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## BOTTOM-UP CITY-MAKING

- THE "RIGHT TO THE CITY" AS AN ETHOS OF ENGAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY EXPERIENCES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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- PROMOTING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY FROM BELOW: EXPERIENCES OF CO-CREATION IN EUROPE

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# THE “RIGHT TO THE CITY” AS AN ETHOS OF ENGAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY EXPERIENCES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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## I. Introduction

Ever since Lefebvre first used the term in 1968, the “right to the city” has been taken on by social movements, NGOs and even some government officials around the world to articulate myriad demands. The term has come about “because it has served to correlate a common set of crosscutting concerns that have emerged from a particular global pattern of capital accumulation and dispossession” (Görgens and van Donk, 2012: 4). The right to the city slogan has increasingly been used by civil society actors in cities of the Global South, where the tendencies of capital accumulation and dispossession have resulted in growing social and spatial inequalities as well as violations of a series of human rights. The concept of the right to the city received particular traction among civil society actors through debates and sessions at the World Social Forums, which culminated in the 2005 World Charter on the Right to the City. This movement has continued and gained new energy through the formation of the Global Platform for the Right to the City in 2014, bringing together a variety of organisations, including networks of local governments from the Global South as well as North.

This chapter approaches the “right to the city” not as a defined project or slogan, but rather as an “ethos of engagement”. Drawing on Southern urban theory perspectives (Bhan, 2019), an “ethos of engagement” is associated with a mode of practice which is defined through struggles and mobilisations located in particularly uneven geographies. While the concept emerged in Europe, the positioning of the “right to the city” within experiences of marginalisation, oppression and resistance in cities such as São Paulo, Lagos and Mumbai calls for the recognition of diverse trajectories of urban development, shaped by tendencies of market enablement intertwined with postcolonial relations. This chapter aims to explore the contributions of grassroots experiences from the Global South towards the discussions on the definition, interpretations and advancement of the right to the city. By doing this, the chapter aims to highlight the importance of continuing to connect the slogan to actual claims. Furthermore, the chapter hopes to feed into the making of translocal alliances in ways that avoid particularisms that fragment as much as universalisms that homogenise diverse experiences and conditions.

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This chapter highlights three main lessons from civil society experiences from the Global South in relation to the right to the city debate. Firstly, it recognises the need to *reframe and redefine the meaning of citizenship*. Instead of focusing on formal mechanisms of associations of nation-states, initiatives have called for all inhabitants of cities to be recognised as citizens, with a set of rights as well as responsibilities without distinctions. Secondly, civil society experiences have played a role in creating more awareness about the growing injustices related to the *differentiated access and appropriation of the city*. A series of campaigns and initiatives by civil society have aimed to illustrate in tangible and meaningful ways how social diversity associated with gender, class, age, (dis)ability and ethnicity affect the uneven distribution of opportunities to experience the city. Finally, practices from civil society groups in the Global South have emphasised the relationship between *collective production of space and the expansion of rights* in cities. Apart from condemning modes of spatial production that have deepened social and spatial inequalities, civil society has also been demonstrating precedents of diverse, more grassroots and democratic forms of city-making. Underlying these three practices is deep preoccupation among civil society to promote the right to difference in ways that recognise the role social diversity plays in the production of a more just city. The right to difference is also approached as a means to advance solidarity across claims and groups rather than to feed into the risks of fragmenting social mobilisations. These practices have the potential to illustrate alternative pathways to how cities can be planned and designed, enabling more inclusive, emancipatory and redistributive imaginations of urban futures.

## II. The right to the city as an ethos of engagement

The emergence of the “right to the city” slogan amongst grassroots organisations, social movements and activists in the Global South has been substantially shaped by the activities around the 2005 World Charter for the Right to the City. According to Ortiz (2010), this process began in 1992 during the preparatory activities leading to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. This initiative led to the development of a treaty on urbanisation called “Towards Just Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages”. The mobilisations around these discussions continued through a series of different events, which included the First World Assembly of Urban Inhabitants in Mexico in 2000. Since then, the World Social Forums have become a key space where civil society groups advanced on these debates, leading to the development of concepts around the World Charter for the Right to the City and discussions on its implementation, dissemination and promotion.

It was from this trajectory that the motivation to set up a Global Platform for the Right to the City emerged in 2014 because several organisations identified a “need to promote and mobilize national and local governments, international and regional organizations towards a new paradigm for development, more inclusive and democratic cities” (Global Platform for the Right to the City, 2015). Operating as an informal and loose international network of existing organisations, the platform has been leading a series of activities aimed at recognising and promoting the right to the city in the implementation of public policies. The platform played a particular role in pushing for the adoption of right-to-the-city principles and themes within the New Urban Agenda.

There is an ongoing debate raising a series of questions around the representativeness and applicability of this growing promotion of the right to the city agenda in the Global South. Many civil society groups do not mobilise around this motto, arguing that the language of rights may compromise the possibility of building productive partnerships and alliances that can lead to the distribution of resources and opportunities in cities. Some groups, particularly those from Africa and South Asia, have argued that, in contrast to Latin America, rights-based approaches are not appropriate in contexts where there is a lack of trust and reliance on legislative, executive and judicial instances of the state to guarantee rights. Finally, it has been argued that the right to the city agenda might create unhelpful divisions between urban and rural struggles in contexts where experiences of the urban are very diverse and embedded in deep rural-urban linkages and movements, such as in African cities.

Instead of focusing on the right to the city as a “working slogan and political ideal” (Harvey, 2008), this chapter argues that civil society groups have often approached it as an “ethos of engagement”, channelling the emergence of a particular way of mobilising towards the production of a more equitable city. When attending meetings led by the Global Platform for the Right to the City, it is possible to see a variety of groups that do not use the slogan or mobilise around this concept. So, what is it that brings these groups together? Drawing on the work of Marcuse (2010) and Sugranyes and Mathivet (2010), the right to the city as an “ethos of engagement” can be defined in relation to three characteristics: firstly, it is an umbrella concept that allows the connection and sharing of diverse experiences of exploitation generated by market-led processes of urban development. Even without the use of the right to the city as a concept, there is growing recognition among grassroots groups about the linkages between their different struggles generated by the impacts of the neo-liberalisation of urban governance, such as the lack of access to adequate land, services and housing, insecurity of tenure, evictions, abuses of power and violation of a series of fundamental sets of human rights.

Secondly, the right to the city ethos of engagement represents the growing sentiment among grassroots groups to enable actions that can go beyond the manifestations of such problems, and address root causes of injustices associated with processes of urbanisation. As articulated by Marcuse, the right to the city “leads to an examination of what makes the system tick, what produces the pain and what produces the benefits it achieves, what its weaknesses and its strengths are — beyond what a simple analysis of the causes of individual problems and subsystems produces” (Marcuse, 2010: 89).

And thirdly, the right to the city as an ethos of engagement captures the interest of civil society groups in articulating visions of alternative forms of urban development. Instead of focusing on avoiding particular problems, civil society actors are advocating and calling for other ways of doing things, engaging in a deeper discussion about more socially and environmentally just values and imaginaries about cities. The right-to-the-city ethos of engagement is about capturing and recognising the diverse articulations of such concepts, rather than amalgamating them into one vision of a good city. Therefore, the right to the city is often understood not as a defined project, but rather constituted by a network of claims and mobilisations led by grassroots groups, interested in linking local concerns, practices and narratives with global processes.

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### III. Lessons from civil society experiences

We are seeing an increasing amount of civil society initiatives advocating for the recognition of a more substantive articulation of citizenship.

This section focuses on some of the key experiences and lessons generated by civil society groups relating to this right to the city ethos of engagement. The experiences outlined here were selected because of my own engagement and familiarity with them, as well as their connections to the debate on the right to the city. These encounters with practices reviewed here reflect my own trajectory with civil society initiatives in the Global South and this chapter does not intend to be comprehensive. The text attempts to depict practices as they have been presented and articulated, in order to recognise and draw on their particular narratives and thereby explore the lessons for the wider debate around the right to the city.

Firstly, we are seeing an increasing amount of civil society initiatives advocating for the recognition of a more *substantive articulation of citizenship*. Instead of calling for the protection of rights of citizens defined by their nationality or formal affiliation to the nation-state, these initiatives elaborate on the reasons all urban inhabitants should have their rights protected. This is leading to the articulation and production of new forms of citizenship, in line with Lefebvre's notion of the "right of urban inhabitants" (Purcell, 2002) and the concept of "insurgent citizenship" developed by Holston (2008). The Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation has conducted a series of enumerations and para-legal activities in informal settlements in Lagos and Port Harcourt advocating the rights of all urban inhabitants to human dignity. Such an approach has been used to contest state-led evictions affecting urban inhabitants of various nationalities and citizenship statuses. In São Paulo, various urban social movements have recognised the importance of occupations of vacant buildings to operate as spaces where migrants and refugees can be assisted and welcomed. This approach can be seen for example in initiatives such as the occupation welcoming Syrian refugees led by the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (MTST), or Ocupação Marconi led by the Movimento Moradia Para Todos (MMPT) where residents of different countries join in various building management tasks, citizenship education programmes as well as demonstrations to fight against evictions and for more equitable housing programmes and policy (Frediani et al., 2019).

Similarly, the Right to the City Charter of Greater Beirut makes reference to the "sanctuary cities" debate, and calls for the recognition of the rights and responsibilities of all urban inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The charter has been led by the Habitat International Coalition - Housing and Land Rights Network and the Amel Association and involves a variety of government and civil society stakeholders. It has the objective of addressing the growing refugee and displacement crisis resulting from Lebanon hosting approximately 1.5 million Syrian and 500,000 Palestinian refugees and displaced persons by providing a detailed analysis of the local, national and international legal commitments and obligations to protect the human rights of all inhabitants of Greater Beirut.

The interfaces between refugee rights and the rights of urban inhabitants have also been explored by academics from Makerere University in Uganda. In partnership with international researchers, they have been advocating for the protection of the human rights of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Kampala. According to the UN Refugee Agency, 94,958 refugees and asylum seekers live in Kampala. Uganda's 2006 Ref-

1. For more information on the Right to the City Charter of Greater Beirut, see: [http://www.hlrn.org/img/publications/Assessment\\_FINAL\\_EN\\_web.pdf](http://www.hlrn.org/img/publications/Assessment_FINAL_EN_web.pdf).

ugee Act aims to guarantee refugees' "freedom of movement", "gainful employment" and "treatment without discrimination". However, studies on the livelihood practices of refugees and IDPs living in Kampala have demonstrated the various ways such rights are being denied. The main barriers to fulfilling such rights include a series of urban development issues, such as high housing costs and the erosion of affordable workspaces in the city, such as market places. As in the case of Right to the City Charter of Greater Beirut, this case highlights the importance of urban policy and planning to guarantee human rights commitments and obligations (Monteith et al., 2017).

The second lesson from civil society experiences in the Global South in relation to debates on the right to the city relates to the importance of recognising the *differentiated access to and appropriation of the city*. Fenster (2005) challenges "the Lefebvrian notion of the right to the city using a gendered and feminist critique by arguing that the identification of the right to the city lacks sufficient attention to patriarchal power relations" (2005: 217). Similarly, Beebeejaun (2017) also argues that "contemporary urban theory that draws upon Lefebvre's work rarely develops a feminist or gendered understanding of space" (2017: 325). In the meantime, several campaigns led by civil society groups in the Global South have highlighted the various ways power relations have shaped the opportunities for different social groups to exercise their right to use and participate in urban life. In the 2000s, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) led campaigns drawing on its Women and Housing Rights Programme, which explored the struggles of women living in informal settlements across the Americas, Asia and Africa. COHRE's work has been fundamental in supporting the protection and advancement of women's housing rights and exploring the relationship between urbanization processes and gender-based violence, gender discrimination and women's housing insecurity (see, for example: COHRE, 2008). ActionAid has led similar advocacy, called "Safe Cities for Women" focused on women's rights in the city, examining rights violations as a consequence of urban insecurity in various countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Jordan, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe (ActionAid, 2017).

Beyond issues associated with gender, a growing number of campaigns have focused on other aspects of social diversity shaping people's right to the city. The disability-based organisation, Leonard Cheshire International, has been increasingly interested in issues associated with the interfaces between urban development and rights of people with disabilities (see: Walker et al., 2012). The Lugar Comum research group from the Faculty of Architecture of the Federal University of Bahia in Salvador (Brazil) has been supporting several urban collectives to expose the ways racism is experienced in Salvador and how it is deepened by exclusionary urban planning and design. Human rights violations have been highlighted that disadvantaged black people face in terms of police brutality, as well as processes of gentrification and urban regeneration. How race determines an extremely uneven and unfair distribution of risks and burdens in the city has also been brought to light (Fernandes et al., 2018).

While national and international conventions and spaces of engagement keep pushing campaigns to address particular identity-based claims, these experiences often approach the differentiated access to opportunities in

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the city from an intersectional perspective. Campaigns may enter the debate from a particular identity perspective, but they illustrate how the experience of injustices in the city are produced by the burdens generated by the intersection of different social identities associated with gender, class, age, (dis)ability and ethnicity. In the case of Mumbai, for example, Leonard Cheshire is revealing how the city's Slum Rehabilitation Programme creates more insecurity, particularly for girls with disabilities. In Salvador, Lugar Comum is exposing the particular form of racism experienced by poor black women caused by regeneration processes in the inner-city area.

And thirdly, various civil society groups from the Global South have demonstrated in practice how *collective forms of spatial production* can play a role in the advancement towards the right to the city. While being embedded in very different contexts, these experiences involve processes of social mobilisation and collective forms of production and management of space in the city. One of the most significant examples of this type of experience has been the work of various federations working on the urban extension, mainly in the Asia and Africa, networked through Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI). Their work has involved self-enumeration processes, recognising that the urban poor can enhance their power to influence urban decision-making by generating and owning the knowledge about their living conditions. In Cape Town (South Africa) for example, enumeration exercises have led to experiences of re-blocking of informal settlements, where communities re-plan their settlements *in situ*, enhancing access to services as well as improving living conditions. In Freetown (Sierra Leone), federation members have worked with the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) and Architecture Sans Frontières-UK to develop Community Action Area Plans (Macarthy, Frediani and Kamara, 2019), which have supported existing processes of bottom-up and civic-led informal processes of slum upgrading, as well as coordinating interventions carried out in partnership with NGOs and government authorities (Macarthy et al., 2019).

In Latin America, Habitat International Coalition (HIC) has been supporting exchanges and systematisation of similar community-led processes of city-making by recognising them as a "social production of habitat" (Ortiz and Zárate, 2004). According to the HIC, social production of habitat is a people-centred and -driven process of designing, planning, building, maintaining and inhabiting spaces, and addressing historical social and spatial challenges. These practices are defined as complex and dynamic processes, built through social movements and interactions among urban dwellers and driven towards social transformation. Therefore, as summarised by Larraín, the process of social production of habitat "accounts for an improvement in material terms, but even more important than that, it is the advance in the emancipation of socially excluded and segregated groups" (Larraín, 2019: 1). In South East Asia, similar processes have been enabled and supported by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), a network of grassroots groups, activists, NGOs and professionals that has operated in the region for more than 30 years, supporting community-driven processes of slum-upgrading based on collective saving groups, mapping and innovative land tenure and financial models. Collaborating with other regional groups such as the Community Architects Network (CAN), ACHR has worked over the past decade with hundreds of communities across 19 countries of South East Asia, influencing policies and development partnerships for the implementation of the Asian Coalition



for Community Action (ACCA) Programme, a people-centred citywide upgrading programme that seeks to work in 150 Asian cities.

Even though many of these practices are not formulated and advocated in terms of the right to the city, they represent an ethos of engagement that aims to highlight the fact that the dominant planning practices have been unable to respond to the needs and aspirations of the urban poor. These initiatives demonstrate the agency of organised grassroots groups in leading processes of city-making on their own terms, and in the process in unlocking new imaginaries for urban change. While these practices have set precedents for more democratic forms of spatial production, they have also faced substantial difficulties in challenging existing inequalities and power imbalances within and among “communities”. A key tension among these sets of practices is how not to “leave behind” the less organised, marginalised and vulnerable groups that face more obstacles to engaging in such processes. Likewise, how to deal with city-wide processes and needs beyond organised neighbourhoods is another issue. Therefore, instead of joining top-down, predefined and invited spaces of participation, these experiences call for public, market and civil society actors to support and enhance the community’s ability to be more inclusive and sustain ongoing initiatives.

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#### IV. Conclusions

Is there such a thing as a global right to the city movement? Caruso answered this question by saying: “A global movement for the right to the city is not as yet a reality. However, it is possible that a group of leading activists and organizations may succeed in facilitating a growing alliance centred on crucial issues of exclusions and violations of rights as generated by the current hegemonic institutional framework of urban governance” (2010: 110). Today, with the emergence of the Global Platform for the Right to the City, this aspiration may well be a reality.

But together with this increased consolidation of a global movement for the right to the city, there is also growing institutionalisation of the same concept, posing opportunities as well as many threats. One example of this increased institutionalisation has been the recognition of the Right to the City in the New Urban Agenda, as well as in the process leading up to its formulation. The creation of the “Right to the City and Cities for All” policy unit opened up an opportunity to recognise the demands of this growing international movement within the Habitat III process. However, it can be argued that it also sidelined and compartmentalised the right-to-the-city agenda to one specific area, potentially leaving all other policy unit debates unchecked, such as the Urban Economic Development Strategies or Housing Policies. Ultimately, the final agenda has been criticised for its lack of coherence, with some elements that may support and others that may threaten the advancement of the right to the city.

The right to the city’s trajectory once again looks delicate. It is simultaneously used as an instrument for social mobilisation and transnational collective action, and an instrument to institutionalise a slogan without the content required to challenge the systems producing unfair and unsustainable urban development. Hence, this review of the lessons from civil society experiences in the Global South is a reminder about the im-

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portance of connecting the concept of the right to the city to particular experiences of collective resistance and production of the city. This review outlines that these experiences call for urban politics that: recognise all urban inhabitants as citizens with rights and responsibilities; address the differentiated access to the use and production of the city, specifically by capturing how the intersections between social identities are shaping the distribution of opportunities and burdens in the city; and promote collective forms of production of the city that enhance the capacity of grassroots groups to safeguard against the commodification of land and property and contribute to the elaboration of more democratic imaginary concepts for our urban future.

To approach the right to the city from a Global South perspective means recognising that it is not a predetermined and clearly defined agenda. This chapter argues that it is necessary to understand it as an ethos of engagement, an approach that is rooted in the experiences and claims of struggles embedded and situated in local contexts, which have relevance and connections to global actors and processes. Such claims, driven by networks of civil society entities (including social movements, associations, collectives, NGOs, activists and academics), articulate their own discourses and languages associated with the struggles for a more socially and environmentally just process of urbanisation. In this context of localised practices as well as global alliances, the right to the city emerges as a potential space to build solidarity and enable learning. I would argue that for many civil society actors, the right to the city is a meeting point, rather than one of departure or arrival; it is an ethos rather than a recipe.

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