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Institutional capabilities towards urban equality: Reflections from the KNOW programme in Bangalore, Kampala and Havana

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Shuaib Lwasa
Jorge Peña Díaz
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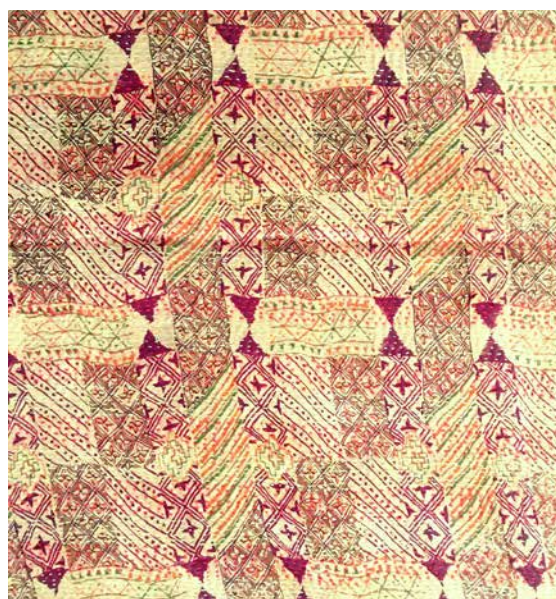
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Cover textile

Woven interrelationships

This hand-stitched Indian patchwork presents a typical '*Kantha textile*' from the eastern states of Bengal and Bihar in India. For centuries, rural craftswomen have used methods passed down from mother to daughter to create intricate, embroidered fabrics. The textile uses layers of recycled cloth, delicately stitched together using threads from old saris. The overlapping layers of colour and pattern represent the interrelationships of the artist's personality, tradition, community, and craftsmanship.

Textile image and caption courtesy of Ruchika Lall, 2020.



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Abstract

This Working Paper is a collection of reflections to explore the notion of 'institutional capabilities', and its possibilities to advance the urban equality agenda. KNOW partners from Bangalore, Kampala and Havana reflect on how their research activities are interrogating the capabilities of institutions to translate knowledge into practices, and potential implications for building pathways to urban equality. The document starts with an introduction by Alexandre Apsan Frediani and Camila Cociña, which frames the notion of institutional capabilities. Then, reflections from three KNOW Investigators are presented: Gautam Bhan from the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Bangalore, India, reflects on institutional capabilities within education institutions in the piece "Notes from Bangalore: Reflections on teaching urban practices". Shuaib Lwasa

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from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, discusses "Scalable solutions for social inclusiveness and embracing of informality: Waste economies to enhance urban livelihoods in informal settlements in Kampala"; and Jorge Peña Díaz from the Technological University of Havana (CUJAE), Cuba, discusses "Urban equality in Havana: The role of research networks in increasing state capabilities". The Working Paper concludes with reflections by Caren Levy on how these cases talk to questions of urban equality. Apart from enabling comparative thinking and reflections across these three contexts, the different sections of this Working Paper aim to explore the usefulness of the concept 'institutional capabilities' as a framework for the implementation of global urban agendas.

INTRODUCTION

Institutional capabilities for urban equality

By Alexandre Apsan Frediani¹ and Camila Cociña²

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What is the role of institutions in advancing urban equality and social justice? If institutions define that urban equality is an expected outcome of their work, what kind of capacities, norms, regulations and resources should they have in place? Addressing urban inequality has slowly become a priority for institutions at different scales, including international agencies. This is manifested in the inclusion of equality as a key issue in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's New Urban Agenda (NUA). The Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme is a response to the growing challenges of urban inequalities and examines the role of knowledge co-production in building pathways to urban equality. KNOW defines urban equality as a multidimensional experience for urban dwellers, encompassing access to income and services, recognition of diverse social identities, and inclusion in decision-making processes that affect them, promoting an overall context of care and solidarity. This collective definition draws on seminal work on social justice by Nancy Fraser (1995) and Iris Marion Young (1990), as well as on research that has mobilised their ideas to explore issues of urban equality (Allen & Frediani, 2013; Levy, 2015; Levy & Davila, 2018).

One key focus of KNOW is to examine how institutions (in government, civil society and the private sector) are able to use knowledge to promote practices that challenge the reproduction of inequalities. In this context, part of the KNOW team is working on supporting, understanding and researching the ways in which different initiatives are translating research into practice. In other words, supporting and documenting the ways in which research based on the co-production of knowledge actually influences the ways things work. We have called this 'processes of knowledge translation'¹. Looking at these processes with KNOW partners in different cities, it has become clear that one of the most important mechanisms to transform cities is to change the way in which institutions work. In other words, if research projects seek to bring about some sort of change to advance urban equality, they have to be able to impact institutions – local and national governments, the private sector, NGOs, community organisations and international bodies – and the broader set of institutional arrangements and relationships that govern them.

This Working Paper aims to explore the usefulness of the concept 'institutional capabilities' to approach and frame this inquiry, and to contribute to current debates on the implementation of an urban equality agenda. Understood from a development perspective and based on the seminal work of Amartya Sen (1979; 1999), a capability approach focuses on people's ability and their opportunities to achieve the things that they value. Sen's work has been applied in a variety of ways and purposes, which includes the exploration of the capabilities of groups and collectives. The shift of the definition of poverty from being income-based to being based on the deprivation of capabilities, has informed the articulation of the Human Development perspective, directly impacting the work of many governments and development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme. In simple words, what this approach asks, is: "What are people actually able to do and to be? What real opportunities are available to them?" (Nussbaum, 2011:x). Rather than asking these questions about people, this Working Paper proposes the use of the capability approach to focus on the conditions and attributes of institutions to enable knowledge translation and to build pathways towards urban equality. We want to interrogate the potential of the concept of 'institutional capabilities' as a means to understand and document those processes: to investigate the capabilities that institutions should have to promote a normative, value-based agenda such as urban equality, and the processes of transforming those capabilities. In this Working Paper, KNOW partners from Bangalore, Kampala and Havana reflect on how their research activities are interrogating the capabilities of institutions, and their potential implications for building pathways to urban equality².

Defining and interrogating institutional capabilities

From a Human Development perspective, it is crucial to make explicit the values that drive capabilities: to locate the normative aspects of social justice at the forefront of capability analyses. This approach has been spread internationally through Human Development Reports and put forward theoretically by the work of scholars such as Martha Nussbaum, who has articulated human capabilities as the bases to think about feminist political principles (Nussbaum, 2001). With this lens in mind, we want to understand and interrogate the usefulness of the idea of 'institutional capabilities', both in the ways it has been used in the past, as well as interrogating the potential to mobilise it through our research and practice.

The concept of 'institutional capabilities' has been used by literature in several ways. In the context of business and management literature, for example, the term is frequently used

1 For an extended reflection about these discussions, see our previous KNOW [Working Paper No. 2](#) "Translating knowledge for urban equality: alternative geographies for encounters between planning research and practice" (Frediani, Cociña and Acuto, 2019). For more information about the work on 'knowledge translation' within KNOW, visit the page of "Work Package 4: Translating research into practice", available at <https://www.urban-know.com/wp4-practice>

2 These reflections were first presented in the panel "*Institutional capabilities towards urban equality: Lessons from knowledge translation processes from the KNOW programme*", organised by KNOW as part of the "*Human Development and Capability Association 2019 Conference: Connecting Capabilities*", which took place in London between 9th and 11th September 2019.

to distinguish institutional norms and regulations that frame the operations of an organisation. This implies recognising enabling environments that, for example, allow companies to sense opportunities and threats (Teece, 2007), increase profitability (Ethiraj et al, 2005) and navigate institutional contexts (Carney et al, 2016). In this literature, the normative considerations about the expected outcomes of those capabilities tend not to be very explicit, or to focus on issues around companies' productivity, profitability, and good governance. Needless to say, issues of social justice tend to be absent from these discussions.

Literature using the notion of 'institutional capabilities' in the context of public institutions explore more clearly the interactions between knowledge production and institutional changes. In this regard, the book 'Building a Capable State', co-edited by Ian Palmer, Susan Parnell and Nishendra Moodley (2017), is particularly relevant. The term capability is used here, recognising that it

"...covers a broad range of factors that influence the ability of organisations to perform effectively in providing services. The book prefers to use the word 'capability' over the term 'capacity'. While there is an overlapping meaning in these two words, 'capability' covers not only the existence of the natural, human, and financial resources, and systems to utilise these resources, but it also includes the values, relationships, and organisational culture that lead to good performance, and hence effective provision of services to citizens." (Palmer et al, 2017:9)

One could argue that this use of the term capability is limited in defining an explicit normative outcome, focusing rather on good performance and effectiveness. However, the book mobilises this notion to a more value-based approach, defining a 'capable state' as "the very antithesis of the neo-liberal logic of service provision, is instead the foundation of a progressive rights-based settlement agenda" (Palmer et al, 2017:5). The use of 'capabilities' to promote a progressive rights-based settlement agenda starts to allow the connections to be made to a social justice lens and an urban equality agenda. From a Human Development perspective, we propose that in order to shift this approach from humans to organisations, from people to institutions, there are at least three sets of questions to ask of 'institutional capabilities'.

First, as mentioned, the Human Development literature emphasises the need for normative values to complement the use of the capability approach³. Within this framework, explicit values are a fundamental aspect to make sure that the capability approach safeguards transformative elements linked to social justice. Otherwise, there is a risk that it can be appropriated, co-opted and utilised in ways that do not necessarily challenge

entrenched injustices. In the context of KNOW and the cases presented in this Working Paper, there is an unequivocal use of urban equality as the main normative value. We are not talking about institutional capabilities for improving performance as a neutral goal, but institutional capabilities for urban equality. Furthermore, the outcomes expected from the development of institutional capabilities are clearly articulated around a series of values that underpin the definition of urban equality: equal distribution, reciprocal recognition and parity political participation. In the last section of this Working Paper, Caren Levy expands on the implications of the cases presented for each of these categories.

This is the value-lens that the cases presented in this document are using when interrogating institutions. The capability approach talks about the 'beings' and 'doings' of individuals and collectives. Similarly, we could ask what the 'beings' and 'doings' are that institutions value, and how they connect to the notion of urban equality: What are the values at the basis of the institutions we are interrogating? What are the values implicit in the practices of institutions? Do these institutions work on a basis of distribution, recognition, participation, care, and solidarity? If that is the case, how do these principles shape institutional practices?

A second set of questions to ask of an 'institutional capabilities' perspective, is – using capability 'language' – about the 'portfolio of practices' of institutions: What are the different practices that institutions are deploying to advance this set of values? What are the procedures within them? The three cases presented in this Working Paper explore the different tactics, strategies and practices that institutions are encouraging – or that emerge from collective actions taken within institutions – to promote values of urban equality. Some of these practices might emerge from explicit institutional commitments, while others come from the collective effort of more marginal views within institutions. In this respect, it is important to look back to some of the lessons from institutionalisation and mainstreaming of gender (Eyben and Turquet, 2013; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Levy, 1998) to learn from the conflictive processes of institutionalising marginalised positions, and to explore the institutional capabilities to address social change.

The third set of questions that we would like to ask relates to the spaces of opportunities: What kind of opportunities and organisational abilities should be in place to allow institutions to achieve those value-based outcomes? What kind of abilities do institutions promote for civic engagement, for producing policies, for delivering new kinds of projects and programmes? These questions imply understanding the policy and planning frameworks within institutions, and how they enable or constrain the possibility of those abilities to actually pursue the visions of change that are embedded in institutions.

With these considerations in mind, the three cases discussed hereafter are an invitation to think of how change takes place in and through institutions, how to make sense of that change, and

3 See Boni and Des Gasper (2012) for an articulation of human development values to inform the rethinking of university quality; Drydyk (2013) on the prioritisation of the principle of empowerment within capability thinking; Robeyns (2017) arguing that the capability approach allows room for additional normative concerns and moral principles to complement the use of the capability approach.

how the notion of 'institutional capabilities' can be instrumental to that process. To support and research those processes of institutional change, it is indispensable to understand the arenas in which marginalised forms of knowledge co-production are incorporated into planning research, teaching and practice. The cases of Bangalore, Kampala and Havana provide rich examples of ongoing engagements in each city with groups and knowledges that usually remain at the margins of urban debates. Urban planning provides a fruitful setting for such exploration, as it "represents a privileged site to assess the translation of an ethos of inquiry into the political field of practice, intervention and engagement" (Bhan et al, 2018:8). In the process of implementing global agendas of urban equality, unequal social dynamics can only be transformed if relations and geographies of power in knowledge production and circulation, and the ability of institutions to mobilise those knowledges, are challenged.



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CASE 1

Notes from Bangalore: Reflections on teaching urban practices

By Gautam Bhan

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This text reflects on the experiences of teaching, learning and curriculum development at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Bangalore. Between 2009-2012, IIHS undertook a three-year curriculum development process towards a new framework of urban education called *Urban Practice*. This reflection traces the challenges of implementing this, outlining how thinking from the framework of institutional capabilities relates to IIHS' approach to urban education. It argues that, in the Indian context, a shift away from 'planning' was necessary for a number of reasons to enable a deeper, inter-disciplinary and rooted curriculum development appropriate to address questions of urban equity, especially within southern urbanisation. It focuses on a pedagogical interface at the IIHS that deliberately attempts to stretch what this Working Paper understands as the 'practices, abilities and opportunities within institutions'. This experience is an institutional strategy to hire 'Fellows of Practice' onto the Institute's payroll, who were all activists and organisers within the housing space. This reflection discusses what it meant to have activists as faculty and fellows in residence within the institution, and how it impacted the teaching, practice and research on equity.

Assuming that the capabilities needed to build pathways to urban equality require processes of collective action in what I will call 'activism', the questions I want to focus on are two: how can higher education institutions that train practitioners, support and sustain activism in order to get those capabilities? And how can higher education institutions actually support and sustain the existence of 'activists'? If we believe that 'activism' is central to capabilities, one of the big questions we have to face is how our activists are meant to sustainably practice activism. Literally, how are they meant to survive? What kind of institutions are able to hold activists in lives of activism? We have struggled with this question in many ways, assuming that those institutions would be part of the development sector

as either a nongovernmental organisation, or, as continues to be the case, within non-funded collective action spaces and social movements. Historically, at different times, it has been both and either. These will both continue to be important, albeit very different, institutional sites that support activism. Yet, should the university not also be a site that takes on the responsibility of supporting activism and activists?

The story I want to share is then based on this more specific question: if we had an institution that wanted to support activism, then what specific institutional arrangements allow higher education institutions to do this considering all their constraints and notions of expertise, the regulations by governments, and the requirements of degree programmes? This story is about the IIHS, and there are three important things to note and flag about this institution: first, the IIHS is a relatively new institution in urban education in India, having only been established in 2009, which implies it can take some risks; second, it does not yet offer degree programmes that are regulated differently within Indian higher education; hence, it is currently not regulated; and third, IIHS is an endowed elite private institution, which means it has a resource base that allows it to take risks.

Through this experience, we are trying to make an argument that if higher education institutions take capability seriously theoretically, they have to change their own institutional arrangements to allow practitioners to come into the classroom with authority, and not just as partners from communities, or as co-learners or co-producers. They have to come in as faculty.

About four years ago, we started something called the 'Fellows of Practice' programme, where we brought in practitioners as faculty members. This is not uncommon in institutes of urban studies and practice, but typically those practitioners are planners from private sector firms, people having an architectural practice, people who do consultancy work. But our first 'Fellows of Practice' were all anti-eviction housing rights activists.

Three Fellows began the programme, and they have been with us for four years now. Each of them identifies as an activist and works as a grassroots organiser, takes part in direct action, often legal action, around questions of low-income informal housing and anti-caste politics.

In terms of formal education, they range from not having completed high school to having undergraduate and graduate degrees. I mention this specifically, because when we talk about institutional arrangements, all educational institutions judge credentials, expertise and accreditation partly by formal education and degrees. Doing things differently is then not just a matter of intent, but about grappling with structures of bureaucratic norm- and rule-making, most of which extend far beyond any individual institution. This engagement is key to making sure that this does not become yet another project that depends on a few individuals, so that even if those individuals exit, the programme to have 'Fellows of Practice' continues.

Reflecting on these four years, I want to present three considerations. The first relates to our experience of having full-time activists that are faculty, and therefore are in the classroom and are jury for the 'community development studios' – familiar to everyone who runs urban programmes or development planning programmes. We find, in some sense, that in the professionals we are training as practitioners, there is a sensibility and a sensitivity to questions of capabilities that cannot be intentionally taught. They seem to imbibe themselves in the classroom in ways that many of us have been trying to do but were not fully able to do, almost intuitively and instinctively, when certain 'life worlds' are presented to the classroom as the lives of the faculty themselves. For example, one of the neighbourhoods we study is a low-income area in Bangalore that has seen repeated housing evictions, and one of our faculty grew up in that neighbourhood and went through those evictions. Having him as faculty in the studio transformed the way in which the students looked at their role as professionals and practitioners. It did not do so because anyone said it – that is precisely the point: no one had to say it. And that is why I'm using the word sensibility. It is not so much a taught outcome that is told as a political stance that is intellectually correct and ethically right. It is actually a sensibility that seems to pervade the environment of learning in the classroom.

The second important thing appeared when we invited all three of the fellows to what we call 'master classes of practice' for our new students. One of the things that all our students ask us is 'what they are meant to be when they grow up'. One of the things we do through the year is that they meet practitioners and hear about their lives: they meet professional planners, consultants in the private sector, government officers, and they meet activists. And in this framing, what we are trying to get is a set of urban professionals, who believe that there is a life pathway as an activist – and again, I remind you, this is a postgraduate certificate course in an elite college with students who will become critical practitioners across urban sectors. The argument for us is that they see activism as a mode of practice, that has tactics, logics and strategies. That it is not just a field of values, sensibilities and norms, but actually something that can be practiced both with empathy, but equally with rigor. And that they see and consider themselves to possibly take on a life of activism as a profession, as a practice. This distinction between a profession and a practice, and the role of higher education institutions to tell the next generation of practitioners and our graduates, to construct lives of practice that are not reducible to their professions, is a key aspect that has come from our learning.

The third consideration I want to emphasise, drawing on the capabilities framing of this Working Paper, regards the outcomes for institutions when they engage in this direct and pointed way to increase capabilities through activism. One outcome, one could say, is to create a set of practitioners who are sensitive to questions of transformation capabilities. But a much more immediate and self-interested outcome for institutions is that we were able to argue, to sustain this

programme, that the direct outcome was an improvement in our pedagogy as an institution of higher education. We have long argued that there are certain aspects of inequality that cannot be taught effectively without a diverse classroom. You cannot teach inequality, especially in the Indian context, to a classroom that does not actually reflect the diversity of our population; and most higher education institutions in India, the private ones particularly, fail at this. When we talk about admitting a diverse student body, this is a recognised debate: we have affirmative action, we have questions of mandated inclusion on caste, on religion, on gender and identity. What this programme brings, is an argument for the same diversity in the faculty, not only in the students. This is a discussion that most institutions of higher education should take on very seriously. It is not a simple fight, to put it mildly. I have no magic wand answers for it. But a reflection of our experience of an on going struggle on this front may add to these struggles elsewhere, and so I think it is worth reflecting on. The 'Fellows of Practice' programme argues that the presence of activists in the classroom should not be seen only as a measure of diversity or inclusion, but of excellence. Simply put: without it, we could not achieve pedagogical excellence. Without it, we, as an institution, could not meet our own outcomes and standards of excellence. This is an important tactical framing on the question of how you increase diversity in higher education institutions, and it is an outcome-based framing that claims: 'if you want to increase capability through your education, you cannot do so unless you have a certain set of actors in your faculty, not just in your students'.

My final point is to reflect on some of the challenges that this experiment continues to face. It is now four years in, and I do not know if we will be able to sustain it. I do not know if we will be able to scale it. As the external regulatory environment of higher education changes, we may be mandated to use certain norms of accreditation that limit our ability to bring a non-high school graduate with twenty years of activist experience formally into our faculty. In many ways, our own ability to imagine and sustain innovative institutional arrangements is not itself so certain. I will mark two of these challenges. One, we have a lot of programmes in which IIHS has supported multilingual learners, and we support non-English learners because we have an inclusion mandate that brings several non-English learners into the classroom. However, we do not have any such support for non-English faculty; it never occurred to us. I am being very frank. In my personal view, I think it never occurred to us seriously enough as an institution that we would have faculty that would not speak English. We only anticipated students who would not speak English, and I think that says a lot about our imagination of where inclusion happens, and where expertise is constructed.

The second challenge is how the CV of an activist is read. And this was a pleasant surprise, because it was not the challenge we expected. We were very afraid of how to present a CV of someone who did not complete high school, and whose CV lists employment started from being an electrician at a local

garage at age 14. But our HR came back and said: 'We can't afford him'. Our reaction was: 'What do you mean you can't afford him?' But they said: 'No, he has 27 years of professional experience, we can't afford him'. So, it was HR who counted everything he wrote from being an electrician's assistant at age 14 as professional experience; and it was us who had not anticipated that counting. I think it is very interesting that the legacy our hiring department has, is to be able to equate professional experience across diverse modes of practice, and to be able to take organising and activism as part of that. However, I think that can only happen if you have that circle completed: where we teach activism as a practice, we treat it as a practice in our hiring.

Engaging with questions of activism as a method, practice and site for the creation of equity must be structured in particular ways within formal institutions of higher education. Understanding the terms of this engagement – with clear risks in all directions – is pivotal if institutions of higher education are truly to break their historical role as the gatekeepers of authoritative knowledge, even when they remain committed in word and deed to equity. Transforming and acknowledging the university's role implies moving beyond just curricular and pedagogical changes to deeper structural questions about who gets to teach in universities, and what the institutions themselves do for the production and reproduction of inequalities in our cities. Through this experience, we are trying to make an argument that if higher education institutions take capability seriously theoretically, they have to change their own institutional arrangements to allow practitioners to come into the classroom with authority, and not just as partners from communities, or as co-learners or co-producers. They have to come in as faculty.



CASE 2

Scalable solutions for social inclusiveness and embracing of informality: Waste economies to enhance urban livelihoods in informal settlements in Kampala

By Shuaib Lwasa

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As Africa experiences a fast wave of urbanisation, challenges associated with pollution, land degradation and climate change have put urban populations at high risk. However, development deficits still hang on the heads of urban managers and state governments. The description of urban Africa as informal and inadequately serviced has possibly locked urban managers into large-scale infrastructure or industrial development assumed to seamlessly link to job establishment, security and enhanced incomes. Urban Africa is largely informal and working with this informality to create scalable solutions, which are relevant in this context, will be key for transforming development on the continent.

African cities have the potential to be nodes of scalable solutions that integrate poorer communities into urban economies while addressing existential and emergent risks. This piece illustrates scalable micro-level businesses tapping the resourcefulness of urban Africa. It discusses the role of enhanced knowledge management for systematic planning at city-regional scale. It focuses on the case of Kampala, Uganda, and analyses the institutional capability gaps for the promotion and scaling-up of micro business models that are able to deal with urban inequalities.

I would like to start by clarifying the use of some concepts: I prefer to use 'emerging sector' rather than informality, but 'informal' is included in the title and throughout this text because most discourses use this term. This distinction is important for this reflection, as I would argue for the need to enable this 'emerging sector' to become part of the urban economy, and to enable disadvantaged communities to become part of it. Likewise, this intervention invites a reflection on the opportunities that this emerging sector offers, and on how the other part of the economy that is 'not informal', rarely sees it. To do so, I will share some reflections based on the work we are doing as part of the KNOW programme to enable capabilities within communities and other actors, connecting them at different levels within Kampala City. Kampala is the major urban centre in Uganda

with an estimated 1.5 million residents according to the 2012 census. The city's population has more than tripled since 1991, and accounts for a third of the national urban population. As the population grows, Kampala's spatial footprint has expanded from 195 km² in 1972 to a city region of 839 km². Kampala is Uganda's commercial and economic hub, and a key centre and driver of growth in the Great Lakes Region. It contributes approximately 60% of Uganda's GDP and accounts for 80% of the country's industrial sector (KCCA, 2014).

We are living in a world in which many cities are largely unequal. These inequalities manifest in many dimensions, including wealth distribution, housing infrastructure and the delivery of urban services. But there are also disparities in relation to decent and rewarding available jobs and, equally important, in relation to livelihood opportunities. In many cities, services, roads, sewage networks, etc., are available for a small part of the city, while a larger part of it is struggling, managing to survive through their own individual and collective ingenuity. While informality is generally seen as 'negative' in the city and to city managers, as something that needs to be 'sorted out', what emerges from our experience in this research, is that informality actually might be able to 'sort out' certain aspects of the formal sector.

We need to engage the institutions involved, like Kampala Capital City Authority, to trigger processes and actions that can change the 'rules of engagement' in respect of service provision.

In practice, the informal part of many cities is much larger than the formal. Kampala, like the rest of Uganda, has a very dynamic and growing urban informal sector. The prevalence of informal activities creates a new normality of Kampala as a truly informal city that plays an important role in the country. Informal settlements make up at least a quarter of the total city area, and informal housing provides homes for roughly

60% of the city's population (Richmond, Myers, & Namuli, 2018). This prevalence of informality means that the economy itself is also largely informal, as there is very limited absorption of the labour force into the formal market. In this context, it is important to look at the institutional mechanisms, and existing mandates and capabilities to incorporate these trends.

We know that institutions are more than just agencies: institutions are also 'rules of engagement', which embed power and decision-making processes. Public institutions have embedded mechanisms that determine who makes decisions to service which part of the city, and who makes decisions about promoting what kind of economic activity to absorb what kind of labour. Because of these disjunctions in terms of decision-making and power, the orientation of urban development policies is largely focused on large scale infrastructure and industrial development. Following this rationale, by promoting industrial development in the city, and by constructing and installing infrastructure, seamlessly all the labour force will be absorbed into the urban economy – which is not the case in most instances. We see how institutions and decision-making



to a meso scale. This development is based on what has already been happening in neighbourhoods, assessing how the waste can be sorted and managed, and then creating enterprises – some of which we have supported – and a product which can be marketed. Overall, we seek to interrogate the different ways in which poorer communities of informal settlements develop innovative livelihoods, understanding how they contribute to the economy of the city as a whole, and their impact on both local conditions and wider urban dynamics. Organised groups of dwellers of informal settlements in Kampala are developing innovative waste economies to enhance urban livelihoods, and these scalable micro-businesses can have a particular role tackling urban inequalities.

There are many issues that are still open: one of the big questions we are navigating is how to brand that particular product in order to scale up and transform household and community economies: we have to continue participatory co-design research with the communities to do that. Another key question is about enabling the municipality and private sector actors to incentivise the processes of waste sorting, to allow these medium-scale enterprises to flourish. This second set of issues requires the interrogation of the existing capabilities at these meso levels, to understand both the leadership that is needed and how these processes can plug into global policy frameworks on SDGs of energy, inclusive cities, and addressing climate change. These experiences allow us to challenge the kinds of capabilities required in different institutions – from community-based enterprises, government institutions, private sector, and the academy – to leverage micro-business in a way that tackles wider urban inequalities through enhanced knowledge management that can contribute to systematic planning at a city-regional scale.

What we are learning so far in this preliminary work, is that we can enable communities to take their advocacy and activism further; to become more visible and represented in the urban economy; and to be recognised by city actors. This means that we need to engage the institutions involved, like Kampala Capital City Authority, to trigger processes and actions that can change the 'rules of engagement' in respect of service provision. We know that waste is a big municipal sector from an expenditure perspective, as municipalities spend a huge amount of money annually to overhaul waste to the landfill. If they manage to change the rules to reflect capabilities that allow the promotion of micro-enterprises or meso-enterprises at scale, this could actually change their budget and expenditure lines. As academic institutions, we are also learning in terms of the kind of education we give to our graduates, who will become the next generation of practitioners in the municipalities, and also future scholars. This process is helping us to reframe education and the curriculum, to teach urban practice and planning in a different way, questioning our own institutional capabilities, and the kind of institutional capabilities that our graduates will be able to promote.

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CASE 3

Urban Equality in Havana: The role of research networks in increasing state capabilities

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The history of urban equality in Havana is marked by the particular geopolitical and economic trajectory of Cuba, and the history of the institutions that have shaped the city. The Cuban planned economy and its influence on urban planning has produced a very different scenario compared to most market-led economies. However, the ongoing process of opening up to the market and the new demands and actors this process has generated, have put a lot of pressure on urban policies that seek to consolidate pathways towards more equality. This reflection seeks to explore the role that academic institutions, networks, and the knowledge and learning produced through research have in increasing the capabilities of multiple public institutions to deal with these new complexities.

Havana, the largest city in the island-nation of Cuba, is currently celebrating its 500th anniversary, which has opened up spaces for reflection on the opportunities, trajectories and challenges for the future. This anniversary is occurring in a very interesting moment: even though there was a systematic process of eliminating of unjust conditions and inequalities during the period between 1959 and 1989, the crisis of the 90s following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist block, as well as the strengthening of the U.S. financial blockade against Cuba, have threatened the logic of equality that prevailed for a long time. This 'special period' 30 years ago introduced many distortions in people's everyday life, and the country is still trying to cope with the impacts of this lasting process. Despite the many efforts to achieve social equality, socio-spatial differences in cities have not disappeared completely since the revolution. Several authors have covered the spatial dimension of existing socio-economic dynamics, and the urban dimensions of it (see: Espina Prieto, n.d.; Bolay et al., 2005; Peña Díaz & Schmid, 2007; Schmid & Peña Díaz, 2008; Íñiguez Rojas, 2004). As the main urban centre of the country, Havana concentrates most of the challenges related to urban policy and institutional development.

We should acknowledge that, due to the process initiated in the country more than 60 years ago, many of the most unfair dynamics that are taking place in cities around the world were eradicated from Cuba a long time ago. The island is, in many ways, an exception: it is the country in the Latin American region that has the largest public spending on health. Historically, with very little money, Cuba has achieved significant health achievements, improving health indicators even in the 90s when

the economic situation was very severe. The 'starting point' in terms of equality is very different to the rest of the region, where some countries present some of the most unequal indicators in the world. Having said that, we should note that the Gini coefficient has grown in the last decades: In 1986, it was around 0.22, today there are no official statistics, but estimations set it at around 0.40. Even if it is significantly outside of the trends within Latin America, urban equality is under pressure because of the dynamics that are taking place, both inside the country and internationally.

Since 2011, Cuba has been through a process of economic and political reforms that have brought a completely new face to the country. Because of the scale of the changes, we could say that we are getting into a new stage of the urbanisation process of Havana. Some people even say that Cuba has changed more in the last eight years than in the previous 40 years. The depth of this transformation has somehow culminated with the drafting of a new Constitution, which was approved in 2019. Although these changes cut across most aspects of people's lives, it is important to acknowledge that there is some kind of inertia within institutional frameworks to react to this new context and its multiple implications. For example, this process has brought new economic urban actors due to the creation of a local market for housing that was non-existent before 2011, bringing about new dynamics of social-spatial differentiation.

In this context, there is an intensive process of debate, which has contrasting dynamics: at the national level, for example, the Cuban population approved a new Constitution in 2019, in one of the most interesting processes of nationwide debate we have seen. Around 7.3 million Cubans participated in more than 100,000 assemblies during the entire process, and a completely new tool has been produced⁴. Likewise, in 2018, at the national level, Cuba advanced in the production of the Cuban New Urban Agenda and at the city level, the planning tools have been updated. The latter was a very interesting process, defining a vision for the city of Havana. Nevertheless, these were processes made with very little participation at the local level: with a lot of input from experts, but with very little engagement of other actors. It seems like there is some inertia in the institutional framework at the local level, which becomes even more evident when dealing with urban questions.

At the same time, the country has decided to concentrate efforts on the role of universities as an engine and catalyser of development. For a long time, human capital has been a central component for the national project, but particularly in the current scenario, universities have been singled out as a relevant actor. Even if notions such as the 'social impact of research' have been historically a central component of the academic landscape in Cuban universities, there is still important space for increasing the impact of academic production, creating more

4 For more details about this process, see: "Más de 7 millones de cubanos han participado en el debate constitucional", *CubaDebate*, available online at www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2018/11/02/mas-de-7-millones-de-cubanos-han-participado-en-el-debate-constitucional/#.Xs5p2y-ZOAx

and stronger spaces of encounter that give visibility to the results of research projects and their potential impacts on urban policy. Recent urban policy instruments such as the Cuban New Urban Agenda (2018), or updated planning tools such as the Territorial and Urban Development Plan for Havana (2015), have some shortcomings in effectively reflecting and addressing the spatial inequalities brought by the different phases of Cuban political history and that paradoxically, have been covered and published by academic institutions and researchers. This mismatch between the reality of inequalities and the way they are addressed by policy tools, is also a mismatch between academic production and policy-making processes.

In this context, I want to share the ways in which CUJAE, under the KNOW programme, is seeking to consolidate and strengthen national networks of research and action, that can address some of the gaps described so far. We seek to contribute to the process of institutional learning, providing spaces for the exchange and visibility of knowledge. In the context of changing challenges related to urban equality, it is particularly relevant to understand the capabilities needed by the state and the role of research networks and universities in supporting them.

What we are trying to do in KNOW is to find pathways to urban equality with impact on national policy, on city planning instruments, and on the urban trajectories of four neighbourhoods in Havana: Plaza, Centro Habana, Alamar, and the Havana Bay. To do so, we have created alliances with different sets of actors, in which we are working with other universities, national institutions, provincial institutions, municipal governments, and particularly with a group of community-led projects that are active in these four neighbourhoods. Overall, it is an extremely diverse setup. What we are proposing, is that creating impact means that the work cannot be led by one university or discipline only. We have to create alliances that allow us to conduct this kind of embedded study, a trans-disciplinary work that engages with multiple institutions, which is accompanied by methodologies such as tailored collective mapping exercises, and multi-actor workshops.

The university becomes a catalyser for debate and for the translation of knowledge into practice by nurturing and oiling existing networks and pollinating them and their work towards urban equality. A change of mentality is required: less vertical relations, more networking, more participation. This kind of networked collaboration can help to promote capabilities within public institutions, which allow the creation and sustainability of those horizontal engagements. The Cuban New Urban Agenda constitutes a relevant milestone and a stronghold that must be defended. But this requires that planning institutions catch up with the already installed dynamics of change and innovation, which

include more participation and forms of co-production. Knowledge translation is a mandate for universities in order to influence the ways in which planning institutions work and engage with local areas. This opportunity must be scaled up, as strengthening the interconnection between existing knowledges is a big challenge. In our view, this challenge lies in the consolidation of networks of students, researchers, practitioners, activists and authorities, which are able to provide a solid base to understand the kind of institutional capabilities required in universities and government departments to implement an urban equality agenda rooted in the Cuban historical, institutional and spatial reality.

I would like to conclude with a reflection that helps visualise the extent of the challenge, and the magnitude of the endeavour behind introducing urban equality as a value that mobilises institutional capabilities. In 2002, Manuela Pfrunder published the book 'Neotopia', seeking to take on the notion of equality in a radical way. She asked: what would the world look like if everybody was equal, having the same amount of resources, land, water, everything? The implications of this fictional scenario are very serious for everyone: even for Cuba, with all its difficulties, this would mean that we would live 16 years less. If we are all really equal, even someone who might look to be in a worse off situation, would have something to lose; even in Cuba, where equality is a widely shared value across people and institutions,

and Cuban society has astonishing achievements in this field. This is to say, deepening equality requires revisiting the concept, and critically reflecting on the distinction between sameness and equality. This is something that impacts our academic reflection, and that should also affect the questions we bring regarding the kind of capabilities required within public institutions to advance prosperity with equality. Within KNOW, it is clear for us that co-production can be a tool to get there.



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FINAL REMARKS

Interrogating institutional change from an urban equality perspective

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The cases presented throughout this Working Paper highlight many interesting differences, but also some common themes. In this final reflection, I will try to pick up some of the common topics raised, particularly from an urban equality perspective. In the context of the KNOW programme, we talk about urban equality not as 'sameness', but rather as – purposely using the language of a capabilities discussion – the opportunities that diverse women and men have to access the kind of lives they value and want to live. Taking the KNOW programme's 'placeholder' definition of urban equality as a starting point, in these final remarks I will look back at the cases presented from three angles: from questions of *reciprocal recognition*, *parity political participation and equal distribution* (drawing on Young, 1990; Fraser, 1995; Allen & Frediani, 2013; and Levy & Dávila, 2018). In the KNOW programme, urban equality is obviously a normative frame that we hope to advance, and we propose the idea of contributing to 'pathways to urban equality' – or as Shuaib Lwasa says about his work in Kampala – urban equality 'in the making'. Institutions, in the way that our colleagues have discussed them in this Working Paper, are certainly central to 'the making' of those pathways to urban equality.

With respect to *recognition* (Fraser, Ibid.), we are using the notion of 'reciprocal recognition' (Levy, 2015) in order to look at a first critical dimension of justice. One thing is to promote recognition of the diversity of people and their living conditions, but it is a different and crucial step to promote that people themselves recognise and make claims related to their social identities and injustices in their living conditions. This means that recognition does not become something unilateral or imposed, but it is rather a reciprocal act. This distinction is very important, and in a sense, it appears throughout in the various ways the different cases were presented. Recognition is a concept that is embedded in the everyday practices of policy planning, the everyday narratives of citizens, in discursive institutional practices, all of which is why it is really important institutionally. From this perspective, I would like to present a series of issues that can be explored through the cases, all of which challenge the very conceptualisation of important mainstream institutions and their practices related to urban equality.

First, looking at the experiences discussed in this Working Paper, the notion of 'practice' itself goes beyond the idea of professional practice. It also incorporates activist practice, the practices of civil society and social movements. This implies that the way we think and talk about practice has to open up,

and this has important implications for institutions and how they work.

Second, in KNOW we talk about the principle of 'partnerships with equivalence', which is a direct challenge to the traditional neoliberal view of partnerships. The ways in which institutions recognise partnerships with equivalence – in the way they formulate and manage partnerships – is a real challenge, and can provide a critical lens through which to interrogate the experiences presented.

A third relevant issue related to questions of recognition, is that the cases presented are all challenging traditional notions of academia and higher education. On the one hand, Jorge Peña Díaz from CUJAE in Havana, talks about a new way of understanding the role of universities in Cuba. Universities are not just seen as spaces for the production of human capital for the country, but much more directly focusing on contributing to the development of programmes, policies and practices of the country. In Gautam Bhan's discussion, we see the role of activist-academics in re-shaping higher education institutions and their outcomes. Traditional universities are not always comfortable with activist-academics, despite all the talk about public engagement and current trends in emphasising research impact. There is a discomfort because of the belief in some sort of academic autonomy of knowledge. This is a discussion that we need to have, particularly to understand how institutions mediate this. These questions take us into the world of the institutions of higher education: how we structure them, who the staff and students are, the content of curricula, etc.

Another element that came through in all the cases, is the relevance of a recognition of the collective in the city, not just individuals; the collective, understood as a real fight for the recognition of urban social movements, communities working collectively, and collective action. This brings to the forefront questions about what some authors have called 'capabilities of collective action'. In Shuaib Lwasa's discussion about the work they are doing in the informal sector in Kampala, the provocation for me is that they are challenging the traditional neoclassical economics of the individual firm, placing it in a collective realm of community organisations. We are starting to talk about 'social enterprises' in the city, enhancing the recognition of the economic role that social actors can play in the city. I think this kind of recognition implies, as his reflection exposes, discussing the 'rules of engagement', which need to change to advance in such recognition. There are some crucial institutional challenges there. Underlying all of that is the recognition of informality itself. In my opinion, one of the biggest scandals of traditional urban planning has been the criminalisation of informality in many cities internationally. The work discussed here is really crucial in the reciprocal recognition of the role that informality can play in our cities, and I think the work in Kampala highlights that so beautifully.

The second dimension of urban equality I would like to discuss is *political participation* in decision-making. Clearly, there are a number of institutional laws, rules, procedures, vehicles of

inclusion, transparency and accountability related to political participation. Across different contexts, experience has shown us that the processes of reworking, challenging or defending those institutional frameworks tend to be enormously difficult, facing fundamental resistance to change. Looking at the cases discussed in this Working Paper, it seems evident that the people who are really making many decisions that are important to our lives, are not that many. Even though lots of people are making lots of decisions in the city about how to live their lives decently, crucial decision-making processes actually do not involve a lot of people in the city. Then, the challenge is how to work with this capability of collective action related to political decision-making. I love the word 'sensibilities' that Gautam Bhan uses, because that notion, linked to participation, implies a political sensibility. In this sense, it is a political culture that we need to reconstruct, that we keep needing to reconstruct. It is not a once-and-for-all process, but, rather, it implies processes of constantly engaging, reimagining and reconstructing political culture in and about the city.

The third dimension of equality that we work with, is the question of *redistribution*. This is central to any equality agenda. In this respect, I would like to qualify this idea through the notion of the 'deep distributions' that are at work in our societies, that is, those deep power relations that entrench certain interest in our society. There are many interesting things that come out of the cases in this regard, but I would like to pick up just a couple of them. One element that is central in the KNOW programme, is the localisation of global agendas such as the SDGs and the UN's New Urban Agenda, as was discussed for the cases of Havana and Kampala. The reality is, however, that more thought and discussion need to be had on the localisation of these agendas and what they really mean on the ground. There has been a lot of work done on indicators, but I think as Jorge Peña Díaz reflects for the Cuban case, there is a lacuna at the local level, to really understand how that is going to play out, who is going to report back on all of this, and which voices are going to be heard in the process of reporting back.

A second element I would like to highlight from the three experiences, is that urban discussions tend to put emphasis on what sounds like a range of 'new' actors; I say 'new' in inverted commas, because we have been playing with new actors in development for some time now. Namely, in the past, the state was the main deliverer of services, and then with neoliberal policies and practices, we saw privatisation and 'new' actors coming in, and now we are talking about concepts such as social enterprises in Kampala, new housing markets in Cuba, etc. I think we need to focus a lot of attention on this institutional side of distribution, that is, the processes of delivering redistribution. This means understanding those organisational forms that are coming through in the different cases. It implies interrogating how we deal with the market, but also the state, the relationship between market, state and civil society, and the rules of engagement between them. Furthermore, within that is the delivery of higher education itself, as discussed by Gautam Bhan.

I will finish sharing a couple of thoughts. It seems to me that all these experiences raised questions of urban equality, which relate to the essential character of what we could call 'connected capabilities'. Using the capability language, for me, institutions are 'conversion factors' in all these dynamics, an important notion if we want to understand the role institutions play in building pathways to urban equality. It is obvious that these capabilities are not static; they are dynamic, they are changing, and they need to be constantly created and recreated, as these cases show. What is also clear from the cases presented by my colleagues, is that they are all involved in some kind of tactical process to contribute to pathways to urban equality. Recreating these new institutional frameworks is a tactical process of understanding what the 'room for manoeuvre' is in the different contexts in which they are operating. If we use the work of my colleague Michael Safer (2002), looking at the 'room for manoeuvre', the *institutional/inter-organisational* aspect was only one dimension of understanding the action space for transformative change. The second dimension was social *relations/mobilisation*, which comes through very clearly in all these cases. The third dimension was what he called *technical/behavioural practices*, which also comes through in all the cases. For example, the use in Kampala of traditional business tools by social enterprises, in order to try to understand their role in the market and to build new livelihood strategies, is a very interesting re-use of a technical and ethical set of instruments. And, clearly, what universities teach in Bangalore, Kampala and Havana feeds into that technical dimension as well. The final dimension of Safer's 'room for manoeuvre', is the *strategic response dimension*, to understand the political economy of the context in which we are working. The political economy of the context is absolutely fundamental to understanding the sorts of institutions we need to build to shape pathways to urban equality. Recognising the global dimensions of the political economy among our cases, this could not be more dramatically demonstrated than in the case of Cuba, where the international political economic context has had a challenging impact on the way the country is functioning to address what Jorge Peña Díaz refers to as 'prosperity with equality'.

At the heart of all the issues raised is the capability to learn collectively, and I think this is one of our biggest challenges. We are not so good at it. We keep saying that history should not repeat itself, but somehow, we have not quite grasped that capacity to learn collectively. For me, this is one of the most important things we need to build into our institutions. I hope that we can take collective learning in our institutions forward in our different ways, as it should be at the core of any effort towards an urban equality agenda.



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