



## Justice et injustices spatiales, Nanterre 2008

### *Social Movements and the City: Codifying Spatial Justice* *Les mouvements sociaux et la ville: la codification de la justice spatiale*

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This paper will investigate moments when social movements have changed the way space is produced, perceived and/or perpetuated. Using Eyerman and Jamison's notion of cognitive praxis to describe the alternative ways of knowing produced by social movements, my argument is that social movements can play an important role in the articulation and remediation of spatial injustice.

Democratic society is kept in balance by three forces: the market, the government and the citizenry. The market can fail and the state can be led astray from the public interest, but the people, at least in theory, serve to balance these other governing entities with their voice. Although many citizens go unheard in market-driven societies, the collective action of a social movement can reorient these other forces with their political will. Standards are raised when new societal codes are produced; the power of a social movement can actually reshape our physical surroundings and the tools that govern them. The interests of the market, the state and the collective will of citizens are rarely in healthy balance in a democratic society; but regulatory codes should serve to provide a voice for the public will in contrast to the louder and more seductive cries of market and government forces.

Yet, regulatory tools often serve to perpetuate spatial inequities instead of resolving them. Tactics to organize American space and the citizenry within it vary from segregation to the employment of historic preservation to impose specific notions of place and identity. Citizens become so accustomed to these sorts of regulatory tools that they no longer question the injustices often perpetuated by them. However, when the public stops thinking critically about the ways in which the market and state influence the spatial composition of communities, they lose the ability to properly mediate these other forces. Jamison and Eyerman argue that social movements function as a civic form of knowledge production. For these authors, cognitive praxis is a knowledge-making activity that happens when a social movement disseminates a new way of understanding certain issues into mainstream society. These authors argue that a social movement succeeds when its tenets are longer radical and the organizations guiding it must refocus their missions or become obsolete—when they have institutionalized their cognitive praxis into some sort of societal/regulatory code.

This paper will begin with a critical overview of the modes in which space and society have been regulated, controlled and recreated in the United States, with special attention paid to the spatial injustices created by these practices. The paper will then juxtapose these dominant ways of understanding spatial regulation with the cognitive praxis developed in social movements, employing a set of case studies in order to better articulate the interplay between them. Through the lens of the civil rights, disability, and environmental movements, the paper will demonstrate the ways in which cognitive praxis has enabled the public to critically engage with the realities of their environment and to develop a civic awareness of spatial injustice.