

3. No Region/Space Left Behind: Assessment of the SDGs from a Socio-spatial View

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INTRODUCTION

We all know that the global agenda has seen fundamental differences from the early discussions of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The deepening thinking on sustainability stresses the necessity of integrated, results-based planning and budgeting in order to achieve the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pays bold attention to different dimensions of sustainability including social sustainability (with 5 Goals, 47 objectives and 77 indicators), economic sustainability (with 5 Goals, 54 objectives and 72 indicators) and environmental sustainability (with 6 Goals, 56 objectives and 69 indicators).

As we know, “no one left behind” is one of the core principles of sustainable development. This raises some questions: What is the meaning of “no one”? Who is “no one”? It can apply to women, children, the elderly, people with special needs, women-headed households and all deprived and excluded persons. Is this enough to cover the “no one left behind” principle? Briefly, our answer is no, because many persons may have been left behind and excluded from development intervention processes because of the lack of or weakness in the spatial pillar of the SDGs. Our main proposal is that no region, space or place must be left behind, from the local community to the global community.

First of all, we insist on the fact that the spatial location of persons or settlements in or between countries may be a major determinant of whether or not they are left behind. We also believe that sustainability of development in all spaces/places within a given territory or between countries is a function of spatial equality of development. Therefore, we must not only consider spatiality as a one of the pillars of sustainability but spatial capital as critical for sustainable development.

During the Istanbul National Evaluation Capacities Conference, we heard repeatedly about the three pillars of sustainability but it is worth mentioning that sustainable

development requires two additional pillars: the institutional and particularly the spatial pillars. For developing countries, these two may be more important than the first three, the social, economic and environmental pillars.

However, while these two dimensions have been raised in the SDGs, both of them, particularly spatial and territorial sustainability, have been neglected in the determining of the indicators. This may change the principle of “no one left behind” to “someone left behind”! And some regions within countries like ours may be neglected. It should be noted that although SDG 10 has considered inequality within or between regions, in terms of inequality within regions which refers to spatial inequality, proper indicators have been not defined. We believe that this lack of attention may come from neglecting the spatial dimension of justice.

While reviewing and evaluating the goals, objectives and indicators of the SDGs, this paper proposes that along with social, economic and environmental sustainability, a focus on the institutional and spatial/territorial bases of sustainability is essential, especially in developing countries. *Paying little attention to them in thinking about, planning and evaluating sustainable development can cause serious damage to the whole of development.*

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: SPATIAL JUSTICE

The term “justice” is rooted in political philosophy and political thought. From ancient Greece, most political philosophers and thinkers would have explained and understood it. Also, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of the scholars and pioneers of the Age of Enlightenment tried to explain the position of their thinking in relation to the idea of justice. At the same time, they provide a means for critics to measure and expand the idea of justice from their own point of view point.¹⁰⁶ The concepts of equality and justice have attracted thinkers, planners and politicians in recent years. David Harvey, in his discussion of “Social Justice and the City”, considers social processes and spatial forms as indivisible realities of each other which are analytically separable. With awareness of various perceptions of justice, Harvey extrapolates the principle of “fair distribution of the fair way”.¹⁰⁷

Edward Soja discusses the issue of spatial justice in “Seeking spatial justice”. According to Soja, distribution disparities are the most fundamental and explicit form of injustice in space.¹⁰⁸ Peter Roberts, in his work entitled “Sustainable Development and Social Justice”, does not consider spatial justice independent of other forms of justice (social, economic, and environmental). He places spatial justice at the core of all the movements for justice. Roberts believes that reducing social exclusion, promoting solidarity and achieving social justice are basic goals that play an important role in achieving sustainable development as a response to economic progress and effective management of the environment.¹⁰⁹

106 Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton University Press, 2013.

107 Harvey, David, *Social justice and the city*, Edward Arnold, London, 1973.

108 Soja, Edward, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

109 Roberts, Peter, *Sustainable Development and Social Justice*, University of Dundee, 2003.

Spatial justice is likely an unfamiliar term to political theorists. Even in its parent discipline, geography, the term is something of a fringe concept. It likely calls to mind the much more familiar “environmental justice”. One might rightly wonder, what is spatial justice? Geographer Edward Soja, the concept’s most visible proponent, is a good starting point: “Guiding the exploration [of spatial justice] from the start is the idea that justice, however it might be defined, has a consequential geography, a spatial expression that is more than just a background reflection or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped”.¹¹⁰ Spatial justice is 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.¹¹¹

The opposite of spatial justice is spatial injustice, which itself is derived from wider social injustice. Spatial injustice has been expressed in two forms: (1) segregation; and (2) unequal allocation of resources in space, including unjustly limited access to jobs, political power, social status, income and wealth as the forms of unjust resource allocation. Justice here does not mean absolute equality, but rather inequality not based on need or other rational distinction.

One possible definition of a rational distinction is one agreed up by open, informed, democratic processes, one based on legitimate authority rather than relations of power.¹¹² The main purpose of spatial justice is improving the prospects of life in all spatial arenas.

JUSTICE-CENTRED PLANNING

The motto of justice was considered as the central axis of any kind of social and political act by leftist thinkers, whom politicians and communist systems considered as the most qualified people to justify human societies. As a consequence of these conditions, in political systems, socialist thinkers in the area of planning also regarded themselves as having the most compassion for deprived social groups and as leading the implementation of justice.

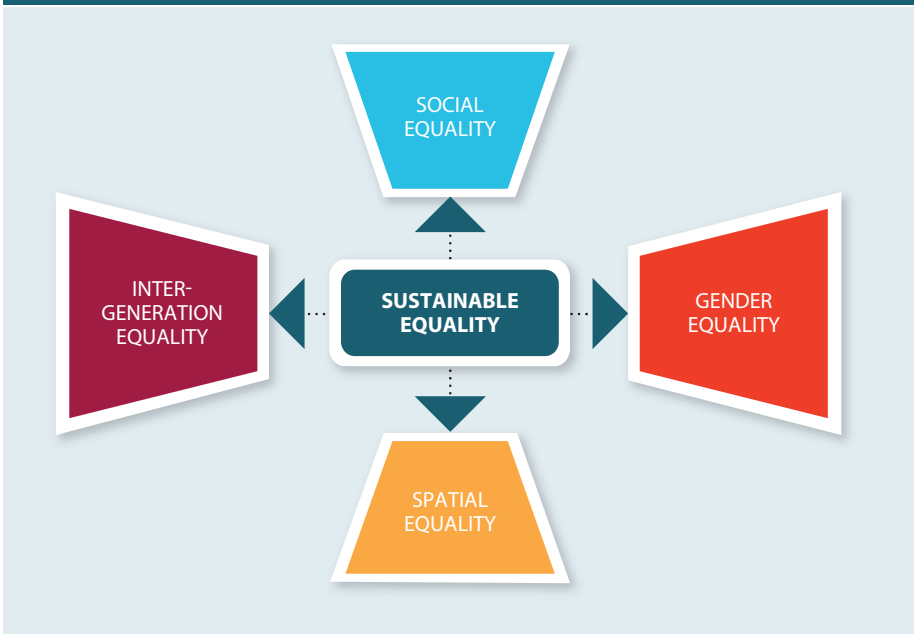
By the 1980s, most thinkers in planning that considered justice as the central subject of their studies belonged to the realm of socialist ideas, and often believed that justice in the political system of liberal capitalism was not possible and this system must be abolished in order to achieve justice. But since then, with the weakening of the political system of the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union and then its collapse, and the efforts of prominent scholars such as Rawls and Habermas who are non-socialist thinkers, the debate on justice was included in the form of liberal philosophical tradition and then liberal planning. Since

110 Soja, 2010, p. 1.

111 Williams, J., ‘Toward a Theory of Spatial Justice’, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association Los Angeles, CA, 2013, p. 1.

112 Marcuse, Peter, (2010). “Spatial justice: derivative but causal of social injustice” [« La justice spatiale : à la fois résultante et cause de l’injustice sociale », traduction: Sonia Lehman, justice spatiale | spatial justice | n° 01 septembre | September 2009, p. 4.

FIGURE 1. PROCESS OF JUSTICE PLANNING



the beginning of the twenty-first century, the subject of justice has flourished in the minds of planners.¹¹³

Planning is an activity that is selected by choosing between bad and good, right and wrong. It judges issues that are sometimes very controversial. Hence, planning is deeply related to justice and in thinking about issues related to justice, planning is essential.

The figure above shows the process of justice planning, which originates from the planning and review of spatial justice.

In the figure, the cycle of planning stages in the justice-centred planning process is shown. In fact, this process consists of two cores, the first focusing on injustices and the second focusing on the realization of spatial justice. This figure indicates the importance of spatial justice and spatiality in planning for sustainable development.

113 See Campbell, Heather, 'Just Planning: The art of situated ethical judgment', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, no. 26; 2006, p.92-106; Fainstein, Susan S., 'New directions in planning theory', in S. Fainstein and S. Campbell (eds.), *Readings in planning theory*, Blackwell, Malden and Oxford, 2003; Fainstein, Susan S., 'Planning and the Just City', in *Searching for the Just City*, edited by Peter Marcuse, James Connolly, Johannes Novy, Ingrid Olivo, Cuz Potter and Justin Steil, Routledge, New York, 2009; Fainstein, Susan S., *The Just City*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2010; Sandercock, Leonie, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century*, Continuum, London, 2003.

REVIEW THE SDGs FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPATIAL JUSTICE

Table 1 lists the 17 Goals and reviews them from a spatial perspective.¹¹⁴

TABLE 1. THE 17 SDGs VIEWED THROUGH A SPATIALITY LENS

SDGs	OBJECTIVES	SUSTAINABILITY PILLAR	EQUALITY PILLAR
Goal 1	No poverty	Social	Social
Goal 2	Zero hunger	Social	Social
Goal 3	Good health and well-being	Social	Social
Goal 4	Quality education	Social	Social-gender
Goal 5	Gender equality	Social	Gender
Goal 6	Clean water and sanitation	Social	Social
Goal 7	Affordable and clean energy	Environmental/economic	—
Goal 8	Decent work and economic growth	Economic	—
Goal 9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Economic	—
Goal 10	Reduced inequalities	Socio-spatial	Spatial
Goal 11	Sustainable cities and communities	Socio-spatial	Spatial
Goal 12	Responsible consumption and production	Environmental/economic	Inter-generation
Goal 13	Climate action	Environmental	Inter-generation
Goal 14	Life below water	Environmental	Inter-generation
Goal 15	Life on land	Environmental	Inter-generation
Goal 16	Peace, justice and strong institutions	Institutional	—
Goal 17	Partnerships for the Goals	Institutional	—

¹¹⁴ A complete list of the SDGs with the targets framed under each Goal is available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>. A list of monitoring indicators is available at [www.http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/](http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/).

What is being discussed in this paper are SDG 10 and SDG 11. Tables 2 and 3 consider them from a spatiality view. The findings indicate that spatiality has low status in the SDG indicators, even though spatiality must be regarded as an important pillar of sustainable development.

TABLE 2. CONSIDERING SDG 10—REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES—FROM A SPATIAL EQUALITY VIEW

TARGET	TARGET STATEMENT	SPATIAL SENSITIVITY
10.1	By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average	Neutral
10.2	By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status	Implicitly/ partially sensitive
10.3	Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard	Neutral
10.4	Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality	Neutral
10.5	Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations	Neutral
10.6	Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions	Implicitly/ partially sensitive
10.7	Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies	Implicitly/ partially sensitive
10.a	Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements	Implicitly/ partially sensitive
10.b	Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to states where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing states and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes	Implicitly/ partially sensitive
10.c	By 2030, reduce to less than 3 percent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 percent	Neutral

TABLE 3. CONSIDERING SDG 11—MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE—FROM A SPATIAL EQUALITY VIEW

TARGET	TARGET STATEMENT	SPATIAL SENSITIVITY
11.1	By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums	Sensitive
11.2	By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons	Neutral
11.3	By 2030 enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacities for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries	Neutral
11.4	Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage	Implicitly sensitive
11.5	By 2030 significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of affected people and decrease by y percent the economic losses relative to GDP caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with the focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations	Implicitly sensitive
11.6	By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality, municipal and other waste management	Implicitly sensitive
11.7	By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities	Implicitly sensitive
11.a	Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning	Implicitly sensitive
11.b	By 2020, increase by x percent the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, develop and implement in line with the forthcoming Hyogo Framework holistic disaster risk management at all levels	Implicitly sensitive
11.c	Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, for sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials	Implicitly sensitive

CONCLUSION

Some comments arising from this review are as follows:

Leave “no one behind” is a core principle of the SDGs.

- Many of the SDGs have addressed this principle with a focus on social justice, socio-economic equality, gender equality and intergeneration equality. However, the attention paid to spatial equality is not transparent and is inadequate.
- The implementation of the SDGs thus has to ensure that development gains are equitably distributed across all territories and demographic groups. Localization recognizes that different territories have different needs and priorities that can be better achieved through bottom-up approaches for development planning, and context-based implementation strategies. It helps to address specific gaps in development and has the potential to reduce territorial inequalities between places/spaces.
- Only two of the SDGs acknowledge the spatial aspects of development. SDG 11 embeds the territorial dimension of sustainable development within the 2030 Agenda. One of the primary concerns raised by the creation of SDG 11 is that it may promote separation between urban and rural areas. However, SDG 11 is geared not only towards cities but towards all human settlements, and SDG localization advocates a territorial approach in which local governments work with each other and with other partners to define, plan and implement the SDGs based on the unique local context, resources, challenges and opportunities of their territories.¹¹⁵ However, given the lack of national and regional spatial planning, the success of SDG 10 and SDG 11 cannot be guaranteed.
- The other Goal that acknowledges the spatial aspects of development is SDG 10, reduce inequality within and among countries. But the indicators for both Goals do not cover the spatial pillar of sustainable development, particularly within countries. It should be noted that although SDG 10 considers the inequality within and between regions, in terms of inequality within regions that refers to spatial inequality, proper indicators have not been defined. This may be due to the neglect of the spatial pillar of justice. The most important point is that given the lack of nation/regional spatial planning, success cannot be guaranteed.

To ensure that “no one is left behind”, leave no space or region behind.

- Although SDG 10 and SDG 11 have a more or less spatial approach, they do not guarantee the spatial thinking, planning and monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development.

115 See for example <https://sdgcities.guide/chapter-1-cities-and-a-territorial-approach-to-the-sdgs-22c2660644e3>.

- SDG 10 is “Reduce inequality within and among countries” but the indicators for this Goal do not cover the spatial pillar of sustainable development, particularly within countries. As mentioned above, only one indicator for this Goal is about the spatial pillar.
- The other issue is that the spatial pillar of sustainable development must be considered over the others, so that guaranteeing the success of the other pillars of sustainable development requires thinking/acting within the country in a spatial manner.
- The evaluation process must be equipped to include the spatial view (thinking spatially, spatial assessment of policies, planning spatially, monitoring and evaluating spatially). Also, spatial equality requires proactive evaluation, not traditionally passive cost-benefit evaluation.
- Therefore, future evaluations must consider the following: sensitivity to space and spatiality as one of the main planning principles; development interventions are responsible for proactive assessment and have the power to bring about change based on defined principles, particularly on local/community interests; in assessing impacts, spatial differences and spatial justice need to be taken into account.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE

Dadashpour, Hashem, Bahram Alizadeh and Faramarz Rostami, *Spatial justice dialectic in city*, Azarakhsh publication, 2015.