

Everything about Climate Change is Disproportionate: A Call for Spatial Justice in Climate Action in Cities

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Disproportionate Impacts

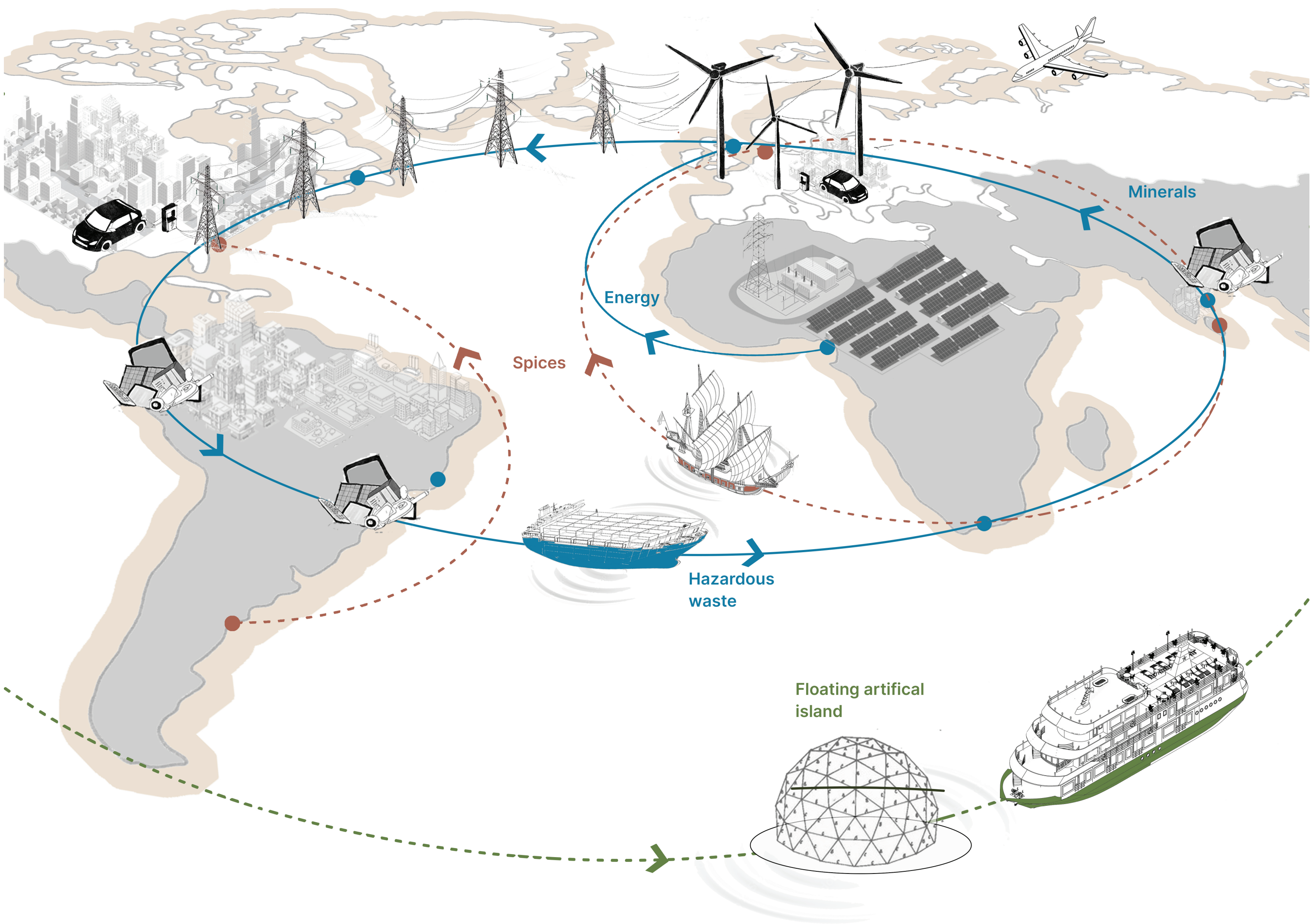
At the global level, countries characterised by small carbon emissions, low income, and high vulnerability are already experiencing extreme climate events. At national levels, the impacts and risks of climate change are worse among poor and low-income communities.

Unequal Responsibility

While there is no consensus on how to deal with unequal climate responsibility, high carbon emissions are associated with a carbon-intensive lifestyle, typical of industrialised countries and wealthier people within these countries.

Unjust Futures

Unequal impacts and unequal responsibility create unequal prospects in adapting to a changing climate. Dystopian literature and cinema give us a glimpse into an unjust future in which only a privileged minority can survive the effects of the climate crisis.



Why justice?

The concept of justice has a broad meaning when understood as the quality of being just or fair. From a philosophical point of view, justice is seen as the fundamental virtue of institutions. Beyond institutions, the symbolic force behind justice has the potential to foster collective action across cleavages of class, race, and gender, creating a sense of solidarity based on shared experiences of injustice, which is crucial for successful climate action in cities.

Why Spatial?

A spatial perspective on justice considers the geographical processes through which injustices are (re)produced, capturing:

distributive injustices: how benefits and burdens are distributed across space and how space affects such distributions;

recognition injustices: how space contributes to oppression and how oppression shapes space for the benefit of a privileged minority; and

procedural injustices: how space influences decision-making and how decision-making affects spatial inequalities.

Why Cities?

With urban areas housing 4.2 billion people - over half the world's population, cities are hotspots of climate impacts and thus seen as sites of opportunity for climate action, including both mitigation and adaptation interventions. However, designing, planning and implementing climate interventions in urban areas is a challenging endeavour. In addition to climate impacts, cities also have to grapple with multiple interrelated urban challenges, including growing inequalities. Without considering the complexity inherent in cities, climate interventions might reinforce existing inequalities or create new ones. Viewing climate action from an spatial justice lens shows that ill-conceived provision of infrastructure (e.g., green spaces) can lead to gentrification and displacement of certain social groups or considerably impact the well-being and sense of community of those that remain.

8 spatial justice principles for research & practice

Acknowledging that inequalities are created, shaped, and maintained by spatial processes, we call for spatial justice in climate action and offer eight principles that support spatial scholars and practitioners in pursuing a critical perspective on climate change in cities.

Practice what you preach

In our research and teaching, we strive to put spatial justice principles into practice. This poster is based on a research article currently under review. For this research, we have commissioned the artist and researcher Namrata Narendra to create visuals* based on our article, illustrating how research and arts can “transcend boundaries” and “enable alternative visions and narratives” (principles 5 and 8).

*Visuals are work in progress

