

Introduction, Motivation, and Methods

1.1. The Research Question

This book is motivated by a simple question. Just as Jane Jacobs asked what makes some parts of cities feel safe and others unsafe (Jacobs 1961), we ask: what makes some cities attractive to people who think of themselves as progressive, liberal, egalitarians (such as us, the authors), and what makes some cities less attractive to such people? Of course, people can be attracted to cities for all sorts of reasons: the theatre, the music, the proximity to the beach or the mountains, the quality of the coffee, and so on. But still, there are some cities that do more to embody what we can call ‘the egalitarian spirit’, which can be part of the package of features that attracts egalitarians to live there, and it is this we hope to capture. In the words of the title of this book, what makes a city (more of) a city of equals?

It might appear as if we run together two questions: what makes a city egalitarian and what makes it attractive to (self-described) egalitarians? Of course, these are not the same question even if the answers may be connected. So let us clarify: the former is the book’s framing and its core; the second is the puzzle that motivated us to do this research. It seems that, almost paradoxically, and some might even allege hypocritically, egalitarians prefer cities where *prima facie*, there is quite a lot of material inequality. But the main research question is, indeed, what is a city of equals? Another way to put it is to ask what kind of city would be attractive to people who are disadvantaged, assuming that disadvantaged people will find it more appealing to live in a city of equals than elsewhere. This, of course, calls for a theory of disadvantage, which we have discussed elsewhere (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007).

Our answer will, in fact, have much in common with Jacobs’s own approach, and much less in common with what, to many, may seem the obvious answer: that what matters is the distribution of income and wealth in the city. In fact, it is the lack of correlation between income inequality and attractiveness to egalitarians that fascinates us and drove us to reflect further. According to compilations of statistics, some of the most inegalitarian cities in the world, in terms of income and wealth, and especially in the United States,

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are the ones egalitarians—rich or poor—would most like to live in. The most obvious example is Berkeley, California, as we mentioned in the Preface, the city of choice for many egalitarians but at the same time a city of staggering financial inequality (Lu and Tanzi 2019; Euromonitor 2013; 2017; Adamczyk 2019). (And as we shall show, this might be because the people of Berkeley tend to be egalitarian and therefore people who are poor or even homeless are attracted to this city.) Other obvious examples are Frankfurt, Germany, and Jerusalem, Israel, which are often thought by locals to be rather egalitarian in their nature, while in terms of income gaps are among the most unequal cities in their countries.

A prior question, no doubt, though, is why focus attention on cities and the policy of equality in the city rather than develop a general theory of equality and apply it to cities? The answer to this question partly emerges from our approach to political philosophy, which we characterize as falling into the tradition of ‘Bottom Up Moral and Political Reasoning.’ To explain, one dominant approach in political philosophy has been to try to develop theories of equality or justice in abstraction, through methodologies such as a hypothetical contract, or hypothetical auction, or from refinement of a theory in the light of ingenious counterexamples. Once such a theory is developed it can be applied to the state and, perhaps, to the city as well. In contrast, while we recognize that these abstract contributions can enrich our philosophical understanding of justice and equality, when we turn to recommendations for policy we subscribe to the view that political philosophy should begin with understanding the challenges to policy makers, and then bring relevant moral considerations to this understanding (Wolff, 2019b, 9–10). In this particular case we do not merely wish to see how abstract theory can be applied to cases, or how abstract theory can inform public policy, but actually to begin from policies—good and bad—that we observe around the world, as well as the problems identified and, sometimes, the solutions offered, by residents of cities whom we interviewed. From these materials we are inspired to build up a more general theory that is sensitive to real-world achievements. Certainly, abstract theories can also guide us, but our first move is not to jump from the policy challenges to the application of an existing theory, perhaps designed initially for other purposes, but to theorize on the basis of these challenges, and thereby generate an approach tailor-made for the subject matter of a city of equals.

But still, why focus attention on cities? Why not pay attention to equality within a state, which after all has many instruments available to tackle inequality if it so wishes, or perhaps to global justice where problems of inequality are so much more pressing? We agree that these are vital areas

for examination and research. They may well be more important, although we do not need to take a stand on that issue here. All we need point out is that state-level and global inequality do not exhaust the terrain.

Generally speaking, thinking about justice, equality, egalitarianism, and even democracy in the city, can take two paths. One is to assume that the city is like a mini-state. It is yet another institution in the state, which behaves according to the same rationale, and therefore should be subject to the same ethical principles. Even the expectations of citizens from the state and its apparatus are more or less the same as the expectations that city-zens (citizens in cities) have from the city and its apparatus. Following such assumptions, when political philosophers come to think about equality in the city they should *prima facie* rely on theories and principles of justice and equality developed in the context of the state, and perhaps modify them here and there to suit the particularities of the context of the city.

But another path, the one we suggest to take, is to acknowledge that treating the city as a mini state is what was once in philosophy called a ‘category mistake’. The city is indeed a political institution, but of a different kind than the state. It is not that the city is like a state, only smaller. In fact, empirically this is not so true. Many cities have budgets which are larger than budgets of many states. This is so even within Europe and within the United States. At the time of writing this book, London’s budget equals more or less the budget of Croatia or of Slovenia, and is twice the size of Latvia’s, and three times that of Bosnia and Herzegovina. New York City’s (NYC) budget is bigger than the budget of forty-three US states, and Chicago’s budget is bigger than that of thirteen US states.

Moreover, the city is a different kind of institution, as its rationale differs. First, to put it starkly, the rationale of the state is separations and borders—it is about putting a boundary around individuals and protecting their rights, and distinguishing the state and its citizens from other states and other states’ citizens, whereas the rationale of the city is connecting. The city connects city dwellers with each other to create a strong local economy and vivid local community, but just as importantly connects the city with its wider regional environment, bringing in and sending out people, goods, and services in a system of mutual dependence. Second, relationships between city-zens and their municipalities or mayors differ significantly from relationships between citizens and their prime ministers and ministers. Within the city political relationships are often much more intimate than those between citizens and their governments, prime ministers, or ministers. Consequently, also the distribution of power between cities’ authorities and their residents differs from that between states and citizens. Mayors and city councils often run their

institutions in a more technocratic manner than governments do, being less committed to this or that ideology. The legendary mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek famously said: ‘Gentlemen, spare me your sermons and I will fix your sewers.’ Even if Benjamin Barber exaggerates when he writes that ‘that’s what mayors do, they fix sewers’ (2013, 91), it is quite common to believe that mayors are less committed to ideological positions than legislators and governments. Most cities are also limited in their ability to raise taxes and therefore in the way they are able to handle questions of equality. As a result of all this, we argue, city-zens’s expectations from cities differ from their expectations from states. The two are rather different kinds of political institutions, and therefore the idea that *prima facie* we should simply apply principles and theories of equality from the state to the context of the city would be very difficult to do, even if it were the preferred approach (which for us, as should be clear, it is not). It is at this point that we depart from many of the works on equality in the city.

Thus, equality at the level of the city should be discussed and studied separately from equality at the state level. And equality at the level of the city is, we believe, an under-researched area, and one reason for this current research is simply to attempt to fill this gap. Our previous work puts us, we hope, in a good position to make our own contribution (Bell and de-Shalit 2011; de-Shalit 2018; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007; Wolff 2019a). Much has been written about equality and inequality in the state, and, commencing in the 1980s, also much has been written about global inequality or cosmopolitan justice. At the same time, very little, if anything, has been written about inequality in cities.

While Ancient Greek philosophers, most notably Aristotle, did directly discuss the city, and at times some cities themselves have in effect constituted states, as in the case indeed of ancient Greek cities, or Rousseau’s Geneva, modern and contemporary political philosophers have, to this point, paid little attention to cities as objects of analysis in their own right. In aiming to address this gap we are not alone, and in the last few decades there has been growing philosophical discussion of the city, including work on the just city, which we explore in Chapter 2. This discussion has been taking place both in philosophy and in allied disciplines. We build upon some of the most important contributions to this literature, as we will show in Chapter 2. But this is still an emerging field with much work to be done. We are pleased that cities are now being put under the philosophical spotlight, though feel that the task for philosophers has only just begun at any scale.

But the full answer to why we have undertaken this project goes well beyond the idea of simply filling a gap in the literature. These reasons relate

to what is distinctive about cities, and what makes conceiving and measuring inequality in them so different from conceiving and measuring inequality in the state, for cities differ from states in many ways that make traditional approaches to equality problematic, as we shall argue shortly. But we want to argue that cities are important enough politically and economically speaking for us to devote a whole book to this topic.

First of all, cities are home to more than half the world's population, and are assuming ever increasing political and cultural importance, driving economic prosperity, and dominating global trade (Bradley and Katz 2013a; 2013b). Most of the world's population—around 4 billion people at the time of writing this book—live in cities, particularly in developed and middle-income countries, and in some European countries, a sizeable majority (68–85 per cent) lives in cities. Cities are responsible for nearly 80 per cent of states' GDP. Therefore, Brookings scholars Jennifer Bradley and Bruce Katz (2013a) write: 'The national economy is a network of metropolitan economies.' Cities dominate trade, generate their own wealth, and consequently, find themselves with considerable political power (Barber 2013). As already noted, some cities today spend more than many states. Thus, Parag Khanna (2012) claims, albeit controversially, the twenty-first century will not be dominated by China or India but by cities (see also Barber 2013; David Harvey 2019; and Bell and de-Shalit 2011). Whether or not Khanna is right, it would be foolish to deny the political, social, cultural, and economic importance of cities (Clarke and Gaile 1998).

At the same time, inequality in cities is becoming a daunting issue (Musterd and Ostendorf 2012; Sassen 1999). Economic inequality in cities is growing (Glaeser et al. 2009), perhaps reflecting changes in employment opportunities (Nijman and Wei 2020) and causing political instability (Musterd et al. 2017). The UN-Habitat report of 2016 declares that 75 per cent of the world's cities have higher levels of income inequalities than two decades ago. As King (2011) argues, the sheer scale of urban growth is likely to exacerbate poverty and inequality even more. There are new, brutal forms of deprivation in many cities around the world. Gentrification, rising rents, and the withdrawal of public services push poorer residents to the periphery, to temporary accommodation, or even the streets. According to 'the world city hypothesis' (Friedmann 1986) metropolises are especially prone to extremes of inequality, with dense clusters of poverty adjacent to 'concentrations of the extraordinarily wealthy' (Fainstein 2001) while the middle classes flee to the suburbs (Sassen 1991). (As we will discuss in Chapter 2, these particular class-based housing patterns have changed in more recent years, with mass gentrification in the inner cities being a new factor, but cities remain

patterned by class.) Housing is perhaps the most visible sign of deprivation and inequality, from the slums of the developing world, to the shocking clusters of tent-dwellers appearing overnight in some of the world's wealthiest countries. Equal city-zenship and some sort of fairness in opportunity and enjoyment of life, seem absent, even discouraged. At the same time many people report that they are attracted to the 'urban way of life,' and any approach that attempts to diminish the dominance of cities feels utopian and out of touch with both the practicalities of contemporary life and the priorities of many people today.

A city's wealth and its internal inequality often correlate (Tonkiss 2017). London, for example, is the United Kingdom's richest city but, in terms of income, wealth, and housing security, its most unequal (Aldridge et al. 2015; King 2011). But how inequality in cities should be measured has rarely been discussed in detail. Although, as we have said, it has been taken for granted that the right measurement is gaps in income and wealth, in many academic works racial or ethnic segregation, especially when it takes a spatial form, is added to the analysis. In this book we raise the question how inequality in cities should be understood, or, put differently, what it takes to characterize a city as what we call a city of equals. We distinguish between the standard accounts of equality in the city, which take distribution of income and wealth as the defining issue, and a city of equals, which, we argue below, pays much more attention to how people feel, what they can do, and how they are treated and regarded by others, thereby embodying what we have referred to as 'the egalitarian spirit'. To make our case we have to explore what egalitarianism (and equality) in cities means and whether it is significantly different from egalitarianism (and equality) in other institutions, not only the state but also the family, or workplace, or other parts of life, although we will not explore these non-state contrasts in detail.

It is also worth pre-figuring a distinction that needs to be kept in mind throughout this book. Although the literature is full of important suggestions about how to *measure* inequality in the city, we find it weaker on the question of *definition* and, therefore, on a firm grounding for the accuracy of the measures. To explain by way of a related analogy, it is common in the poverty literature to measure relative poverty in terms of falling below 60 per cent (or some other percentage) of median income. But this is only a proxy measure. Relative poverty is traditionally defined in terms of whether one is able to be included in society on the same terms as others. A typical definition could be summarized as: 'not being able to do what is normally expected or encouraged in your society' (Townsend 1979), and it is thought that if you have less than 60 per cent of median income you are very likely to miss

out on some activities or forms of consumption taken for granted by others. It is the ‘missing out’, not the income inequality, that captures the essence of relative poverty. Similarly, we can measure inequality by income gaps or commuting time or access to leisure facilities or segregation in the workplace or equality in education, but the underlying question is what is it that we are measuring by these proxies? Here, as we shall set out in detail over the course of this investigation, our core insight is that a city embodies the egalitarian spirit, and is thereby a city of equals, to the degree that it gives each person what we will call ‘a secure sense of place’, or a sense of belonging to the city, on the same terms as others. How further to specify, and ultimately to measure, this idea of the egalitarian spirit is the central focus of this book.

It is also worth saying that our question is an internal one, not an external one. For the purposes of this project we are interested in equality within a city, and not, for example, relations of justice between the urban centre and rural periphery, or inequality between different regions in a country. These, once more, are vitally important questions (Chauvin 2021). But they do not take up the whole space, or render our study irrelevant.

When reading the account we present over the course of this book, some may think we have captured the idea of a ‘good city’, or of the benefits of urbanism in general, rather than ‘a city of equals’. But nevertheless our motivation is to explore the idea of an egalitarian city. We are, of course, influenced by the benefits of urbanism and exploring the idea of a city of equals inevitably raises the questions of the benefits of urbanism and how they are distributed among all city dwellers. A truly good city, in our view, is one that provides the benefits of urbanism for everyone who lives within it. It is therefore, in that respect, a city of equals.

1.2. What Is a City?

First and foremost, we need to explain what we mean by a ‘city’. The city is an elusive concept (Parnell 2015). In the contemporary world providing an account of the city is not a straightforward matter. David Harvey summarizes Max Weber’s defining characteristics for early ‘occidental cities’ as: ‘A fortification; a market; a court of its own and partially autonomous law; a distinct form of association and partial autonomy and autocephaly’ (Harvey 2009 [1973], 305). Times move on, and factors around partial independence, size and organization, and identity have become the critical factors. Geographers often focus on spatial issues referring to a continuous district of

settlement,¹ urban sociologists focus on individuals or groups of people and on population density, lawyers and political scientists often refer to a single jurisdiction,² and urban economists often refer to the scale of economic activities. Some define the city on an institutional basis (referring mostly to its jurisdictional borders)³ and some on a functional basis.⁴ So let us at the outset offer our definition of the city.

We take the city to have four primary components. Cities are, first of all, *institutional*, meaning that they have a single jurisdiction. This is a typical factor, not a necessary condition. London has thirty-two boroughs (plus the City of London, which is a ceremonial county and local government authority), each of which functions as a jurisdiction, in addition to a central authority. Yet between 1986 and 2000 London did not have a mayor or a city-wide leader. However, this is clearly an anomaly, and it is natural to regard a city as highly typically having a political infrastructure. It would also be possible to regard each of the London boroughs as sub-city. Many are of the size and complexity as entities regarded as a city. At this stage we are neutral on whether they should be so regarded.

A second aspect of the city is that it is *densely populated*, at least relative to its surrounding area. Of course, there can be parts of cities that are less densely populated. There are parks, some cities such as Berlin and Paris even have farms within the city boundaries, and in some cases the enclaves of the highly wealthy are much less densely populated. But the jurisdiction as a whole will typically be more densely packed than the surrounding area, though we are also aware that there are conurbations in which cities merge into each other with no remaining less-populated space in between.

Third, cities have their own *cultural-political identity*. They encourage civicism, or pride in the city (Bell and de-Shalit 2011), and facilitate and encourage an intense ‘urban’ way of life involving particular forms of commerce, transport, leisure activities, and so on. Typically, each city has its own

¹ Although in some cases, such as Paris, the metropolitan area includes some rural areas and some areas with lower-density settlements that are not really ‘urban’. Rio de Janeiro even has rain forest and mountains in the city centre. We are primarily concerned with what city dwellers regard as the urban core of their cities, because we are interested not only in the city as a form of government, but more so in the impact of the urban way of life on inequality.

² UN-Habitat 2009. Some theorists claim that cities are often governed by a system of formal and informal relationships and that the formal government of a city could never really achieve its goals without collaboration with civic elements and interests, and therefore a city is often governed by informal relationships. For more about the ‘urban regime theory’ see Stone (2006), and for a critique see Smith (2013). About how we reflect upon cities in a global age see Derudder et al. (2011).

³ See, for example, Briffault’s (1996) definition of the locality as a territorially attached political community that is formally organized around the principle of residency, with boundaries, distinctions between members and non-members, and democratically elected officials, who are expected to pursue policies that benefit the members of the community that elect them. We thank Lior Glick for this reference.

⁴ Weinstock (2011) claims that a city is characterized by a certain degree of spatial integration.

distinctive character, relying on some form of local, urban citizenship, which makes an impact on how city-zens think politically (Bauböck 2003; 2019). The distinctive local character possibly helps us to divide what may look like an undifferentiated conurbation into a number of separate cities.

Fourth, as Daniel Weinstock (2014; 2011) notes, perhaps following Aristotle, the city is the smallest geo-political unit in which a person can find anything they need and want to do.

On the basis of these four factors, it is clear that cities are significant political bodies with vital decisions to make about service provision and strategic planning. Although city-level decision-making may often be presented as a largely technical matter, it will always be informed by values, whether or not those values are made explicit. Contemporary metropolitan cities often pursue normative goals such as explicitly aiming to be a low waste city, a smart city, a resilient city, and so forth. Indeed, when we consider the well-being of individuals, what happens in their city can be just as important, or perhaps even more important, than what happens in their nation. Of course, only a nation can declare war, or make fundamental changes to a tax code. But a city can pursue a strategy for green spaces, for public transport, for street cleaning, and so on, and these affect people on a day-to-day basis to a very high degree. Furthermore, a city has to decide how to allocate its budget to different districts, either directly, or indirectly through the location of services such as fire stations or libraries. Some countries, to some degree, follow the ‘principle of subsidiarity’ which proposes that decisions should be taken at the lowest level consistent with rational efficiency, thereby combining efficiency and local autonomy, although in other cases power is jealously hoarded at the centre, as far as possible. But the general trend has been to disperse power, or at least responsibility, and as a result cities are becoming politically and economically more important and independent than they were. Many services are now the responsibility of local government (housing, police, education, social work services). So there are many acts of decision-making which make an impact, and therefore should be guided by values and moral considerations.

At this point we should add that for the purpose of this book our concern is *metropolitan cities*, by which we mean major cities that are politically, economically, and culturally significant and serve as centres for larger populations than the city’s residents. While metropolitan cities are not necessarily huge in their population or size (i.e. they are not necessarily mega-cities) they often have a densely populated urban core and a less-populated surrounding area, often comprising suburbs or small towns which can be politically independent, but nevertheless rely on the metropolitan city for important services such as hospitals, colleges, markets, ports, or airports. But we also add that

for a city to be considered metropolitan it has to think of itself as a political alternative (at least in some spheres) to the state; namely it challenges state regulations and policies and offers alternatives in various spheres of life. We can, therefore, regard such cities as ‘cities with an ego.’⁵ Remember that we opened this chapter by asserting that cities and states are different institutions. Indeed, cities, we want to argue, are not only different institutions from states but also generate different states of mind. When the city-zen, the individual member of a city, reflects upon herself and the state (as a citizen) she has in mind different expectations, images, and metaphors compared to those she associates with when she contemplates about herself and the city.

As Iris Marion Young suggests, the modern city has an important mediating function. It can avoid, on the one hand, a suffocating tendency to allow the community (or the state) too much power, determining and controlling each person’s behaviour, and, on the other hand, an alienating individualist tendency, and complete privatization of our social life (Young 1990). The city allows us to smoothly switch from one mood or state of mind to another. In the morning we can go to work and be individuals who seek to flourish and promote our particular interests (including caring for those to whom we have special obligations, such as our children, by earning a salary), and in the afternoon or evening we can become part of the city, participating in activities in our neighbourhoods, or clubs to which we belong, or simply going to a pub or restaurant where we relax alongside others. Even when we escort our children to the playground, on the way back home we might pop into the local farmers’ market, and in the evening, when we visit the cinema, our state of mind is different and becomes more communitarian in all these acts. We see the well-being of our neighbours, or of the institution of the farmers’ market, as part of what constitutes our own well-being, our identities, and even contributes to our joy.

⁵ There are many examples of cities that challenge the state nowadays, and in some countries this happens more often than in others. Here are four examples: First, consider a decision by NYC’s municipality to ban selling cigarettes to those under 21 years old, whereas in the rest of the country the law bans cigarettes sales to those under 18 years old. Unfortunately (if we may say so) for those who smoke, smoking is important. Such an act is meaningful to them. Or consider Berlin’s reaction to the German federal court’s verdict that circumcision was illegal. Berlin declared that it would allow circumcision. Berlin, of course, is also a state within the German federation, which is why it could do so, but those living in the city interpreted it as a challenge to the federal state by the city. Third, in Israel a law prohibits shops from opening on Saturday. Enforcing the law is in the responsibility of local authorities. Tel Aviv municipality decided it would not enforce the law. Fourth, in the United States, especially when Mr. Trump was president, dozens of cities declared themselves as sanctuary cities, asserting that they would not cooperate with the federal government in enforcing immigration laws.

1.3. The Egalitarian Spirit

In this book we ask what it is for a city to embody the egalitarian spirit. This is a precursor to the more practical question of the nature of the policies a city should pursue in order to become a city of equals, though what we say is also designed to inspire policies (and also warn against inegalitarian policies) as we will briefly explore in the final chapter. Aiming at equality is likely, at best, to be just one of several ideals that a city follows, and we do not argue that a city should pursue equality to the exclusion of everything else, such as environmental goals or understanding its special responsibilities in relation to other regions of the country, although of course other goals can sometimes reinforce equality rather than detract from it. But we want to know what it would be to embody the egalitarian spirit. To put it another way, if you are an egalitarian, what should you wish for in a city?

Many people around the world are concerned about inequalities. Some worry because they care about inequality itself; others, such as Frankfurt (Frankfurt 1987; 2016), because they want to ensure that the least advantaged enjoy ‘sufficient’ (whatever that stands for) resources, or welfare; and a further group, broadly following Rawls, believes we are under a moral obligation to provide for the least advantaged first, as a matter of priority (Parfit 1997; Crisp 2003; Arneson 2013). In the latter case, when goods can be distributed either to those who are well-off or to those whose lives are not going that well, we should prefer the latter as a matter of priority, even if it is *not* the case that the least advantaged can gain more utility from this good.

Each of these ideas—equality, sufficiency, and priority—undoubtedly has appeal. First, inequalities can seem unfair, even among the affluent. Second, if some people are living with an insufficient amount to support an adequate life then we can feel something has gone badly wrong in society. And if there is economic growth but those at the bottom do not share in the success then we feel that a society has lost its sense of justice. There is, of course, sharp philosophical debate about which of these ideas should take precedence when they conflict. However, as we argued in our previous book *Disadvantage* (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007, 2–4) in circumstances of scarcity and in which there are still people who have not achieved sufficiency, all egalitarian principles—equality, sufficiency, priority—converge on the same general policy: egalitarian cities have to identify the worst off and take steps, directly or indirectly, that will improve their position.

Yet as we also argued in *Disadvantage* (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007) there is no simple answer to what it means to be worst off. Well-being is plural, and, we argued, the categories are at least in part not fully comparable or

compensable. For the purposes of our previous study we adopted a modified version of the capability approach, following Sen and especially Nussbaum, arguing that what matters from an egalitarian perspective is not merely whether functionings and capabilities are distributed fairly, but also how secure people's functionings are, and whether people have 'genuine opportunities for secure functionings.' In this present work, while continuing to recognize complexity, the change of scale and focus of the study means we will take a far more contextual and less abstract approach, and ask first how we should understand 'being worst off' or treated as an unequal *in a city*? What does it mean to have less, or to be treated as an unequal in the city? Less of what? Unequal in what respect?

This is not an easy question. Imagine you are entering a period in your life when you wish to settle down and perhaps raise a family. You are considering which city to move to. Presumably you will consider the cost of living and how good the salaries are in that city; but you will also think of the local education system, the crime rate, the level of pollution, whether there are nice parks, cool pubs, good theatres, a good enough variety of cinemas, maybe the café culture of that city, its public transportation system, whether you will need a car and where you might park it, how people of your ethnicity are treated, and so on. Thus, we can hypothesize that when people think about what matters in terms of the quality of their lives, and hence equality, in cities they look at their lives at a level of detail which is distinguishable from what they think is important when they think of distribution on the level of the state. This provides a rich basis for thinking about inequality in the context of the city.

However, the pluralism of well-being may seem to make the question of what it is to be worst off in the city intractable. How do we compare someone who does well on one criterion and badly on another with someone who has the opposite profile? How, in other words, do we weigh the different parameters? In *Disadvantage* (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007) we suggested that this is more of a theoretical question than a practical one, for disadvantage tends to cluster in the sense that people who do badly in one respect often do badly in others, and there are causal mechanisms that explain why. Here we do not abandon that framing of the issue, but we add a further element that makes 'all things considered' judgements considerably less important. We believe that being treated as an unequal could consist of doing especially badly on one or two parameters, such as being a victim of racism, or being denied civic services available to others in a similar position, rather than an all-things-considered judgement of total well-being. Hence if, as sometimes reported of some cities, wealthy members of racial minorities find that taxi cabs do not stop for them, we do not say 'your wealth makes up for the discrimination'

but rather that the city fails to meet one of the obvious criteria for embodying the egalitarian spirit.

In that previous study we attempted to develop a position that was sensitive both to questions of distribution—the typical terrain on which the ‘equality, sufficiency, priority’ debate takes place—and to questions of social or relational equality, or, in other words, the question of what it is to relate to each other as equals. When we, the authors, consider the question of what attracts us to the idea of equality, we find we are less interested in making sure that everyone has the same amount of anything that can be distributed between them, but rather that each person has good reason to regard each other as an equal, and be regarded as an equal by them. In the words of R. H. Tawney, for us the enemies of equality include snobbery and servility (Tawney 1931), though with Iris Marion Young we would add exploitation, powerlessness, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young 1990) and also include social exclusion too, as well as, perhaps, other relations (Wolff 2017; 2019a). For this reason we find Nussbaum’s capability of ‘affiliation’ especially important, as it can capture all these parameters. This is especially true for affiliation in the city, which, as we have defined it, is about connectedness. So in a way this book can be considered as a study in what a secure sense of affiliation means at the level of the city.

From these considerations it may already be apparent that we are less interested in precise measurement and comparison than many of those writing about equality in the city have been. In this respect we are influenced by the joke with which Harry Frankfurt starts his famous paper ‘Equality as a Moral Ideal’ (Frankfurt 1987).

FIRST MAN: How are your children?

SECOND MAN: Compared to what?

Frankfurt’s point is that there is something alienating and disconcerting about making comparisons. It seems competitive in a way that it is contrary to the considerations supposedly motivating egalitarians. But this point needs to be considered carefully. Frankfurt does not suggest that we should never compare. I can compare my life with my successful neighbour in order to discover what my life lacks, just as I might have found out what is missing in my life by reading a book or watching a movie. And indeed, for some goods strict equality will be necessary, such as in the distribution of votes in local elections. But generally speaking, we are interested in whether people are able (rightly) to regard themselves as being taken to be an equal in their city, and in how to translate this into a kind of moral principle, or a principle for policy,

rather than counting how much of each good they have compared to others, even if there are times when counting is entirely appropriate.

Consequently, in this book, somewhat paradoxically, we suggest that a sense that you are being treated as an equal in the city cannot be entirely reduced to the claim that there is a scale on which you are being measured and come out as equal, and especially we deny that equality in a city can be measured by a comparison of possessions or resources. Nevertheless, undoubtably there are elements that can and should be counted and compared. We would be concerned to find that garbage collection happens more regularly in wealthy parts of town than poorer parts, or having an address in a certain neighbourhood makes you less likely to be called for job interviews for example, or you might even be unlikely to reach the interview on time because of very poor public transport services (Giannotti and Logiodice 2023). But at the same time there are intangibles that are much less amenable to precise measurement, such as a feeling of being respected by the city authorities, although even here surveys can act as a proxy. Hence there could be a complex set of indicators that would allow us to judge where particular work is needed to make a city more of a city of equals, and we will return to this in the final chapter. Nevertheless, we would be alarmed to find that a city has and uses such a scale as anything more than a rough heuristic to guide policy. Detailed attention to how people perform on the equality scale could mean the city has made a fetish of equality rather than seeing it as part of an organic, intrinsic, element of city life.

1.4. Methods

The city population's fluidity raises another important methodological issue: inequality among whom? Who should be counted as the city-zens? Obviously, residents in the city should count. But under this category we would also include immigrants before naturalization—individuals who often are not counted when inequality at state level is measured. No less challenging is the question of whether to include commuters (individuals who work and shop in the city but do not reside there) as well as non-resident tax payers (individuals who own a business in the city but live elsewhere). Voting in local elections, for example, is possible for some commuters in some cities (e.g. the City of London)⁶ and for non-resident tax payers (e.g. in

⁶ This is an anomalous case as what is known as the City of London is a small area in the centre of London, with few residents, and many businesses. Some non-resident business owners can vote in local elections, as well as residents.

Australia).⁷ Such people have an interest in what goes on in the city and contribute significantly to its economy, so *prima facie* the demand to refer to them when measuring inequality in the city sounds reasonable. Yet it is also true that there are also people who never enter the city but have important relations with it, and a legitimate interest in how it is run. For example, the headquarters of the supermarket they shop at, or the bank they use, could be located there. It is hard to draw a natural line about whom to include and whom not to. We have chosen to focus on those who live within the city boundaries, because they are those mostly affected by the city's policies, and are constantly subject to the city's regulations, but we are conscious that other choices could have been made.

We have already emphasized that inequality, the personal sense of inequality, and the study of inequality in the city, differ significantly from the same issues at the state level. First, individuals belong to various institutions with different norms or ethical principles, and their political consciousness, states of mind, and expectations change when they switch from thinking as citizens of states to thinking as city-zens of cities (Magnusson 2011; Amin and Thrift 2017; Bell and de-Shalit 2011; de-Shalit 2018). Löw (2013) argues that city dwellers regard their cities as 'entities of meaning', expressed through the quite different types of attachment they feel towards their cities, in contrast to their countries. Compare the open and liberal slogan 'I love Berlin' with the chauvinistic overtones of 'I love Germany'. The former sounds celebratory and welcoming whereas the latter reminds us of fearful moments in history, or in any case has nationalistic overtones. This might suggest that people feel differently towards the city and the state, and develop very different expectations from them, and that we as society regard such feelings differently.

Second, there are likewise different states of mind concerning equality: at state level, for many people, income and wealth; at city level, what we have access to—the education system, levels and distribution of crime and pollution, pleasant parks, cool pubs, good theatres, café culture, housing, public transport—as well as, critically, how we are treated. As we will demonstrate later in this book, a city's qualities, amenities, services, and social relations are critically important to its egalitarian character.

Third, in thinking about a city of equals, we must particularly attend to the dimensions that local authorities can influence. As much as personal income and wealth matter, local authorities can do very little about them

⁷ The question whether commuters and non-resident tax payers should vote is discussed in Glick (2021).

directly, especially income. However, as David Harvey has argued (2009 [1973]; 1985), state policies affect the value of land and other resources, and thereby have powerful indirect redistributive effects. Harvey's observation is reinforced by the fact that local authorities can mitigate the pernicious effects of inequality through policies such as land-use regulation, zoning (Macedo 2011), development or conservation, or special services (Wolman 2012). They can provide infrastructure (Marsh et al. 2010),⁸ attract capital and business, or enable political participation. Indeed it is part of the natural functioning of a city to decide where to allocate its budget and locate services, such as fire services and schools. Hence there is wide discretion, with far reaching consequences for many aspects of the quality of life.

Fourth, another reason why our constant theme of this book is that we do not want to identify equality in the city with its distribution of wealth and income between its residents, is that standard measures of wealth or income inequality can be problematic at city level. While income gaps as measured, for example, by the Gini coefficient index, make sense at a national level, they can be highly misleading for the city (Alster 2022). For one thing, the Gini index assumes a stable population. Yet people move in and out of cities, partly in response to policies. Suppose a city makes life difficult for poor people, manipulates them into leaving, and busses in labour from outlying districts, as reported of Giuliani's NYC (1994–2001) (Baker 2005; Polner 2005). Such policies intuitively feel anti-egalitarian, but their immediate effect is to lower the Gini coefficient.

But even if these technical issues around inward and outward flow of population can be overcome, Gini measures, and similar, are simply a poor match for our intuitions about which cities best embody the egalitarian spirit. Consider once again liberal Berkeley, which we have already mentioned as an inspiration for this study. Berkeley hosts homeless people as well as many students, who are classified as low-income regardless of parental income. Paradoxically, in part because of their liberal and egalitarian policies, in Gini terms Berkeley is exceptionally unequal (Knobel 2014). This alone is enough to make us look for alternative accounts of equality in the city. To recycle the motivation of the capability approach, what matters is less what you have, but rather what you can do and be. And this will depend on what the city offers, in terms of infrastructure and public services, among other things, alongside the market. Thus, rather than income gaps, we argue that what matters in egalitarian terms is that city dwellers are able to build valuable lives for themselves

⁸ For example, upon becoming Commissioner of the NYC Department of Transportation in 2007, Janette Sadik-Khan realized that the city lacked resting spots in public spaces when she saw people perching on fire hydrants (Sadik-Khan n.d.).

and have a secure sense of place, independently of their economic success. This idea—that everyone has a secure sense of place—is the core for us, of what it is for a city to embody the egalitarian spirit.

The two questions that jump out in the face of such a claim are, first, what does the idea of a ‘secure sense of place for all’ mean in detail, and second, how do we show that this does indeed capture what we are calling ‘the egalitarian spirit’? Answering the first question is the project of this book. On the second—the issue of justification—we cannot claim to offer any sort of demonstrative argument, although the empirical grounding that we discuss in Chapter 3 and 4 shows that the account we draw resonates with the views of many city dwellers. But instead, we try to draw up a picture that will be as compelling to others as it is to us. We hope that those with egalitarian leanings, on reading our account, will think, ‘that’s the type of city I want to live in.’ Although we are painting a general picture that is, to some degree, abstracted from particularity, it is important to understand that our account is grounded in particularity, albeit multiple particularities, incorporating not only our perspective as authors, and the views of the academic community represented through a literature review, but also an extensive set of interviews in which we explore with citizens of ten cities what, for them, makes a city equal, or at least feel that it treats them and others as equal.

To explain, between 2015 and 2019 we conducted 182 face-to-face interviews in: Amsterdam (19 interviews) Berlin (20), Hamburg (18), Jerusalem (32), London (13), New York City (11), Oxford (14), Rio de Janeiro (20), Rotterdam (5), and Tel Aviv (30). We use the *dynamic public reflective equilibrium* method that we introduced elsewhere (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007; de-Shalit 2020; Wolff 2020). The first step was to draw on our own reflection and scholarship as theorists, thereby generating a broad conception of what matters in a city from an egalitarian perspective, based both on our own perceptions and arguments, and on an extensive literature review which we will discuss in Chapter 2. We rejected an exclusive focus on economic factors, and incorporated considerations important to egalitarians, such as whether the city starves poorer neighbourhoods of civic amenities, whether all groups have similar access to services, the degree to which groups are, against their will, segregated residentially, and how individuals feel they are treated.

The next stage was to test our understanding with residents of cities, as they have distinct knowledge and important normative intuitions about this question. This was the point of our interviews with ordinary, randomly selected city-zens of differing ages (17–85), genders, sexual orientations, social backgrounds, and ethnicities. We use the term ‘interviews’ because it is used in social sciences, but in some respects it would really be more accurate to

describe them as philosophical conversations. We acknowledge that some social scientists, who are used to structured interviews where the interviewer does not engage in discussions and debates with the interviewee might find this term, interview, misleading, but no term is perfect.

We interviewed, in the sense of having conversations with, long-standing residents and newcomers, sampling numerous districts within each city, often at different times of day. Our overall goal was to enrich, deepen, and develop our understanding, and to inspire us to insights we may not have reached had we relied purely on conventional academic resources. In short, we wanted first to see if the interviewees confirmed, or conversely challenged, the aspects we had already identified as important to the understanding of a city of equals; second, to fill out our broad conception with richer detail; third, to see if we had overlooked any dimensions; and fourth, more broadly, to provide inspiration for our own thinking. To summarize, our goal was not to provide a statistically significant survey of views, but to enrich our own understanding. Hence we could call it a methodology of ‘enrichment’.

We like to think of our interviews using the metaphor of springboards, for which we thank one of the book’s referees. Although the notion of a ‘springboard’ has become something of a clichéd metaphor to mean something like ‘assisted starting point’ we would like to revitalize it by taking it as something more like a trampoline. Jumping from the springboard or trampoline enables you to gain an elevated viewpoint, thus freeing yourself from the solid ground of your position. Similarly, we wish to challenge our initial theory, look it over, and be able to revise it if necessary. Also, jumping so high, we can see things we did not see before when standing on the ground. Similarly, these interviews enable us to listen to questions, ideas, and thoughts that are lacking in the literature. These semi-structured interviews—perhaps better described as barely structured at all—of between twenty and forty minutes, followed a pre-prepared set of questions, but allowed plenty of space for the interviewees’ own reflections, including us challenging their views by applying analytical philosophical methods, as we would do in class with our students. They started with the interviewee reflecting on what is important to them in their urban experience (to inform relevant dimensions of inequality), and moved to questions about inequality in their own city. Finally, they were asked to justify these normative evaluations by proposing an ideal of an egalitarian city and corresponding policies, asking such questions as what they would do if they were ‘mayor for the day’. We often challenged the interviewees’ normative standpoints, asking them to propose a rationale.

Although it was important to consult with and be inspired by city dwellers, we did not cede absolute authority to the interviews. This is because we did

not aim at gathering data to be later analysed. Nor did we wish to reach a representation of what the public thinks. Rather, as noted, the point was to inform, enrich, and modify our own, necessarily partial, perspectives. Therefore, the range of responses, rather than the preponderance of particular answers, matters most. For similar reasons we also consulted surveys such as ‘Soul of the Community’ (Knight’s Foundation and Gallup, n.d.) and the Eurobarometer ‘Quality of Life in European Cities’. While the focus of these surveys is not inequality in cities, they explore what matters to city-zens, thereby providing materials to inform our own analysis concerning dimensions of inequality.

Because our method is analytical political philosophy and yet we rely on interviews and qualitative research, we realize that we are open to various lines of question. One possible criticism of our interviews is that the sample is too small to be statistically significant, and furthermore we did not code and analyse the texts using a formal methodology. But this would be to misunderstand the purpose of the interviews. We did not attempt a survey to provide an empirical, authoritative, account of ‘what city-zens think’. The function of these interviews is not to find out, empirically and statistically, the preponderant views of the city-zens in any city, but to serve as an inspiration for us when we philosophize and suggest conceptual and normative arguments. These interviews are for us what texts of other philosophers are for many of our colleagues: a point of departure, an inspiration.

Furthermore, a cross-city study such as this one will face the difficulty of cultural attitudes to expressing oneself to outsiders. In some cities interviewees may want to defend their cities from outside criticism, and hence over-praise it, whereas in others interviewees may be openly, or even overly critical. This type of variation is, however, not a problem, but a valuable resource for us, as we are not attempting to collate and compare results. Rather, as said, it was to inspire, challenge, illustrate, deepen, and inform, and so what matters is that views are expressed, not how many people said them. Moreover, it is important that we discuss these views with the interviewees, because in this process we and they sharpen our thoughts about the issues discussed.

Another possible challenge is that in this book our understanding of a city of equals will be heavily impacted by the choice of cities in which the interviews were conducted. For example, it might be that we reach a notion of a city of equals as one that embraces and integrates immigrants simply because we chose cities that already had this attitude. We disagree with this challenge. First, we did conduct interviews in cities where immigration is often welcomed, most notably Amsterdam, but also where, arguably, it is much less

so, such as Rotterdam and Tel Aviv. Second, and most interestingly, while there is some variety in what city dwellers in the various cities mentioned as the components of an egalitarian city, in general, nearly all the topics were mentioned time and again by city dwellers from all the cities.

Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, we conducted the interviews in different cities in several countries, where these cities differ by size, their claim to fame (whether a capital city, a commercial centre, or a cultural centre, etc.), their dominant religion, whether they are in a liberal or less-liberal country, and many more variables. And still, the parameters repeated themselves in those cities. Third, and most importantly, we emphasize again, that we did not aim at reaching a representative picture of what city dwellers think. Instead, we wanted to capture the insights of our interviewees in order to challenge ourselves and be inspired.

But we acknowledge that the methodology of stopping people in the street has its own biases.⁹ Those who regard their time as critically important are less likely to stop, and so some groups, such as people who are retired or not in the formal workplace, are more likely to be represented than others. We attempted to compensate by seeking out as much variety as we could, by conducting the interviews in different parts of the cities and in different times of the day, and among veterans and newcomers, men and women, the young and the elderly, people of different ethnicities, and so on. We also used research assistants who spoke the local language in German and Brazilian cities, as we do not speak either German or Portuguese. Having said that we are aware that we could also have missed some voices. But at the same time, as we are not pretending to offer a representative view, this criticism is not as significant as it could have been for other types of study.

Even though we do not claim to have a value-free starting point, there could be a lingering concern that the study suffers from confirmation bias, especially as our interview script was driven by our research agenda, including our provisional suggestions. For example, we were not interested in the empirical question of how many people believe that the city should be egalitarian, but more in the question of what it means for a city to be egalitarian. Right from the beginning, therefore, in effect we excluded many opinions from the interviews. But this, again, is legitimate, as we were not interested in whether people are egalitarians or not, but in what an egalitarian account of the city

⁹ A growing number of researchers believe that one cannot write about urban issues without strolling, and being inspired by talks with people, as well as interpreting the city's planning, architecture, and design. See, for example, Sharon Meagher (2007).

would entail. So to conclude, without entering into the debate about whether it is possible for any study to be entirely value-free, we accept that our own starting point was value-laden. The remedy, such as it is, is to be aware of these possible biases, and to be especially vigilant in looking out for ideas that conflict with our own. And we did find such cases. For example, one Berliner reported that they felt excluded in some social contexts because they were ‘too conventional for bohemian Berlin’, a very different way of looking at exclusion in the city than our initial understanding of it, and we were challenged by a small number of interviewees who stated views that could be interpreted as racist, especially when complaining about the way in which their neighbourhoods had changed over the years. In one case (in Jerusalem) an interview was stopped because the interviewee expressed views which were so xenophobic and anti-Arab that we realized there was no way these views would be interesting and relevant for our effort to understand what the egalitarian city is.

1.5. The Argument in a Nutshell

To summarize what we have said, and where we are going next, one obvious answer to our question, what makes a city a ‘city of equals’, is income and wealth equality. But we see that some cities, although they have unequal distribution, are nevertheless regarded as ‘egalitarian’ in spirit, which is a puzzle and one of the main drives for this research and book. Starting with our own reflections, we discussed this question with city dwellers in ten cities in six countries and three continents. This helped us refine our own view and construct a theory. These interviews aimed to challenge and enhance our opinions and inspire us.

Reflection on our initial thoughts, the literature review, and the interviews enables us to come to a structured view of what we think it means for a city to offer each individual a secure sense of place, and thereby be a city of equals. In such a city, people feel, and are treated as if, they have as much right to be there as anyone else; there are no off-limits spaces in the city (apart from exceptional cases such as parks or halls designed for women only), city dwellers feel they are part of the city’s story and have pride in the city. Critically they also feel that the city has pride in (people like) them, rather than wishing they were not there or ignoring them.

More formally, we argue that a secure sense of place consists of four core values: (i) access to the city’s services is not constituted by the market; (ii) equal opportunity to achieve a sense of meaningful life; (iii) diversity and

social mixing, without a monolithic culture; and (iv) inclusion without deference or submissiveness (by which we mean that city dwellers should have access to the facilities and resources of their city by way of automatically assumed entitlement, rather than as grudgingly granted discretion, relying on the mercy or discretion of gatekeepers).

A question might arise about the four core values. Isn't it the case that sometimes there must be some trade-off between these goods? We will explore this in more detail in Chapter 5, but here we would like to clarify that we do not necessarily believe that all good things go together and that life can be perfect. Some things come into conflict with others. For example, we were impressed to see that in Rio de Janeiro the city operates public football pitches that are open throughout the night. When we raised this as an example of treating people as equals because it caters to the needs of those who work at night, often people working in hospitality and transport, we were told by locals that, well, many who reside in the favelas cannot make use of the facilities because public transportation at night is awful. We admit that this creates a kind of 'elite' among the working class, or that it discriminates against those who live far away, and that ideally, public transportation should work during the night, or, alternatively, football pitches should be arranged in additional areas of the city. Yet, the city is more egalitarian if it enables some working-class people to play at night. Trade-offs are a fact of life, and city planners will have to face them and find reasonable solutions. Moreover, cities vary, even more than states. Consider Glasgow (Victorian, big-city vibe, fun city, great nightlife) versus Edinburgh (more medieval, traditional Scottish, more bourgeois, pretty city), or Milan versus Rome, etc. These cities might have a different ethos from each other, with different values and priorities, which to us adds to the richness of life. Ideally, people can then choose where to live and which city suits them best. Of course, in real life, there are many considerations about where to live, and many people do not have the good fortune to live in the type of city that would be ideal for them. Nevertheless, it is important for us that everyone can live a meaningful life wherever they live, and accommodating such a value should be a high priority for all cities and perhaps a way to navigate some of the inevitable trade-offs between different values. But given that circumstances vary so much we are very reluctant to give any value guaranteed priority over others.

Our findings generate a pluralistic account of the egalitarian city, although we do not attempt a strict definition. Instead, we offer a 'family resemblance' account (Wittgenstein 1953) of the features that in varying combinations can make a city egalitarian. We will set out and develop our own findings in Chapters 3 to 6.

1.6. Conclusion

Our task in this introductory chapter has been largely explanatory; to explain why we are interested in the question of equality in the city, how it may differ from equality in the state, and to lay out the outlines of the methodology we adopted in pursuit of our theory of what makes a city a city of equals. We have also given a very brief account of the definition we adopt.

In Chapter 2 we undertake a literature review. Had we restricted ourselves to political philosophers who have directly discussed equality in the city it would be rather short. Since the book is written for a wider readership, including social scientists, urban studies scholars, planners, and political scientists, we have extended the discussion in several dimensions. Thus, we first look to contributions from a broader range of social scientists, including urban studies and sociology, as well as political philosophy. Second, we incorporate a broader discourse on justice in the city, because justice is not often explicitly distinguished from equality in this literature. And third, we look at some contributions which indirectly bear on our questions, even if they do not address them directly. Chapters 3 and 4 summarize our interviews, drawing out a series of key, recurring, themes. Once again, these chapters might appeal more to social scientists than to philosophers. Those who wish to skip them, or read the theory first, can jump to Chapter 5. It explains our theory in detail, interweaving observations and results from the previous chapters, while the final chapter, Chapter 6, explains our approach towards operationalizing our theory and makes some initial steps and suggestions.