

L'ACCESSIBILITÉ COMME CONDITION DE LA JUSTICE SPATIALE EN MILIEU URBAIN

ACCESSIBILITY AS A CONDITION TO SPATIAL JUSTICE IN URBAN CONTEXT

3-4 MAI 2013 \ \ 3rd - 4th MAY 2013

HÔTEL LE MÉRIDIDIEN, MONTRÉAL - 1808 RUE SHERBROOKE OUEST



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Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities
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Issues

The purpose of this workshop is to interrogate the concept of “spatial justice” in urban context through the lens of accessibility. Transport geography defines accessibility “*as the measure of the capacity of a location to be reached by, or to reach different locations. Therefore, the capacity and the structure of transport infrastructure are key elements in the determination of accessibility*”¹. Thus defined, it characterizes mechanisms – both material and institutional – allowing citizens to get access to urban resources and services located in space. It is widely used by various branches of geography, and by other disciplines, (sociology, anthropology or political science) for the study of mobility and transportation, health and educational services, consumption, or recreational activities.

If an economical perspective on accessibility, considered as the first condition for competitiveness and economic growth, was prominent until the 1980’s, a “moral turn”² in geography has been giving birth to works focusing on ethical and political dimensions. The aim is to understand how accessibility is a key factor to implement spatial equity defined as an equal access to the places and the services. This way, the notion of accessibility moves away from its primary use and can be located in an overarching thought on justice. So doing, it has strong links with “spatial justice” which studies the “consequential geography of justice”³ and interrogates the desirable forms of space organization in moral terms. Speaking of “good accessibility” is both a practical affirmation and a moral assessment, drawing on collective norms and values.

In urban context, accessibility is more than a “right of access” and refers directly to the practical means allowing the realization of what otherwise is only a potential. Here, lies a link to the “capability approach”⁴ for which it is necessary to operate a shift from the rights people have to the means they have to act concretely. As early as 1968 Henri Lefebvre explained that “the right to the city cannot be conceived 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”⁵. Following Lefebvre, accessibility is a mean through which urban dwellers (“citadins”) get an access to the urban life.

Moreover, accessibility represents a paradox in contemporary urban context: whereas city is based on propinquity which facilitates social interactions, it is characterized by “frictions” of

¹ Rodrigue, J-P. *et al.* (2006). *The geography of transport system*, New-York: Routledge, p. 28.

² Smith, David (1997). “Geography and Ethics: a moral turn?”, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 21, N°4, p. 583-590.

³ Soja, E. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 5.

⁴ Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and human development: the capabilities approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writing on cities*, Blackwell: Oxford, p. 158.

space which make difficult, or not to say impossible, the access to some places or services. That is especially the case for people having few resources. Both in Northern and Southern cities, researches focus on the situations of spatial injustices – theoretical principles of justice are based on these lived experiences of injustice – having an impact on accessibility. They try to understand how material devices and institutional mechanisms have for main consequence, deliberately or not, to reduce accessibility.

Thus, the notion of accessibility will be our Ariadne's thread in our journey through spatial justice. In so doing, we would like to confront different conceptions and issues regarding accessibility, depending the theoretical frameworks and social contexts of researches. For instance, it is highly relevant to tackle accessibility in a metaphorical way so as to take into account all the mechanisms allowing citizens to get an access to the institutions of the city. Bringing together various theoretical and empirical approaches, we would like to interrogate how accessibility is concretely experienced when it is considered as a core value for urban governance and a key element toward the “just city”. It will be the occasion to go beyond the denunciation of unjust situations in respect to accessibility, and to try to lay the ground for a definition of just accessibility in the city.

Programme

Friday, May 3

9.00 am **Introduction**

9.15 am **Keynote address: Susan Fainstein**, Urban Planning, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University
Approaching the Just city

10.00 am – 12.00 am

Accessibility, between political strategies and citizen tactics

Chair: **Marc-Antoine Dilhac**, Philosophy, Centre de Recherche en Éthique de l'Université de Montréal

Thad Williamson, Philosophy, University of Richmond
Who is opposed to accessibility and why?

Julie-Anne Boudreau, Urban Studies, Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique – Urbanisation Culture Société
Working towards spatial justice: the aesthetics and ethics of urban political action in Mexico City

Oren Yftachel, Geography, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
From ethnocracy to Justice? Accessibility in a multiethnic metropolis

12.00 am **Lunch**

1.30 pm – 5.30 pm

Who are the citizens? The shape of social movements struggling for spatial justice

Chair: **Valérie Amiraux**, Sociology, Université de Montréal

Sophie Oldfield, Geography, University of Cape Town

Mobilizing for access: social movements and the politics of spatial justice in Cape Town, South Africa

Frank Cunningham, Philosophy, Cities Centre, University of Toronto

Possessive individualism and urban justice

Kathryn Furlong, Geography, Université de Montréal

The dialectics of equity: consumer citizenship and the extension of water supply in Medellín, Colombia

3.30 pm

Coffee break

The ages of accessibility: spatial justice and mobility across the generations

Chair: **Annick Germain**, Urban Studies, Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique –
Urbanisation Culture Société

Juan Torres, Urban Planning, Université de Montréal

Gain (or lose) mobility in adolescence: a developmental approach

Paula Negron-Poblete, Urban Planning, Université de Montréal

The age-adapted habitats in Post-War suburbs: questioning urban environment walkability to understand elderly (territorial) inclusion

Saturday, May 4

9.00 am – 12.45 am

Spatial Justice and access to environmental amenities

Chair: **Frédéric Dejean**, Geography, Centre de Recherche en Éthique de l'Université de Montréal

Liette Gilbert, Urban Planning, University of York
Spatial justice and the suburban imagination

Julie Sze, Environmental Studies, University of California
Reframing accessibility and spatial justice: racial and public health lenses

Hiên Pham, Urban Studies, Université du Québec à Montréal
Access to public and private vegetation in Montreal: an empirical investigation of environmental equity

11.00 am **Coffee break**

The fate of neighborhoods in an age of mobility

Chair: **Fabien Desage**, Political Science, Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales de l'Université de Montréal

Thomas Kirszbaum, Sociology, École Normale Supérieure de Cachan
The rise and fall of the idea of accessibility in French urban policy for deprived neighborhoods

Martin Blanchard, Comité logement de la Petite Patrie
Housing discrimination in Montreal, or how social exclusion is reflected in spatial mobility

12.45 am **Lunch**

2.15 pm – 5.30 pm

Access to transportation: a condition for spatial justice

Chair: **Violaine Jolivet**, Geography, Université de Montréal

Nik Luka, Architecture, McGill University

Accessibility, mass transit, and public space: perspectives from urban design

Kafui Attok, Geography, Syracuse University

Accessibility on what terms? Transportation justice and other struggles against the “idiocy of urban life”

3.45 pm

Coffee break

Toward a recognition of the political core of spatial justice

Chair: **Daniel Weinstock**, Law, McGill University

Claire Hancock, Geography, Université Paris-Est Créteil

Is accessibility a feature of space or society? An essentially political issue

Patrick Turmel, Philosophy, Université Laval

Accessibility as a problem of urban justice

5:30 pm

Conclusion

Abstracts

Kafui Attah – “Accessibility on what terms? Transportation justice and other struggles against the “idiocy of urban life.”

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This paper will look at public transit's role in the struggle for "spatial justice." It begins with the observation that for the transportation disadvantaged (elderly, poor, disabled) "spatial justice" is arguably contingent on quality public transportation. Drawing on several case studies, this paper will argue for looking at public transportation as both a site of political struggle and as a product of competing conceptions of accessibility. The nature and outcome of such struggles, I will argue, matter for whether transit policies forward "spatial justice" or -- as several case studies will show-- whether they undermine it in the name of neoliberal social control. The paper will end by suggesting that even if we accept accessibility as a condition for spatial justice, the more important question is what kind of accessibility. In answering that question, this paper will conclude by looking at Oakland's transportation justice movement.

Martin Blanchard – “Housing discrimination in Montreal, or how social exclusion is reflected in spatial mobility”

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This communication will address housing discrimination in Montreal and will highlight the issues of accessibility and spatial justice. First, I will describe the tense context of the housing market in Montreal and the absence of clear legislation pertaining to the search for housing. These two realities produce numerous cases of abuse and discrimination related to the social condition and the ethnic and cultural origins of would-be renters. Second, I will show how urban planning excludes these very same groups, which are victimized a second time in their search for housing. Third, I will use theoretical and practical concepts of social justice and popular education which offer solutions to these problems.

Julie-Anne Boudreau – “Working towards spatial justice: the aesthetics and ethics of urban political action in Mexico City”

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This communication aims to change the usual focus: instead of only observing the great spatial inequalities in Mexico City, we will look at how people circumvent and deflect these limits, obstacles and prohibitions. Whereas Henri Lefebvre advocated for the right to the city, his situationist colleagues developed deflection strategies. In the context of Southern cities,

such strategies do not limit themselves to the artistic field, but are part of the everyday visual, sociocultural, political and economical scenery. How do we access urban services such as water? How do we move about a city which is perpetually moving and saturated with cars? How do we access cultural rites or political representatives in such a diversified and politicized city? How do we ensure its security? These examples of deflection which aim to ensure accessibility to urban life will allow us to address spatial justice issues differently.

Frank Cunningham – “Possessive Individualism and Urban Justice”

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C. B. Macpherson’s critique of market societies for breeding a culture of possessive individualism and his alternative endorsement of an egalitarian, “developmental-democratic” alternative are applied to current cities with respect to urban contexts relevant to social justice. Aspects of cities exemplifying possessive individualism are identified, as are requirements for realizing developmental-democratic alternatives. The focus of the paper is primarily on the specifically cultural dimensions of urban life insofar as they sustain one or the other of possessive individualism or developmental democracy. The paper concludes by addressing the question of how realistic it is to nurture a culture counter to possessive individualism and conducive to its egalitarian alternative in contemporary cities.

Susan Fainstein – “Approaching the just city”

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The term "accessibility" is often limited to refer either to availability of transportation or ease of reaching public facilities like recreational centers, schools, or government offices. More broadly, however, it means having access to all the benefits of urban life, including the ability to participate in decision making, in Lefebvre's terminology, having the right to the city. At the same time, however, it need not imply that every neighborhood be equally diverse or that citizens should always have a direct voice in policy making. Rather accessibility should be evaluated in relationship to justice: what are the outcomes of spatial boundaries and public decision making as measured by their effect on relatively disadvantaged populations? Applying this criterion requires looking at the costs to and effects on different social groups of particular policies and examining qualitative as well as quantitative measures of outcomes.

Kathryn Furlong – “The dialectics of equity: consumer citizenship and the extension of water supply in Medellín, Colombia”

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In light of neoliberal prescriptions for a business-like approach to public service provision, researchers and activists have voiced strong opposition to treating citizens as consumers. On one side of the debate, it is argued that a consumer model for public services will lead to more responsible consumption, better allocation of resources, and improved accountability.

On the other, such a model is said to jeopardize both the equity and quality of essential services. Yet, both of these perspectives rest on a binary analysis of consumption and citizenship that is not sustained by empirical observation. This article draws on studies of consumption in sociology and geography as well as a case study of water services in Medellín, Colombia, to explore the potential for a dialectical consumer citizen approach to public services. I argue that, for water supply, such an approach—rather than one that prioritizes either end of an often unhelpful binary—offers opportunities for regulated solidarity and differential responsibility in the achievement of collective goals. This means recognizing the role of the state in consumption, the unevenness of citizenship, and the limits of “choice.”

Liette Gilbert – “Spatial Justice and the Suburban Imagination”

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Lefebvre's right to the city emerges out of his conception of right to nature. While city and nature processes have often been spatially segregated, they are usually understood in opposition. In a North American context, accessibility to the suburbs has often been realized through economic mobility, the primacy of property ownership, and the desire for better, safer, and greener amenities. In looking at the suburbanization of injustice, my presentation will examine the conflicting tensions between sub/urban development and nature conservation, property privilege and race, class and other forms of social discrimination, and the rise of environmental coalitions in the defense of suburban and exurban spaces. The presentation will focus on urban environmental conflicts in the Greater Toronto Area.

Claire Hancock – “Is accessibility a feature of space or society? An essentially political issue”

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The acclimatization of the idea of "spatial justice" in France faces a few difficulties, one of which is the fact that its application in this country is limited to the "territories" themselves, between which "equality" would need to be implemented. This leads to issues of spatial justice being ignored. Space is produced by and helps reproduce an unjust social order. The opposite of accessibility is exclusion, which is socially produced by processes of categorization/stigmatization. This entails numerous "visibility" issues in the public space of minorities and stigmatized populations. Which in turn raises the question of responsibility of public authorities, as well as the following question, of particular interest for geographers: can essentially social issues be addressed spatially? Does spatialization lead to a categorization of public issues that runs contrary to the "equality of all talking beings" (Rancière) or to the "parity of participation" advocated by Nancy Fraser as the key to social justice?

Thomas Kirszbaum – “The rise and fall of the idea of accessibility in French urban policy for deprived neighborhoods”

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The idea of accessibility had its heyday in the politics of the French city during the nineties. Even the term "city politics", used to designate actions in poor minority neighbourhoods, signaled a desire to change the scale of public intervention in order to guarantee a fair and effective use of the city and to thus move beyond the formalism of citizen equality. However, accessibility was a mere concept, developed by various researchers and experts. They were able to find relays in the administration, but were unable to influence the political logic of the public management of minority neighbourhoods. Politics effectively claimed the "right to the city", a notion dear to Henri Lefebvre, but only to reduce its meaning to a quest for "normality" of neighbourhoods and of populations themselves.

Nik Luka – “Accessibility, mass transit, and public space: perspectives from urban design”

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The compelling concept of 'accessibility' describes how individuals can connect with opportunities for personal development and wellbeing, particularly vis-à-vis the qualities of urban space as 'enablers' or 'thwarters' of everyday movement and mobility. Irrefutable critiques of the dominant automobile-oriented postwar patterns of (sub)urban spatial organisation in North America have inspired more comprehensive performance-based approaches to the planning, design, and management of urban space through the interdisciplinary theory and practice of urban design, focusing on the interactions between individuals and their surroundings so as to create 'cities for people'. This presentation outlines the importance of public transit--an integral component of public space in metropolitan areas--as an apparatus for enhancing both real and perceived accessibility to the diversity and opportunity of urban life. Illustrated with case studies from Montréal, we explore how well institutionalised planning has met the philosophical challenge of ensuring accessibility for all, proposing strategies for continuous improvement.

Paula Negron-Poblete – “The age-adapted habitats in Post-War suburbs: questioning urban environment walkability to understand elderly (territorial) inclusion”

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An aging population makes the demand for housing more complex and opens up new specialized niches. Apartments reserved for the elderly attract significant private investments. However, their location criteria are left to the discretion of developers, who defer to the availability of land and to zoning regulations. These residences can be confined to relatively closed-off areas (along highways, in isolated neighbourhoods, etc.) where transportation and walking are difficult. This communication addresses three residences in suburban Montreal (Vieux-Longueuil, Lachine and Laval). Based on the results of panel discussions, the author questions these environments' ability to properly cater to the elderly's aspirations and mobility choices. She highlights the need for urban planning to address the issue of mobility, but not only in terms of transportation needs, since these reduce the complexity of the notion of mobility, thus creating inequalities.

Sophie Oldfield – “Mobilising for access: Social movements and the politics of spatial justice in Cape Town, South Africa”

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The paper builds a multi-layered analysis of neighborhood activism and its politics, generated in mobilizing for access to housing and land in Cape Town. Initiated thirty years ago, the movement's genesis lies in the social trauma of forced removals and resistance to apartheid-era evictions. Yet, despite successfully winning this fight, community leaders and residents feel a stigma in a 'dysfunctional township', an impoverished neighborhood. Through ethnographic work, I reflect on practices of land occupation, the building of settlements, and the performance of community crafted in these struggles for access to a place to stay in the city. On the one level, a story of resistance and fierce struggle, embodied within this success is savvy and street-wise engagement in neighborhood and city politics and strategic participation in the democratic structures of governance institutionalized after apartheid. These practices shape access and challenge simple analyses of social movements and their mobilization for spatial justice in the contemporary period.

Hiên Pham – “Access to public and private vegetation in Montréal: An empirical investigation of environmental equity”

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Vegetation provides a wide range of ecological and social benefits to urban dwellers. However, underprivileged populations and racial groups across North American cities have disproportionately less access to vegetation than affluent groups, raising concerns of environmental inequity. This study investigates the existence of such form of inequity in Montréal while considering characteristics of the built environment. Statistical analysis indicates that even after controlling for housing age and population density, there are disparities in the distribution of vegetation which disfavour low-income people and, to a lesser extent, visible minorities. Disparities are also more pronounced on public land than on private land. Income is a major factor but cannot fully explain inequities among visible minorities. As those vulnerable communities might need a better access to ecological services provided by vegetation (e.g. heat island mitigation), compensatory equity needs to be addressed. Our findings call for authorities to reconsider greening budgetary allocation and practices.

Julie Sze – “Reframing Accessibility and Spatial Justice: Racial and Public Health Lenses”

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During the past 20 years, a vibrant social movement for environmental justice in the USA has sought to remedy conditions of "transportation racism", through what was called a "race and

class barriers to mobility." The decades long struggle by the Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles is emblematic of how struggles for transportation, environmental and spatial justice are intertwined. My contribution, drawn on 15 years of research in New York City and the Central Valley region in California, uses asthma and air pollution activism to argue that the search for racial, environmental and spatial justice are interconnected and that these interconnections mirror the complex interface between urban, rural and bodily spaces. In other words, I am re-framing accessibility and spatial justice within a public health frame, to suggest that urban studies of spatial justice necessarily involve analyses at multiple scales.

Juan Torres – “Gain (or lose) mobility in adolescence: a developmental approach”

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Adolescence is a time of important changes in terms of mobility. The location of daily destinations, such as a high school, as well as several characteristics of the urban environment, strongly influence the way in which teenagers move about. This being said, their autonomy, which partly reflects their relationship with their parents, can change significantly during this period of life and result in very varied abilities to occupy urban space. These changes in autonomy thus modulate the importance of the best-known environmental factors of mobility. This communication draws on analyses of data collected in the origin-destination survey conducted in the metropolitan region of Montreal (2008), and on the study of teenage mobility in a periurban municipality (Sainte-Julie, QC.), in order to highlight the developmental nature of teenage mobility and its impact on access to the city.

Patrik Turmel – “Accessibility as a problem of urban justice”

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Many urban theorists interested in questions of justice have turned their attention in recent years to the question of spatial justice. But one should be careful not to conflate questions of spatial justice and questions of urban justice. I want to do two things. First, I want to show that a theory of spatial justice only gives us a partial view of what is going in the city. A complete theory of urban justice should not only take account of the spatiality of the city, but of two other dimensions of the material and institutional structure of the city as well: its polycentricity -- the fact that the city is the product of a plurality of heterogeneous places - and its territoriality -- which refers to the territory or the political space of the city. Second, I want to give a fuller account of accessibility as a problem of urban justice, relying on these three distinct dimensions of the contemporary city

Thad Williamson – “Who is opposed to accessibility and why?”

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U.S. metropolitan areas vary widely in the degree of accessibility provided to low-income and impoverished residents. In many small and medium-sized metropolitan areas, ownership or

regular use of a private car is a requisite of mobility, and public transit is limited. Further, the little public transit that exists is often stigmatized--regarded by middle class and affluent residents as a mode of transportation suited only to the poor and/or people of color. This paper examines the question of what political forces and civic attitudes act to prevent the expansion of accessibility in small and medium metropolitan areas. The principal evidence considered will be a detailed case study of the Richmond, VA transportation system, and its failure to develop an adequate transit system connection suburban and urban areas. Issues to be considered in this investigation include explicit and implicit racism, and dysfunctional local political institutions.

Oren Yftachel – “From ethnocracy to Justice? Accessibility in a multiethnic metropolis”

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The paper analyzes the concept of spatial justice through the theoretical and empirical lenses of community accessibility in a multi-ethnic metropolitan region. It focuses on the 'ethnocratic' Beersheba region, Israel, and examines the relative accessibility to metropolitan resources, enjoyed by the largest three communities in the region - veteran Mizrahi (eastern) Jews, immigrant 'Russian' Jews and indigenous Bedouin Arabs. The paper focuses on accessibility to a range of material metropolitan assets, such as housing, land, local government capital, transport, development and social services, as well as less material resources such as planning power and cultural recognition. The emerging picture portrays a metropolis replete with inequalities, in which planning is a source of differential treatment to the three communities. Yet, at the same time, planning also attempts to stabilize the sensitive situation by offering services and development to all.