



## Justice et injustices spatiales, Nanterre 2008

*State representations of spatial injustice. A comparison of territorial policies in Northern England and the Mezzogiorno.*

*Les représentations de l'injustice spatiale par les Etats: une comparaison des politiques territoriales dans le nord de l'Angleterre et le Mezzogiorno.*

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This paper tackles one of the central questions of this conference: At what spatial scale should we search for spatial justice? I will argue that regional disparities within nation states need to be considered spatial injustices and directly impact on people's life conditions. The paper focuses on the UK and Italy, two countries where regional disparities have a contemporary relevance and a long history. In Italy, the South, known as the Mezzogiorno is significantly poorer than northern Italy and the three northern English regions consistently grow less than the south. Both the North of England and the Mezzogiorno are often portrayed as state assisted regions, lacking entrepreneurial spirit, and where innovative companies are not likely to locate.

Until recently, both the British and the Italian State perceived this divide as a "national question" and developed interventionist policies to redress it. Since the 1990s both countries have changed these policies following a neoliberal turn and have paid less attention to regional disparities, withdrawing interventionists measures and developing softer policies to allow market forces to penetrate more deeply the regions in disadvantage. If Southern Italy and Northern England were once considered regions in decline, they are now re-imagined as "underutilised regions" which need to compete as any other region for government funding and international capital. More emphasis is now being put on the role that the central cities in these regions can play and the concept of the North/South divide is losing policy relevance.

The paper will explore this discursive and policy transformation by posing the following questions: How do British and Italian central government regional policies represent their "lagging regions"? How do they construct the "spatial injustice" problem? What underpinning concepts of space inform this representation? Why have these two States partially tried to resolve spatial injustice at a regional level?