

Knowledge translation in global urban agendas: a history of research-practice encounters in the Habitat conferences

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between planning research and practice plays a key role in shaping global commitments related to urban development. Arguably, this is the case for a ‘global urban agenda’ being articulated at an international scale via frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. These multilateral commitments have been shaped by power relationships and assumptions about what kind of knowledge is valuable at different historical moments, a recognition of the local and global impacts of urban development and what sort of urban development is desirable at specific historical junctures. The pathways that have led to the present global attention to cities are as telling as the frameworks themselves. In this paper, we explore the history of multilateral and international networks that have shaped today’s global urban agenda. We focus on the three United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat I, II and III) as milestones in the evolution of this agenda. Drawing on Southern urban theory and current debates on the interaction of practitioners and academics, we discuss the paradigms that have shaped the ways in which knowledge has been articulated, circulated and valued in those historical moments via the concept of ‘knowledge translation’. We discuss the way in which ‘urban equality’ has been approached and explored in the praxis of these agendas. To do so, the paper discusses community-based cases that can highlight the different knowledge paradigms, and the power dynamics behind them, opening up questions about the challenges of including diverse voices and knowledges in the ‘global’ conversation on urban agendas.

KEY WORDS: Global urban agenda; UN-Habitat; Habitat conferences; urban equality; knowledge translation

Introduction

Local and global planning practices are in constant interaction, influencing each other in ways that are shaped by power relationships, spaces of knowledge circulation, institutions and politics at international and local level. This paper explores the history of multilateral and translocal networks that have shaped the current ‘global urban agenda’ (Parnell 2016). It discusses, in particular, the relationship and

assumptions about what kind of knowledge has been valuable at different historical moments, interrogating what we call *knowledge translation processes*. We focus on the three United Nations Conferences on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (commonly known as Habitat I, II and III) in 1976, 1996 and 2016 as milestones of this international agenda-setting, discussing how knowledges have been approached and have shaped the framing of urban development in general, and urban equality in particular. Our focus

on urban equality relates to the prevalent historical position that equality has had within progressive discourses, as a demand that has been historically prioritised by more justice-focused voices.

This discussion is built upon three assumptions. First, that we can now speak of a 'global' urban agenda being articulated via United Nations frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) in 2016 (Parnell, 2016; Revi, 2016; Caprotti *et al*, 2017). We propose that the pathways that have led to this historical juncture are as telling as the frameworks themselves, and that there is value in examining them. Second, to do so, there is value in examining 'knowledge translations processes', looking at how knowledge has been articulated, circulated and valued in those historical moments. As we elaborate below, we understand this as a process in which diverse knowledges, produced through both research and practice, influence agendas, policies and actions. Third, we argue that it is in the processes involving knowledge of community-based actors located on the 'margins' of global processes where we can better interrogate the politics of translocal geographies of knowledge co-production and circulation, and the power dynamics underlying them. To this end, we explore a selection of cases in which community-based actors and their knowledge have been central within the three historical Habitat moments.

The inclusion of an explicit urban goal (Goal 11) as part of the SDGs, as well as the process of preparation for the Habitat III conference in Quito that led to an agreed NUA, have created a perfect setting for a review of the role of the UN frameworks, processes and international organisations in urban development. This assessment has been led by a range of academics and practitioners such as Aromar Revi (2016; 2017), Susan Parnell (2016), David Satterthwaite (2016), Michael Cohen, among others, and in fact, we might even argue that there is a growing field of inquiry catalysing around the dynamics of 'global' urban governance (Acuto, 2018). Based on these precedents, the historical analysis presented in this paper interrogates the implications of different paradigms of knowledge since the 1970s. Its contribution lies in presenting a review of the multilateral context with a specific focus on knowledge translation and its implications for urban equality, two themes that are less explicitly scrutinised in these discussions.

The structure of this paper is as follows: it starts by briefly discussing our approach to knowledge translation; it then introduces the current international institutional

landscape in which the global urban agenda discussion takes place. Then, the main body of the reflection focuses on describing the Habitat conferences (I, II and III) with special attention to how knowledge translation and urban equality have been conceived and valued in their processes and outcomes in the different historical paradigms. To do so, it examines historical documents produced before, during and after the Habitat conferences, as well as secondary sources that have critically assessed them. For each of these time periods, the paper discusses a respective case that provides a clear example of praxis within the different paradigms, as well as questions and challenges regarding the implementation of urban agendas and the inclusion of different kinds of knowledges in such processes. The paper concludes by discussing the value of this historical review to contemporary planning practice, and particularly to the implementation of current urban agendas.

Knowledge translation processes

Stone (1989) highlights how, prior to any process of agenda setting, there is always a process of transforming 'difficulties' into 'problems' that are "amenable to human intervention" (Stone, 1989:281). Building these "causal stories", Stone asserts, "move[s] situations intellectually from the realm of fate to the realm of human agency" (1989:283). Planning intentions and practices are based on assumed causal linkages between intervention and impact. As Rydin reflects, "[k]nowledge differs from information and data in that the specification of a causal relationship is central to knowledge" (Rydin, 2007:53). The production, circulation and exchange of knowledge is central in the construction of those causal linkages and agendas. This makes processes of knowledge translation a topic of central interest to both scholars and practitioners.

Based on the well-established critique of the relationships between the scientific method, modernisation and society (Rydin, 2007), it is widely recognised that knowledge is produced through multiple means and networks, in various spaces and through different rationalities. Forms of research and practice shape and are shaped by each other in various ways, and the importance attributed to some kinds of knowledge over others in a particular time and place, is given by power relationships and socio-cultural constructions: the knowledge that emerges from certain institutions and is presented through particular means and voices, for example, might be valued over others in shaping policies or planning instruments. In this paper we focus on understanding processes

in which different forms of knowledge circulate and influence each other in the formation of practice, under the umbrella of what we have called 'knowledge translation' processes. Looking at how knowledge has been *translated* in different historical moments, allows us to highlight some of the underlying logics governing and shaping urban agendas.

We understand knowledge translation as multi-scalar and non-linear processes of encounter between knowledges emerging from both research and practice. This approach seeks to avoid a simplistic linear definition of knowledge translation as a process that always take place *from* research *to* practice. A wide spectrum of fields have focused on issues around 'translation' (see Apter, 2006; Munday, 2016), on agenda setting in the political science literature (Stone, 1989; Shiffman and Smith, 2007), on defining an approach to a 'sociology of translation' (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; 1999), and more specifically on understanding the translation of knowledge and learning (McFarlane, 2006, 2011; Shaxson *et al.*, 2012), raising questions such as: "How is knowledge transformed by the process of its circulation? [...] How are local practices shaped by the interaction between situated knowledge and formalized knowledge?" (McFarlane, 2006:293).

In this paper, we focus on processes of knowledge translation that involve encounters between various forms of planning research and planning practice. These discussions have a long history with a rich debate taking place over the last few years, focusing particularly on the relationship between scholars and practitioners, reflecting on the difficulties of such relation and how incommensurable the worlds of planning scholarship and practice might be: "Why does some knowledge come to be seen as "the evidence base", and other forms of knowledge become marginalized and indeed rendered invisible in the worlds of policy?" (Porter, 2015:293).

These debates include reflections on the role that current development patterns might have in widening the gap between academics and practitioners (Balducci and Bertolini, 2007), pointing to the *deep schism* between research, teaching and practice in the field of planning (Whitzman and Goodman, 2017). They highlight the difficulties for planning scholars to influence the work of urban planners (Taylor and Hurley, 2016). At the core of these debates lie the questions about how knowledge is produced, circulated and exchanged in a variety of forms. This is a discussion that has been widely explored through ideas such as collaborative rationalities (see Innes and Booher, 2010), a principle

of operation that has become more and more relevant in the field of planning.

Building upon these discussions, and stressing the importance of recognising the multiple ways in which knowledge is produced, we interrogate the politics that govern geographies of knowledge production and circulation, and discuss how marginalised and subaltern knowledges have found their space in the global debates. As McFarlane reflects:

Given that the unequal circuits of urban planning tend to create truncated space, when they create space at all, for marginalised knowledges of the city, the ethical and political challenges here are vast, and cannot be stepped around or wished away (McFarlane, 2018:324).

To understand how power dynamics have determined urban agendas at different historical moments within the international landscape of urban development, we focus specifically on the capacity of different actors to shape the processes of agenda setting. In this context, knowledge flows are constrained or enhanced by wider geopolitical paradigms, that distribute power locally and globally accordingly. As McFarlane has argued, to understand the negotiations between different situated knowledges "requires critical reflection on the power relations of different agents such as the World Bank relative to, for example, community-based organizations" (2006:301). In their exploration of "the determinants of political priority for global health initiatives" in the process of global agenda setting, Shiffman and Smith (2007:1317) identify four avenues of power: "the power of actors connected with the issue; the power of the ideas used to define and describe the issue; the power of political contexts to inhibit or enhance political support; and the power of some characteristics of the issue".

These avenues of power shape and are increasingly shaped by the politics that govern the geographies of knowledge production and circulation internationally. In her account of "the transnational flow of knowledge and expertise in the planning field", Healey (2010) reflects on how "exploring the complex interchange of planning ideas and practices transnationally makes it difficult to avoid developing a sensitivity to institutional and cultural differences in the way that planning work is done in different parts of the world" (Healey, 2010:17). Similarly, authors have acknowledged "that planning ideas no longer move only from global North to global South and that there are many cross and counter-currents, yet it seems likely

that traditional north-south flow is still dominant” (Watson, 2012:329). Particularly, Southern urban theorists have recognised the existence of new urban epicentres in the production of theory (Robinson and Parnell, 2011), as well as the importance of planning theories and practices that are relational and yet specific, recognising local histories, rationalities and urban dynamics (see Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; 2011; Bhan *et al.*, 2018). As we discuss in the following section, the Habitat conferences have facilitated key encounters in which urban knowledges have been elevated, valued and translated into global and local agendas. Focusing on those encounters allows us to investigate the ways in which alternative forms of producing knowledge have been either misrecognised or mainstreamed, raising questions of marginality, resistance and power in the ‘global’ urban setting.

Setting the scene: the international development landscape

The international landscape has been setting the rules for the interfaces in which knowledge translation processes occur globally, affecting consequently the ways in which agendas are approached locally. Using the language of Shiffman and Smith (2007), in this paper we want to understand the way actors, ideas, political contexts and specific issues have built power avenues in the global process of urban agenda setting. The architecture of world politics and its historical trajectory is composed of a set of intertwined political-economic realms that rarely fall neatly into hierarchical scalar relations or preordained systems. In this complicated context, the United Nations (UN) has arguably occupied the most central positions. In the realms of built environment policy and practice, this has progressively happened through UN-Habitat as the preeminent ‘urban’ agency within the UN system, and its agenda setting efforts. As Parnell (2016) explains, “while the UN cannot define the parameters of a new global urban agenda alone, no other body is as powerful in setting out the normative base or systems of implementation for urban change” (2016:533).

The ‘international system’ has had a continuous impact on local planning processes, not just through multilateral UN agencies, but also through lending and cooperation bodies such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and a realm of ‘global governance’ that includes institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) or the World Health Organization (WHO). These institutions

interact with the whole edifice of the modern nation state, as well as regional or geographically-defined entities, like the European Union or the Association of South-East Asian Nations. Built around and across this skeleton, the last decades have witnessed the emergence of a wide range of private actors both of a business nature, such as large corporations like IBM and corporate philanthropic organisations such as the Gates Foundation, and of not-for-profit actors like Habitat for Humanity and Oxfam, routinely playing important roles in determining responses to urban challenges.

As several scholars and practitioners have noted, the contours of what we might call ‘global urban governance’ are shifting, and with them the paradigms and international pressures on an urban equality agenda (Verrest *et al.*, 2013; Acuto and Parnell, 2016; Acuto, 2018). Urban agendas have been increasingly influenced by the growth of philanthropy and private developmental investment, as well as international consulting companies of both quite sizeable nature and explicit built environment focus, as with Arup and AECOM, but also a scattered populace of individual or small team consultants. As we will discuss later, there are important implications of the rise in influence of such private sector institutions. The role of the nation state, even if it has apparently continuously decreased since the 1980s (according to neoliberal rhetoric), has in some cases become more explicit in relation to urban matters. Following on the growth of an urban interest in processes like the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, numerous countries have begun charting overt ‘National Urban Policies’ and developing cities-framed ministries and initiatives (Dodson, 2017). Yet the role of the state remains ambiguous: whilst agenda-setting processes are very much shaped by state-based conventions of the international sector, national-states are also very often left behind in terms of implementation. Additionally, in the last few decades the international system has witnessed a steady growth of city networks, now numbering in the hundreds and in some cases moving considerable resources towards urban settlements.

Alongside these institutions we also encounter a complex pattern of transnational initiatives often bypassing international mechanisms and cutting across nations, which are both global organisations of sub-national governments, like United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and civil society movements, like Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), as well as hybrid networks of lobby coalitions comprising

a mix of these actors (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014). These entities were formed not just to give voice to their constituencies, but also to lobby global agendas to further their interests. For example, SDI, “a network of community-based organizations of the urban poor in 33 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America [...] was launched in 1996 when federations of the urban poor in countries such as India and South Africa agreed that a global platform could help their local initiatives develop alternatives to evictions while also influencing the global agenda for urban development” (Skoll, n.d). As international systems value and translate knowledge in different ways, the strategies that these entities and movements have used to participate in the processes of setting and implementing global agendas have changed over time.

The Habitat conferences

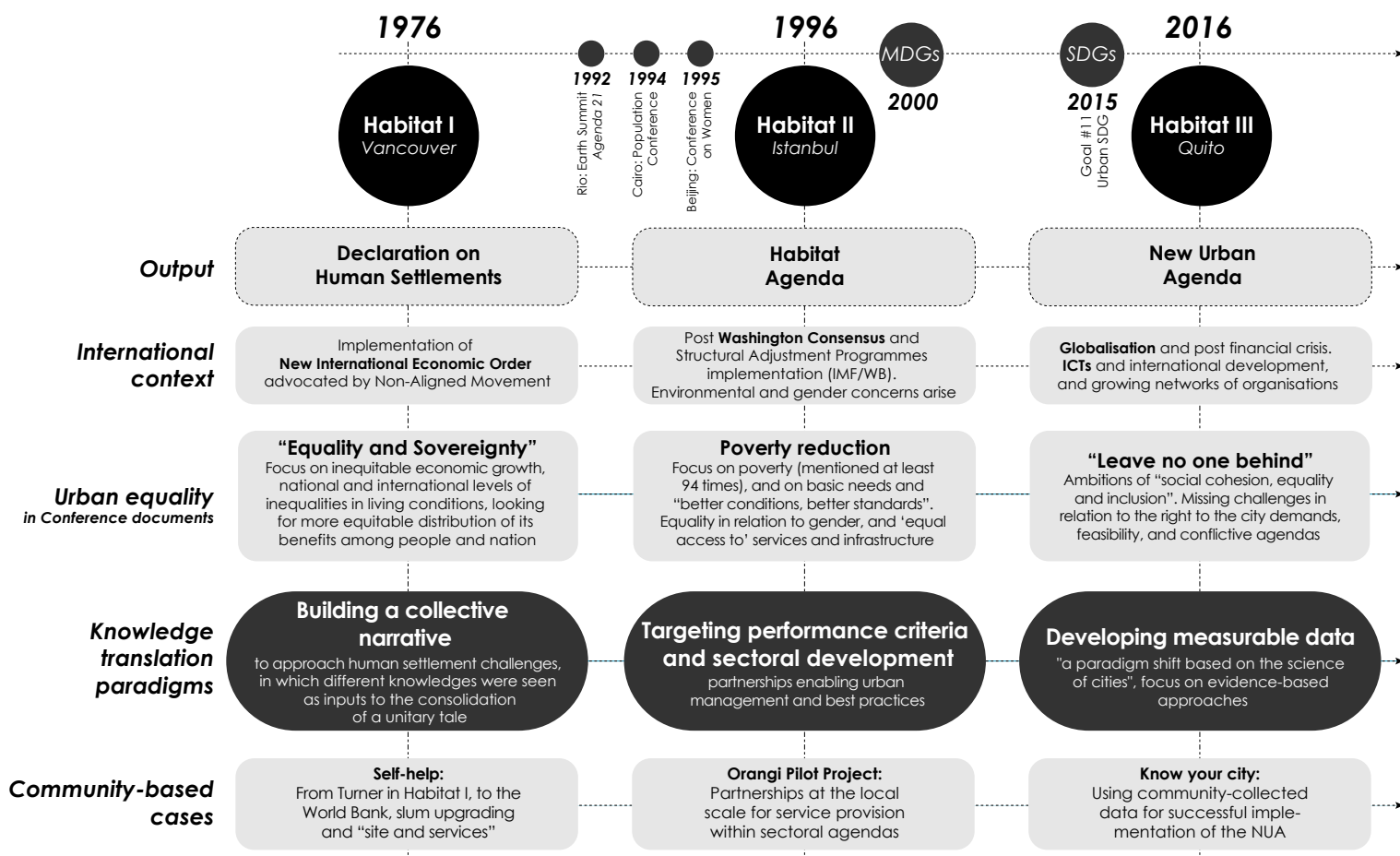
This complex landscape is well represented in the process of shaping the current ‘global’ urban agenda and its implications for cities (e.g. Caprotti et al, 2017). In what follows, we present a reflection focusing on the Habitat conferences of 1976, 1996 and 2016. Figure 1 summarises the main points to be discussed, stressing the assumptions that underline knowledge translation processes in each moment and the understanding of

urban equality. For each of the periods, we will discuss cases that provide clear examples of the different paradigms, to illustrate ways in which local practices are informed and shaped by these global agendas. We want to understand how these praxes have been influenced by the predominant paradigms of the international development landscape. We propose that it is in those particular settings of community involvement where we can interrogate better how planning systems test and recognise various “knowledge claims”, a terms used and defined by Rydin (2007), who argues that knowledge within planning should be seen “as socially constructed, multiple and constituted in the form of claims, open to contestation and recognition” (Rydin, 2007:66).

Habitat I (1976): building a collective narrative

The contemporary cities agenda begun to take shape in the early 1960s as a response to what was seen as a demographic and socio-economic crisis brought about by initial acknowledgements of the world’s urbanisation prospects. Authorities and academics had begun pointing to ‘worrying’ trends such as the growth of the then-termed ‘slums’ both on the edges of booming global South metropolises and at the heart of northern cities. Housing was seen as the key

Figure 1. Knowledge translation and urban equality in Habitat I, II and III



issue at this stage, with broader discussions couched under the umbrella term of ‘human settlements’. These concerns led to the UN’s first major summit on the issue in 1976 in Vancouver, under the banner of UN Conference on Human Settlements or *Habitat I*, an explicit national and multilateral effort to address what was seen as a mounting problem. As with the following summits, Habitat I included parallel events for NGOs. This led to the creation of longstanding networks such as Habitat International Coalition (HIC), and the establishment of the Human Settlements Group within the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), founded by Barbara Ward, an early advocate of sustainable development. The results of the summit were crystallised in two documents, *The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements* and an *Action Plan*, as well as the setting up of an organ of the UN that was to be the precursor to today’s UN-Habitat: the *UN Centre for Human Settlements* (UNCHS).

In her accounts of the history of the urban question in global policy making, Parnell (2016) has described debates about the role of research-based policy informing practice prior to the establishment of UN-Habitat. The conference of Habitat I was the first and most significant moment in which discussions had global scope. The way in which the relationship between research and practice was conceived during Habitat I was arguably embedded in the underlying modernisation paradigms that governed the period, influencing the design and results of the summit. As participants at the conference reflect forty years later, Habitat I was a space of catharsis, that gave room to the inspiring sense of “*Utopia*” to unfold a rights-based approach to the habitat (Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017). The main focus appeared to be on building a collective grand narrative to approach human settlement challenges, in which knowledges from different actors and geographies were seen as inputs to the consolidation of a unitary tale. After its establishment, UNCHS housed the City Data Programme (CDP), the Housing Indicator Programme (HIP - with the World Bank), and a ‘Global Urban Observatory’ to track progress in implementing Habitat I. In a sense, these early data-driven efforts were part of the scope of building a collective narrative, something that left a legacy to the present day, including outputs like the *World Cities Report*.

The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements that emerged from the first Habitat conference states in its second paragraph that it looked “to create an international community based on equity, justice

and solidarity” (United Nations, 1976:2). *Equality* and *sovereignty* are two pillars in most of the agenda’s narrative, which translate into specific goals to decrease inequality, as well as explicitly emphasising the importance of nationally sovereign knowledges. Where did this narrative come from? Many of the historical reviews of Habitat I focus on the ‘*epic*’ atmosphere that the conference created (Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017; Satterthwaite, 2016), as well as the role of “[a] few key individuals, who held ambitions to shift the global policy machine to confront sustainable development challenges” (Parnell, 2016:531), and managed to push for ambitious progressive agendas (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 2014). Certainly, individuals like Barbara Ward and David Satterthwaite, played a crucial role in centring the urban question in the international debates. In order to grasp the origins of such a progressive narrative, it is important to look at the wider geopolitical context in which Habitat I took place, and the role of some structural forces in shaping it. A factor that is mentioned from the very first page of the Vancouver declaration is its ambition to collaborate with the implementation of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and the direct relationship between this ambition and equality issues:

Human settlements are characterized by significant disparities in living standards and opportunities. Harmonious development of human settlements requires the reduction of disparities between rural and urban areas, between regions and within regions themselves. Governments should adopt policies which aim at decreasing the differences between living standards and opportunities in urban and non-urban areas. Such policies at the national level should be supplemented by policies designed to reduce disparities between countries within the framework of the New International Economic Order (United Nations, 1976:8).

The *Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order* had been published in 1974 by the UN as a proposal to replace the Bretton Woods system,¹ to create a new global architecture “based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and cooperation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social system which shall correct inequalities and redress existing injustices,

¹ Following the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, most Western economies agreed on a common monetary management system, that included monetary policies at the national level that allowed international cooperation. The International Monetary Fund was established along with the Bretton Woods agreement to regulate the international monetary system. The Bretton Woods system was interrupted in 1971 by the unilateral decision of the United States to terminate the convertibility of the US dollar to gold.

make it possible to eliminate the widening gap between the developed and the developing countries” (United Nations, 1974). The origins of the NIEO demands lie in voices that had emerged following independence movements, claiming the need for a new postcolonial order, by recognising that the “greatest and most significant achievement during the last decades has been the independence from colonial and alien domination of a large number of peoples and nations which has enabled them to become members of the community of free peoples” (United Nations, 1974).

According to the *Introduction Note* to the NIEO declaration in the UN archive, among the crucial actors advocating and pressuring for the declaration of a NIEO were the Non-Aligned Movement, looking “to lay the groundwork for a new order, a more equitable one” (Mahiou, 2011:2). The Non-Aligned Movement had been established in Sri Lanka in 1961, by leaders of countries that had gained independence in the previous decades, initially led by India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Indonesia and Ghana.² The movement was based on five pillars that had been previously declared as the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* between India and China, by Nehru and Zhou Enlai in 1954: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual nonaggression; mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence (Boutros-Ghali, 2004).

The unequivocal postcolonial nature of the declaration of the NIEO, and the explicit reference to the latter in the Vancouver declaration, explains in part the clear focus on equality and sovereignty in the first Habitat document. Through the efforts of progressive individuals and institutions prior and during the Habitat I conference, these principles were crystallised into explicit commitments and recommendations in the Vancouver outputs, translating the national focus into ‘urban’ and housing matters. The declaration presents ‘inequitable economic growth’ as one of the main global challenges, as well as “socio, economic, ecological and environmental deterioration which are exemplified at the national and international levels by inequalities in living conditions, social segregation, racial discrimination, acute unemployment, illiteracy, disease and poverty, the breakdown of social relationships and traditional cultural values and the increasing degradation of life-supporting resources of air, water

² Actually, it was first named as the “Non-Aligned Movement” in a conference in 1976, the same year of the Habitat I conference.

and land” (United Nations, 1976:3). Based on this, the declaration advocates for an economic development that “contributes to a more equitable distribution of its benefits among people and nations” (United Nations, 1976:4). Equality is also understood as equal rights for women and the youth, disparities between rural and urban areas, and the effective participation of “both skilled and unskilled” population. These principles translate into *The Vancouver Action Plan’s* recommendations, including at the very beginning of point ‘A.4: More equitable distribution’. The Action Plan also includes explicit reference to basic needs. Additionally, the declaration emphasises the notion of national sovereignty when discussing knowledge issues. It states: “Governments and the international community should facilitate the transfer of relevant technology and experience and should encourage and assist the creation of endogenous technology better suited to the socio-cultural characteristics [...] having regard to the sovereignty and interest of the participating States” (United Nations, 1976:8). The Action Plan also includes a recommendation specifically about “Indigenous planning models” (recommendation B.2), and a whole section on Public participation (Agenda item 10(e)).

Case of translation: Self-help ideas in Habitat I

What kind of urban praxes illustrate these paradigms, and the processes of knowledge translation they involved? An interesting case from this period is the series of knowledge translation processes that took place in relation to self-help housing from the 1970s. This is of course a non-linear process with many possible trajectories, but we want to focus on two particular processes at two different moments. There was a first process of knowledge translation from research and theory into global agenda setting, that can be recognised in the explicit reference during the Habitat I to the work of John Turner, as recognised by various authors (Ortiz Flores, 2008; Satterthwaite, 2016; Parnell, 2016; Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017).

Since the 1960s, Turner’s research had focused primarily on the processes of housing construction in the poor urban areas of Peru. In the context of increased informal urbanisation, Turner developed a body of work compiled most notably in his books *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (1972, co-authored by Robert Fichter), and *Housing by people: towards autonomy in building environments* (1976). There, he argued for an understanding of the value generated through informal processes of housing production, in the context of the general failure of

the modernist approach to mass housing in the Latin American context. His theoretical contributions can be summarised in the understanding of housing as a verb, the relevance of both *use value* and *exchange value* of housing, displacing the question of housing value from *what it is* to *what it does* to people, and the valuing of peoples' knowledge and decision-making in the production of their housing.

The presence of Turner at the Habitat I conference as a keynote speaker and advisor was widely noted: "One of the stars of the Forum was John Turner [...] Turner had a strong impact on the debates and resulting resolutions" (Ortiz Flores, 2008:22). Even if other Latin American academics collaborated in the construction of that grand narrative, Turner remained as its most visible face.

Turner's ideas translated mainly into the promotion of self-help programmes in Habitat I, that appear in the Vancouver declaration through guidelines calling for the urgent attention to the challenge of adequate shelter, "beginning with direct assistance to the least advantaged through guided programmes of self-help and community action" (United Nations, 1976:7). The logic of building a grand narrative coherent with the NIEO and its progressive ambitions of equality and sovereignty, found fertile terrain in the research of Turner, and particularly in his ideas about people's own knowledge and decision making, and the use value of housing, alongside viewing housing as a process.

It is interesting to note, however, that there was a second process of knowledge translation from those agendas to national and local policies. The year 1976 also saw the ILO World Employment Conference which provided a re-framing of Turner's self-help approach in its promotion of participation as an essential component of the implementation of the ILO's basic needs approach (Moser, 1989). Moser points to the diverging interpretations within UN-Habitat, comparing the 1984 UNCHS Participation Programme Report – in which participation is presented both as a means (to improve project efficiency and effectiveness) and "as an end in itself" – to the 1986 Director's report, "which defines participation quite clearly as an economically efficient means of achieving development in the housing sector" (1989:85). The latter reflects the global shift towards market enabling policies led by the World Bank, and the abandonment of the NIEO aspirations. Even if originally articulated under the frame of sovereignty and equality principles, the way in which the self-help ideas were translated into policies tended to facilitate the implementation of efficiency

principles developing out of the emerging neoliberal debates at the time (Pugh, 2001; Frediani 2009). According to Cedric Pugh, in first instance the Bank adopted Turner's ideas "especially because they were more economical and appropriate than formal sector public housing" (2001:404). This implied a process of de-politicisation of the ideas, adding an 'efficiency' perspective that was not present in the way in which Habitat I approached them.

The direct involvement of dwellers in the urbanisation process through 'illegal' land occupation that had been taking place since the 1950s, and that had inspired Turner's ideas, became then adapted and re-translated into models such as slum upgrading and site-and-service projects in the implementation of urban agendas by multi- and bi-lateral aid agencies like the World Bank, USAID and DFID in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These models also became instrumental in the consolidation of the withdrawal of the state and the implementation of neoliberal ideas (Burgess, 1992), particularly shifting the focus from a collective to an individual logic within a market approach (Frediani, 2009). Turner's ideas remained an important reference even during the 1980s and 1990s, when the Bank advocated for the role of governments in the "provision of housing finance", and "enabling markets to work with technical supplements" (The World Bank, 1993:53). The trajectory of self-help ideas shows how a particular conjuncture allowed the development of powerful synergies between the institutional and structural conditions of a period, and the research produced at the time. It also demonstrates how changes in the international paradigms and geopolitical landscape can disrupt declared intentions and produce new limitations for the implementation of such ideas.

Habitat II (1996): urban management, the environment, and sectorial break-down

The Habitat II conference took place in Istanbul in 1996. Although it could be argued that "the most significant aspect of Habitat II [...] is that the Conference confirmed the inexorable transition to '*an urbanising world*'" (Beall, 1996:133), the political context, the actors and the formulation of predominant ideas and approaches related to understanding and addressing an 'urbanising world' had shifted.

The principles of neoliberal globalisation alluded to in the previous section were widespread and implemented locally through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), usually as part of the requirements of

organisations such as the IMF and World Bank after the 1982 debt crisis. SAPs included transformation such as the opening of national economies to international financial markets, the privatisation of welfare services, the decrease of state's attributions and deregulation (Mohan, 1996), as well as the use of targeting principles in social policies with a focus on poverty reduction (Skocpol, 1991; Mkandawire, 2005).

Looking back on the outcomes of Habitat I, in practice the NIEO was never properly implemented, and was bypassed by the principles of the Washington Consensus that soon became the guiding principles for the global economy (Mahiou, 2011). This global shift also altered the fate of the urban agenda. Indeed, as Habitat I was taking place, the World Bank Group was developing a more explicit urban arm and driving international and national attention to cities (Cohen, 2001). Under McNamara's leadership (1968-81), the Bank underwent a re-orientation from post-war reconstruction to global South development, a move which played a substantial part in bringing cities to the fore in the last decades of the 20th century (Pieterse, 2013). In this context, urban issues were focused on poverty rather than inequality, within the Bank's increased priorities to basic needs in the late 1970s (Moser, 1989; Levy *et al*, 2015), and its emphasis on poverty as the dominant problem in the 1970s and 1980s (Parnell, 2016; Williams, 2012). In terms of strategies, particularly after 1984, the Bank's approach to urban policies was dominated by the logic of 'market enablement', especially for the housing sector (Frediani, 2006).

Within this framework, in 1986 the World Bank, UNCHS and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established the Urban Management Programme (UMP), that sought to be the "world's largest urban development multi-agency technical assistance programme" (UMP, in Werna, 1995:353). The establishment of the UMP reflected a shift towards 'management', which became the central approach to urban development during this period, an ethos that would replace the very notion of planning. As reflected by Werna, by 1995 urban management was seen "as 'the' ultimate approach [...] a concept which encapsulates the new tendencies, and is now at the core of urban development thinking and assistance" (1995:354). This shift impacted directly the setting up of a 'causal story' with strong focus on management and performance indicators, with the emergence of "new concepts of public sector management, many of them derived from the private sector" (Devas and Rakodi, 1993:43), with a strong "administrative/business emphasis" (Werna, 1995:355). Finally,

as discussed by Jones and Ward (1994), the UMP reflected "a broader paradigm shift away from large scale urban projects in which government expects to be the principal provider, towards a position in which the role of public administration is to 'enable' urban development processes, in part by offering conditions conducive for privately-raised capital to become involved" (1994:33). In its second phase (1992-1996), just before Habitat II, the UMP also promoted more venues for knowledge exchange laying out a series of regional 'expert panels', workshops and consultations, aiming to introduce new policies and tools.

The 1990s also saw the emergence of concerns linked to other issues, such as the centrality of women and the environment, which became growing themes in international discussions and non-governmental advocacy. Central to the focus on women's issues were the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as well as The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, which *Programme of Action* "emphasized the fundamental role of women's interests in population matters" (United Nations, n.d). Regarding the environment, a central moment was the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Fundamentally, Rio pushed an explicitly locally grounded international framework, *Agenda 21*, with explicit provisions for the local implementation of the summit's global aspirations. This marks the early days of the rise of cities as internationally active, with the founding of ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability in 1990s and its growth post-Rio. ICLEI came to represent one of the most well-known *city networks* – a type of city-driven cooperation mechanism that would experience a boom in the international politics of the early 2000s (Acuto, 2016).

Even in the context of a global landscape dominated by the post Washington Consensus focus on poverty, the rise of environmental concerns and its links to urban issues had direct implication in positioning social justice and to some extent equality within the international development debate. The publication in 1999 of a reader in 'Sustainable Cities' is a good example of the new and growing links between the urban and sustainability agendas at the time. These links had an explicit focus on social and environmental aspects, defining *sustainable development* as a term "to imply a simultaneous commitment to meeting human needs and to 'sustaining' or keeping intact environmental capital" (Satterthwaite, 1999:3). Arguably, the discourse of sustainable development consolidated in the *Agenda 21* "enlarged the consideration of rights through its explicit attention to the rights of future

generations and of present-day socially marginalized”, as did the “social- and environmental- justice debates (which) have involved equity issues at a range of scales, from the local to the global” (Haughton, 1999:233). This shift implied an understanding of equality as a non-static aspiration, incorporating a notion of time in the debate. Environmental concerns were practically recognised in the report published by UN-Habitat (1996) in preparation for the Habitat II conference. Nevertheless, the relevance of these agendas was still minor compared to the predominance of the focus on basic needs and poverty from dominant international organisations, with its roots in the 1970s ILO’s approach to basic needs.

The convening of national governments in Istanbul for Habitat II can be seen as the beginnings of the current focus on *cities* rather than human settlements, and of the more official opening to entities other than central government. This meant, for instance, that local governments began to be represented in the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, and non-governmental entities took a seat at the summit. The conference saw the growth in the numbers and variety of non-negotiating actors who gathered for debate, advocacy and alternative declarations on the side-lines of the formal discussions, for instance, like those catalysed by Rio’s aspirations for an explicit focus on ‘sustainable urbanisation’. The practice of ‘side events’ started at Habitat I by institutions like the IIED flourished in this and following international urban gatherings – including in the biannual UN World Urban Forums or the UN environmental negotiations on climate change – engendering multiple parallel non-official or ‘track 2’ processes for advocacy, testifying to the expanding arena of global urban governance (Dellas *et al.*, 2018).

To understand how knowledge translation was conceived in Habitat II, it is important to look at the process previous to the conference as much as the nature of the final outcomes. Between 1994 and 1996, the UN developed a process of collecting evaluations and proposals prior to the summit: “around the world, different forces articulated themselves at national, regional and international level; trade union confederations, NGOs and academia participated, as well as a great number of dwellers organisations from every country” (Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017:168). This process opened the opportunity for a great dialogue, as “despite great variation around the world, these discussions were very important in creating an opportunity for learning and dialogue, and they were quite rich in their content” (Cohen, 1996:429).

The spread of managerial and neoliberal development agendas explains in part the approach to knowledge and urban equality in Habitat II. As recognised by the *Introductory Note* of the NIEO declaration, “the reference to a radical vision has faded and the strategy of the countries of the South is now focused on more sectoral and more concrete concerns. [...] The approach is now more pragmatic, with the aim of making corrections on a case-by-case basis, addressing the difficulties developing countries are experiencing, rather than seeking a global, abstract solution to international economic inequalities” (Mahiou, 2011:5). If the construction of a first collective narrative shaped the process in Habitat I, Habitat II shifted from a *big narrative* rationale into the logic of targets and sectors.

The result of Habitat II was also a global agenda for urban issues. A much bigger document than its 1976 predecessor, *The Habitat Agenda* contained a series of goals and principles, commitments, and plans of action, to address two themes: “adequate shelter for all” and “sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world”, appealing to a sense of hope based on “a new era of cooperation, an era of a culture of solidarity” (United Nations, 1996a). Basic needs, international cooperation, the role of the private sector, and the notion of ‘best practices’ were key aspects in the Istanbul document. Equality issues receded to the background compared with the Vancouver Declaration, with less mention in the over two-hundred paragraphs, in which the focus was on “better conditions, better standards”, and less on inequalities or injustices. While poverty is mentioned at least 94 times, equality and equity are mentioned less than 20 times, and often attached to concerns about gender inequality or ‘equal access to’ services and infrastructure for different groups, including resources such as “equal access to credit” (United Nations, 1996b). Even in terms of rural/urban relationships, the focus tended to be on “adequate infrastructure” rather than concerns with disparities. Despite this emphasis, the discussion in Habitat II also included more critical perspectives on SAPs, mainly led by certain individuals, more notably Caroline Moser within the Bank (Parnell, 2016). Such views invited the framing of basic services and poverty within the notion of assets of the poor. As described by Levy *et al.*, the “commitments to addressing basic needs and to universal provision (for water, sanitation, and primary health care) [...] re-emerged in the 1990s, in part within discussions of human development” (Levy *et al.*, 2015:21).

The aftermath of Habitat II was not void of criticism. Influential non-governmental actors and academics

were already pointing out in 1996 how the ‘poverty bias’ (with particular emphasis on the ‘problem’ of the ‘slums’) meant that focusing only on “the needs of the poor” diverted attention away from the “structural causes of poverty – operating within nations and internationally” (Mitlin, Satterthwaite and Stephens, 1996:4). During the same period and from within the World Bank, Michael Cohen (1996) had already identified five substantive problems of Habitat II to effectively attain its ambitious objectives: first, the lack of cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary thinking, and the fact that the discussions remained largely sectoral; second, the lack of big picture and broader issues at national level; third, as the NGOs were included in official events of the conference, Cohen suggested that their potential impact decreased, as “bringing the NGOs into the tent [...] may have diminished the “creative tension” between the two perspectives” (1996:432); fourth, a lack of discussion about capacity building and the non-operationalisation of the notion of environmentally sustainable development, even if both were included then in the Declaration commitments; and finally, the limited references to research during the conference, which he qualifies as a “dangerous lacuna”, as “in Istanbul, the research community was neither very visible nor effective in conveying that the pace and scale of change requires more, not less, research” (Cohen, 1996:432-433).

Finally, in terms of the role of knowledge for the agenda’s implementation, the Istanbul declaration exhibits a few important differences from the Habitat I document: the notion of *partnerships* prevails over participation, with emphasis on the private, public and third sector partnerships; it advocates for decentralisation, and the mobilisation of resources at the national and international level, including financial and technological ones, illustrated through ideas such as capacity-building and technology transfer (United Nations, 1996a).

The years following the Habitat II conference were marked by the development, negotiation and launch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. Here cities occupied an important but often undefined role, with a strong focus on poverty and a predominant dualism between North/South. The rhetoric and mainstreaming of the MDGs became, alongside environmental debates on climate change, perhaps the most pervasive concern across most of the UN system, and often overshadowing the statements of Habitat II. This promoted a specific worldview on the issue of urban development. As Parnell points out, the MDG’s “focus on slum eradication is the best example of an earlier iteration of global policy that impacted directly on how

cities across the world and especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were approached by policy makers, but which could not be thought of as a comprehensive urban policy agenda” (Parnell, 2016:530).

Case of translation: Partnerships for service provision in Habitat II

As discussed in the previous section, when the Habitat Agenda was published in 1996, the global geopolitics had witnessed a complete reconfiguration. The second translation case we want to discuss is an example of a much smaller scale, but clearly illustrative of that paradigm change. A well-known and successful community-based initiative, the NGO Orangi Pilot Project–Research and Training Institute (OPP–RTI) is located in the town of Orangi in Karachi, and other Pakistani cities. The OPP-RTI’s low-cost sanitation programme is based on a partnership model in which sewerage systems inside houses and neighbourhood are developed by communities themselves and are linked to an ‘external’ sewer system developed by local government. The success of a large number of the OPP-RTI projects has “demonstrated that communities can finance, manage and build internal sewerage development provided that they are organized and supported with technical support and managerial guidance” (Hasan, 2006:451).

The project has consolidated a network of collaboration based on the Urban Resource Centre (URC). The URC was founded in 1989 aiming “to influence the planning and implementation process in Karachi to make it contribute to poverty reduction (which also includes reducing its capacity to create or exacerbate poverty) and become more environment friendly”, by “developing an accessible knowledge base on Karachi and on urban planning and projects available for use by all interest groups” (Hasan, 2007:277-278). The aim was to support community-based organisations through various activities that include research, advocacy, networking, monitoring evictions, and support and training. One of the means that the URC used to influence planning was through partnerships, including financial ones. This also aligned to UNCHS’ focus on ‘urban observatories’ as sites of partnership through the Global Urban Observatory Network, of which URC has been a member since.

The URC as an institution has preserved its independence, ‘resisting’ offers of resources to become closer to official institutions, so that it can remain closer to grassroots organisations “to be part of the solution rather than part of the development problem”

(Hasan, 2007:282). Since the early 1990s and to preserve its independence from the government, it accessed funding from international organisations. In the case of the OPP-RTI, the URC was at the base of its creation, and was a key factor in its financial success: “The URC was a major player in getting a US\$ 100 million Asian Development Bank loan cancelled in favour of the US\$ 18 million OPP-RTI alternative proposal for the Orangi Waste Water Management Project” (Hasan, 2007:286).

Undoubtedly, OPP-RTI is a successful project in many respects: its effective delivery of services, the involvement of community members and grassroots organisations, the international networks of collaboration that it has established, and its capacity to scale-up. In the context of these achievements, it is interesting to look at how it illustrates the ideas of the global knowledge paradigms as embedded in the Habitat II processes. The notion of partnership is a central strategy of collaboration and scaling-up projects, including in financial terms. The partnership is also a response to the absence of the public sector as the main provider. As explained by Mitlin, the process of acknowledging the withdrawal of the state required an adaptation from the civil society, that in the case of the OPP-RTI implied that “at the beginning of their programme [...] a serious obstacle to community improvements to sanitation was the belief that the state would provide, even though residents accepted that this was unlikely” (Mitlin, 2001:161). This is also the period in which the co-production of services, understood as “the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not “in” the same organization” (Ostrom, 1996:1073), is seen as an efficient and effective way to deliver goods and services, involving community-based organisation in the urban process. Finally, the scale of OPP-RTI itself indicates a change of approach from Habitat I, from the grand narrative to the more sectoral and targeted logic to address poverty which dominated the 1990s. In a period of the growing importance of the private sector, this case shows the emergence of community-based organisations that in order to retain and increase their power to influence planning processes, had to find in the language of partnership and entrepreneurship an opportunity to legitimise local collective community action.

Habitat III (2016): the expansion of networks and the ‘science of cities’

As the MDGs were being implemented and monitored, the international landscape of urban development

experienced a growth in transnational and non-governmental initiatives, city networks and civil society efforts, from new types of city coalitions like the C40 Climate Leadership Group, transnational bottom-up initiatives like Slum Dwellers International (SDI), and multilaterally-supported but ‘arm’s length’ efforts like those of the Cities Alliance. The growth of this semi-formal system of non-state actors and semi-formalised processes, which often gathered in different advocacy guises such as the Global Urban Campaign and the Global Urban Taskforce, was by the late 2000s one of the driving forces of the internationalisation of urban issues well beyond the Habitat and UN processes. The role of several of these actors in advocating for greater commitment to addressing urban equality aspirations as well as North/South dichotomies, became increasingly central in global urban governance. They also called for reform within the UN system and for changes in attitude by the global philanthropic sector towards these issues (Revi, 2017).

This became central as the MDGs framework approached its conclusion and the successor programme, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), kicked off in full swing. Within this context, a clear example of the role of these growing networks was the creation in September 2013 of the *Urban SDG Campaign*, that lobbied the UN to establish an ‘urban’ goal (now SDG-11), with substantial involvement of a purpose-built UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network to host the process (SDSN, 2013). Beyond SDSN, the Urban SDG Campaign (often represented by the social media campaign “#urbanSDG”) also coalesced a larger group of actors from academia, local government and private sector, with extensive engagement for instance by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) city network, numerous scholars mentioned thus far, and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. Unlike the MDGs and their focus on ‘developing’ contexts, the SDGs have an explicitly universal approach, breaking from acceptance of the North/South dichotomy, and even if poverty is still a central issue, the urban SDG includes the equality question through the imperative to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (United Nations, 2017a).

This growing semi-formal coalition also played an important role in influencing the direction of Habitat III and the negotiations underpinning the establishment of a UN ‘New Urban Agenda’ (Birch, 2016). Held in Quito in 2016, the third Habitat conference was the culmination of a lengthy process.

This entailed months of research-practice dialogues under the aegis of a ‘policy units’ and ‘issue papers’ system designed to provide expert input into the formulation of the agenda across a variety of key themes (either coalesced in formal units or engaged, mostly via UN actors, in providing specific issue input into the text), and to identify the pressing urban challenges to be tackled in Quito (Revi, 2016). Issues of urban equality occupied a central position through the principle of “leave no one behind” and the ambitions of “social cohesion, equality and inclusion” (United Nations, 2017b). However, even if issues of urban equality found wider consideration than in many SDG venues, they also were limited in the process of being narrowed into a single negotiated document. This meant intense discussions about feasible statements and missing challenges, as well as some incongruence between aggregated points that fit in discrete and sometimes contradictory sections within the final text; the NUA final document has even been accused of being “wishful thinking based neither on the present nor the past” (Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017:165).

These contradictions can be observed, for example, in the *right to the city* campaign. Arguably, the inclusion of the right to the city can be seen as “the clarion call of major southern nations led by Brazil and other Latin American nations, who are now much more prominent and powerful within the UN system than in its early years when northern powers dominated” (Parnell, 2016:533). However, a lengthy debate over the feasibility of a right to the city approach took place, and even if some related aspirational statements made it into the final document, there is little indication as to implementation (Klaus and Singer, 2017; Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017). Along the same lines, HIC notes: “Although the NUA dutifully mentions the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, accountability, and solidarity, it does not stress existing legal obligations of states or operationalize the “indivisibility of human rights” framework” (HIC, 2017:124). Likewise, there has been criticism of “the imposition of paradigms such as ‘the competitive city’ or ‘the smart city’” (Zárata, 2017:202) at the expense of the rights-based approach advocated by many civil society organisations. Questions have been raised about the pressures behind the explicit inclusion of the smart city in the third draft of the Agenda published on 28th July 2016 (paragraph 66 of the final version states: “We commit ourselves to adopting a smart-city approach”), when neither the so-called ‘Zero Draft’ previous to negotiated approval, nor the Revised Zero

Draft after a round of negotiations and published on 18th June 2016, included mentions of smart cities.³

Cohen’s critique of Habitat II, particularly regarding the diminished role of research in the 1996 summit, accurately reflects the basic paradigms of knowledge translation that have emerged in the last two decades. In the case of Habitat III, the ‘policy units’ and ‘issue papers’ seem to be a good example of the focus on *expert-led* processes and *measurable data* as the main kind of inputs labelled as valuable knowledge. As described in the prologue of the NUA document, “The New Urban Agenda presents a paradigm shift based on the science of cities” (Clos, 2017), making explicit mention of the role of the scientific community. This approach also influences the way the implementation and monitoring of the NUA (and SDG-11) is seen, highlighting as part of the *Implementation Plan* the role of “technology and innovation and enhanced knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms” as well as “evidence-based and practical guidelines for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals” (United Nations, 2017b:32). To do so, it calls for “robust science-policy interfaces in urban and territorial planning and policy formulation and institutionalized mechanisms for sharing and exchanging information, knowledge and expertise, including the collection, analysis, standardization and dissemination of geographically based, community-collected, high-quality, timely and reliable data” (United Nations, 2017b:39).

Despite this, both prior to and after the Quito Summit, a growing community of international urban scholars lamented the fundamental flaws in the science-policy links and interfaces underpinning these processes, calling for the need of radical reform (Acuto, Parnell and Seto, 2018).⁴ Scholars and policymakers acknowledged how contemporary processes of knowledge production are “disparate, marginalized and ill-prepared to

³ All versions of the New Urban Agenda drafts are available online at <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>. Last accessed 22/08/2018.

⁴ Climate has perhaps been the best example of this. In this context a now well-established community of practitioners has regularly fed into the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This first entailed providing input in the broader scientific process part of this multilateral system. Yet it then resulted in carving a recognition of the importance of cities not just in the Paris Agreement but also in a purpose-built component of the UNFCCC’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, culminating in a ‘CitiesIPCC’ conference in 2018 and a joint call for strengthened science-policy partnerships jointly produced knowledge (Bai *et al.*, 2018).

interact effectively with global policy” (McPhearson *et al*, 2016:165). Criticism has also been raised about the scant attention given in the final draft of the NUA to the key roles that local government and civil society organisations can play in its implementation (Satterthwaite and Johnson, 2016), and the exclusive focus on cities and the urban realm over the more holistic idea of habitat, in what has been described as “a top-down shift to replace the more–universal vision of previous Habitat Conferences” (HIC, 2017:123). The focus on an ‘urban agenda’ has been questioned, given that almost half of the world population still live in other kinds of human settlements (Rodríguez and Sugranyes, 2017), a challenge which requires a different set of knowledges and tools to those that emerged from the Summit’s spaces of exchange.

Case of translation: The era of data in Habitat III

In the context of a growing and more complex landscape of international actors, community-based organisations are adopting different strategies to increase their impact and response to new demands. One of these strategies has been the use of information and language that is consistent with the *data* and *science* approach adopted in the latest Habitat summit. This data-bias is manifested in the way in which organisations have approached the production of inputs for the conference and the implementation of the agenda. This includes organisations that traditionally have looked for alternative approaches to planning practices and co-production strategies. One of them is Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) and their most recent campaign ‘Know Your City’.

SDI is a network of community-based organisations and NGOs that links organised members of the urban poor from more than thirty countries. The story of collaborations behind SDI goes back to the late 1980s in India and Southeast Asia, but it was in 1996 when the international network was officially created. Over the last decades, they have consolidated a network “to create a global voice of the urban poor, engaging international agencies and operating on the international stage in order to support and advance local struggles” (SDI, n.d). Nowadays, they operate actively with federations of the urban poor in cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

A key feature of SDI’s strategy has been that local capacity should be built “within the leadership of the urban poor, rather than the leadership of the NGOs” (SDI, n.d), shifting traditional structures of collaborations. Historically, knowledge and learning

have been at the core of SDI’s concerns. One of the main strategies of the network has been the use of ‘horizontal exchanges’, which include groups of urban poor traveling to informal settlements in different countries to share knowledge and experiences. In his research on knowledge and development, McFarlane use the example of SDI “as a means for illustrating the use of a post-rationalist approach to knowledge and learning in development” (2006:288). As he explains, even if the centrality that SDI gives to knowledge concurs with more mainstream development visions such as those of the World Bank, “SDI politicizes knowledge for development by contesting the ways in which knowledge is conceived, how it is created, how it is communicated and how learning takes place” (McFarlane, 2006:288-289).

Considering the role that SDI has had in articulating the voice of groups that usually have little power, in gaining international visibility, and politicising and contesting the way knowledge is produced, it is particularly interesting to look at the way it has engaged with global agendas under the current paradigms. Their most recent project is the ‘Know Your City’ campaign - a collaboration with Cities Alliance. Cities Alliance is a “global partnership supporting cities to deliver sustainable development” (Cities Alliance, n.d), hosted by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and operating a Multi-Donor Fund supported by a grant-making mechanism with global reach. Its members comprise six constituencies: national governments, multilateral institutions, associations of local governments, international NGOs, the private sector and foundation, and universities and knowledge networks. This partnership reflects an extension of SDI’s principle of *constructive engagement* within the current configurations of global urban governance and paradigms of knowledge translation.

Looking to put together ‘hard data and rich stories’ through community-driven data on slums, the Know Your City campaign is described as follows:

Around the world, slum dwellers collect city-wide data and information on informal settlements. This work creates alternative systems of knowledge that are owned by the communities and have become the basis of a unique social and political argument that supports an informed and united voice of the urban poor. SDI’s databases are becoming the largest repositories of informal settlement data in the world and the first port of call for researchers, policy makers, local governments and national governments (Know your City, n.d).

The data available online shows evidence at the settlement level, which includes information about prioritised development needs, percentage of land ownership, current eviction threat levels, legal status, estimated population and area, sanitation and water infrastructure, the organised community, and health access and facilities. The campaign has a strong bias towards the kind and scale of empirical information needed to influence the implementation of Habitat III and other global processes of agenda setting. This was explicitly stated in the networking event organised by SDI and Cities Alliance in the context of the World Urban Forum in 2018, under the title 'Using community-collected data for successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda.' This strategy adopted by SDI should be framed and understood as probably the most tactical way to participate in this global process, through partnering with Cities Alliance and through the explicit engagement with the language and impact metrics set by the UN.

In line with what we have discussed in the previous cases, a number of further questions emerge here on how power is negotiated in the shaping of research and practice in the current scenario. In a more globalised context, community-based organisations need new strategies to be able to exercise power and participate in global agenda setting. The production of a particular kind of community data-based knowledge is a strategy to take part in international networks and conversations, in the context of a much more complex and disputed terrain populated by public and private sector actors and diverse interests. It seems important to question how the different interfaces in which knowledge translation is taking place facilitates encounters between various knowledge co-production processes; and to what extent the favouring of some kinds of knowledge (i.e. data-based information) may hinder the emergence and recognition of alternative geographies and understandings of knowledge, despite the tireless efforts of organisations such as SDI to mainstream information produced by less powerful groups in cities.

Final reflections

In this paper we have presented a re-reading of the history of the Habitat conferences and the setting of a 'global urban agenda', discussing the way in which knowledge has been valued and translated over time. We suggest that this perspective is relevant as it provides a particular perspective to understand knowledge translation as a space of negotiation and unveils the mechanisms through which these

processes can become vehicles for challenging inequalities. In understanding how knowledge has been negotiated historically, we hope to illustrate the ways in which different global and local agendas have been produced, and how changing contexts, actors and ideas have generated spaces not only for cooperation, but also co-option.

To conclude, we want to reflect on the value of this historical review for contemporary planning practice. The growing presence of the urban agenda in multilateral and global forums "put(s) enormous, possibly untenable, pressure on planners to deliver sustainable development" (Barnett and Parnell, 2018:25), which is particularly challenging as the definitions of 'who is a planner' in local contexts becomes less clear. In the different historical moments discussed, various actors have found ways to translate these global approaches into planning practices, sometimes challenging paradigms and 'causal stories' through the constitution of advocacy alliances and networks, and sometimes adopting tactical nuances that involve using similar language and approaches to those of international actors, while attempting to keep local priorities and knowledge claims paramount.

In the context of growing complexities in the international setting, at the local level the process of implementing 'global' agendas that pursue social justice needs to recognise the variety of existing knowledges. A critical reason for understanding how knowledge translation processes have taken place historically is to grasp the underlying power asymmetries that govern them; by being explicit about how global dynamics interact with community-produced or popular knowledges, we hope to unveil some of those power negotiations. These questions become more crucial if we acknowledge that different regions in the world have had different trajectories of modernisation and urbanisation, which generate distinctive knowledges. As Harrison points out, "if we accept that different regions in the South are the locus of differentiated modernities, then the recovery of subalternised knowledge is potentially critical to the construction of other ways of thinking" (2006:324). Opportunities in society can only be transformed if unequal relations of power in knowledge production and circulation are challenged, questioning and reviewing the relationships that govern the production of knowledge at different scales, and its implications for planning practices. For planning scholars and practitioners, understanding the nature of those processes at the international level can be strategic to leverage knowledges that otherwise remain invisible or undervalued.

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