

Securing Positive Change in International Urban Poverty Reduction Policies

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Counter-hegemonic practices and imaginaries: From Nairobi to Caracas

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Introduction

The multifaceted processes of globalization, unprecedented urban growth, and increasing inequalities in the distribution of resources and strategic activities are reinforcing existing and creating new spaces of exclusion at global and local level (Balbo, 2002b; Burgess et al., 1997; Davis, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2007; Osmont and Goldblum, 2003; Zetter and White, 2002).

Cities of the south have mounting difficulties to respond to both economic and social demands. Economic development has not followed, as expected, the increased urbanisation, and cities are more and more pressured to provide the necessary 'infrastructure' in favour of economic growth in order to be inserted in the circuit of global economy. Poverty, vulnerability, and exclusion from the economic and social opportunities of the city seem to be multiplying under the effects of a globalized world economy.

Since the early 1970s the most important aid organisations have progressively refined their discourse and set a variety of urban strategies which generally call for the promotion of sustainability, from sustainable cities (World Bank, 2000) to sustainable urban shelters (UN-Habitat, 2006b). An even more articulated number of actions than in the past are envisaged and a renewed emphasis has been placed on planning, either strategic or integrated, as a tool for urban development, environmental management and prevention of slum formation. However, the dominant urban planning approach seems incapable of reconciling the demand for a productive city with the need of creating a more inclusive city, giving greater access to political, economic and social benefits for the majority of the population (Balbo, 1992, 1999, 2002b).

The city of south has become one of the central stages where the shift towards neoliberalism is played. The strategies formulated, mainly by western experts, for planning and managing the expanding third world urban space are largely driven by the demands of global capitalism. It is in those cities where neoliberal imaginary has the most important operational consequences: its hegemony is exercised by consent, but also by coercion through the 'conditionality' of aid. This 'material' and 'discursive' interest on the city is in line with the strategic role attributed to cities by the neo-liberal development, described in its features and main economic, social and political measures by most recent critical literature (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Osmont, 2002, 2006; Osmont and Goldblum, 2003).

The research of new paradigms for sustainable urban development, pro-poor policies able to address the needs of the disadvantaged, and innovative instruments for managing the complex urban world and overcome inequality, alienation and injustice, are, rhetorically or genuinely, the objectives of the 'international development community' lead by multilateral aid organisations. However, this research appears feeble in taking meaningfully into account both bottom up practices contesting urban neoliberal policies outcomes and alternative approaches (in terms of concepts, policies and strategies) emerging at different scale (from the local to the international), promoted by various actors (NGOs, movements, municipalities, intellectual organizations, etc.).

This paper, a work in progress, would like to contribute to understand this gap and to help to bring in the scientific debate alternative practices and imaginaries emerged and still emerging at various scale of contestation. There is the necessity to look at bottom up responses to the neoliberal agenda springing from deprived local groups and places; but it is also essential to analyse the variety of imaginaries articulated (e.g. the right to the city), which, in spite of, and because of, the hegemony of the neoliberal culture, are resilient or are emerging.

The case studies presented refer to different type of spatiality, in terms of scale and (non)materiality, different type of subjectivity (international organisations and civil society at different scale). The analysis aim to highlight their contributions (more or less consistent and articulated, discursive and/or material, strong or fragmented) towards the production of alternative knowledge capable to be translated into socio-spatial projects.

Part 1: Conceptual framework

1. Power and knowledge

(Counter-)hegemony: basis for a conceptual framework

The theoretical and analytical framework for analysing alternative imaginaries and practices refers to the concept of hegemony in order to take into consideration both material and discursive elements and highlight the key role of the power-knowledge relations in the affirmation of alternative projects. Specifically, we refer to the concepts of: a) hegemony, asserted by Gramsci (1971), and b) (counter-) hegemony worked by Sum (Sum, 2006a, 2006b, 2007)¹. It also draws on insights from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001, 2005), which explores the connection between language and unequal relations of power.

Hegemony, in Gramsci, is a comprehensive term for conceptualising power and the struggle for power, which depends on consent rather than just force. It indicates the ability of one social class to dominate over others, not only in political and economic terms, but also in cultural terms, referring to the capacity to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense'. Ideology is a key-mechanism of exercising power by consent, and discourse and language represent key-vehicles for establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 1995). Hegemony is not a static, rigid system of top-down domination, but a dialectic process, which involve counter-hegemony (resistance and contestation to domination). It is a complex and contradictory process of social formation, continually transforming itself because counter-hegemonic forces challenge dominant institutions, imaginaries, and practices (Gill, 2008; Leitner et al., 2007b; Rose, 2002; Sum, 2006a). Hegemony implies the engagement of practices in various domains of the civil society that consolidate 'common sense' assumptions particular relations and ideologies. Thus, the intellectuals play a fundamental role, as, by shaping and re-shaping objects, concepts, theories, and visions they contribute to affirm certain cognitions and representations of the world. These processes, largely discursive, are the most effective mechanisms for sustaining and reproducing the cultural dimension of hegemony. The network of social relations (thinkers, experts, NGOs, etc.) that selectively transmit certain values over others reflect the hegemonic project of the dominant social forces. Conversely, counter-hegemonic conceptions need to struggle for the de-naturalization of existing conventions, beliefs and practice and replace them with others.

The struggles for hegemony are waged through battle for ideas and mobilization of material resources and capacities. The success depend on the capacity to articulate convincing visions which combine political, intellectual and moral leadership with a flow of material rewards (Sum, 2006 in Fraser and Bartky, 1992).

Imaginaries and practices

The hegemonic process operates at the semiotic and material level. As imaginaries, objects, identities are first discursive in nature, the discourse represents a strategic tool for hegemonic culture, and is an opportunity for counter-hegemonic culture to affirm alternative conceptions of the

socio-spatial structures and relations. Systems of meaning and signification are the complex products of history, constitute culture and generate from civil society, state and other institutions (education, religion, political parties, intellectuals, etc.), therefore the exercise of power also entangles with placing limits on oppositional discourses and practices, refraining debate, shifting discussions and argumentations. However, counter-hegemonic discursive practices can challenge prevailing worldviews, show the contradictions of the hegemonic project and propose various forms of alternative set of norms, beliefs, ideals.

Imaginarities (economic, socio-spatial, legal, political, etc.) are narrations, descriptive or predictive, of highly complex realities, which mean to represent, simplify and condensate, in order to make them an object of calculation, management, governance, or guidance. Imaginarities “are discursively constituted and materially reproduced on many sites and scales, in different spatio-temporal contexts, and over various spatio-temporal horizons”² (Jessop, 2004). Dominant and contesting imaginaries and practices take place in the same historic contest, are dialectically influenced and they are mutually reshaped³ (Leitner et al., 2007b).

The city itself engages an ideological dimension, which is first a discursive construction. In the representation and cognition of the world, socio-spatial configurations (cities, human settlements, metropolis, etc.) increasingly acquire the role of proper urban imaginaries, capable of reflecting and condensate hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. The city of the South, as a discourse, produces concepts and theories, which contribute to the construction of new imaginaries (e.g. city without slum, sustainable city, livable city), that, if normalized, become new regimes of truth. Strategies shift constantly in order to adjust to changing historic circumstance and involve new ‘technologies of power’ (on individuals and populations) implemented by experts and operators and conformed social movements.

The processes of socio-spatial imaginaries and practices formation represent struggles for hegemony: the restructuring of capitalism include changes in the social construction of relations between space-times, which need to be legitimised, normalised for being implemented from local to global scale. These processes are omnipresent in texts. They depend on the production of knowledge and discourses, which regulates conduct, constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way things are represented, thought about, envisaged and practised.

Discourses are more than ways of giving meaning to the world. They include representations of how things are and were, as well as representations of how things might or could or should be. Imaginarities envisage possible social practices and networks of social practices, activities, social subjects, social relations, instruments, objects, space, times, values. They can become real, and become actual activities, subjects, social relations etc., through operationalisation. Discourses as imaginaries may also come to be inculcated as new ways of being, new identities. Inculcation happen at semiotic level (for instance by enacting new genres, or chain of genres, through styles, ways of using language) and materially in bodies, postures, gestures, ways of moving, etc. (Fairclough, 2005).

Counter-hegemonic socio-spatial imaginaries and practices

Capitalism needs the city for reproducing itself, but urbanisation creates contradictions, and the socio-spatial landscape of the urbanised capitalism is something more than the product of the transformative power of capitalism and technology. Urbanisation implies a specific human organization in the spatial-temporal context, which involves all forces and aspects of human life that may conflict with each other. The result may not be harmonization (Harvey, 1989b). Insofar contestation is unavoidable, though it may be confined in small corners of the world, acts at small scale, and is unable to be consistent, gain strength and credibility.

The hegemonic culture has emphasised the urban horizon and the city-level in all its physical, social and cultural aspects, so as the city is the crucible of new ideas and movements responsible for realising and envisaging alternative socio-spatial configurations. Social and geographical alternative imaginaries are mutually constituted and alternative visions of justice, democracy, freedom, and

ecology are imagined. The collective action that promote them involves struggles over the practices and meaning of everyday life and upon codes that are themselves spatially specific (Harvey, 1989b). Places become sites of conflict whereas social structures and relations of power, dominations and resistance interconnect.

Leitner et al. (2007b) have grouped the multiplicity of socio-spatial imaginaries contesting neoliberalism into four categories with respect to the object of contestation, and identifies four realms of practices: direct action, lobbying and legislative action, production of alternative knowledge, and production of alternative economic and social practices.

2. The right to the city

Re-emergence of the concept within human rights groups

The concept of the right of the city, coined by Henry Lefebvre in the upheavals of 1968, anticipated the struggles for adequate housing and public services taking place in many western countries and animated by social movements, labour unions, activists, and students⁴.

The concept fell out of favour in the following decades (Mitchell, 2003). In recent years, the right to city (and the rights talks) has regained attention amongst scholars, experts, civil society and policy makers. In the context of the mounting concerns over neoliberal global restructuring, erosion of democracy, disenfranchisement of citizens, who lose control over the city and some urban scholars have devoted attention to the idea of the right to city (Holston and Appadurai, 1999; Sandercock, 1998; Smith, 1993; Soja, 2000). However, they have not systematically elaborated what the right to the city entails (Purcell, 2002) or articulated the concept into a comprehensive counter-hegemonic project. The concept catalysis forms of counter-hegemonic imaginaries and practices, against neoliberal urban policies and practices. In the last few years, international human rights groups and organisations have build charters around it: the first was the World Charter for the Human Right to the City collectively authored by groups in occasion of a seminar at the World Social Forum in 2002. The second charter World Charter on the Right to the City was first released in July 2004 at the Social Forum of the Americas, then presented in September 2004 at the World Urban Forum and later in Porto Alegre during the World Social Forum in January 2005.

Whether those actions embed the theoretical and material implications of Lefebvre's view, or instead the right to the city is a slogan, an icon, they represent forms of contestation. They are cries against inequalities and social exclusion, and a call for democratic participation of urban dwellers in decision-making processes. Thus the right to the city re-emerged in times in which city inhabitants are increasingly disenfranchised and marginalised, in spite of the general augment of economic well-being at global level, and when the 'Washington Consensus' is still guiding a global turn towards neoliberal practices.

The right to participate and the right to appropriation: Henry Lefebvre

The first element for understanding what the right to the city means in Lefebvre's view⁵ is the concept of city itself. The city is an *oeuvre*, to which all inhabitants participate. It is a projection of society, of a certain way of living on the ground, an ensemble of systems of objects and values, in course of transformation and revision. The urban cannot be identified with a particular material territorial morphology, but cannot be detached from it. It is not a system outside time and above other systems. It is, instead, a social and mental quality, which refers to simultaneity, reunion, convergence, meeting and ensemble of differences (Lefebvre, 1970).

The statement that those who can exercise the right to the city are the *inhabitants* is the second fundamental element. Lefebvre does not speak about citizens or residents but about people that are living out the routine of the city life. This expression establishes an egalitarian principle of all people in front to the city and setting aside the necessity of having other rights or titles (citizenships, property ownership, etc.)⁶.

The right to the city is the right to urban life, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time, which consent the fulfilling use of those moments, places, and uses. It requires a science

of the city directed to understand the relations and correlations in the city, an urban planning oriented towards social needs, and a political and social force able to enforce it. The shift to the right to the city can only be based on the use value and on the control of the economic realm. Thus, the scope moves towards the restructuring of power relations, which underlie the production of urban space. Lefebvre (1970) advocates two principal rights for the inhabitants:

1. The right to participate, which dictates that inhabitants should play a central role in any decision that contributes to the production of urban space.
2. The right to appropriation, which includes the prerogative of physically occupy and use urban space, involves the re-creation of existing spaces and the production of new ones. The right to occupy and use space promotes use-value, which is in conflict with the production of space for profit, as the exchange value connected to capitalism and industrialisation tend to destroy the city and the urban reality and to subordinate the city to the economic forces and the particular interest⁷.

Dialectical utopianism: David Harvey

The reasoning on social justice in the city is the first contribution by Harvey (1973) on the right to the city. More recently he has encompassed the issues of contemporary globalization, and questions concerning universality of truths, values, rights, ethics, on one side and a world of differences (cultural, social, political, economical) and otherness, on the other. The trajectory of global capitalism has accelerated the spread of negativities in the world; however, the uneven geographical differences display oppositions to it and reveal a variety of ways of life, resources uses, relations to the environment and a multiplicity of diverse cultural and political forms. “The problem is to find ways to broaden and amplify the scope of human rights in ways that are sympathetic as possible to the right to be different or to the right to the production of space. Any strict and narrow interpretation of human rights must be contested” (Harvey, 2000:87)⁸.

In “Spaces of Hope”, Harvey (2000) contributes to a crucial issue for the affirmation of the right to the city, which is also relevant for the argumentations of this paper: the realisation (and conception) of alternative social and spatial forms. It implies the overthrowing of the physical and institutional structures that the free market produce and have become permanent characteristic of our time. The seed for transformation should be found in the contradictions of the present organisation, rooted in the present possibilities and able to points towards different trajectories of developments. Harvey calls for a dialectical utopianism⁹ that goes beyond the socio-ecological forms imposed by uncontrolled capital accumulation, class privileges, and gross inequalities of political-economic power (2000:193-196).

Great effort is placed on the construction of a better world, as the issuing of charters, declarations and the attempt of recognising new rights (such as the right to the city) seem demonstrate. However, “the concepts circulating do not fundamentally challenge hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market logics, or the dominant modes of legality and state actions” (2008:23) as it is the right of private property and the profit rate which have the leadership.

In a recent paper Harvey (2008) argues that the freedom to make and remake our cities is the most neglected of the human rights, because the neoliberal ethic of individualism has become the model, the result is a generalised withdrawal from collective actions in the name of collective interests. Harvey also suggests that the right to the city should be established by granting a greater democratic control over land rent and development gain.

The right to the city is depended upon public spaces: Don Mitchell

In western urban history and planning, the public real has always been a relevant issue while in the cities of the south has been often neglected. Public spaces are key element in livelihoods and a fundamental resource for the urban poor. However, this vital space is often ignored even by studies on the informal sector, and by development policies for low-income cities (Brown, 2006). Various forms of enclosures are causing spatial segregation and when they contribute to the privatization of

public areas, they represent a threat to public space existence, and an exploitation of the common good by some particular interests. Alison Brown maintains that urban poor should be given “adequate voice to challenge underlying perception of the role of public space and its position in the cultural and economic agenda of cities” otherwise social exclusion remains the dominant policy response (Brown, 2006:26).

The contribution of Mitchell to the right to the city (2003) is based on the investigation of the idea and practice of public space in the context of American cities. However, the concepts and principles, inherent to the importance of those spaces in affirming the right to the city, appear relevant to other contexts, however, what the public space is and who has the right to it cannot be established in the abstract. Notions of public and private space vary with nations, and their conceptions, interpretations, creations, usage, norms and legislation depend upon culture, political control both at the symbolic and material level, and at economic regime.

The right to representation (rights of free speech, of assembly, protest, etc.) is of critical importance for achieving social justice, and those rights are expressed in public spaces. Today public space is still contested at legal, political and everyday life level: it is produced through a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, order and disorder, rationality and irrationality, violent and peaceful dissent (2003:51). Although the ideologies of inclusiveness generally are at base of public space, and the degree of inclusiveness has changed through history, in realities, many groups face exclusion. The meaning of the public is historically and socio-culturally contingent, and even within the European experience this notion has changed dramatically.

In the contemporary city, public space is constrained by political discourse and by the presence of events, which impose surveillance on the type of behaviour and activities to be undertaken. It is threatened by pseudo-public space (e.g. shopping mall) which instils a diverse image and representation of the public. The places where the struggles occur are steadily diminishing, as new forms of surveillance and control are implemented at discursive and material level. It is fundamental that mass movements take up physical spaces to give evidence of the power created by representation: the visibility of struggles is crucial in spurring recognition of the legitimacy of demands by the authority. Public space as well as the right to the city is always a negotiation, in which the imaginaries of public place are also important, as they shape our projections in defining what we aim for, and they guide our desires for and uses of public space.

Part 2: The perspective of Multilateral Aid Organisations

Urban poverty reduction policies have for a long time been determined on the basis of a neoliberal agenda, as cities – in the north and south of the world – have been increasingly considered the key actor of this hegemonic approach. Nevertheless, urban poverty, vulnerability and exclusion have not been reduced through the neo-liberal approach to city growth and development, while worsening them in some cases.

When the international community agreed and committed itself on the priority to reduce poverty and inequality in the world, through the MDGs, it was already clear that the hegemonic approach proposed so far was not a guarantee for the achievement of those goals. In the last decade, there seems to be signs of the search for different approaches and perspectives on urban policies for poverty reduction from some of the main multilateral aid organisations. In particular, there is a mounting consensus in the international community on the necessity to shift from a needs-based approach to a rights-based approach to development, in order to ensure (re)distribution of development gains and equal participation in the development process. As a result, also in the urban sector, a right-based approach to the city has been increasingly investigated in order to find alternative (counter-hegemonic) policies and strategies capable to make all citizens benefit from what cities offer.

We try here to focus our analysis on the exploration of the possible changes that some of the main multilateral aid institutions seem having undertaken in approaching urban poverty reduction policies. In particular, we focus on one of the most significant initiatives that have been elaborating

in the last decade to investigate and document the concept of the “right to the city”, and make it an operational possibility to reduce urban poverty.

The debate and the knowledge produced by multilateral aid organisations around the concept of the “Right to the City” are very limited and dispersed in some programmes, conferences and debates developed so far. Despite the increasing interest shown by these organisations, the elaboration of a holistic notion of the “Right to the City” at the international level is still under construction, together with the definition of internationally applicable public policy or legislation. The evidence applied here can only rely on the few theoretical and empirical documents and reports that multilateral aid organisations have been producing or coordinating with respect to the specific issue of the “Right to the City” and urban poverty reduction policies.

The hegemonic approach of neoliberalism in the cities

Within the shift from liberalism to neo-liberalism, cities play a central role.

First, cities hold a strategic role in the context of the market economy because, through the concentration of infrastructure, the urban economies are clearly considered as the engine of the economic growth, productivity and efficiency, not only in the national context but also, and especially, at the international level; they are the best place to develop the neo-liberal market, based on scale economies and comparative advantages (Burgess et al., 1997; Osmont, 2002; UN-Habitat et al., 2001). Cities are also regarded, according to the neo-liberal project, as the drivers of greater innovation and competitiveness (Jessop, 2002) and as the place where ‘public expenditure reduction and economic liberalisation deploy their main impact’ (Balbo, 2002a:18).

Second, from the political point of view, the neo-liberal world market can work more effectively if ‘economic and social policy and their supporting institutions’ are harmonised (Jessop, 2002). In this perspective, cities hold a key role in the reorganisation of the institutional infrastructure, conducive to greater private investments and, in turn, to the well functioning of the free market. Cities are the privileged place where the re-structuring of institutions can take place through the elimination of subsidies for, and the privatisation of, public services, and also through the ‘deregulation and reform of regulatory regimes in land, housing, finance, infrastructure, services and employment markets’ (Burgess et al., 1997; Osmont, 2002).

Third, cities represent a place for civic initiative where, in theory, it is possible to solve the social conflicts and tensions generated by the development of a market economy, through the construction of a neo-liberal ‘market society’¹⁰. The involvement of the community sector can contribute to urban efficiency and social inclusion ensuring “a better grasp of local demand and a better organisation of provided services” (Maloutas and Pantelidou Malouta, 2004) but also through those new solutions that formal and informal social networks can find in mobilising and organising their own resources, without burdening the scarce resources of the state (Jessop, 2002).

Relying on the concept of governance, municipal governments have begun to manage cities focusing on productivity rather than on their welfare in terms of housing, infrastructure and basic need (Halfani et al., 1995): a new hierarchical institutional structure no longer belonging to the welfare state but to the principles of economic efficiency and managerial effectiveness of the corporate governance has started to organise a multiplicity of stakeholders, ranging from international enterprises and donor agencies to the social informal networks and self-organising communities.

There is widespread agreement that the notion of urban governance is used to make the neo-liberal economic development model objective and inevitable, naturalising and legitimising the market economy at the urban scale. Despite this term bringing with itself a host of issues belonging to the political, technical, and social fields, a clear priority is given to the neo-liberal economic development, while the other factors must adapt to it (Jessop, 2002). According to Maloutas and Pantelidou Malouta (2004:453), ‘competitiveness has become the benchmark’ for the social problems of cohesion, inclusion, participation, access to goods and services, ‘making a reversal between goals and means’: the improvement of urban life conditions is not considered as an

objective per se any more, but a tool to enhance urban economic growth and productivity. Thus, starting from the idea that the neo-liberal project does not need justification because it is a natural phenomenon (Brown 2001; Jessop 2002), urban governance is called in to tackle the issue of social justice within the ‘horizons’ (Jessop 2002:456) or ‘margins’ (Maloutas and Pantelidou Malouta 2004:454) created by neo-liberalism, that is, without impeding competitiveness.

Local communities are called to adapt to this natural and spontaneous design, representing one of the actors involved in the context of a free and competitive market, at the local and urban level. Communities have to rely on their own initiatives and resources to answer their needs by developing ‘family, neighbourhood, informal, or market-based and market-sustaining solutions’ (Jessop, 2002:465). Urban governance provides the arena to manage the proliferation of actors and their innovative solutions through a progressive ‘democratisation of political processes’, by applying the instruments of networks, partnerships, participative democracy, pluralistic political system of government, etc. (Devas, 2001).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the cities in developing countries have been the theatre of ‘a profound shift as neo-liberalism has become the dominant development paradigm’ (Burgess et al., 1997:3). However, widening of the gap between rich and poor – as a consequence of the removal of subsidies for services by the government and the cuts in the expenditure of public administration leading to underemployment and a reduction in wages, especially in urban areas (Batley, 2004) – has resulted in serious negative social effects and a general increase in levels of poverty that led to the definition of a ‘second wave’ of structural adjustment programmes, characterised by a strong social concern (Osmont, 1999)¹¹.

Nevertheless, it has been extensively argued that these policies were designed without challenging the discourse on urban productivity and efficiency: the improvement of the productivity levels of the poor continues to be seen as the key to urban poverty reduction (Burgess et al., 1997). As Burgess et al. (1997:27) highlighted, ‘it is important to reiterate that the urban poverty alleviation policies must remain just that – policies that aim to lessen the number of the poor or to lighten the burden of poverty, no matter what the underlying trends are. They are not to be confused with policies of poverty eradication’. In the same vein, Weber (2004) argues that the Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers – which represent, since 1999, the lending conditions of the IMF and the World Bank – and the form of governance that they imply are conducive to a ‘capitalist restructuring’, ensuring ‘the continuity with the SAPs process and the policy (political) framework this entails’.

2.2. The Right to the City within the context of multilateral aid organisations

Although the hegemonic neoliberal approach to urban development – especially in the cities of the South – is not currently challenged by any alternative practical and operational modalities amongst most multilateral aid organisations, the search for unorthodox solutions to urban poverty reduction seems rather active. Most of the main multilateral aid organisations are exploring a right-based approach to development and to urban development in particular. We briefly mention a few initiatives developed by some relevant multilateral aid agencies that have been contributing to the debate on the cities and rights, and we present an international research project focused on urban policies and the Right to the City for a more effective and sustainable urban development.

UN-HABITAT is certainly one of the most active UN agencies addressing the right of the city, especially through the “Global Campaign on Urban Governance”, launched in 1999, to support the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The theme of the Campaign is the “Inclusive City”, as a place where everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, is enabled to participate productively and positively in the opportunities cities have to offer. At the same time, UNESCO has been investigating the relationships between rights and cities for more than a decade¹².

Other multilateral aid agencies have also addressed the issue of the right to the city in the development and replication of urban policies. For instance, UNDP has launched in 1996 the World Alliance of Cities against Poverty – in the context of the International Decade for the eradication of

Poverty – while UNICEF launched the “Child Friendly Cities Initiative” in the same year. In addition, it is worth noticing that the World Bank has been collaborating with UN-HABITAT in the “Cities Alliance” Initiative, from 1999, relying on “the idea to constantly identify and remove that elements that hinder faster and more efficient social and physical inclusion on the urban poor with regard to the “Right to the City””¹³.

An international initiative on the Right to the City

In 2005, by UN-HABITAT, UNESCO and ISSC hosted the public debate on “Urban policies and the Right to the City”. The purpose of this research initiative was to make a first step in gathering “consensus amongst all key actors and local authorities in particular on the constituent elements of public policy and legislation that combine urban development with social equity and justice” (UNESCO et al., 2006). This international debate on urban policies and the right to the city has been structured as an international comparative platform of reflection on the potential relationship between the concept of the “right to the city” and inclusive, socially sustainable urban policies. The contributions made to the debate documented right-based urban policies and instruments at the local, national, European and cross-national / civil society levels.

At the basis of this debate lie two main ideas. On one hand, the understanding that – while there are many and encouraging initiatives promoting the right to the city in various cities and countries – there is neither yet an international consolidated approach to inclusive urban legislation and governance, nor a legally recognised or adopted formulation on the notion of the right to the city. On the other hand, the belief that a right-based approach to urban development can guarantee access for all citizens to income-generating opportunities, land and housing, and urban basic services, while placing the needs of vulnerable groups at the same of level of the interests of those who are better off in the city. It was asserted, echoing Lefebvre, that, “broadly speaking, the “Right to the City” seeks to (1) promote equal access to the potential benefits of the city for all urban dwellers, (2) encourage the democratic participation of all urban dwellers in decision-making processes, notably on the municipal level, so that (3) urban inhabitants may fully realize their fundamental rights and liberties” (UNESCO et al., 2005:4).

Conclusion from this international debate focused on the necessity to foster the collection and analysis of information to clarify the kind of urban policies and institutional structure providing the necessary conditions to create inclusive cities. Some relevant key questions related to the concept of the “Right to the City” and the role that international development organisations can or should play emerged. First of all, the issue about the representativeness of the “World Charter on the Right to the City” for every actor in every city of the world. Second, the question on the kind of new concepts that can be elaborated from the current right-based charters, such as the “World Charter on the Right to the City”, the “European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City” or the “Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities”. Third, the question on the possibility and ways to build partnerships between academia, municipalities and representatives of international associations to promote the right to the city (Colin, 2006:167).

There seems to be a not only a willingness but also a concrete engagement for the UNESCO and UN-HABITAT to disseminate the conclusion of this debate and continue the dialogue and research on this issue. Usefully, this debate was presented at the Third Session of the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, 2006, where views of city stakeholders and policies, practices and approaches to promoting the Right to the City were shared and ideas on how to take this concept to international level discussed. Moreover, at the first “World Conference on Development of Cities” in Porto Alegre, 2008, one of the four main themes related to the “Right to the City: Local Policies on Citizens’ Rights and Responsibilities” as a follow up of the above mentioned debate. Two points, addressed to participants, are relevant for this paper. On one hand, it is asked how the new non-governmental public policy practices developed by citizens fit the interpretations of the right to the city or whether the concept should be rather broaden. On the other hand, the attention is focused on

the issue of whether the ideas of cooperation and competitiveness – within the right to the city – could or should be considered complementary or conflicting proposals¹⁴.

Part 3: Case Studies

Leitner et al (2007a) emphasize the necessity of investigating (theoretically and empirically) the simultaneity of imaginaries and practices of space, including in this variety the different type of scale. The observation of multiple spatialities produce diverse knowledge from which to draw insights for the elaboration of future urban projects that for their nature entail different type of spatialities, scale and places.

The case study case of Nairobi, which refers to the experience of a local NGO in fighting the evictions from the slum and providing material help to the poor, is an example of production of alternative socio-economic practices accompanied by a lobbying action, and production of knowledge based on local, regional and transnational grassroots experience. In addition, there has been an attempt, with the of requalification of an informal market, to develop an alternative socio-spatial imaginary. The team of experts/intellectuals supporting the local organization and the concurrence of the World Social Forum hold in Nairobi in 2007 stimulated this challenge¹⁵.

The case of the new local governance arrangements developed in Caracas to improve access to water provisions represents, on the contrary, both a practice and an imaginary of how to invent a new way to guarantee access to urban services and a decision-making process shared amongst the main urban actors. The positive results achieved at the settlement level cannot be separated by the imaginary that is under construction at the national level.

1. Case Study: Pamoja Trust's approach in Nairobi

The issue at stake: forced evictions in the slum

Rapid urbanization, deteriorating economic conditions, segregation policies implemented in the colonial era, post-independence policy of slum clearance, and lack of equitable and defined land and urban development policies in recent years have shaped Nairobi city development and the socio-spatial exclusion of an increasing share of the urban population¹⁶ (Anyamba, 2005; Mitullah and Kibwana, 1998; Otiso, 2003, 2005; Syagga et al., 2002).

Over the last decades in Kenya, there have been several attempts to deal with the large numbers of slums in Nairobi ranging from demolition and eviction, sites and services schemes to upgrading projects. Forced evictions by the governments, although with different intensity, have always been carried out in Kenya until very recent time. While the 1980s were marked by a more permissive approach, the 1990s were particularly hard time for slum dwellers, and many communities and individuals were expelled¹⁷.

In that context a coalition of slum dwellers, called Muungano wa Wanavijiji, affected by evictions, demolitions and land grabbing began to emerge to oppose Government's actions. Kenyan NGOs – that undertook public interest litigation on behalf of stricken communities and used the courts and other legal means to stop or prevent evictions – catholic priests and human rights activists supported the group. Local Muungano were created in many communities, which then networked with each other to form a platform for the urban poor to fight displacement as well as advocate for land rights and city services (Alam et al., 2005; Weru, 2004).

The Muungano federation formed in Nairobi, resembled others established elsewhere in the world, and exchanges with the international network Slum/Shack Dwellers Federation (SDI) started. It was suggested that the same methodology, developed by SDI and experimented in other poor communities could be adapted to the Kenya's context. Following a series of workshops addressing the need of Muungano wa Wanavijiji network, in 2000 the non-governmental organization Pamoja Trust was funded (Weru, 2004) for giving organizational and technical support to the to urban poor communities in opposing forced evictions, accessing land, adequate housing and basic services for better livelihoods (Pamoja Trust, 2003:3).

Pamoja Trust's approach and the Toi Market regeneration project

In the eight years since its creation, Pamoja Trust has initiated several projects involving land rights, housing and more generally the improvement of the living conditions of the urban poor. Pamoja is a catalyst for community action, provides strategy advice, technical assistance and training to the local Mungano groups in order to develop their decision-making capacity at each stage of the slum regeneration process adapting an approach developed by the SDI¹⁸. The objective of creating a critical mass capable of impressing changes within the socio-spatial environment depends from external and internal factors. Not all slum members may join the saving schemes and not all engage actively in the process; however, the aim is to involve, over time, the majority of individuals. Strengthening the communities is a step-by-step process, which requires time and progressive achievements that build confidence among the members.

One ongoing projects supported by Pamoja Trust involves the traders' communities of a large informal market, the Toi Market¹⁹, situated on public land at the edge of the Kibera slum. The market represents for the urban poor a source of income, and an indisputable place of social utility. Pamoja Trust, constituting the committee of the emerging Toi Market Saving Scheme, initiated the process in 2002. The aims identified by the local Mungano Wa Wanjiji were: (1)merging the various traders communities and enabling them to speak one voice; (2)protecting the market from government's eviction (under threats by conflicts over ownership and by market pressures); (3)enlightening members on land/tenure rights; (4)helping to manage business; and (5)supporting members in achieving permanent residential areas.

The design proposal for the regeneration of Toi Market was conceived some years later²⁰ and an international team of professionals was formed in 2006 to support the upgrading process and provide technical assistance on urban design and engineering aspects. Given the collective use of the market, the public ownership of the area, the lack of communal and social structures within poor settlements, the urban development project was seen as a tool for integrating social and spatial elements at different scales. It aimed to improve public spaces and routes and provide basic infrastructure and facilities, taking into account land use of neighbourhood communities. Liaising with Nairobi City Council planners was a necessity in order to harmonize the new interventions with others, avoid duplication and waste of resources, build towards a more inclusive city, and to ensure public investment to guarantee the implementation of infrastructure and social programs.

Participation planning was conceived as a mean towards a greater adequacy between the designed decisions made by professionals, and the people individual and social needs. A negotiation of space and interests, sometimes conflicting, among the traders in order to achieve communal spaces was imperative.

The Toi Market Saving Scheme is expanding gradually. However, the participatory planning process, after a fruitful period in 2007, had mounting difficulties to continue. The international team as a whole was not able to support the process. The lack of funds impeded the required and fundamental exchanges with the communities.

The heterogeneity of the team, the independence from structured and channel forms of aid and cooperation produced an alternative 'slum upgrading' project. The overlapping of the project with the events co-organized at the World Social Forum (WSF) created a positive synergy between different type of approaches (slum integration, public space-driven regeneration) and concepts (the city as a common good, socio-spatial inclusion). However, the ambitious, long term goals, where not accompanied by intermediate and more feasible achievements. It was underestimated that this process needed further exchanges among the actors involved, that alternative approaches required more time to be explored and put in practice, as previous experience was available. External factors as the violence spurred in the early part of the year, which destroyed parts of the market, exacerbated the existing difficulties and put aside the ambitious project for more contingent and urgent solutions.

Ideology and Socio-spatial imaginaries

The issues of ideology and knowledge were critical in this process, as different alternative ideologies, which informed the practices and the imaginaries developed by Pamoja on one side and the international team on the other, overlapped.

1. The SDI/Pamoja process and methodology departs from a strong condemnation of top-down approaches, either implemented by the governments or aid agencies. The increasing absence of the voice of the poor in decision-making, the validity of the role of the State as a delivering agent for addressing the issue of equity; and the dominance of ‘experts’ knowledge upon other type of knowledge are the major issues addressed by SDI criticism. Thus, the federations looked for alternative forms of practices for catalyzing community-based experience and increasing the ability of grassroots groups to control local development: federating communities-horizontal networking, community-based knowledge and community learning, and a sole coordinating-supportive role for aid agencies and NGOs (Patel et al., 2001).

2. The imaginary proposed by the international team, was based on the believe that the built environment is not a mere physical support for complex human actions, but it can represent an emancipator tool for society as spatial forms and socio-ecological and political-economic conditions are dialectically constituted.

The concept of integration was fundamental for the urban project, which aimed to satisfy the needs of the local communities and to lead towards a more inclusive city. It emerged from the inputs presented at the WSF, where slum integration, instead of traditional slum upgrading, was proposed as an alternative approach. It consists of ameliorating the social, physical, economic, environmental and organizational characters of the settlements while integrating the slums into the city. This implies that slum infrastructure has to be physically linked to those in the formal city and vice versa. A high degree of coordination and programmatic intent is required and the regularization processes should become part of the regular government business and not channelled through parallel structures like KENSUP²¹ (Abonyo, 2007). The collective/public spaces were seen as tools for achieving inclusion, because it is in public realm where negotiating democracy takes place and where interaction among different communities and interests happen. The integration process had to take down physical and non-material barriers existing between the Toi market area/members and the surrounding neighbourhoods/communities, formal and informal. Otherwise, the resolution of conflicts over spaces and interests between different communities would produce once again segregated neighbourhoods.

3. The goal of inclusion at different dimensions, societal and urban, recalled the concept of the right to the city, issue brought up at WSF debate in which the expression *the city as common good* was presented as conception capable of satisfy the right to the city (Salzano, 2007). The imaginary invoked is that of a city capable of taking care of all its inhabitants, starting from the powerless and disadvantaged. Necessarily, urban transformations have to be conducted on the base of clear, defined, transparent rules established by the inhabitants disregarding the fact that they own or not lands/buildings. The urban government needs to have control on the land-use and on the land/building revenue in order to distribute the benefits (services, infrastructures, etc.) equally, accordingly to the needs of the diverse social groups. Public urban planning is the tool able to synthesise the struggles for the right to the city and the construction of a city as common good²².

4. The elaboration of the socio-spatial imaginary, represented by the new configuration and organisation of the market, remained, in practice, disjointed by the social process. The two dimensions, spatial and social, remained substantially separated, and were seen the dominion of different expertise and knowledge: the saving scheme members coordinated by Pamoja (and community-based knowledge) on one side, the professionals, with their scientific-technical knowledge on the other. The participatory planning process was supposed to be an important tool for mutual learning, exchanges at practical and ideological level, however it was not proprietary devised, and neither a confrontation or synthesis of the various positions was not achieved.

2. Case study: from water to urban governance in the Caracas Metropolitan Region

The issue at stake and its context: the access to water provisions

Shortage of formal provisions in the poor areas of developing cities has led to a proliferation of by informal systems to access urban water that have recently been considered as a useful and successful way through which many urban poor currently gain access to water (Allen et al., 2004; Amis et al., 2001; Batley and Moran, 2004; Jaglin, 2001; Nickson and Franceys, 2003)²³. As most of developing countries' cities, current Venezuelan systems of accessing water service provisions – especially for low-income residents – are based on both formal and informal practices and arrangements²⁴. Anyway, with the urban population especially in the Caracas Metropolitan Region, water production has proved to be inadequate in responding to the demand related to drinking water, especially in the low-income settlements.

In the last decade, illegal water provision networks have no longer been removed or opposed to; on the contrary, it is possible to notice an explicit institutional effort to better organise and further develop these kinds of connections. This shift in urban policies has been supported by a new administrative, legislative and political framework, especially at the national level. At the administrative level, the 2001 Organic Water and Sanitation Law (*Ley Orgánica para la Prestación de los Servicios de Agua Potable y Saneamiento - LOPSAPS*) establishes that responsibilities for the provision and control of water services shall be transferred to municipalities or metropolitan districts, according to a subsidiarity principle to guarantee better service provisions. From a legal perspective, many regulations have been approved to recognise citizens' right to water. The 1999 Constitution (art. 304) underlines that 'all water are goods in the public domain belonging to the Nation and indispensable for life and development', while the LOPSAPS (2001, art. 3.b.) identifies 'the access of all citizens to drinking water and sanitation service provisions' as one of the principles underpinning the delivery of the public services regulated by this law. In a more explicit form, Venezuela has stated the right of access to water services in 2007 through the "Water law" (*Ley de aguas*) which states that 'the access to water is a fundamental human right' (art. 5.1). Finally – and perhaps more crucially – from the political point of view, the current Venezuelan government is overtly working at the definition of a counter-hegemonic project. Government's efforts to look for alternatives to capitalistic regimes are unquestionably a priority, so much so that 'Mr Chavez's fame stems, too [besides the opposition to George Bush], from his oil-backed claims to be leading a new revolutionary project of "21st-century socialism" that tears up the nostrums of economic liberalism'²⁵.

A new form of urban governance to guarantee access to water and participation: the mesa tecnica de agua

Decentralising water provisions to municipalities is seen as a way to increase efficiency but also to promote citizen participation: 'The transfer of water and sanitation services to municipalities – as per the LOPSAPS – aims at guaranteeing the service to Venezuelans, allowing them to participate in the construction of alternatives for the autonomous solution of their problems' (Hidroven and MARN, 2005:8). In order to participate in the search for and realisation of improvements in accessing water, citizens are requested not to act individually but to be organised in locally-based associations which can rely on most of the local potentialities and knowledge while working for the benefit of the whole community.

At the core of this new tentative governance practice in Venezuela are the 'technical water boards' – *Mesas Tecnicas de Agua* (MTA) – which represents the unique and fundamental community body in the water and sanitation service delivery process. It is considered as 'the expression of the citizen participation's new politics' in the water sector (Lacabana et al., 2004); it constitutes a community-based organisation, built with the purpose of channelling community participation in the decision-making process and in the physical improvements of service delivery. Governance arrangements develop around MTAs as a result of collaboration and cooperation with

the other main stakeholders in the drinking water provision process – notably, the water companies, the municipalities and all of the community members.

The construction of the water project involves the workers from the hydrological enterprise together with settlement's residents. To realise it, the settlement is organised in 'condominiums', which are smaller areas sharing one or a few secondary pipelines. Condominiums are not just a physical settlement subdivision to organise the piped network's construction. They are also a social unit around which the whole process for improving access to water (water survey, network construction, network maintenance, payment collection, etc.) is built. They are the basic settlement units where common problems for water and sanitation facilities are discussed and decisions over solutions are taken²⁶.

The MTA is not a production of the current government. The first MTA was established in 1993, in the Antimano *parroquia* within the Libertador Municipality²⁷. The 'Antimano's experience' has been a positive one, taken by the Hidrocapital water company as an example to manage water service improvements in a joint manner between the hydrological enterprise and the communities. With the arrival of the Chavez government, MTAs have been progressively entering in the legal and formal water provision system. From 1999, HIDROVEN (the Venezuelan hydrological company) established a Citizen Participation Program in order to replicate and strengthen, at the national level, the experience of the water boards (Corrales, 2004; Hernaiz, 2004; INDIA, 2006). Community participation in the water and sanitation service delivery is now institutionalised in the form of the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*, as recognised in the LOPSAPS (2001).

Finally, it is interesting to notice that citizen participation in the water sector is not limited to the search for water shortage solutions at the settlement level, but also at the municipal and even national levels. The Water Community Councils and the National Water Meetings represent alternative formal and institutional opportunities in which MTA representatives are invited to share their experiences with other MTAs, representatives from the elected authorities and from the hydrological enterprises. These meetings aim at transferring positive practices to other communities and strengthening knowledge for a more equitable access to water (Cariola and Lacabana, 2005b; Lacabana et al., 2004). Although, it is not easy to quantify the actual impact of this new system of access to water, as water boards are still growing and developing in Venezuela, the results seem being encouraging. For many low-income residents the quality and the frequency of their access to water have improved, and the construction and connections costs have been dramatically reduced. At the same time, this new process of local governance has contributed to integrate into the debate/issue of urban development low-income and illegal dwellers that are the actor usually excluded from the decision process.

Ideology and socio-spatial imaginaries

Evidence collected from research on this issue and from a field work in two low-income settlements in the Tuy Valleys (belonging to the Caracas Metropolitan Region) allows us to point out the following points concerning the ideology and knowledge that underpin this experience.

1. This experience can be described as an alternative way of local governance for improving access to water. The informality of water provisions – instead of being removed or opposed – is considered as the departure point to build a new system of service provisions. This is realised at two different levels. The first one is related to the recognition of the right to access water also for those communities that are illegally settled and – furthermore – the access to water is build on the informal systems that these communities have been developing. The second level concerns the establishment of formal as well as informal relationships amongst the institutional and non-institutional actors involved in this process that facilitate a truly democratic participation and shared decision-making process.

2. The organisational arrangements and the joint work between the state-owned water companies and the structured groups of citizens is based on a vision, attitude and culture of co-responsibility in working out solutions for improved water supplies (Cariola and Lacabana, 2003; Cariola and

Lacabana, 2005a, 2005b; Lacabana et al., 2004; Lacabana et al., 2003): ‘The relationship with the institutions is seen from a perspective of greater responsibilities by communities, where the latter carry not only the right to ask for the service, but also a series of obligations for its procurement and functioning: it stems from that a vision of co-responsibility between the community and the institutions ... communities not only ask for and are clients of a service, but they also held in its construction and are a part of it’ (Cariola and Lacabana, 2005b:125-126).

3. There is here a wonderful example of how the community knowledge of low-income residents and the technical knowledge from engineers can collaborate to find solution for service delivery. The shared responsibilities between the MTA and the water company, in the design as well as realisation of the water network, have benefited from the informal practices and knowledge developed by community residents in getting water in the past, through illegal or private arrangements. Indeed, the community’s knowledge on the characteristics of the settlement (such as the settlement topography or the location of existing pipelines – legal and illegal) together with those regarding the various informal ways of accessing water (such as the cost of hosepipes materials, the ways to store water, the pressure problems related to illegal connections, ...) provided the basic information upon which the water company and the MTA created the water project.

4. For many community leaders, the achievements of the technical water boards are not only represented by the realisation of the piped network, but also by their capacity to generate other community organisations to lobby for other basic services (such as the *comité de tierra urbana* to deal with urban planning and housing; the *comité de salud* to provide the settlement with health facilities, the *mesa tecnica de energia* to install a power network, etc.). Relying on the experience of the water network, some water boards are organising themselves to carry out the joint work between the community and the water company to realise the new sewerage system, for instance; other water boards are helping in the construction of health-service clinics. The issue of access to urban services is here based on a vision of “public/common space”. From one side, services (water, health services, housing, etc.) are considered as common and public resources to which anyone should be guaranteed access, through the joint contribution from the institutions and the community. From the other side, the community is fully involved as the main actor in the decision concerning their settlements and the type of use they want to do of it. As Colau (2008:6) stresses speaking about the *comité de tierra urbana* (CTU), “the CTU’s activities extend far beyond the basic process of land ownership and regularisation, as they are effectively political agents with a global vision of the city – a city in which nobody is excluded”.

Towards some conclusions: open problems to build further research

This paper analysed some alternatives in terms of (counter-)hegemonic imaginaries and practices. Attention has been given to discourses of beliefs, values, and practices able to project a vision for the general interest. To a less extent, attention was also given to strategies (e.g. alliance-building with other actors) and knowledge issues employed to oppose resistance to neoliberal policies and practices (the right to the city, the Caracas’s experience, the city as a common good) and/or more specifically to mainstream/top-down approaches (SDI/Pamoja and slum integration approaches).

The considerations coming out from our analysis of theoretical and practical contributions constitute more a list of issues for further reflections (and further research) than conclusions. We have divided them into two broad realms.

The right to the city as a counter-hegemonic project

1. The fundamental principles identified by Lefebvre, Harvey and Mitchell, although echoed at discursive level, have not been explored comprehensively at policy/practical level, although the propositions of the three authors contain clear indications, though highly political. Lefebvre and Harvey point to the role played by market economy in shaping urban development and the lost control by the majority of population over that. Harvey also identifies a practical way: taxation of land rent and development gain for redistributions across the city (thus inhabitants). Thus, the

discussion about the right to the city appears to be an ideological struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic culture.

2. An expression of this struggle can be seen in the attempt of formulating a more broad framework for the right to the city in the above mentioned theme related to “The Right to the City: Local Policies on Citizen’s Rights and Responsibilities”, at the first World Conference on the Development of Cities (2008). In particular:

- a) The question whether competitiveness and cooperation are complementary or conflicting mechanisms appears more a step in, of the neoliberal ideology, into the right to the city, than a constructive attempt to discuss the matter. An increasing number of authors have highlighted the negative aspect of adopting a competitive approach (e.g. Cheshire and Gordon, 1996, 1998) and the incompatibility of an *urban entrepreneurialism* (Harvey, 1989a) with equity and fair distributions of benefits and opportunities (e.g. Fainstein, 2001; Hall and Hubbard, 1996). So, if the right to the city wants to become hegemonic, has it to find a compromise with neoliberal ideology? If a compromise is reached, can it - at least in theory - still be hoping to achieve Lefebvre and Harvey aims?
- b) Some ‘components’ of the right to the city, such as housing rights, rights to safe water and public services, have been challenged, thus the opportunity/necessity of a consistent welfare state in poor countries comes up. The issue is interlinked with the debate about the role of the State, NGOs and multilateral agencies in delivering basic services and infrastructure to the poor. Some urban movements (e.g. SDI/Pamoja) assert that the State is not capable to satisfy the needs of the poor. However, the solution of having parallel agencies (e.g. Kensup for slum upgrading in Kenya) does not appear satisfactory. Nor self-help, community-based interventions in isolation can solve the inequalities between the have and the have not, and risk to perpetuate exploitation. However, the Caracas case study has demonstrated that a way forward is possible in bridging bottom-up experiences/resources and top-down policies which frame practical actions and provide an institutional safeguard to the interest of the disadvantaged too. More examples of bottom-up projects supported by institutional frameworks should be investigated and analysed in terms of strategies, procedures and technologies (discursive) used.

3. Mitchell suggests taking up more public spaces, and this call is being collected by urban movements across western countries. It is rather surprising that this aspect, so crucial for balancing private/collective interests, struggle to emerge in the policies/programmes of cities of developing countries either by multilateral agencies, NGOs or local governments. Is it again an ideological/political issue? What would be the consequences for a shift of interests from private goods (housing) to common goods (public spaces, communal structure and services, recognised as public) for those cities? What would be the consequences for a shift from individual (market) choices to integration and welfare in a common space (both physical and theoretical)?

4. Cities are increasingly spaces of divisions and polarization (core and periphery, poor and rich, place of work and home, etc.). It is important to distinguish where divisions are expression of diverse way of conceiving/living or whether they are expression of social injustice. Socio-spatial divisions are also the direct consequences of urban policies, e.g. certain program of regeneration, slum upgrading, etc. that promote boosterism, gentrification, expulsion of the poorest. Exploring socio-spatial urban imaginaries and urban practices in terms of hegemony and counter-hegemony can help to highlight contradictions between implied ideologies, engaged discursive practices and policies/practices implemented.

Knowledge and Power

1. Practice VS theory:

Although the contradictions and difficulties in this relationship are not a new story, the need to understand and conceptualise alternative practices continue to represent a fundamental issue in “securing positive changes in international poverty reduction policies”²⁸. Perhaps, the possibility to invert the current approach to this relationship should be investigated: the study of alternative

practices and imaginaries should not be aimed to their integration in the hegemonic/mainstream ideology but, rather, produce new knowledge for different, innovative, and counter-hegemonic urban policies and strategies.

2. *Academicians / experts VS social movements*

Some of the problems associated with the difficulty of identify, articulate comprehensively, and enact envisaged socio-urban configurations (cities, neighbourhoods, communities, etc.) arise in part because of the frequent separation of the academy (independent intellectuals) from the struggles of everyday life and the actions of civil society. The necessity of interactive practice between academics and activists should be favoured and exercised as a strategy for counter-hegemonic power.

3. *Local / traditional knowledge VS institutionalised knowledge / language*

Some troubles arise from the reluctance of recognising as central the differences in the relations of power and knowledge in which subaltern groups are situated. The underestimation of this relevance produces negative results at various levels.

- a) Contesting discourses are both within and outside the society of the culture consumption and elsewhere in the world. They may have forms of knowledge that are not amenable to rationalisation and discipline. Those projects are likewise relevant to the creation and articulation of knowledge and entail the creation of space of life to be lived differently in different spaces. The marginalization of intellectual production produced in the “peripheries” of the world contributes to undermine counter-hegemonic, non-capitalist and local knowledge (Escobar, 2001).
- b) There exists the risk that local, informal, traditional knowledge can be exploited and/or manipulated by those who define urban development policies and strategies (such as multilateral aid organisations) without really challenging the mainstream approach and using it to keep proposing a hegemonic approach. The idea of local knowledge and ideologies – with their basis on counter-hegemonic practices and imaginaries – risk to be voted to same destiny of other “bottom-up concepts”, such as that of participation, which lost their original power to be included into the neoliberal urban development paradigm.
- c) The ensemble of procedure (e.g. fund/grants application, analysis, evaluations, monitoring, training, project’s tasks) speaks a particular ‘language’ (verbal, written, gestural, ritual) and operates within specific cultural framework, alien to non-expert actors. This undermines the possibility for alternative experience to experiment and to flourish, as the creative of ‘problem solving’ is channel within pre-established and culturally-framed reasoning and procedure.

Notes

¹ Concepts developed within the cultural political economic that examines the co-implication of semiosis in the interlinked materialities of economics and politics in different contexts and scales (Jessop, 2008: Chapter 8).

² Jessop in the cited article referred specifically to economic imaginaries.

³ Dominant and contesting imaginaries and practices redefined each other through different mechanisms, like cooptation and assimilation (Leitner et al 2007b). Neoliberalism has demonstrated the ability to rework itself both at the discursive and material level by the appropriation and re-definition of bottom-up and counter-hegemonic concepts and practices. For example, terms such as participation, and empowerment are re-interpreted and de-politicised as well as grassroots organizations and solidarity networks are exploited for their ability of producing social capital (Miraftab, 2004)

⁴ In the late 1960s beginning 1970s rent strikes, campaigns for free public transports, marches to reclaim the street, and squatting were commonplace (Castells, 1983). Legislative and administrative measures followed, and in many cities, there was an appropriation by the residents of the urban socio-space: social housing, public transportation and utilities (schools, kindergartens, green areas, etc.) were granted to a certain extent to the entire population. However, struggles are not fought ones for forever, and what has been won can be lost again (and vice versa).

⁵ Lefebvre’s contribution to the development of an alternative imaginary cannot be disjointed from the criticism he moved to the urban society under industrial capitalism, its social relations and the relations of power derived from it.

⁶ This concept together with the issue of segregation defined by Lefebvre as a peculiar characteristic of production of space by modern capitalism, are relevant for the conceptualization of social exclusion and the linkages with the need of order and security. The author asserted that segregation may not be proved coming from the constant strategy of the

dominant power and being the result of an efficient projection of institutions and willingness of ruling leaders, but practices go very much in that direction (Lefebvre, 1970).

⁷ The production of space in contemporary capitalism is subservient to continuous investments and accumulation and “assume a commodity form” (Harvey, 1999). Urban areas are valued for their capacity to respond to the market conditions change, to be built and re-built, gain attractiveness and further investments. Though this process is accompanied by the necessity to reproduce, recreate the army labour, which imply the satisfaction of needs (health, education, culture, etc.), the principle of indifference applied to places and to the city has tremendous consequences for inhabitants. Certain people (the poor, the disfranchised, the homeless, etc.) are expelled, displaced, or pushed out from their places. For doing it, a re-investment in discourse is needed because those operations cannot go on and on without a broad consent. Again, language and knowledge play a central role in the affirmation of certain logics of space. Space is for Lefebvre site and centre in which strategies are deployed, as space has ceased to be neutral.

⁸ Harvey asserts that the application of human rights has been dominated, since the 1948’s UN Human Rights Declaration, by a separation between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. Also a distinction between rights in the public sphere and in the private sphere, operated, with the latter broadly ignored. Harvey re-formulates the universal principles of the UN Declaration: partly sharing the content of some articles (art.1, art.10, art.14, arts 18-22, art.23, section 3, art.27), and sometime opposing others, such as art.17, which actively support the systems of property rights as a universal claim. The most interesting rights proposed by Harvey are: 9) the right to the production of space; 10) the right to difference including that of uneven geographical development; and 11) our rights as species beings. The ninth refers to the prerogative for individuals and communities to circulate in order to fulfil needs and desires elsewhere in the world. It also means “the right to reconstruct spatial relations (territorial forms, communicative capacities, and rules) in ways that turn space from an absolute framework of action into a more malleable relative and relational aspect of social life”. The tenth represent the prerogative by individuals and groups to explore differences, also in terms of development and socio-spatial organization, which may depart from established norms. The eleventh poses the basis for allowing the functioning of the others, as it combines the right to creatively explore and experiment all the possible transformative turns (implied in right number 10) with the duties, responsibilities and obligations to protect against potential powers of non-democratic elite that “represent narrow class interests rather than human interests in general” (Harvey, 2000:248-252).

⁹ Utopia is constructed in terms of spatial forms and temporal processes which permits the exploration of a wide range of human potentialities: different modes of collective living, of gender relations, of production-consumption styles, in the relation to the nature, etc. (Harvey, 2000).

¹⁰ ‘Market society’ is a term utilised by Jessop (2002), drawing on Polanyi (1944) to explain how liberalism has tried to solve its contradictions and tensions: ‘... in response to crisis-tendencies in laissez-faire capitalism, many social forces struggle to re-embed and re-regulate the market. The eventual compromise solution was a *market economy* embedded in and sustained by a *market society* (Polanyi, 1944). The same point applies to neo-liberal capitalism. Thus, after the efforts of “roll-back neo-liberalism” to free the neo-liberal market economy from its various corporatist and statist impediments, attempts are now being made to secure its medium-term viability to embedding it in a neo-liberal market society’.

¹¹ Starting from the late 1980s urban poverty reduction policies began to be systematically included as compensatory mechanisms for the social problems of Structural Adjustment. This took place relying mainly on the emergent definition of a normative framework for development policies and on the progressive construction of a qualitative and participative paradigm for poverty (Ramirez, 2002).

¹² This exploration ranges from the round table on the “City of Solidarity and Citizenship”; the dialogue on “Dialogue on Democracy and Citizenship in the City of the twenty-First Century”, organised by UNESCO at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (1996); the cooperation on the SHS’s International Social Science Journal publication on “Cities of the Future: managing social transformations”.

¹³ http://www.unhabitat-rolac.org/cities_alliance.asp?id_secao=709&id_idioma=3

¹⁴ The 4th and 5th question asked during the first “World Conference on the Development of City” refer to these points as follow: “04. During the 3rd World Urban Forum in Vancouver in 2006, two different interpretations of the concept of right to the city were defined: the first is based on a legalistic paradigm in which the legal concept determines the conception of actions guiding the development of cities; the second is based on value references in which interpretation is subjective and the concept is understood in a spirit of global rights based on the approach to developing policies, planning and urban administration. Are these the only interpretations? How can the new non-governmental public policy practices developed by citizens fit within these interpretations? How can local players define this right in terms of the particular characteristics of each city? 05. The concept of Right to the City is related to the following issues: 1) Dignified, decent life for all residents of the city. 2) Urban planning and laws which promote inclusion, social cohesion, competitiveness, urban cultural diversity and inter-religious dialogue in the city. 3) Local democracy as a necessary element of urban governance: rights and responsibilities of city residents. 4) Civic and empathetic (or solidary) cosmopolitanism amongst urban inhabitants. What are the necessary determining factors for turning the various dimensions of right to the city into real, concrete rights? Should we add the idea of cooperation (social capital or social network, for example), alongside the idea of competitiveness, to the dimensions of (or the objectives associated with)

the concept (of right to the city)? Are these complementary or conflicting proposals? How can good governance contribute to both strategies becoming compatible?" (www.cmdc2008.com.br).

¹⁵ The people involved in the Toi market project co-organized an event at the Nairobi WSF in two sessions: an open debate at the Toi Market and a conference at the Forum. The theme was *the city as a common good*: the relevance of this expression in today's divided cities, the challenges posed by informal settlements in Nairobi and the struggle to find viable alternatives. The meaning of the word was explored through the European urban experience, analysing the interaction between politics, planning process and public spaces in the Italian context (Salzano, 2007). Slum upgrading in Nairobi was presented from different perspectives (Githatu, 2007; Kibue, 2007), and alternatives to slum upgrading discussed (Abonyo, 2007). The event included the response of urban movements and groups in Nairobi to the slum challenges and upgrading options. Further information of the events available at: <http://eddyburg.it/article/archive/345/>.

¹⁶ In Nairobi, the proportion of people living below the national poverty is increasing and an approximate 60% of the city's estimated population of 3 million live in informal settlements, occupying an area of less than 5% of total municipal residential land (UN-Habitat, 2006a).

¹⁷ The motivations seem connected with conflicts over land rights, non-payment of excessive land and house rents, political struggles, urban renewal, and enforcement of various government orders. However, this attitude of the government towards slum dwellers is embedded into the country's political economy, in particular with the inequitable land ownership structure which impedes the poor to access land and shelter (Otiso, 2002). Public land is used as a political tool: leaders and politicians allocate it to private owners in order to gain political patronage, and appropriate it for their own use. This practice, *land-grabbing*, provoked the displacement of many urban poor (Syagga et al., 2002).

¹⁸ The Pamoja Approach is based upon four principles (Alam et al., 2005; Weru, 2004): (1) The process is important as well as the outcomes of the undertaken activities. (2) The process should be enacted by community participation, facilitated by three means: a) Muungano wa Wanavijiji, are the entry point for mobilizing the communities; b) Increasing community leadership; c) Consensus-building within the communities in each step. (3) Promote learning and knowledge creation through the exchange of information, experience and skills between urban poor communities. (4) The implementation of a series of activities in a logic sequence: a) Formation of saving and credit groups based on a daily money collection to promote income generation, and as a mechanism for mobilising and organising the urban poor communities; b) The enumeration and the mapping of settlements. It provides data necessary for planning, but it is also a way to build consensus and inclusion; c) Negotiation for secure tenure: raise awareness among members and build consensus around issues of housing and land rights; achieve a critical mass; engaging negotiating with Nairobi City Council, GoK and other stakeholders; creating agreements and establishing coexistence laws to guarantee the future of the markets and public spaces; ending discrimination in the enforcement of regulatory requirements; d) House modelling and settlement planning. It serves first to vision among the residents how to develop the settlements and to demonstrate to the government their project.

¹⁹ The Toi Market area has an extension of 8 hectares ca, and about 3000 people work there. A mixture of formal and informal structures and activities occupies the area. Beside the informal and unauthorized market, there are important communal-social spaces: a church, a nursery and an open ground. Some infrastructures, like water points, public toilets and street lighting have been provided by Nairobi City Council, but they are either insufficient or in poor conditions.

²⁰ Tecta Consultant, a Kenyan architectural-planning practice with previous experience in slum upgrading, conceived the design in 2004 projects, with the help of an G. Cardosi an Italian architect undertaking an internship there.

²¹ The Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme see: <http://www.housing.go.ke/kensup.html>;

²² Further work on the city as a common good has been presented at the European Social Forum (Malmoe 2008): <http://openesf.net/projects/the-city-as-a-common-good/project-home>; <http://eddyburg.it/article/articleview/11972/0/335/>

²³ The dimension of this phenomenon is big. Collignon and Venzina (2000) calculate that informal and/or small-scale private water providers serve much of African, Asian and Latin American cities; whilst in some African cities they serve up to 70-80 per cent of the urban population. Informal practices or activities – interacting with the more formal arrangements and institutions that belong to the public, private or community sectors alike – are deemed to generate a range of more or less formal and informal relationships.

²⁴ In most Venezuelan municipalities, formal practices are represented by piped networks, public or private household distribution through licensed tankers, wells or bore-wells. Informal practices count illegal connections to the main public pipes or private distribution through non-licensed tankers. As pointed out by Cariola and Lacabana (2005b), 'informal' connections to the public piped network can be defined as 'illegal' practices which have been permitted and sometimes supported by the water companies.

²⁵ *The Economist*, August 4th 2007, p. 70.

²⁶ Generally, the water company installs the main pipe through which the 'invasion' is connected to the formal water network. Company workers and settlement residents realise these secondary water connections together. Consequently, within the condominiums, components of each household build their own plastic connection to link the house to the piped water network.

²⁷ According to Arconada (1996), the municipality and the water company Hidrocapital acknowledged the importance of community participation in the delivery of drinking water and accepted not only to directly inform citizens about the service distribution but also to change procedures and attitudes in order to involve them in the service delivery. Two

main results were achieved through the so-called 'Antimano's experience'. First of all, residents in the Antimano's parish were provided with an aqueduct represented by a pump station and a storage tanker. Second, through the provision of the service, local institutions indirectly recognised citizens as dwellers of the metropolitan area and no longer as illegal invaders.

²⁸ At the point that this issue will be the theme of the N-aerus contribution at the World Urban Forum 2009. the N-aerus session will focus on Urbanisation in the South exploring relationships between reflection (science) and action (management and politics) towards urban sustainability. The session will discuss the perspectives and potentials of research networks, and draw essential links to the round table on 'urban research'.

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