta-synthesis.

In the process of meta-synthesis, one has to decide how studies are related or different by comparing and contrasting them. It entails identification and tabulation of the original author's knowledge of ideas, concepts, key phrases and metaphors in each of the studies. Walsh and Downe (2005) argue that while this process might seem uncomplicated, it is at this stage that various questions are asked, such as the sufficiency of the accounts given in papers. The process of analysis must ensure that meaning from the original text being analysed is preserved as the authors interpret it. An attempt to force fit studies should be avoided as studies could be complementary, reciprocal or conflicting to each other.

In carrying out a meta-synthesis, it is important that some steps be carried out, such as determining topical similarity as well as setting inclusion criteria. It is advised that the hermeneutic intent be maintained so that the richness and complexities of meanings are revealed. Connections between the different studies may then open up new perspectives and knowledge, which would make the whole greater than the sum of its part. This process starts by reading various studies and is finalised by creating a grid in which key concepts are inputted. The findings from these are then juxtaposed to pinpoint the similarity of codes, themes, categories, as well as conflicts and disparities. Noblit and Hare (1988: 2-4) propose seven steps in completing a meta-synthesis using what they call the meta-ethnographic approach. They are:

*Step 1: Getting started.* The first step in conducting a meta-synthesis involves identifying an area of interest that could be informed by qualitative research (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Yin (1984:13) highlights that qualitative approaches “are the favoured strategy when questions of how and why are being asked, when an investigator has minimal control over activities and when the attention is on contemporary phenomenon with some real life concept”. This stage involves the researcher asking questions on how intellectual interest can be informed by examining a set of studies. For interpretivist, deciding what is relevant to a synthesis study needs to be justifiable. If the intent is to synthesise the ethnographies of a group of people, there should be a reason to justify the intent of the synthesis – what could be learnt from this synthesis? Noblit and Hare (1988) argue that the answer to this could mean a gross generalisation, which is against the interpretive meta-ethnographic approach.

*Step 2: Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest.* Choosing the relevant studies depends on what the research is about, the purpose of the research, the audience and interest of the audience reading the research, as well as your personal interests in the effort. Carrying out an exhaustive search for relevant accounts of a study could be accepted when the interest is not in the synthesis of that study. Noblit and Hare (1988:3) explain that it becomes difficult for an investigator to know when he/she is being exhaustive because not all studies are published or available publicly. Noblit and Hare (1988:3) state that “meta-ethnography is driven by some substantive interest derived from comparison of any given set of studies. Studies of particular settings should always be regarded as particular. Unless there is some substantive reason for an exhaustive search, generalising from all studies of a particular setting yields trite conclusions”.

*Step 3: Reading the studies.* According to Noblit and Hare (1988:3), this phase should be seen as repeatedly reading the accounts and identifying the similarities and interpretive

metaphors. Careful attention needs to be the paid in this stage as it brings out the main concerns of the study.

*Step 4: Determining how the studies are related.* In carrying out a synthesis, the different studies read need to be put together. This is done by recognising the relationships between the studies to be put together. Noblit and Hare (1988:3) suggest creating a list of key phrases, metaphors, ideas and concepts used in each study and to juxtapose them. Towards the end of this phase, an initial assumption about the relationship of the study can be made.

*Step 5: Translating the studies into one another.* Translation can be simply described as treating the accounts as analogies. However, in meta-ethnography, it could be seen as more involved than analogy. Noblit and Hare (1988:4) see translation as “unique syntheses because they protect the particular, respect holism, and enable comparison”.

*Step 6: Synthesising translations.* Synthesis can be described as creating a whole that is more than its parts (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Translations could be one level of meta-ethnographic synthesis, but when it involves a large number of studies that leads to a plethora of translations, then, the translations could be checked against one another to ascertain if some concepts, ideas or metaphors are able to include that of the other accounts. In this kind of situation, a second level of synthesis is attainable which involves analysing different interpretations and translating them into each other. (Noblit and Hare, 1988:4)

*Step 7: Expressing the synthesis.* Synthesis is usually biased to writing and would mostly be interpreted in writing. However, if the audience is not academic and the synthesis may be of interest to other practitioners, other forms may be proposed by this audience.

#### *2.1.5 Research strategy*

The information above presents the approach and steps in carrying out a meta-synthesis utilised in this study. The study focuses on four main theories and discourses related to or associated with spatial justice. The process of meta-synthesis involves selecting what is relevant to the initial interest and reading it. Noblit and Hare (1988) argue that carrying out an exhaustive search for relevant accounts of a study could be accepted when the interest is not in the synthesis of that study. They further state that the process of meta-synthesis is driven by some substantive interest derived from comparison of any given set of studies.

While there are various studies associated with justice, the studies below have been identified as studies in which spatial justice could be positioned. The studies include theory of justice (Rawls, 1971), right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968, 1991, 1996; Benhabib, 2004; Marcus, 2009; Harvey, 2003, 2009), social justice and the city (Harvey, 1973), and the just city theory (Fainstein, 2010). The just city theory draws on the works of different scholars, including

Rawls (1971), Young (1990), Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2006), which makes its relevance in the meta-synthesis as important as the other studies. These selected theories and discourse on justice possess aspects that can produce just spaces.

The similarities between these readings were tabulated and translated, and this synthesis began to frame a working definition of spatial justice. From a meta-synthesis, it was realised that all the studies were related in that they all advocated for cities that provided public resources especially for the disadvantaged of the society and viewed the present urban system as favouring the wealthy at the expense of the less privileged. In short, all synthesised studies could be summarised to promote equity, democracy, diversity and just or fair distribution. A summary of the similarities between the various studies is presented in Table 1 in section 4.2 of this article.

*Table 1: Ideas, themes and key phrases*

Theories and discourses	Rawls' theory of justice	Social justice	Right to the city	Just city
(1) Criteria			Diversity	Diversity
	Difference		Equity	Equity
	Liberty		Democracy	Democracy
	Fair distribution	Just distribution (based on need or merit)		
	Advantage of the poor	Benefit of the least advantaged	For the needy, the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless, and the racially, gender and religiously persecuted	Outcomes that would not have a negative effect on the already disadvantaged
(2) Areas of application	Access to primary goods	Access to social and environmental services, consumer goods, recreational opportunities, transport facilities, neighbourhood amenities, medical care, food, education, and housing	Provision of necessary resources to meet the basic needs	Access to health, housing, safety, individual freedom, sustainable living, and transportation

### 3 Overview of theories and discourses

This section presents an overview of discourses and theories related to or associated with spatial justice. As stated by Williams (2013:12), “interpreting available literatures on justice



through a spatial lens can both reveal new ways to understand theories of justice and help to develop a theory of justice”.

### **3.1 Rawls’ theory of justice**

Rawls (1971) developed two principles of justice. The first principle relates to equal liberty, stating that every person should have equal rights to the most expansive basic freedom, which are harmonious with a similar freedom for others (Rawls, 1971:60). In other words, members of a society are entitled to an equal assurance of various liberties as much as can be guaranteed to them. The liberties that were discussed by Rawls were political liberty, which is the right to vote and contest for a public position, freedom of speech and gathering, freedom to follow one’s religious or ethical beliefs, freedom to possess private property, and freedom from being arrested randomly. Rawls’ theory does not support total liberty that would involve members of society to completely own anything. The second principle of justice, the difference principle, states that social and economic inequalities are to be organised in a way that would be advantageous to everyone and should be attached to positions and offices available to all (Rawls, 1971:60). If this were to take place, Rawls argues that “...each generation should preserve the gains of culture and civilization, and maintain intact those just institutions that have been established, in addition to putting aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation” (1971:285). From Rawls’ perspective, inequality in a society would only be accepted if it favours the disadvantaged people in the society and if the inequalities are linked to posts, offices or employment opportunity that every member of the society would have an equal opportunity to attain. Rawls (1971) also discusses primary goods, describing them as “what persons need in their status as free and equal citizens, and as normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life”.

A just space, according to Rawls’ principles, would be “one in which the basic requirements for a just distribution, equality of basic liberties, and the distribution of all other social inequalities according to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged are met” (Rawls 1971, 42-43). This is described by Williams (2013:9) in two ways: Firstly, space can be the context of justice relations – it can be used to measure the distribution of social goods. For instance, are schools distributed in a way that meets the minimum requirements of the difference principle? In other words, are the schools distributed in such a way that different communities would have access to them? If so, we can assume that the criteria of distributive justice have been achieved. Secondly, space can be viewed as a content of justice relations; it

could be identified as a material. For instance, specific kinds of physical goods can be distributable (parks, access to water, electricity).

### **3.2 *Social justice***

The notion of social justice is usually considered to be a principle or set of principles used in the resolution of different conflict claims. Social justice is a specific use of just principles to address the need for social collaboration in the search of personal improvement (Harvey, 1973). Harvey (1973) uses the division of labour to explain the application of social justice and explains that division of labour assists in increasing production. This implies that the benefits of the production would be shared amongst those who participate in the process. He further argues that the principle of social justice could be seen as the distribution of benefits and the allotment of burdens as a result of joint labour (1973:98). The institution and social arrangements related to the distribution and production of activities are also essential to the principle of social justice. In short, the principle of social justice relates to the fair and just distribution of services and opportunities (Harvey 1973:98).

#### *3.2.1 Territorial distributive justice (the significance of need, contribution to common good, and merit)*

In achieving the principle of territorial distributive justice, the significance of need, contribution to common good, and merit in relation to territories and regions need to be determined (Harvey 1973:101). The concept of need is relative and changes as the society goes through transformation. Harvey (1973:102) places needs in nine different categories that remain rather constant over time, and they are: social and environmental service, consumer goods, recreational opportunities, transport facilities, neighbourhood amenities, medical care, food, education, and housing. Minimum qualities and quantities, which will vary according to the social norms at a given time, could be set against these categories, which could be equated with needs. There are various different ways in which needs can be fulfilled, e.g. through the provision of medical clinics in an impoverished area which is in need of medical services. As stated above, the problem often relates to the quantity and quality as well as the frequency and consistency of the offering. In achieving a normative measure of social justice, it is necessary to describe and estimate the need in a way that is socially just. Harvey (1973:201-103) suggests four ways of determining needs in a socially just way, namely through market demand, latent demand, potential demand, and consultation with experts in the field. Although there are merits in these methods, they also contain some elements of injustice. In reaching a definition of social justice in terms of need, the question of what is understood by need and how it should be measured remains a problem and a major challenge.

According to Harvey (1973:116), territorial social justice can therefore be defined as follows: “The distribution of income should be such that (a) the needs of the population within each territory are met, (b) resources are so allocated to maximize interterritorial multiplier effects, and (c) extra resources are allocated to help overcome special difficulties stemming from the physical and social environment. The mechanisms (institutional, organisation, political and economic) should be such that the prospects of the least advantaged territory are as great as they possibly can be. If these conditions are fulfilled there will be a just distribution justly arrived at”.

### **3.3 Right to the city**

The right to the city is a slogan conceived by Henri Lefebvre in his book *‘Le droit à la ville’*, written in 1967 and published in 1968. Lefebvre sees the urban as more or less the *‘oeuvre’* of its citizens, a work of art constantly being made (Lefebvre, 1996:117). For him, the right to the city “is like a cry and a demand, this right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities” (Lefebvre, 1968:158). He further goes on to state that the right to the city cannot be conceived of as “a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life”. In other writings, he describes it as the right to use multiple services, the right to use the centre, the right to information, and the right of users to make known their ideas on space and time of their activities in urban areas (Lefebvre, 1991:34). For Harvey, the right to the city does not simply mean the right to what is already in the city, but also the right to transform it radically (Harvey, 2009). He further argues that cities have been more controlled by capital than by people, and therefore the right to the city would be a struggle against capital. Holston and Appadurai (1996:97) view rights as a claim rather than a possession. They argue that a ‘right’ is something of a claim by the society for the provision of necessary resources to meet the basic needs and interests of the society instead of a kind of property that some have and others do not. Whose right is it we are concerned about in the struggle for the right to the city? Which rights are we talking about and in which city? Marcus (2009:190) explains that this right is a cry and a demand – a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more. The demand is from those who are literally in want, the oppressed, those whose urgent needs are not met: the hungry, the homeless, and the racially, gender and religiously persecuted. It is a demand involuntarily made by the underpaid, by those whose daily jobs affect their health negatively. The cry is from the aspiration of those embedded in the system in a

superficial manner but limited in terms of opportunities. The homeless person has not been afforded the right to the city when allowed to sleep in the parks or in open spaces.

According to De Beer (2016:11) “the ‘right to city-making’ means an invitation to participate in city-making processes, including envisioning, planning, policymaking, budgeting process and actual project implementation on the ground. It also means asserting that right even if not invited, as citizens and inhabitants of the city”.

The right to the city involves much more; the concept is more of a collective of rights and not individual rights. In the right to the city, the demand is not for the present city, but rather the right to a future city. Harvey (2003) sets out principles which such a city would possess, and they include justice, equity, democracy, sustainability and diversity.

### **3.4      *The just city theory***

In *The Just City*, Fainstein aims to develop an urban theory of justice to evaluate existing and potential institutions and programmes (Fainstein, 2010:5). She argues that the concept of justice is a normative principle of urban policy which encompasses equity, democracy and diversity, and further argues that these three should influence any public decision. The main goal of the just city is to guide urban policy in order to produce outcomes that would not have a negative effect on the already disadvantaged, especially in times of financial crises, which tend to affect mostly the disadvantaged. Starting from the early 1960s, decision makers have been largely criticised by scholars in urban politics for implementing policies that intensify the suffering endured by the disadvantaged. It has been argued that urban development policies mostly favour, e.g., the more glamorous tourist projects and investments in wealthy parts of the city, and not the projects, which support the poor, jobless people and impoverished areas (Jacobs, 1961; Fainstein, 1986, 2010). Indirectly, it can be argued that a just city should be one in which public investments by the government produce equitable outcomes to all, rather than benefiting only the wealthy. Although there are numerous readings and vast literature on planning and public policy, which promote just and fair decision-making processes, it does not provide sufficient clarity on how policies could actually produce greater justice within the urban context (Lynch, 1981; Markusen and Fainstein 1993; Fainstein 2010). The intent of most policy analysis is done based on what works in practice, in relation to producing certain things such as jobs and housing without investigating the wider objectives of these policies (Fainstein, 2010). Taylor (1991:19) states that “social science explanation ... has generally shied away from invoking moral ideals and has tended to have recourse to supposedly harder and more down factors”. Fainstein (2010) goes on to add that, unlike the social scientist, philosophers have long made the issue of

justice a concern. Fainstein proposes three primary qualities of justice as the criteria to evaluate cities, and they are equity, democracy and diversity. These criteria have been used to analyse Amsterdam, London and New York in the areas of housing, employment, public transportation, education, and public health.

### **3.5 *Concept of spatial justice***

Williams (2013:4) describes spatial justice as “first and foremost an analytical framework that foregrounds the role of space, a set of material and ideological relations that act on, yet are formed by, social relations – in producing justice and injustice”. Spatial justice could simply mean a deliberate and directed attention on the spatial or geographical aspect of justice and injustice (Soja, 2008). According to Soja (2008:3), “spatial justice can be described as the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to utilise them”.

Therefore, it is important to note that spatial justice cannot be used in place of other forms of justice, but rather as a way of viewing justice from a crucial spatial perspective (Soja, 2008). With this, it can be said that there is usually an important spatial dimension to justice, while characteristics of justice and injustice are built into all geographies. The notion of spatial justice can be viewed as either an outcome or a process. As an outcome, it can be viewed as geographies that are just or unjust or even as the processes that bring about the unjust geographies. While descriptively it is easier to identify examples of spatial injustice, it is more difficult to pinpoint and determine the fundamental processes that produce these unjust geographies (Soja, 2008). Discrimination by virtue of location is an important factor in the creation of spatial injustice. While the forces attributed to creating spatial and locational discrimination are race, gender and class, the impacts cannot be limited only to segregation (Soja, 2008). Another powerful source of injustice is the political organisation of space, which includes manipulation of electoral districts, investing in particular urban areas, impacts of restricted zoning to regional apartheid, and the development of other spatial structures (Soja, 2010). The day-to-day function and the activities of the urban system is a major cause of injustice given that the redistribution of income in the capitalist economy favours the wealthy over the poor. Gender bias, racism and various forms of locational and spatial discrimination further intensify this injustice caused by the redistribution. It is important to note that these injustices can still function without severe forms of spatial segregation. There is no perfect geography, and most geographies have traits of uneven development, socio-spatial inequality and distributional injustice, thus making intervention difficult. Dikec (2009:80) views the notion of spatial justice as “a critique of systematic exclusion,

domination, and oppression; a critique aimed at cultivating new sensibilities that would animate actions towards injustice embedded in space and spatial dynamics”.

The next section of this paper explores the concept of spatial justice further by attempting a meta-synthesis of the theories and discourses discussed above.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Having discussed various concepts relating to spatial justice, this section investigates the subtle similarities that exist between them in an attempt to carry out a meta-synthesis so as to reach a working definition of spatial justice. It also presents the cross-cutting issues, key phrases, themes or ideas which are present in the various studies/theories/discourses. Bringing out the similarities and synthesising them should not be viewed as a summary exercise, but rather as the revealing of similarities in different studies in order to bring forth one concept that encompasses all and could guide spatial planning and development. Noblit and Hare (1988) recommend creating a list of key phrases, metaphors, ideas and concepts used in each study and juxtaposing them. Towards the end of this phase, an initial assumption about the relationship of the study can be made. Table 1 below represents the ideas, themes and concepts of each study.

### **4.2 Bringing it together: Ideas, themes and key phrases**

The process of the meta-synthesis so far has involved identifying an area of interest that could be informed by qualitative research, deciding what is relevant to the initial interest, and reading the studies. The following section involves determining how the studies are related, translating the studies into one another, synthesising the translations, and expressing the synthesis. Table 1 represents step 4 of the meta-synthesis process, which involves creating a list of key phrases, ideas and themes used in each study and juxtaposing them, while the subsequent section addresses the final steps of the meta-synthesis process – expressing the synthesis.

Rawls (1971) proposes two principles of justice, namely liberty and the difference principle. It could be argued that these principles contain elements of democracy and equity. From the different discourses, the common and reoccurring themes or key phrases from the above studies could be classified into (1) the criteria for achieving spatial justice, and (2) the areas in which they could be applied. The criteria include: diversity, equity, democracy, fair or just distribution, advantage to the poor, benefit to the least advantaged, the needy, the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless, and the racially, gender and religiously persecuted, as well as

equitable outcomes to all rather than benefiting only the wealthy. The common ideas or key phrases of themes according to the areas of application include: access to primary goods, access to social and environmental services, consumer goods, recreational opportunities, transport facilities, neighbourhood amenities, medical care, food, education, housing, provision of necessary resources to meet the basic needs, access to health, housing, safety, individual freedom, sustainable living, and transportation.

From the above, it is clear that the four studies related to justice have similar ideas even when a particular concept was not identified in a particular study. It could be argued that the relationship between the concepts are reciprocal and not refutational. The translation of the studies could be broken down further into diversity, equity, democracy, just distribution, benefit to the disadvantaged, access and provision of necessary resources to meet basic needs. While the necessary resources to meet the basic needs vary, for the purpose of this study, the necessary resources are identified as housing, education, public transport, health, employment and income.

#### ***4.3 Towards a working definition of spatial justice***

Various attempts have been made to define or develop a theory of spatial justice. Pirie's (1983) attempt involved the use of concepts from territorial and social justice. Williams (2013) suggested Rawls' theory of justice as a methodological approach in theorising spatial justice. This article attempts to create a working definition of spatial justice using a meta-synthesis of similar studies, which are: right to the city, theory of justice, social justice, and the just city theory. A meta-synthesis of the theories and discourses discussed above could frame a working definition of spatial justice which could be defined as a spatial distribution of socially valued resources such as education, employment, transport, health and housing in any society in such a way that everyone would have adequate access to them, with the disadvantaged of the society being the first beneficiaries rather than last. In an endeavour to achieve spatial justice, the aforementioned could be incorporated into spatial planning policies, plans, frameworks, and structure of cities by the promotion of diversity, democracy, equity and a just distribution based on merit and/or need.

#### ***4.4 Conclusion***

The quest for a definition of spatial justice came about as a result of the spatial justice turn in planning around the world and in South Africa. While it is easier to describe spatial justice, a definition for the concept was lacking. This became a problem in urban planning as planners trying to achieve spatial justice were unable to incorporate it into their policies and plans.

Moving towards a definition of spatial justice has proven to be more than just an academic exercise as it could provide policy directions for planning in government, and particularly in local municipalities. For instance, the South African National Development Plan 2030 proposes that spatial justice be applied in all development projects, and how the requirements of spatial justice will be achieved must be indicated. This article attempts to propose a definition of spatial justice by carrying out a meta-synthesis of similar studies. The result of the meta-synthesis shows that in order to achieve spatial justice, the requirements of the criteria of equity, diversity, democracy and just distribution must be met in the areas of housing, health, education, employment and transportation. This paper proposes a working definition of spatial justice which opens up further debate on the concept. A framework for operationalising this definition would be the focus of another study. The framework would ultimately give directions to policy makers and planners on how to apply spatial justice in the development of policies and plans for their cities.

By prioritising spatial justice, the needs of everyone in the society, especially that of the poor, would be met in terms of accessibility and opportunity to use socially valued resources. The concept of spatial justice encompasses much that, if implemented appropriately, would lead to a just society and ultimately move closer to undoing the apartheid geographies in South Africa and creating spatially just cities in the global south.

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