Inclusiveness in Urban Theory and Urban-Centred International Development Policy

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Abstract. *Issues of inclusiveness are prominent today in both urban theory and in international urban development policy. Within the academy over the past decade, an influential strand of scholarship has sought to decentre urban theory from a relatively small and canonical set of cities, mostly in Western Europe and North America. This postcolonial urban studies work has argued that there is a need for 'new geographies of theory' that are more inclusive of the experiences of cities in other world regions (Roy, 2009). In increasingly urban-centred international development policy, meanwhile, inclusion is now rhetorically central to conceptions of better futures and appropriate ways of realizing them. The words 'inclusive', 'inclusion' and 'inclusivity' appear dozens of times across the 24 pages of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) document. In this paper, I consider what is understood by inclusiveness in both postcolonial urban studies and in the NUA, before examining the latter in the light of recent scholarly critique.*

Keywords. *New Urban Agenda, Habitat III, inclusion, social exclusion, postcolonial urban theory.*

Abstrak. *Masalah inklusivitas saat ini menonjol dalam teori perkotaan dan kebijakan pembangunan perkotaan internasional. Dalam diskusi akademis selama dekade terakhir, sejumlah penelitian penting telah berusaha untuk mendesentralisasikan teori perkotaan dari serangkaian kota yang relatif kecil dan kanonik yang kebanyakan bersumber dari Eropa Barat dan Amerika Utara. Studi perkotaan postkolonial ini berpendapat bahwa ada kebutuhan akan 'geografi baru teori' yang lebih inklusif terhadap pengalaman kota-kota di wilayah dunia lain (Roy, 2009). Dalam kebijakan pembangunan internasional yang semakin terpusat di perkotaan, sementara itu, inklusi sekarang secara retoris dianggap penting dalam konsepsi tentang masa depan yang lebih baik dan cara-cara yang tepat untuk merealisasikannya. Kata-kata 'inklusif', 'inklusi' dan 'inklusivitas' muncul puluhan kali di sepanjang 24 halaman dokumen Agenda Baru Perkotaan (NUA). Dalam makalah ini, saya menelaah apa sesungguhnya yang dimaksud sebagai inklusivitas dalam studi perkotaan pascakolonial dan NUA, sebelum membahas NUA dalam konteks kritik ilmiah baru-baru ini.*

Kata Kunci. *Agenda Baru Perkotaan, Habitat III, inklusi, pengucilan sosial, teori urban pascakolonial.*

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Introduction

The objective of becoming more 'inclusive' has assumed prominence in both academic urban theory and in international urban development policy. Within the academy over the past decade, an influential strand of scholarship has sought to decentre urban theory from a relatively small and canonical set of cities, mostly in Western Europe and North America. Such postcolonial urban studies work has argued that there is a need for 'new geographies of theory' that are more inclusive of the experiences of cities in other world regions (Roy, 2009). In international development policy, meanwhile, inclusion is now rhetorically central to urban-centred UN conceptions of better futures, and appropriate ways of realizing them. The words 'inclusive', 'inclusion' and 'inclusivity', for example, appear dozens of times across the 24 pages of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) document. In this paper, I consider what is understood by inclusiveness in both postcolonial urban studies and the NUA, before examining the latter in the light of recent scholarly critique. My aim is not to be dismissive of UN or other global urban policy agreements but to put 'inclusiveness' in urban theory into conversation with inclusiveness in urban policy so as to contribute to ways in which these often separate domains may inform and vitalize each other.

This paper comprises three main sections. In the first, I review postcolonial approaches to urban studies that have called for a more spatially-inclusive, 'global' urban theory. In the second section, I turn to the domain of increasingly urban-centred international development policy where inclusion and inclusivity have become a ubiquitous part of normative principles and prescriptions. I focus on UN-Habitat policy discourse, particularly the NUA document that was adopted at the Habitat III meeting in Quito in October 2016. In the third and final section of the paper, I put the NUA into conversation with deliberation of inclusiveness in academic urban studies, working through four critical intersections of theory and international policy. The paper as a whole is based upon a critical reading and review of official policy documents and statements. Clearly, rather different insights could emerge from research involving interviews with actors involved in the process of formulating the NUA or from (auto)ethnographic methods. My more discursive or interpretative approach, however, is appropriate for a paper concerned primarily with the conceptual and definitional dimensions of inclusiveness rather than with technical or institutional dynamics.

More Inclusive Geographies of Theory: Postcolonializing Urban Studies

Although by many definitions cities have existed for millennia and can be identified archaeologically in various regions of the world, the city as a subject in academic urban studies has mainly been about urban transformation since the industrial revolution, and urban theory has largely been based upon a small set of 'great' cities in Western Europe and North America (Roy, 2009). Thus, the likes of Manchester or Chicago have been treated as 'prototypical' (Brenner, 2003) industrial cities, LA and its surrounding region as a new 'paradigm' of postmodern urbanism (Beauregard, 2003), and New York or London as the 'leading' global cities (Bunnell, 2015). Aside from concerns about the selectivity and unrepresentativeness of what are in many ways extraordinary cities and urban regions, it has been noted that this wider tendency means that cities in some parts of the world are cast as frontiers of innovation/progress, while others are imagined in terms of developmental lacks or the need to 'catch up' (Robinson, 2006).

Reacting against such inherited and ingrained tendencies, over the past decade or so scholars have sought to 'postcolonialise' urban studies in two main ways. The first is by diversifying the sites of knowledge production for a more globally-inclusive urban theory. Ananya Roy (2009) refers to this as an orientation towards 'new geographies of theory', incorporating experiences and

knowledges from key metropolitan centres in 'world areas' beyond 'EuroAmerica'. If Chicago and Los Angeles have been 'truth spots' (Gieryn, 2006) for the industrial city and postmodern urbanism respectively, what urban phenomena might be encapsulated by studying the likes of Cairo, Dhaka, Johannesburg, Mexico City, Mumbai, Shanghai, or Jakarta? It has also been argued, however, that while adding such urban territories to the list of great cities may make for a more regionally-inclusive, globe-spanning urban studies, it also continues to favour large metropolitan centres to the exclusion of small(er) cities within as well as beyond the West (on such 'metrocentricity', see Bunnell and Maringanti, 2010). Jennifer Robinson (2006) proffers the term 'ordinary cities' not only as a way of incorporating lesser-known towns, cities and regions into urban theory, but also as a means of breaking down inherited categorization and imagined hierarchies of knowledge. Robinson's treatment of all cities as 'ordinary' is founded on the conviction that there may be as much to learn from a small city in Africa or Asia as from a world/global city in Europe or North America.

The second way in which postcolonial urban scholars have pushed towards more globally-inclusive forms of research follows directly on from the first, and concerns efforts to foster conversations and comparisons across conventional categorical and associated spatial divides. As Robinson (2006) points out, the inherited tendency to locate the leading edge of global urban change, innovation, modernity and progress exclusively in cities in the global North has led to a situation where: (i) to the extent that learning across the global North-South divide is imagined to be possible, it is specifically from North to South (rather than the other way round); (ii) as faith in such modernizing pathways of spatio-temporal transformation has diminished in many regions of the world (in large part because of the persistence and proliferation of urban informality and poverty in much of the global South), cities of the North and South have increasingly been imagined to occupy discrete categories/worlds, such that little meaningful learning or comparison is deemed to be possible across the 'divide' between them. In response, postcolonial urban scholars have proposed and prescribed less exclusively bounded conversations, where all cities have the potential to be sites of innovation and where comparative learning operates at multiple scales and runs in multiple directions, including (in both ways) across the North-South divide.

Overall, postcolonial urban scholarship is about unsettling and building beyond inherited Western-centred assumptions about where urban theory/knowledge comes from and hierarchical understandings of pathways to learning and progress. It is important not to underestimate how deeply ingrained such inheritance and partial understanding can be. AbdouMaliq Simone and Edgar Pieterse, in their recent book *New Urban Worlds* (2017, p. 141), for example, argue that urban scholars continue to idealize a 'culturally limited Keynesian conception of the state', resulting in 'mourning for a past that never existed in the first place' in most geohistorical contexts. The project of postcolonializing urban studies – oriented towards ways of doing urban studies that are *inclusive* of an expanded range of contexts for theory (re)building, vectors of inter-urban learning and trajectories of historical change and possibility – remains as urgent as ever.

Inclusion in International Development Policy: UN-Habitat's Global Urban Agendas

If for postcolonial urban scholars, the impetus for forging more inclusive transdisciplinary urban studies has been recognition of the spatial selectivity of geographies of theory-building and uneven terrains of inter-urban learning, in international policy circles the normative rise of 'inclusion' has been in response to mainstream political acknowledgement of social exclusion in our urbanizing world. While this may appear to be an unambiguously positive response, the term social exclusion itself forms part of vast and complex literatures ranging across various disciplines

(with disputes over both conceptual definition and empirical measurement) and bound up with policy, politics and ideology in contextually-variegated ways. Even back in the year 2000, a scholar writing for the most part only in the context of Europe lamented that 'there are as many theories of social exclusion as there are writers on the subject' (Atkinson, 2000, p. 1039). Given that writing on the subject has proliferated even faster and in even more diverse ways since 2000 – including through being scaled up from particular national and regional contexts (e.g. Lister, 1998 on the UK; Atkinson, 2000 on the EU) into global urban social policy initiatives (UN-Habitat, 2001, 2015) – it is impossible to summarize debates on social exclusion here. However, for the purposes of this article, two key definitional issues – both of which are evident even from the early critical literature on specific national or regional contexts – are: (i) how 'inclusion' (i.e. that which is intended to counter exclusion) and 'equality' are discursively entangled in complex ways; and (ii) how economic inclusion/exclusion may be differentiated from, but in policy practice is also often bound up with, other (civic, social or cultural) dimensions.[2] My concern in what follows in this section is with inter/supranational-level policy responses to exclusion as a global 'urban' phenomenon and more specifically with the way in which 'inclusion' features in the New Urban Agenda (NUA) document that was adopted at the Habitat III meeting (UN-Habitat, 2016).

In introducing a series of 'reflections on the New Urban Agenda' in the *International Development Planning Review*, Seth Schindler (2017) summarizes the shifting foci of UN-Habitat's three 'grand' urban agenda documents that began with the 1976 Vancouver Declaration on Urban Settlements (UN-Habitat, 1976). Unsurprisingly, these shifts reflect changes in the internationally predominant political ideology over the past four decades. Thus, in the face of the destructive effects of the urban industrial crisis in the 1970s, the Vancouver Declaration sought to further empower governments – especially central governments – to control/manage land to ensure orderly urban (re)development and equitable socio-spatial distribution of associated benefits, in line with Fordist-Keynesian logics that were still prevalent at that time. That system began to be dismantled in subsequent years. The election of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US placed supply-side neoclassical economists in an 'unassailable political position' not only in those two national contexts, but also in international organisations. The latter is evident from the markedly different ideological emphasis of the 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, as compared to the earlier Vancouver Declaration (UN-Habitat, 1996). The Istanbul Declaration cast the market, decentralized governance and empowerment of non-state stakeholders as solutions to the full gamut of urban problems – from poverty, to inadequate housing, to unprecedented ecological damage. In the 1996 Declaration from Habitat II, then, as Schindler puts it, 'the state was meant to establish the conditions whereby the private sector could get on with the business of planning and building cities' (p. 351).

Schindler positions the 2016 Quito Declaration (i.e. the NUA) in a middle ground: 'between the Vancouver Declaration's call for a regulated land market and state-led urban planning and the

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[2] While in some domains inclusion and equality are used together (and almost interchangeably), some scholars in 1990s New Labour Britain, for example, argued that the rise of 'social inclusion' was at the expense of concern for inequality insofar as the latter was premised on redistribution while the former prioritized active participation in inequitable and geographically uneven labour markets. Others (including key political figures in New Labour) saw efforts to promote labour market inclusion as an alternative means to ensuring (active, long-term) equality of economic opportunity. This may be differentiated from civic, social or cultural forms of inclusion, and yet both came to form part of a wider 'inclusion agenda' (Lister, 1998). Both are oriented more to *procedural* rather than (re)*distributive* justice (a distinction that I adapt from Alderman and Inwood, 2013).

Istanbul Declaration's affirmation of the virtues of free markets' (p. 351). In part, this shift (back) marks a response to heightened socio-spatial inequality – people and places having been incorporated in highly uneven ways into neoliberal urban development[3] – and the recognition that this is only likely to worsen in the absence of concerted multilateral efforts. There was mention of both social exclusion and inequality in the Istanbul Declaration (UN-Habitat, 1996), yet it is specifically inclusion and inclusiveness that assume rhetorical predominance in the NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016). The words 'inclusive', 'inclusion' and 'inclusivity' appear dozens of times across the 24 pages (and 175 points) of the New Urban Agenda document. In some cases, inclusivity is used as a positive attribute of 'good' cities and settlements in general – ones where there is universal access to housing and public services and where there are universally-applied efforts to protect inhabitants from risk or violence (environmental as well as socio-cultural or political). In other instances, inclusivity is idealized in relation to more specific urban spaces – public spaces and streets, for example, that need to be designed in inclusive ways (e.g. along lines of gender, age, ability etc.) and that can function to make the wider settlements in which they are located more inclusive or accessible. On many further occasions, there is a specifically economic or material connotation to inclusion – 'inclusive' (and often 'sustainable') economic growth, urban economies, (industrial) development, or prosperity. 'Inclusive' is also used adjectivally as a desirable trait for governance – inclusive urban policies, plans, legislation, 'platforms' (for civic engagement and participation) and monitoring/evaluation systems. The NUA document even insists that review of its own future progress be conducted in inclusive ways (to include evaluative inputs from other UN agencies and from other 'relevant stakeholders'). In short, in the NUA, in line with an earlier 'issue paper' on 'Inclusive Cities' (UN-Habitat, 2015), inclusive is unequivocally good; it is a defining trait of the good city and of suitably good processes to achieve urban development that will 'leave no-one behind'.

Most of the approximately 50 uses of inclusive/inclusion/inclusivity in the NUA document are to do with responses to urban social and/or economic exclusion and so appear at first sight to have little in common with concerns over epistemology or methodology associated with academic calls for new (or more 'inclusive') geographies of theory. Even to the extent that aspects of inclusivity in the NUA document have explicit *spatial* dimensions, these concern equitable incorporation of people into urban territories (whether public spaces, cities, metropolitan regions or wider sub-national regions that encompass rural migrant mobilities and linkages), rather than incorporation of a 'world of cities' into 'more global' urban theory (cf. Robinson, 2013). Nonetheless, there are ways in which the NUA (and evaluation of its differences from the two earlier UN-Habitat declarations) intersects with the inclusionary sensibilities of academic urban studies/postcolonial urban theory. Most simply, in terms of ideals of procedural equality, what became the NUA emerged from preparatory issue papers from various policy units that were reportedly formed in such a way as 'to ensure a fair balance on the geographic origin of the experts in order for all five geographic regions to be fairly represented in each unit' (UN-Habitat, 2014, p. 2). Efforts to incorporate preparatory inputs from geographically diverse constituencies also included a series of 'Regional and Thematic meetings' held around the world. Through these, more than 100,000 people are said to have participated in the Habitat III process (Birch, 2018). Diverse stakeholder input into the crafting of the NUA more widely has been hailed as 'an important and lasting part of the Habitat III legacy' (Birch, 2017, p. 45), contrasting markedly with the 'opaque processes' that generated earlier agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 89)

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[3] The NUA document recognizes (in point #3) that 'social and economic exclusion and spatial segregation [are] often an irrefutable reality in cities and human settlements'.

Two further points of intersection are worthy of note and brief elaboration. The first concerns growing recognition of contextual variegation beyond a 'developed' versus 'developing' world divide. The UN-Habitat declarations have always been concerned with urban settlement problems and challenges outside the 'developed' regions of Western Europe and North America. However, the Istanbul Declaration of 1996 went beyond the developed-developing dichotomy in highlighting the need to address the specific concerns of 'small and medium-sized towns' and of settlements in 'countries with economies in transition' (p. 90). The NUA (in point #19) shows evidence of further diversification:

> *We acknowledge that in implementing the New Urban Agenda, particular attention should be given to addressing the unique and emerging urban development challenges facing all countries, in particular developing countries, including African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small-island developing States, as well as the specific challenges facing the middle income countries.*

Secondly, the NUA diagrams a world of urban problems (and associated solutions) in ways that cross-cut conventional partitions and hierarchies. In relation to poverty and informality, for example, point #25 notes how 'growing inequality and the persistence of multiple forms and dimensions of poverty, including the rising number of slum and informal settlement dwellers, is affecting both developed and developing countries'. Significantly, in postcolonial urban studies terms, this serves to *include* cities of so-called developed countries in discussion of global urban problems and challenges (for a similar point at the national level in relation to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, see Willis, 2016), casting them as sites potentially in need of development and intervention, rather than as necessarily the leading edge of innovation and modernity. What is more, to the extent that the NUA also recognizes the 'contribution' of the informal economy (in point #13) there is even perhaps a hint that experiences in/of urban environments in developing countries may be able to contribute to knowledge of how to deal with shared/related concerns in developed countries, thus inverting conventional imagined geographies of learning. More widely, continued commitment to the Nairobi headquarters location of UN-Habitat (in point #170) symbolizes belief that the leading edges of global urban transformation (for better or worse) are beyond the Euro-American truth-spots of academic urban knowledge production.

Towards a Critical Urban Geography of Inclusiveness

From the previous two sections of this paper it is clear that *explicit* use of inclusion/inclusive/inclusivity in the NUA for the most part differs (or is entirely disconnected) from the orientation to inclusiveness that underlies postcolonial urban theory, but also that careful reading of the NUA document (including in relation to the wider history of grand UN-Habitat agendas) allows some points of intersection to be discerned. In this section, I seek to bring postcolonially-inflected academic urban studies and global urban policy agendas into conversation, or to make them rub up against each other. As an academic urbanist myself, I am more accustomed to considering ways in which scholarly debates (including, though not only, in postcolonial urban studies) provide critical perspectives on policy documents and agendas than vice versa. However, I also acknowledge that critical theorists ('urban' or otherwise) tend to be better at articulating what they are 'against' than what they are for (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). That is to say, (especially theory-driven) urban scholars are more adept at critiquing policy agendas and initiatives than at formulating alternatives to them. While what follows in this third section of the paper by no means amounts to an alternative urban agenda, my aim is to treat the 'friction' arising from critical scholarly engagement with the NUA as a generative force in both

directions (Tsing, 2004), and to keep in view what this might mean for doing the urban differently. I will identify and sketch four critical intersections in turn.

The first intersection follows on directly from conceptions of friction-as-generative and has to do with recognising *the progressive possibilities of an agonistic politics of inclusion/exclusion*. Maria Kaika is among the leading urban scholars to have criticized the NUA (and related urban policy agreements from the UN system) for its overriding concern to build consensus among 'the usual suspects and invited participants' (Kaika, 2017, p. 94), rather than allowing for 'dissensus', conflict and disagreement that might open genuinely 'new' policy pathways and directions.[4] This is somewhat harsh given the efforts (noted above) that were made to include a diverse range and geographical spread of participants in Habitat III. Perhaps the core concern, then, is that the priority that is afforded to finding points of 'overlapping consensus' in order to reach agreement at the global level serves to sideline vitally important differences and points of contention (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 89). Even in local level articulations of UN practice, the consensual model of democratic politics is preponderant, leaving no space for appreciation of the transformative potential of dissent and agonistic politics (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). As I have noted, postcolonial urban scholars are concerned to confront the uneven power relations that have historically enabled only certain people in certain places to shape urban theory (or the 'urban question'). Similarly, Simone and Pieterse contend that beyond the academy, contestation may be necessary to disrupt (especially 'invisible' or 'hidden') forms of power that result in people and groups being 'included' in existing urban development processes in highly uneven ways – a point that may be applied to the process of participation in the formulation of the NUA. Kaika (2017) provides examples of groups that have actively refused to be 'included' in planning processes after concluding that 'this only legitimized the injustice of existing practices and reproduced fixed roles and power positions' (p. 96). Does this mean that 'inclusiveness' should not be the goal, or simply that alternative modes of (more-than-procedural) inclusion – ones more attuned to ingrained inequities and cultural modes of power – are required? Either way, scholars such as Kaika, Simone and Pieterse are in agreement about the need for more radical and dissensus-based politics of/for urban change than is evident from the Habitat III process (and, indeed, perhaps even possible within the UN system).

Focusing on dissensus is important not just in challenging ingrained and often invisible inequities but also in diversifying ways of thinking and reimagining the urban. This leads onto my second point of intersection, concerning *the need to expand the variety of people and places that are acknowledged as legitimate resources for urban future-making*. One way of exemplifying this has to do with the largely untapped experimental potential of 'the right to the city' as it appears in the NUA and other UN documents (mentioned in the NUA on p. 2; note #11). On the one hand, the very inclusion of the phrase 'right to the city' in the NUA document was an achievement based on protracted negotiation in the Habitat III process[5] and may prove to be very valuable to groups seeking to hold governments to account for providing access to services, public space and labour markets to all city inhabitants (Satterthwaite, 2016). On the other hand, much of the historical radical potency of 'the right to the city' has been lost in UN documents including the

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[4] Kaika even goes as far as to describe the NUA as 'immunological' – ensuring that people and places can continue to take more of the same forms of inequitable development processes – rather than confronting the need for change.

[5] In the case of the third and final Habitat III Preparatory Committee meeting ('PrepCom III') that was held in Surabaya in July 2016, for example, 'the right to the city' is noted as having been one of the 'main divisive issues' in documentation by the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CSIPDHR) of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) organization (CSIPDHR, 2016).

NUA as part of 'placid' discourses on 'good governance' (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, p. 161). In particular, the kind of inclusivity that is implied here does not extend beyond groups staking their place in the *existing* city. In more dissensus-based articulations of the right to the city, in contrast, that term connotes the right of all inhabitants to imagine the (future) city otherwise (e.g. Harvey, 2012; Purcell, 2002) – in new and radically different ways (on envisioning the right to the city via practices of commoning, for example, see Maringanti, 2011). More widely, while the NUA describes itself as part of an 'urban paradigm shift', it is largely crafted out of *existing* ideas and methods associated with a global corps of experts whose hope for better futures continues to lie in inherited understandings of techno-managerial 'solutions' and corporate-centred innovation.[6] In seeking to chart more radical ways forward, Simone and Pieterse (2017) discern adaptive possibilities in dense urban neighbourhoods in the global South. Importantly, this is not about casting the urban poor as heroic capitalist entrepreneurs-in-waiting (cf. de Soto, 2000), but a matter of recognizing the incremental innovation and quotidian experimentation that enables people to get by in a range of difficult (in some cases seemingly 'uninhabitable') situations (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). In this way, people and places often understood to be excluded from – and in need of inclusion into – extant techno-managerial visions of the city (that always seem to end up benefitting existing elites) become resources for reimagining and inhabiting the urban otherwise.[7]

Among the reasons why it is important to continually diversify sources of and resources for future-making is because *what worked in one geographical or historical context may not work so effectively or have entirely different outcomes in other places and times*. At first sight, it may seem unnecessary to mention this third point of intersection given recognition of the specificity of 'developing world' conditions in UN-Habitat documents going back to the 1970s and acknowledgement of the further contextual variation in subsequent UN Declarations that was noted in the previous section. Yet there is still evidence in the NUA of geohistorically-specific presumptions of the right or proper way forward, however unrealistic or implausible this may be when applied elsewhere (or 'elsewhen'). Recognition of the 'contribution' of the informal economy (in point #13), for example, is immediately followed by commitment to support 'sustainable transition to the formal economy'. The stark reality, according to Simone and Pieterse (2017), is that 'the scale of informality is insurmountable for states in poorer countries, and that urban residents are the primary builders of the city' (p. 39; see also Caprotti et al., 2017, p. 374 on the need for an agenda that 'departs from the technocratic, plan-oriented approaches that often seek to formalize the informal'). Ongoing technological transformation, meanwhile, makes the prospect of extending formal and stable employment fade even further (p. 32). Relatedly, Simone and Pieterse argue that a combination of infrastructure investment deficits, inadequate finance and unaffordability mean that 'it is impossible in the current operating environment of globalized infrastructure finance systems to raise the requisite capital for investments to achieve city-wide infrastructure networks'(p. 42). Such infrastructural ideals have long been, and remain, central to imaginings of the 'good' city in the West (Graham and Marvin, 2001). But their pursuit in the

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[6] This is exemplified in note #133: 'We call on businesses to apply their creativity and innovation toward solving sustainable development challenges in urban areas, acknowledging that private business activity, investment, and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive growth and job creation and that private investment, particularly foreign direct investment, along with a stable international financial system, are essential elements of development efforts' (see also Solecki and Friedman, 2018 on how the NUA does not 'stray too far from a business-as-usual growth trajectory' (p. 131), particularly with regard to sustainable development goals).

[7] The fact that UN-Habitat is headquartered in Nairobi may thus be of little use in fostering novel pathways or prospect insofar as the *parts* of such cities of the global South in which Simone and Pieterse locate their hope for New Urban Worlds continue to be dismissed a priori as part of the problem.

global South in the twenty-first century results in 'delivery systems that can cater only to the needs of those who are bankable – i.e. formal businesses, government agencies, the middle classes, and the elites' (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, p. 42-3). This reaffirms the need for radically different ways forward and (as articulated in the first point, above) to diversify where we look for alternative (re)sources and models.

This is not to suggest that there is nothing to be learned inter-contextually, across time and/or space. Rather – and this is my fourth and final point of intersection between postcolonial urban sensibilities and global urban policy agendas – *it is important that 'learning from elsewhere' proceeds critically, including in ways that are attentive to the politics of (inclusive) urban models and indicators*. There is a longstanding literature in urban studies that critiques the ways in which certain cities become vaunted as models of 'good practice' and how efforts to replicate such models tend to reduce their 'success' to an inadequate (sub)set of measures, criteria or indices (McCann, 2004). There is also recent work that is more specifically critical of the role of indicators in the NUA (Kaika, 2017). While such critiques are valid, indices and rankings – and wider logics of inter-urban competition that drive/sustain them – are here to stay, whether 'critical' academics like it or not. As such, the more pressing issue is perhaps how to engage with indicator-driven processes of competition in ways that may be oriented to 'progressive' outcomes; it is surely better for cities to 'compete' to be seen as 'inclusive', for example, than over which has the tallest skyscraper or which is most attractive to corporations that wish to circumvent tax, labour or environmental regulations. Yet even when developmental competition is oriented to seemingly progressive ends, it is important not to lose sight of wider politics and politicking. In Singapore, for example, the achievements of the Building and Construction Authority's 2006 Accessibility Master Plan were recently showcased as 'good practices' in a United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs document on 'accessible urban development' (UN DESA, 2016). In addition, more specific spaces such as the Enabling Village – 'an inclusive community space' oriented to 'a more inclusive society' – are attracting international attention (Enabling Village, 2018). While such efforts to create an inclusive built environment are of course to be welcomed, my critical concerns revolve around two key final questions: (i) to what extent does competitive striving and image-consciousness around being seen as a model of environmental inclusivity or accessibility shut down criticism, gloss over deficits and ultimately impede learning? And (ii) do site-specific models of putatively good practice according to one measure or another obscure or deflect attention away from other sites and/or ways of evaluating inclusive futures?

Conclusions

Inclusion has been prominent in agendas to realize better forms of urban theory, better urban development policy and, ultimately, better urban futures. The overwhelmingly positive connotations of the term (and its variants, 'inclusive' and 'inclusivity') mean that it tends to be treated as an inherently 'good' or progressive orientation. In this paper, however, I have shown that inclusion may be defined in several ways in and across different domains. As such, the promotion or pursuit of inclusive futures can involve a variety of processes, leading to varied outcomes.

As I have acknowledged, my own positionality means that I am predisposed to think critically about inclusive urban policy agendas through academic lenses. Beyond the points of intersection that I have already sketched, it is worthwhile in this concluding section to revisit what 'inclusive' means in the NUA, the process through which its usage was agreed upon, and likely effects. This yields two further critical points, both concerning the consensus-based formulation of the NUA.

First, and most straightforwardly, the fact that nation-states are very careful about what they commit to in such agreements (Birch, 2018) means that they are inevitably couched in safe language. It is thus possible that 'inclusive' is reflective of a wider set of lowest common denominator terms that everyone can agree upon in a process of 'decision-making by committee' (Willis, 2016, p. 106).

A second point is based on a rather different interpretation – namely, that the reason why everyone is able to agree upon goals of 'inclusion' is not so much because of the safeness or vacuity of the term but to do with its *malleability*. I have already made mention of how: (i) inclusion has been variously understood as aligned with or as an impediment to redistributive efforts for challenging inequality; and (ii) procedural (i.e. non-redistributive) forms of promoting inclusion can range from issues of socio-cultural, institutional or civic representation, to labour market participation. Side-stepping once again the wider literatures and discourses that frame such definitional diversity, the point is that there is something in 'inclusion' for everyone – and that all nation-states could (selectively) adopt. At one level this may be a good (and suitably inclusive!) outcome in that a diversity and spatial variety of good things could be done in the name of inclusion. On the other hand, it allows some forms of inclusion to be pursued at the expense – or even to the *exclusion* – of others. Planners involved in UN urban development policy formulation processes stress the care and attention that was given to crafting the wording of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which in turn guided and framed the NUA, including the precise phraseology of indicators that structure reporting mechanisms (Birch, 2018). However, we know from critical academic evaluation of the earlier Millennium Development Goals that interpretative ambiguity can enable and even serve to legitimize (re)development that is at odds with progressive original intentions (in relation to urban informal settlements and evictions, see Meth, 2013). There is a danger that the malleability of inclusion lends itself to different, selective interpretations that could end up with consequences rather different from original intent or ethos.

Better urban futures do not lie in academic critique alone and nor is academic urban studies somehow beyond or above critical scrutiny even with regard to issues of inclusion. While postcolonial perspectives in urban studies have drawn attention to epistemological and methodological aspects of a more geographically inclusive urban theory, has there been a corresponding neglect of procedural or redistributive transformations? A recent commentary on efforts to decolonize geographical knowledge, for example, notes how such priorities may leave racialized academic hierarchies and privilege untouched unless they are accompanied by a decolonization of institutions, structures and praxis (Esson et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Simone and Pieterse (2017) lament how urban scholars have become disconnected from the 'real world' and constructive engagement with alternative possibilities through having becoming mired in 'the academic game of theoretical one-upmanship' (xii). One way beyond this is precisely for urban theory to engage urban policy (and vice versa). The conference at which an initial draft of this paper was presented compelled consideration of 'transforming beyond borders'. A key border that I have engaged is that between academic theory on one side and the realm of global urban development policy on the other. The friction that emerges from making these two sides rub up against other is a resource for new ways forward in urban theory and policy practice and far exceeds technical matters of how to implement existing global agendas.

With the NUA now well into the stage of implementation, I conclude by re-visiting the initial motivating foundations for this paper regarding the ingrained – but often hidden – Euro-American centredness of aspects of both urban development policy and academic urban studies. There are influential critics of the NUA who have pointed out its failure to specify 'concrete implementation policies and measures' (Garschagen and Porter, 2018, 119), while remaining positive about the

document's wider framing of issues of sustainability, inclusion or human settlements in *urban* terms. To the extent that there has been criticism of the urban-centred reframing of the Habitat agenda through the NUA, the chief concern has been about associated neglect of rural people and places (in the context of Indonesia, see Padawangi, 2016). However, is it possible that the centrality of the 'urban' in the NUA (and SDG 11 before it) reflects specifically Euro-American experiences and priorities? Clive Barnett and Susan Parnell (2016) have argued very persuasively that this is indeed the case, demonstrating how the increasingly 'city-centric conception of development' (p. 88) is based not just on the demographic fact of a predominantly urban planetary future but arises from new forms of 'urban optimism' in public policy in Western Europe and North America. It is in those regional contexts that normative understandings of the relationship between urbanization and economic development have recast urban processes as sites of opportunity and potential rather than as simply problems or challenges. And, crucially for this paper, according to Barnett and Parnell, the 'renaissance in urban thinking' that generated support for city-centric global development policy arose specifically from experiences in the global North. To the extent that the NUA is, in turn, founded on such (unstated) contextual premises and expectations (e.g. around particular levels of local government capacity), then it is, at best, likely to be implemented in highly uneven ways. Recent historical experience in Indonesia suggests that this will not necessarily reinforce existing geographies of uneven development – progressive local government innovation is possible in unexpected places (Bunnell et al., 2013), including around ideas of the inclusive city (Hardiansah, 2015) – but, in general, cities and urban regions that deviate from normative Euro-American trajectories and expectations in the NUA are surely less likely to fare well. The quest for more equitable futures requires that questions of inclusivity raised by postcolonial urbanists continue to be asked of both urban theory and global urban development policy.

Acknowledgements

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