Power relations and incentive structures in university PE with urban marginalised actors

There is an expanding body of work examining knowledge coproduction between universities and urban actors (Hemstroem, Palmer, Polk, Perry, & Simon, 2021; Nesti, 2017), reflecting on the pedagogical and social impact of these experiences (Cognetti & Castelnuovo, 2019). This paper will discuss two models of public engagement (PE): the experience of partnering with informal settlement communities and their organisations in setting up a research centre in Sierra Leone (Rigon, Macarthy, Koroma, Walker, & Apsan Frediani, 2017) and the long-term relationship with civil society actors in London and Salvador de Bahia within the framework of an MSc in Social Development Practice.

Based on these engagements, the paper will argue for PE to be structurally planned within teaching and research and not as an afterthought. We found that it is only when it is planned as a core activity that it is possible to sustaining it in the long-term and a long-term relationship is fundamental for ethical and impactful PE. The paper will reflect on how planning public engagement at the core of teaching and research transforms the type of knowledge coproduced (Osuteye et al., 2019), and on what role the university and this new type of knowledge can play in relation to urban justice struggles. We found that such knowledge can often provide legitimacy to urban actors and, when used strategically, the university presence can be turned into a powerful tool to get grassroots claims recognised by public institutions.

The paper will also reflect on the open-ended and long-term nature of these experimental relations with partners in marginalised urban areas, outlining the challenges and the power issues involved with such knowledge coproduction. The paper will also engage with how the incentive structure of academics shape the public engagement work they do and how academics can find some '*room for manoeuvre*' for political work within a depoliticised emphasis on 'impact' in the neoliberal university. Finally, the paper will consider the incentives and politics of other urban actors for engaging in this work with universities.

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An empirical reflction on two experiences with an element of public engagement. Purposely avoided some theoretical grounding in this paper. My reflection on collective work. Two initiatives done, mainly with one colleague Alexandre Apsan Frediani. And the second one in Brazil was led by him.

The UK government channelled 1.5 billion pounds of aid through the university, which universities had to use for research benefiting developing countries

This reinforced an institutional push for any academic to work in the global South, exacerbating a phenomenon I had observed for many years. Global North Principal investigators buying out the best local academics from their important job of training the next generation of urban professionals and from advising their government. With hundreds of dollars per day as consultant in their project, on their research agenda. Many of these PI never worked in the South.

Little knowledge left in the country and fragmentation between projects where PIs ignored each others.
In 2014, in the context of Sierra Leone, where civil war ended in 2002 displacing 1/3 of pop
post-war recovery was undermined by the Ebola epidemic, which killed approximately 4,000 people in Sierra Leone (and many more in neighbouring countries) and had a major impact on the country's economy. Sierra Leone remains at the bottom of the Human Development Index, ranking 179th out of 188. 78%
of the population is in multidimensional poverty2 and a further 15% is at risk of falling into multidimensional poverty, while maternal mortality is the highest in the world.
After a small consultancy engagement, A development donor initially asked if UCL could help with multiple consultancies to generate the knowledge needed to inform and help the coordination of international and local NGOs operating in the informal settlements of Sierra Leone. This approach was not sustainable and we suggested to invest in creating permanent capacity through a research centre linked to a local university able to provide this actionable knowledge.

Alexandre Frediani, myself at UCL and Joseph Macarthy and Braima Koroma based at Njala University co-founded the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre. Directly linked and playing a knowledge management role for NGOs operating in the area. important step as knowledge advantages used by NGOs to gain funding, so shift that open space for collaboration amongst NGOs. Also residents thorugh the federation of the urban and rural poor were driectly shaping the research agenda.
All the projects proposed by different international PIs are negotiated, knowledge remains within SLURC, and together such knowledge is more than the sum of the parts.
One obstacle was that the partner university was not used to work in the city and did not have the capacity to administrate complex projects on the ground. The financial management of the university did not pass the financial management requirements of donors. This lead to the creation of the research centre as an autonomous organisation controlled 40% by the local university, 40% by UCL and 20% by local civil society. Academics with sellable knowledge often do extra consultant work, which is major source of income. In order for them to bid and dedicate to the research centre rather than individual gigs, there was the need of financial incentives on top of their academic salaries but this created tensions with the university administration.

Also, apart from the research project conducted by different academics from across the world in partnership with the team. The project also needed financial and management mentoring, four years of daily mentoring, an enabling role that only an non-academic donor had been willing to fund to some extent and that only a renewed focus on impact allowed academics to take on board as part of their duties.

Today the centre is a trusted source of knowledge and debate by government, civil society and residents' organisations, but without core funding running after project by project sometimes affecting the potential of the convening role and of the "putting the knowledge together". For example, very difficult for my colleagues in Sierra Leone to commit time to write about the experience outside research projects reports.

The second example is about the practice component of the MSc Social Development Practice that I co-direct with Julian Walker. It is the most intense academic module of the programme that, in the years, I am discussing here, was led by my colleague Alexandre Apsan FRediani, but with the strong involvement of other academics. Students work the entire year preparing for a 2 to 3 weeks practice engagement.

Partnership with a research group Lugar Comum in the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the Federal University of Bahia. Every year, we could bring our students and staff and work with a number of their students and staff and 7 social movements struggling for the right to the city and to stay put, to continue living where they are. Our academic partner questioned throughout the hierarchies that they saw, primarily represented by us having the money to travel and being ranked as top world faculty for the built environment. Discussions amongst staff where mostly in Portuguese, forcing the team to learn the language to avoid the use of English. A formal partnership between universities took years to negotiate because they wanted to sign a document in Portuguese and wanted as a country to resolve controversy Portugal and not what UCL lawyers indicated, making UCL lawyers going mad. Also, we saved on our travel budget by cramming elite students in hostels to create a pot to fund travels of Brazilian social movemnts and staff to the UK. Their trip and them meeting the social movements stuggling for the right to the city in London and witnessing the structural violence of neoliberal developers-led urban development was a revealing moment where they realised the progressive nature of the Brazilian legal framework and the room of manoeuvre that communities had, with important solidarity hugs exchanged. With lot of planning and support from our Brazilian colleagues, the presence of students and staff from UCL was tactically used to obtain the presence of hard to reach government actors. Once they came to the meeting, the floor was left for the movements to directly engage with the authorities.

While for UCL staff, there was a need to combine the teaching/engagement with research as the time intensive experience was only justifiable with some research built around it, our Brazilian colleagues saw their own research (often on subject such as history of architecture) as separate from their engagement with social movements, fearing that a research commitment would imply deviating from the total support of the movements' agenda. One colleague managed to write a photo book inquiring the meanings of certain words from the social movements in London and Salvador de Bahia and the students. However, the fact that in London, we needed to progress from the engagement with movements and teaching to some actual academic writing or even funded research which was not a priority for Brazilian colleagues who, once obtained a job, had a security of tenure independent from their productivity. This meant that over time, once the teaching engagement concluded, the potential to continue this interesting work died down, after a failed attempt at a funded bid, with online meeting where we were not able to agree on a productive plans. There was on one Brazilian professor who spent a year at the DPU during the pandemic with limited exchange and a Brazilian student who won a scholarship for a MSc at UCL and with whom we have worked on some projects afterwards.

Different ideas of academics position in public engagement, at SLURC, very much by doing research by in a specific way, in the second our colleagues saw it as a sepaate dimension from the academic research. While Public engagement increasingly recognised as important (for example, from the Research Excellence Framework, 25% of funds are allocated on the basis of case studies of impact), and it is included in promotion criteria at UCL, it is only viable when embedded in teaching and research. For this to happen, there is a need to plan the public engagement into other teaching/research activities from the inception.