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The spatial dimension of justice : the example of the access to the “conservatoire de l’espace”

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As the call for papers underlines it, our reflection on “spatial justice” leads us to question again our thinking patterns and processes on social and spatial matters. From the point of view of social geography – our research field – speaking of justice infers speaking of the inequalities (Séchet, Veschambre, 2006). Reflecting in terms of “spatial justice” necessarily leads to speak about “spatial inequalities” or “socio-spatial inequalities”, according to the terms that have been used for a long time by researchers in social geography. This terminology raises a fundamental theoretical problem : are justice and inequalities truly “spatial” ? Does it make sense to refer to inequalities that are distinct from social injustices and inequalities as “injustices” and relate them to the autonomous element of space ?

The call for papers provides elements for an explanation : “*There are social inequalities and they are generally spatialised (...)*”. The inequalities, injustices and finally the justice considered here can only be “social” in the broad sense of the term, even though they can or they should be understood as “spatialised”. We would even suggest further to proceed according to what F. Ripoll defines as the “dimensional approach” (Ripoll, 2005, Ripoll, 2006, Veschambre, 2006). Similar to all the social phenomena, inequalities are not an abstraction, they *necessarily* (not generally) include a spatial dimension, they are embodied in human beings and located in specific places (residential areas, links with mobility...). Referring to justice also infers taking the spatial dimension into consideration as a constituent of the social context.

To illustrate this dimensional approach, two populations particularly marginalized and looked down upon can provide some understanding of the stakes of justice, the very poor –those called “Fourth world” by J. Wresinski – and the Gypsies.

However, to give evidence that the dimensional approach goes beyond the everyday concerns (such as housing), we propose to study the visibility of these populations and more specifically their great difficulty to become part of heritage and places of memory in an era when the relation to heritage and memory constitutes a privileged mode of legitimation of social groups.

According to Michel Verret and Michel and Monique Pinson’s statement, if the wealthiest are able to expand and endure through bricks and mortar in space and therefore in time, the poorest populations among the poor do not leave any trace as these traces (housing, working places) are generally erased. The difficulty of this “shameful memory” to emerge in the Conservatory of Space can be illustrated by two examples : the search for a place of memory of the poor in the city of Angers and the memorisation of an internment camp of gypsies in Montreuil-Bellay.