Mainstreaming global urban sustainability: local authorities and UN Habitat in the orchestration of the Habitat Agenda

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This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACCCRN Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network

C40 C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

ECOSOC United Nations Economic and Social Council

Habitat Exec Dir United Nations Human Settlement Programme Executive Director

Habitat GC United Nations Human Settlement Programme Governing Council

Habitat I First United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (1976)

Habitat II Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (1996)

Habitat III United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (2016)

HSF Human Settlements Foundation

ICLEI International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives

IGO International Government Organisations

MDG United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000 – 2015)

NGO Non-governmental Organizations

O-I-T Orchestrator - Intermediary - Target governance model

SDG United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015 – 2030)

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

UN United Nations

UN Habitat United Nations Human Settlement Programme

UNCHS United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

WUF United Nations World Urban Forums

Introduction to the dissertation

This doctoral dissertation addresses how and why UN-Habitat and local authorities collaborate to advance the urban sustainability agenda. Through three empirical chapters, I explore how this collaboration came into being, what are the reasons for it, and why it is characterized by limited coordination between the actors involved. Based on my analyses, I also explain why non-legislative UN forums - such as the World Urban Forum, or WUF - are more influential in international governance than they may appear at first glance.

The answers to these initial questions are relevant for scholars, policy makers and urban stakeholders wanting to assess developments in the global governance of sustainability from a perspective that goes beyond tracking the policies adopted by individual countries. My conclusions also contribute to two research areas that have been developed almost in parallel to date, but which I argue should be connected to understanding the current international role of local governments: the ascendance of cities as international actors, and the role of sub-national governments in the governance of international regime complexes.

Most of the literature I have consulted for this dissertation highlights the difficulty of conceptualising sub-national actors in a world ruled by international law. They rightly point out that while countries and their political institutions can be easily identified by their constitutions, this is not the case for most sub-national actors. Increasingly, national constitutions recognise and list subnational governments such as states and provinces. However, this is not the case for governments under the regional level. To exemplify this complexity, I will use the example of the Valencian Community, one

of the 19 regional government units recognised in the Spanish constitution. From largest to smallest, the Comunitat Valenciana has the following sub-regional government structures: the Diputación Provincial, the Comarca, the Mancomunidad and the Municipality - the latter corresponds to the local government, led by a mayor or mayoress. In large metropolitan areas there are two additional government structures: the Metropolitan District - encompassing multiple municipalities – and the neighbourhood or district boards. Each of these governance structures has its own internal regulations, competencies and processes for the selection of representatives - including direct and indirect election processes. In addition, it is common for the governance of infrastructures that provide services to the inhabitants of several municipalities to be governed by ad-hoc organisations, foundations and public companies - as for example, water or transport services in the metropolitan area of the city of Valencia. To simplify the analyses and ensure consistency throughout the dissertation, I have chosen to use the municipality - that is, the local executive led by the equivalent of the mayoral figure - as the unit of analysis in reference to local government. Thus, whenever I refer to local government or city government, I refer specifically and exclusively to the members of the municipal executive and the public workers of this government organisation. I have used orchestration theory to frame and unify my three empirical analyses, with the aim of capturing the subtle governance relations between these local actors and the other governments and organisations involved in the sustainability regime complex.

While each of the empirical chapters contains its own theoretical and methodological section, it is worth devoting a few lines to provide a general background for this research.

Recent decades have seen a surge of interest in cities, both for their well-explained role in the global economy (Lee, 2014; Sassen, 2016; Leffel and Acuto, 2018) and for their less defined role in sustainability governance (Parnell, 2016; Ramírez de la Cruz and Smith, 2016; Schreurs, 2008). As mentioned previously, the conceptualisation of the city as an international actor is fraught with theoretical and methodological dilemmas. However, this has not deterred researchers, who continue to question the international dimension of local politics around the world. Somewhat counter-intuitively, mayors have become an expected feature of international sustainability events despite being beholden to the opinions of their local constituents – local residents pressure their mayors even in non-democratic systems (Bellinger, 2021).

Through their city networks, local governments have been defining themselves as leading advocates of climate policies, sometimes using these platforms to challenge the stance of their national governments (Manfredi Sánchez and Seoane Pérez, 2021). However, it is difficult to reconcile the prominent presence of local governments in these arenas with two factors that are equally present and a priori antithetical to their participation in international governance. The first factor is that the international system is state-centric and does not acknowledge any international decision-making authority for local governments. In fact, despite decades of economic and demographic growth, local governments maintained until the late 1990s a similar status to NGOs as stakeholders in the UN (Parnell, 2016). The second factor is that local governments engage in multiple, and sometimes contradictory, international activities and exhibit poor of coordination between municipal departments (Lefèvre and d'Albergo, 2007). This can be explained in part by a combination of departmental silo mentality (Boschken, 2013; Stone, 2015) and the existence of stakeholders influencing the topics

that local departments prioritise when engaging in international activities (Denters et al., 2018; d'Albergo, 2006; David et al., 2018: 10).

Some authors have challenged the notion that the international system remains an state-centric affair by stating that local authorities engage as autonomous actors with their own agendas in the UN system, championing local democracy and challenging the dysfunctional response of national governments to challenges such as health crisis or climate change (Barber, 2013; Nijman, 2016). However, the ascendant trajectory of local authorities in the UN system remains limited to its role as collective stakeholders.

The UN was founded after World War II to curve the excess of the previous Westphalian order with the dual missions to "save succeeding generations from the scourge war" and to "employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples." (Alger, 2002). This second mission has been overseen since 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the lesser known of the three UN bodies – with the UN General Assembly and the Security Council being the other two. ECOSOC has expanded its membership with the emergence of new policy issues and carries out a wide-range of activities through "15 UN specialized agencies, 10 funds and programs, eight functional commissions, six research and training institutes, and five regional commissions" (Birch, 2018: 4). Organisations operating in this context are only allowed to make recommendations and rely completely on the voluntary acquiescence of those who receive them (Weiss, 2010).

UN Habitat, like other funds and programmes, is a member of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its Executive Director is ultimately accountable to the UN Secretary General. UN-Habitat directly reports to the

United Nations General Assembly through ECOSOC and its executive board has delegation of authority from the Assembly to submit periodic reports of its activities through ECOSOC in the years when the Assembly is not in session. (UN Habitat, 2021: 6). This institutional arrangement has been influential in how UN Habitat governs its stakeholders, as I further discuss in Chapter 1.

Even though local governments are mentioned up to 1,246 times in UN frameworks as actors playing an international role (Kosovac et al., 2020) these references are always in the context of actions and recommendations promoted by ECOSOC. Furthermore, national authorities have clarified in multiple occasions that stakeholders, including local authorities, would have exclusively a consultative status and not be granted voting rights at the ECOSOC (UN General Assembly, 1996) and to date none of the frameworks or agreements reached under the ECOSOC umbrella have changed this position. Thus, it appears that neither de facto nor de jure local governments are threatening the primacy of nation states.

The realisation that local governments engage in multiple, and sometimes contradictory, international activities and exhibit poor of coordination between municipal departments can be explained by the recent scholarship on city-networks. During the 1980s and the early 1990s a few active local authorities in international topics, such as anti-nuclear proliferation and environmental issues, were grouped by UN organisations along with NGOs and civil society groups (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Revi, 2017). According to Bulkeley (2010) this situation corresponded with the first wave of city engagement in global governance, in which a small group of pioneering local authorities and some transnational networks – such as the Climate Alliance and Cities for Climate Protection (ICLEI) - got involved in attempting and disseminating

local climate governance experiments. These incipient attempts relied heavily on individual mayoral agendas and symbolic gestures, such as twinning agreements (Jayne et al., 2011). By the end of this era, organisations operating in this context such as UNEP and UN Habitat encouraged the activism of local authorities in climate change and urban sustainability, supporting the replication of experimentation and public-private partnerships following the Rio Model (Mieg and Töpfer, 2013), promoting common sustainability standards through the Local Agenda 21 (UN General Assembly, 1995) and giving ideational support to the merger of global city-networks to increase its focality and reach (Salomón and Sánchez, 2008). These actions brought about a second wave of local engagement in global governance in which the minority of pioneering municipalities were replaced by a "new generation of municipal networks and a more geographically diverse range of cities" (Bulkeley, 2010: 232). Even though local authorities kept engaging in multiple and sometimes contradictory international activities, these new municipal networks helped them to access external resources and remain in the loop for developments in policy areas with a distinct urban focus (Schreurs, 2008; Toly, 2008; Stehle et al., 2019). Furthermore, the largest city networks became stable points of contact for UN organisations, elevating the status of local authorities as stakeholders. However, city networks often fail to sustain themselves on membership fees alone and end up relying heavily on subsidies and agreements with national governments and supranational bodies such as the European Union (Haupt and Coppola, 2019; Acuto et al., 2017). City networks suffered a considerable challenge from foundation-based organisations, such as the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) and C40 cities, that adopt a more

exclusive approach and do not require a membership fee (Davidson et al., 2019; Smeds, 2019).

If local authorities are not decision makers in the UN system, and display an inconsistent engagement with international topics, how is that local authorities remain a prominent sight in UN sustainability events? How are they considered to be replacing nation states in the forefront of climate policy internationally? And why would national governments fund and support UN organisations (such as UN Habitat) and city networks that challenge their own sustainability policies? My hypothesis is that UN Habitat and local authorities have collaborated in pursuing the common goal to raise the profile and create consensus around the Habitat Agenda for urban sustainability. I have been able to corroborate this hypothesis through the three empirical chapters included in the dissertation.

In the collaboration I hypothesise, multiple local authorities have volunteered to temporarily adopt the role of policy champions and showcase successful implementations of the Habitat Agenda to national governments. These collaborations have mutually benefited UN Habitat and local governments, attracting interest and funding from national governments for both UN Habitat and urban sustainability projects - which solve concrete problems for the citizens of the cities in which they are implemented. Moreover, the knowledge and interest generated by these successful applications of the urban sustainability agenda has popularised the issue among local governments of all kinds who can benefit from learning from others and adhere to the agenda without having to declare as policy champions themselves. Finally, national governments in the UN fund both UN Habitat and cities and city networks because they benefit significantly from this situation. Sustainability is a complex issue and

governance decisions have a strong redistributive potential. In other words, even if it is a transnational problem with collective consequences, creating hard international regulations would particularly disadvantage some countries and no country would be able to force others to implement them. To circumvent this apparent blockage, states empower, to a limited extent, other actors to develop solutions and build international consensus around them – generating a regime complex[1]. When there is sufficient consensus, countries are more likely to create laws and adopt standards based on this consensus, effectively regulating themselves in the same direction as other countries. Furthermore, countries prefer that the enforcement of such regulations is governed by their own national institutions (Alter and Raustiala, 2018: 11). Thus, a Habitat Agenda recognised the cause of sustainability in ways that would not be possible through hard international regulation. However, as I explain in chapter 1 of this dissertation, this strategy on the part of national governments is designed in part so that they can disengage from organisations and alternatives that do not produce the desired results. Changes in the context or in the capacity of organisations to build consensus can lead to their agendas being absorbed by other organisations and eventually diluted.

The results of this dissertation are novel in several respects. First, my chapters offer the first academic approach to the study of UN Habitat and WUFs in the governance of urban sustainability. The governance dynamics identified in the results of my study are useful for studying the role that other UN organisations may have played in the governance of this or other policy issues. Second, my chapters are the first to date to use the orchestration framework to identify and define the motivations and governance

[1] Alter and Raustiala (2018: 1) define regime complex as "an array of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions that includes more than one international agreement or authority. The institutions and agreements may be functional or territorial in nature".

relationships of local governments within the UN framework. By doing so I suggest improving the framework by including the dimensions of historicity and institutional context in analyses using that framework. Currently, the orchestration framework offers static pictures of governance relationships and does not reflect sufficiently that constraints and motivations of the actors involved vary over time. Third, by focusing on the evolution of governance relations between local governments and UN Habitat, I have linked two bodies of literature that concern the role of cities in international governance but that I have not seen explicitly related to date: the governance of regime complexes in international relations, and the conditions of urban governance by urban studies.

Situating insights from both literatures in the context of governance by UN Habitat allows to understand the apparent incongruity of cities' massive participation in the sustainability debate, and their apparent inconsistency in engaging with it. These results provide a clearer contextualisation of the evolution of the institutional role of local governments in the United Nations, and specifically in the field of sustainability. Rather than explaining their emergence purely in economic and structural terms - e.g., the exodus to cities and globalisation - which hardly apply to most municipalities participating in UN events, their explanation as intermediaries in the orchestration of UN habitat allows for a more holistic approach that considers the high levels of variation and the internal diversity of local governments.

In the following section I take the opportunity to identify and summarise the main theoretical elements that underpin and provide a common framework for the three chapters of my dissertation. These elements are explained in detail in each of the chapters, where their specific usefulness in the empirical analysis is highlighted. The

following section provides an overview of the structure and contents of the three chapters, the general discussion and the conclusion sections.

Theoretical framework of the dissertation

The aim of this section is to provide a summary of the main theoretical arguments that underpin the three chapters of my doctoral dissertation. This section also highlights the key knowledge gaps and terminological discussions germane to this dissertation. The descriptions provided here are not intended to replace the theoretical or methodological sections of each chapter, but rather to facilitate the understanding of commonalities that appear implicitly or explicitly throughout the dissertation.

The concepts described below are drawn from different bodies of literature and I have structured them from general governance concepts to governance conditions for the actors I have included in my analyses. First, I introduce the concept of regime complexes that define the governance of sustainability. Second, I summarise the main traits of institutional incentives and its dynamics of change in regime complexes. Third, I introduce the role and incentives of international government organisations (IGOs) governing in a regime complex. Fourth, I summarise the key concepts of orchestration as a governance technique and its use in regime complexes. Fifth, I define the concept of local authority in this research and summarise the incentives and challenges they face in engaging in international governance. Sixth, I introduce the concept of international fora as spaces for socialisation and orchestration tools. And to conclude, I discuss the key knowledge gaps that will be addressed by this research.

Regime complexes in the governance of sustainability

Expanding on the definition I offered in the previous section, regime complexes are governance spaces characterised by a constellation of institutions attempting to govern

a similar set of policy issues. These institutions have the particularity of not observing a well-defined hierarchical relationship among themselves. In this context, the term institution means the implicit and explicit rules that guide the actions of the organisations involved in this policy issue (Diermeier and Krehbiel, 2003). The fact that the relationship between the institutions of the regime complex is non-hierarchical does not mean that all organisations in this sector interact on an equal footing, but rather that there is no rule - or way of acting - that is automatically superimposed on the others.

Regime complexes emerged after World War II (Keohane and Fioretos, 2017) when the new international community began to contend with issues that went beyond peace and territorial sovereignty (Abbott, 2012; Alter and Raustiala, 2018). National governments had incentives to act on novel issues such as pollution or biodiversity, but they did not have the capacity or the willingness to impose their preferred solutions on their neighbouring countries. To minimise this gap in governance, multiple voluntary organisations and institutions were created, and this number has continued to grow as international consensus is not reached or as new policy issues emerge (Orsini et al., 2013). Alter and Raustiala identified at least "37,000 organizations engaged in international politics, and some 200,000 international agreements" (2018: 1).

Institutional incentives and dynamics of change in regime complexes

Organisations operating in regime complexes operate under their own internal logics and can expand their action to issues adjacent to those they were mandated to address at their creation. For example, as I explain in chapter 1, UN Habitat was created after some countries became concerned about the relationship between pollution and human

settlements. Throughout its history, the organisation has tried to generate standards and consensus on issues tangentially related to this initial concern, such as strengthening local finance or combating homelessness.

National authorities benefit from regime complexes to the extent that they allow them to do something about a situation that concerns them, without having to compromise their own political capital or risking an international conflict (Abbott et al., 2015). Moreover, this approach has the advantage of seeking to mobilise stakeholders to self-organise and experiment with solutions. In this way, national governments can advance agendas on transnational issues discretely (Keohane and Victor, 2011) and in the event generate enough consensus that nations that do not adhere to proven solutions suffer reputational damage (Winickoff and Mondou, 2017).

International Government Organisations (IGOs) in regime complexes

IGOs are entities created by treaties signed by two or more nations to serve a common interest. In the UN system, these organisations often involve a large number of national authorities, and some of them reach near universal membership. IGOs are the primary tool of national governments to maintain or initiate regime complexes. The ultimate target of most IGO activities is the national authorities themselves, who created them to generate international consensus and provide them with solutions that national governments can adopt. However, such organisations are designed to be weak (Abbott et al., 2015), so they can only suggest solutions rather than impose them. Weakness in this context means limiting their authority to enforce their agenda and keeping the IGO financially dependent on donations from national governments. Successful IGOs will find ways to raise the profile of their agenda in these conditions, involving other actors and building consensus around them. Organisations that are unable to do so, or that

refuse to govern in these conditions, run the risk of being perceived as inefficient and losing the interest of their patrons until they disappear.

The raison d'être of the IGOs is to ensure their survival in order to implement their foundational mandate (Bendlin, 2020a: 40). In this dissertation I have assumed that both IGO decision-makers and local government decision-makers operate under the conditions of bounded rationality. By this I mean that I assume that these decision-makers act rationally in order for their organisation to achieve its objectives, but that I consider their rationality to be limited by factors such as lack of information (Jupille et al., 2017) and constant comparison with past efforts and investments (Fioretos, 2011: 373). This explains why, within rationality, IGOs may adopt inefficient governance strategies or prioritise issues that end up damaging their status within the regime complex. It also explains why they may pursue a successful governance strategy by inertia after a crisis or an institutional reconfiguration, rather than by conscious choice. As I mentioned above with the example of UN Habitat, IGOs are incentivised to find areas in which they can show successes on an ongoing basis to enhance their reputation and influence (i.e., gain focality in the regime complex) and thus secure sufficient internal support from their patrons to exist.

Orchestration as an IGO governing technique

IGOs have limited resources and authority to engage in forms of direct governance with other actors in their regime complex. As I have explained above, IGOs in this context do not have sufficient power to bind the action of national governments. They also lack the hard power to impose norms or standards on other actors such as NGOs, local governments, universities or businesses. They can to some extent engage in hard but indirect forms of governance, such as establishing contracts with other actors (i.e.,

enlist agents) to delegate the implementation of projects, but the financial constraints of the IGOs minimise the impact of such measures. These organisations rely heavily on soft governance techniques, such as ad hoc collaborations and partnerships.

These collaborations are usually established with other IGOs and stakeholders but formalising them involves using the organisation's own resources and committing the organisation's scope of action to ensure that the collaboration does not remain a dead letter. Moreover, partnerships alone do not have sufficient capacity to generate the broad international consensus that the IGO needs to demonstrate the utility of its agenda to national governments. The alternative to the forms of governance I have just enumerated is a strategy that is simultaneously soft and indirect, orchestration. The table below, inspired by Abbot et al. (2015: 9), summarises the four main forms of governance I have listed.

Governance Styles	***Direct***	***Indirect***
Hard *(Rests in binding directives)*	Hierarchy Enforcement of set regulations	Delegation Enforcement of defined legally binding agreements
Soft *(Relies in non-binding agreements)*	Collaboration Centralised coordination based on explicit pledges	Orchestration Decentralised collaboration based on common objectives

Table 1. Representation of the four types of governance strategy classified by degree of hardness and directness.

Orchestration theory is a rational choice based analytical framework developed to analyse "whether and how IGOs can have an impact on international governance even though they lack the authority and resources normally seen as necessary for successful governance" (Abbott et al., 2015: 349). It postulates a governance model called O-I-

T, in which each of the letters stand for a different actor in the governance scheme: O stands for orchestrator, the actor seeking to govern; I stands for intermediary or intermediaries, actors who have a special ability to influence the target and benefit from doing it; and T stands for target, the actor or actors the orchestrator aims to govern. In this model, the orchestrator is unable to reach the target or too weak to govern it directly. Instead, the orchestrator resorts to mobilise actors in its regime complex who – due to their own characteristics – are located to influence the desired target themselves.

There are four assumptions underpinning Orchestration theory, which I explain in more detail in CH1: the complementary capabilities assumption, the goal seeking assumption, the correlated goals assumption, and the orchestration assumption (Abbott et al., 2015). Two key ideas from these assumptions that apply in all three chapters are that orchestrator and intermediaries support each other because they benefit from doing so, but also because they have complementary capabilities that give meaning to this collaboration. This means that there are multiple scenarios in which the orchestrator does not find the intermediaries it needs or is unable to attract them (because they cannot complement each other's capabilities). Changing circumstances in the orchestrating organisation or in the regime complex can alter the O-I relationship. Another key insight is that because it is an informal, decentralised collaboration, the orchestrator can continue to be effective even when there is a replacement between intermediary organisations - as long as the new intermediaries continue to meet the assumptions of the model. For example, in the case of UN Habitat, it means that the IGO does not need to involve a particular city but can benefit from collaborating with

any local government that has successfully applied the principle they need to showcase.

The orchestrator and the intermediaries need each other to influence the target and get some benefit from it. Since IGOs in regime complexes often have limited resources of their own, when acting as orchestrators, they resort to certain techniques to empower their intermediaries. Here I highlight two of the most prominent techniques: endorsement and convening. These can be used on their own or in combination with others for which I provide examples in the table below. Endorsement refers to using the reputation and the name recognition of the orchestration to single out policy champions amongst the intermediaries, and use them as benchmark in policy circles, research and media. This increases the influence of the endorsed intermediary in interacting with the targets. Convening refers to the orchestrator capacity to leverage its influence to gather stakeholders, intermediaries and targets in a shared space such as a forum or a seminar. This technique increases the chances for intermediaries to meet and influence targets and contributes to reinforce the use of other techniques such as coordination, assistance and agenda setting.

Orchestration Technique	**Examples**
Convening	Organising forums, thematic seminars, high-level talks, etc.
Assistance	Providing material support, access to expertise, awards, specialised libraries, compilations of best practices, research, etc.
Agenda Setting	Adopting medium term goals, objectives, standard-setting, etc.
Endorsement	Providing statements of support, selecting *policy champions*, using the intermediary as a benchmark, adopting standards, etc.
Coordination	Organising regional platforms, launching campaigns, organising multilateral meetings, etc.

Table 2. Examples of activities corresponding to each orchestration technique

Local authorities' incentives to engage in international spaces

The recognition of local authorities as international actors grew in the 1990's due a combination economic, demographic and geopolitical factors. In the 1990s cities were experiencing significant economic and demographic growth (Töpfer, 1996; Clark, 2004; Huang et al., 2007; Calder and de Freytas, 2009; Leffel and Acuto, 2018) ; this lead to the concentration of resources, but also to the increase of transnational issues such as pollution and climate change (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005a).

Local authorities' numbers multiplied with the decolonisation processes and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Parnell, 2016; Brenner, 2004) and gained autonomy thanks to a wave of decentralisation spearheaded by the European Union. This decentralisation gave them competences in a multitude of policy areas (Bendlin, 2020b; Clerc, 2020; Denters et al., 2018). These changes occurred against the background of economic transformations that saw states abandoning their role as guarantors of planned equitable regional development (Curtis, 2016: 88). National governments began to encourage development corridors and regional competitiveness instead, which lead to territorial imbalances in population, resources, knowledge and public funding (Beal and Pinson, 2014).

Even though before 1990s local authorities had engaged in activism and symbolic diplomacy, their local leaders still fostered above all relationships with their national governments to attract investments and similar interventions. After 1990s, however, they had to face new challenges with less support, more competition, and being firmly embedded in the structure and the regulations of their nation-states (Lee, 2014: 32).

Local governments looked to their peers for expertise and standards on how to approach their new situation, both nationally and internationally (Acuto and Leffel, 2020; Kosovac and Pejic, 2021). They also looked at international organisations, such as IGOs, for ideas and standards. In the area of sustainability, this brought them closer to UNEP and UN Habitat.

Both UNEP and UN Habitat encourage the production of applied research, disseminate common standards, and periodically report findings and progress to national governments (Cociña et al., 2019). Through the activities of these IGOs, local governments could interact with national governments and encourage them to act internationally in favour of urban collective needs (Curtis, 2021; Curtis and Acuto, 2018). It is no coincidence that the birth in the early 2000s of the largest city network, UCLG, occurred with the encouragement from UN Habitat.

UN Habitat tries to mobilise all stakeholders in their regime complex, regardless of their nature – e.g., business and NGOs – to promote its organisational agenda (UN Habitat, 2017: 10). However, most of their stakeholders lack the unique combination of characteristics that make local authorities effective intermediaries in this particular regime complex. Chief among these characteristics is political legitimacy. Through their political legitimacy, local governments that adopt the Habitat Agenda help to legitimise it vis-à-vis citizens and their own regional and national governments. Local governments are legitimised to question the actions of their central governments and to demand funds and concrete actions. Another key feature is the legal competence on sustainability issues, which in combination with access to municipal resources and space, makes local governments necessary partners for most urban experiments and projects (Bouteligier, 2013; Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013). Their ability to convene and lead multi-

stakeholders' coalitions towards specific government goals makes them increasingly important in the context of regime complexes (Curtis and Acuto, 2018: 9) as it increases the chances that experiments based on the Habitat Agenda will take place and that they will be successful enough to attract the attention of national governments.

Despite these advantages as partners for UN Habitat, local governments face multiple challenges that constrain their international activity. Local leadership often depends on shifting coalitions of stakeholders (Schragger and Schragger, 2016) which makes local executives reactive to vocal pressure groups (Maisel and Berry, 2010; Portney and Berry, 2014; d'Albergo, 2006). Also, local governments can suffer backlash and reputational damage if they are accused of neglecting local priorities in favour of external agendas (Stren and Friendly, 2019a; Beal and Pinson, 2014). In addition, most local authorities do not enjoy a well-defined national legal framework to engage in activities or reach binding international agreements (Tavares, 2016: 62). Finally, most cities have never developed a permanent international office. In the case of those that have, the resources and even the guidelines that these offices follow vary significantly even after changes in local government leadership (Kosovac et al., 2021).

International forums as orchestration tools

The factors outlined above explain why it is difficult for UN Habitat to establish formalised partnerships with most local authorities. However, it does not prevent the IGO from attempting to constantly mobilise them around significant issues and large events.

The WUFs are one such events. In fact, they are considered the leading forums for urban issues and attract thousands of participants at each of their biannual editions (UN Habitat, 2009). Despite being non-legislative forums – i.e. they do not produce

normative outcomes – the WUF offer urban sustainability stakeholders a "sanctioned setting for the (re)configuration of social relations and structures, and the (re)codification of positions and perspectives" (Silver et al., 2015). Under the auspices of UN Habitat, the WUFs bring together all the main actors in this complex regime on a regular basis, proposing common themes for debate and a common vocabulary - built on the Habitat Agenda - from which to discuss them. These forums serve both to bring new actors into the conversation and to allow established actors to showcase their successes and share concerns with other experts. As I describe in chapter 2, the WUFs counted among their attendees hundreds of national governments, UN IGOs and development banks. After each edition, UN Habitat produced reports for consumption by national governments highlighting the massive follow-up of the main debates and the progress of mainstreaming the Habitat Agenda.

Knowledge gaps and research pathways in the dissertation

The sections above have introduced some key concepts and relevant literature informing this dissertation. With them in mind, I have identified four significant knowledge gaps currently present in the study of local authorities as international actors. These knowledge gaps need to be bridged in order to address the overarching questions guiding this dissertation. That is, to explain how and why UN Habitat and local authorities collaborate to advance the urban sustainability agenda (i.e., the Habitat Agenda).

The first knowledge gap concerns the specific reasons for why local authorities participate and sustain their engagement in non-legislative forums such as the WUFs. Even though some theoretical approaches have been made in the past, using the analogue of municipalities motivations to be active members of city networks, the

participation of local authorities in international events remained unaddressed. Therefore, in this dissertation I have decided to study their patterns of attendance to the largest events of this kind. My goal is to illuminate their motivations by cross referencing their patterns of attendance with previous historical trends of international participation, and with their own perceptions via self-reporting.

A second knowledge gap I have identified is the role non-legislative forums such as the WUFs play in the governance of sustainable urban development. To date, few studies have attempted to answer this question. This is not a trivial matter, since the interest on urban sustainability and in the role of cities and municipal governments in sustainability is at an all-time high. Yet, no academic studies are currently able to answer why local attendance and mediatic coverage of the WUFs increases over time despite these forums not being set to produce regulatory results. To address this gap, I have decided to study their existence over the historical development of UN Habitat and their governance agenda; as well as to interview participants capable to offer their local perspective on the relevance of the WUFs.

A third knowledge gap I have identified is the ongoing debate about the role of local authorities as international actors. The debate can be simplified in the assertion that some local authorities are emerging as competitors to their national governments, offering a more practically minded and more cooperative alternative to the coercive international relations directed by states. I identify that the debate has remained in theoretical terms, with positions for and against providing anecdotal examples. Yet, there is a lack of application of this debate over governance processes sustained over time. I considered this debate in the background of my three empirical analyses,

identifying in all times the dynamics in the relationship between municipal and national governments.

The last knowledge gap I have identified is the role UN IGOs play in the international governance of sustainable development. In the literature, it is generally assumed that UN organisations push particular solutions to sustainability problems. However, practitioners and national legislators refuse that notion, noting that these organisations should have a mere advisory role. In my analyses I considered to what extent UN IGOs intervened in the governance of sustainable development, and whether they did so from a partial perspective. That is, advocating for the interests of certain countries.

Considering these knowledge gaps, the following section provides a brief overview of the structure of the dissertation and the content of the three empirical chapters.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation aims to explain how and why UN Habitat and local authorities collaborate to advance the urban sustainability agenda (i.e., the Habitat Agenda). To meet this objective, I have drawn on three independent but complementary empirical analyses, which explain how this collaboration developed, how it appears in practice, and what the incentives are for both parts to engage in it. As referenced in the previous section, in the preparatory work for these chapters I have been able to identify the WUFs as a key platform for this collaborative relationship, the goal of which is international governance of urban sustainability.

The framework I have used through my three chapters to understand the governance relationship between UN Habitat and local authorities is orchestration theory. I have applied this framework from three different perspectives: a longitudinal study of UN

Habitat's governance strategy, a study of the patterns of attendance of local authorities to WUFs, and a comparative study of the testimonies of local governments participation at the WUFs. The premise that unifies all three chapters is that UN Habitat provided a platform (the WUFs) to make visible the sustainability experiments, and also the discussions, of local governments vis-à-vis national governments. This would benefit UN Habitat by showing the vitality of the Habitat Agenda and the importance of the IGO itself as its promoter. For their part, local governments would benefit from access to national governments. Another benefit for local governments would be their own legitimisation - by being associated with the UN - access to peers and international actors, and indirectly gaining other useful resources for their citizens. Given that local governments are somewhat inconsistent international actors, UN Habitat would have been content to attract as many local governments as possible to these events in the hope that they would fulfil their role of influencing national governments with minimal coordination by the IGO.

Discerning the actual international agency of local authorities in the mainstreaming of the global agendas for sustainable urban development is complex. The question resembles a puzzle collage: the result can be completed by combining pieces of different shapes and colours, each of which is provided by a different theoretical approach. Despite being thematically related, these pieces of information do not seem interconnected until a final pattern has emerged. Fortunately, this composition is aided by the accumulated wealth in case studies and theoretical approaches regarding the international dimension of cities. It is important to be aware that the approach I have adopted in this research project is one of the potential theoretical combinations supported by the sources collected for each of the research papers. The fragmentary

nature of the subject of study has some advantages, however. It favours the use of multiple data sources and methodologies that are conducive to increase the validity of the findings (Coppa and Sriramesh, 2013: 32) and capture the diversity of perspectives that coexist regarding the research question (Golafshani, 2003).

The approach proposed by this project is novel and offers promising insights determining what has been the role of local authorities in the governance of the sustainable urban agenda. Instead of following the point of view of a single actor - local governments, IGOs, or national governments – the research papers analyse the role that municipal governments performed in international spaces of socialisation attended by all these actor types. By doing so, the research project avoids two issues. First, it avoids inferring from the visibility of local authorities at these international meetings that a new system of international governance must be emerging without providing concrete evidence. Secondly, it avoids the opposite question, that of inferring by means of casuistry the emergence of an international governance trend. Two international spaces of socialisation within the UN system have been selected due to their importance in developing the sustainable urban development agenda in the period before 2016: the UN Habitat Governing Council and the World Urban Forums. I have set the time constraint before 2016 due to the emergence of the New Habitat Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals - specifically SDG 11. These elements have changed the institutional frameworks in which UN Habitat operated and studying their effect on its current governance strategy is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Each of the three chapters of this dissertation offers a different piece of the puzzle that is the Habitat Agenda orchestration. While the results of each piece are of interest to a particular type of reader, taken together they provide a complete picture of the

governance process. The first chapter serves to establish UN Habitat's rationale, incentives and constraints for adopting this governance strategy. This chapter also explains why the IGO did not adopt this strategy earlier and points out that factors such as path dependency can interfere to the detriment of a successful governance strategy. The second chapter serves to challenge the hypothesis of collaboration between UN Habitat and local governments by exploring whether other explanatory factors for cities' international activity might be motivating their attendance at WUFs. This chapter serves to identify some apparent inconsistencies in the hypothesis of collaboration to advance the sustainability agenda, and also to disprove patterns of local government participation in these events can be explained by random chance. The third and concluding chapter takes up the apparent incongruities identified in the second chapter and attempts to unravel them through semi-structured interviews with local WUF participants from diverse backgrounds. This chapter explains the viability of orchestration as a governance strategy, even when the actors involved are not fully aware of their role. The following paragraphs summarise the three chapters in more detail.

The first chapter, titled *Orchestration and Local Authorities in the Rise of UN Habitat (1978 – 2016)*, discusses the decentralised cooperation and governance relationship between UN Habitat and local governments. The chapter combines the perspectives of historical institutionalism and orchestration theory to show how UN Habitat's institutional trajectory did not take off until it began to incorporate local governments as intermediaries in its strategy to govern national governments' support for the IGOs agenda at Habitat Governing Councils. This internal support, in turn, translated into enhanced international support for the IGO at the UN Assembly and its increased

prominence the UN's agency for cities. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the influence of institutional inertia and personal leadership on this process. Throughout the text it is illustrated how a development that seems logical in hindsight hinged to a significant extent on the individual leadership of the interim Habitat Executive Director, Klaus Töpfer, during a period of deep institutional crisis (i.e., a critical juncture).

The second chapter, titled *The Participation of Local Authorities at the World Urban Forums between 2002 and 2014*, questions if there was a local authority profile that was more likely to participate in the WUFs. To do so, the chapter analyses the attendance patterns of different local authorities at the WUFs in the period leading up to the adoption of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs in 2016. I explore the correlation between several factors that motivate local governments' international activity according to IR and urban studies and the participation patterns of municipal delegations. These analyses rely on a database elaborated using archival sources and show that traditional explanations for attendance, participation and engagement of local authorities in international events are insufficient to explain this apparent mismatch.

The third chapter, titled *Drivers of local government participation in the UN World Urban Forums between 2002 and 2014*, analyses several semi-structured interviews with individuals who attended the WUFs as members of a local delegation. This chapter relies on the views and interpretations of the protagonists themselves to explain what led them and their local authorities to participate in the WUFs. The analysis follows the hypotheses put forward by researchers who studied why local authorities

participate in international city networks to assess the extent to which these arguments apply to local government attendance at international events.

The results of the three chapters are summarised in the discussion and conclusions section. In this section, found at the end of the dissertation, I link the results of the three chapters in order to offer a conclusion.

CHAPTER 1 Orchestration and Local Authorities in the Rise of UN Habitat (1978 – 2016)

1.Introduction

This paper traces the institutional consolidation of UN Habitat, from its establishment in 1978 until becoming the custodian agency for the implementation of the SDG 11 and the focal point for global urban policy in the UN system. As an IGO, UN Habitat's survival has been highly dependent on retaining the support of their government sponsors while also maximising the spread of their agenda across the UN system. I argue that the feedback loop between internal and external support for the IGO is key to understand the evolution and the consolidation of the agency. It is this interplay that helps to explain how despite being almost dissolved in 1997, UN Habitat has become a prolific and influential actor in the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Furthermore, this paper introduces the combination of orchestration theory (Abbott et al., 2015; Abbott et al., 2016). and historical institutionalism (Fioretos, 2011; Rixen et al., 2016) theoretical lenses to capture the dynamism of these governance relationships.

This paper explores how UN Habitat has not only survived for over four decades despite challenging internal circumstances but has also become one of the most dynamic agencies in the UN system. The exploration is based on the argument that the successful institutional consolidation of UN Habitat has been caused not by a carefully laid organisational vision nor by strategic planning, but rather through the accumulation of individual instances of entrepreneurship capitalising on the emergence of issues and agendas in the UN system. Furthermore, UN Habitat owes most of its success to its capacity to influence and convene local authorities participating in the UN system to extend and defend its organisational agenda. Global

urban policy, like other international regime complexes (Abbott, 2012; Alter and Raustiala, 2018), emerged with the aim of governing a complex issue with redistributive effects in an interconnected world. In such a scenario, there is no single actor or coalition of actors with enough power to govern autonomously the issue of urban sustainable development (Raustiala and Victor, 2004; Gordon and Johnson, 2018; Graute, 2016) and attempting to governing it from a weak position would likely cause conflict between national actors in the international system. Therefore, national governments enlist deliberately weak IGOs to generate consensus and further solutions without having the capacity to generate significant conflicts (Elsig, 2015).

Governance of transnational policy issues is characterised by dynamics of competition and cooperation IGOs and national authorities, as well as between IGOs themselves (Gehring and Faude, 2013). Moreover, the potential redistributive effects of the decisions invite non-governmental and private actors to get involved as well. Actors in these systems pursue their own individual agendas over which IGOs and national authorities have varying degrees of influence (Alter and Raustiala, 2018: 4).

Within the broader assumption of global urban policy as international regime complex, orchestration theory provides a conceptual framework to identify subtle and indirect power dynamics and governance efforts that may seem chaotic and ineffective at first glance (Abbott et al., 2015; Bendlin, 2020a). This paper improves on the classical orchestration model by studying simultaneously the internal governance efforts UN Habitat had to deploy to maintain support of its national government patrons and ensure its organisational survival. I argue that the IGO's governance efforts outwards – to fulfil UN Habitats mission – and inwards – to ensure patrons' support – mutually influenced each other on a feedback loop. Internal support improved UN Habitat's

capacity to be influential in the UN system, further demonstrating its usefulness to their national government patrons. Conversely, internal struggles diminished UN Habitat's capacity to lead in the UN system and planted doubts on the IGO's usefulness. My analyses show that this feedback loop occurred despite the limited awareness of the actors themselves, including UN Habitat's officers and national government representatives.

Historical institutionalism helps to explain the dynamism of the governance relationships and limited awareness of the actors involved in them. It also contributes to contextualise the influence of contingent events that shaped the institutional environment - e.g., the end of the Cold War or the adoption of a relevant international agreement. By using historical institutionalism, the paper identifies and connects changes on UN Habitat's institutional environment with organisational decisions and path dependence trends (Fioretos et al., 2016: 84 - 85). Similarly to previous analyses of other internal regime complexes such as Ivanova (2010) and Baroncelli (2021) the combination of both frameworks allows us to overcome three limitations of the orchestration model. First, the orchestration model offers a fixed image instead of accounting for the dynamism that exists necessarily in regime complexes. Second, the orchestration model implies a planned and logic design to the governance strategy of the orchestrators, when this strategy is often implemented accidentally and with limited awareness by the actors involved. Lastly, the orchestration model does not make explicit the role of individuals entrepreneurship and reactiveness in the emergence and the maintenance of orchestration attempts.

With the combined framework of orchestration theory and historical institutionalism this paper analyses UN Habitat Governing Council reports, supporting documents and

relevant UN General Assembly resolutions between 1978 and 2017. These analyses conclude that UN Habitat's survival has been aided significantly by orchestration in the late 1990s, contrasting with the previous period of organisational struggles in which UN Habitat attempted more direct governance styles. Furthermore, the paper highlights the strategic decisions made by the interim UN Habitat Dir Klaus Töpfer as a turning point in the incorporation of local authorities as intermediaries in the organisation's governance strategy - both internally and externally. These decisions improved the global recognition of local authorities as international actors and the stability and the reach of UN Habitat in the governance of global urban policy.

The remainder of this paper unfolds as follows. Section 2 situates UN Habitat within the regime complex of global urban policy. Section 3 argues how and why the conceptual lenses of orchestration and historical institutional are useful to understand the transformation of IGOs active governance in regime complexes. This section also explains the methodology used in the chapter, as well as the primary and sources that have been analysed. Section 4 traces the transformation of this IGO in becoming one of the most recognisable organisations of the UN. Section 5 analyses the pivotal period containing the critical juncture that changed UN Habitat's evolutionary path. Lastly, section 6 summarises the findings and suggests avenues for further research.

2. UN Habitat within the Regime Complex of Global Urban Policy

This section introduces and explains the key theoretical assumptions to conceptualise UN Habitat as an IGO in the context of the regime complex of global urban policy. These theoretical assumptions underpin my explanations of the motivations of diverse types of actors, as well as the tools and resources they can use to govern the evolution of global urban policy.

First, it is important to historically contextualise the emergence of regime complexes. They are a result of the expansion of the pluralism in the international order after World War II. The post-war decades saw an increase in the concern by UN member states on issues beyond peace and territorial sovereignty, such as pollution or biodiversity (Abbott, 2012; Alter and Raustiala, 2018). International solutions to these issues required permanent negotiations since national governments are aware of their lack of capacity and willingness to enforce the solutions directly on their neighbouring countries. Therefore, regime complexes reflect the emergence of new international institutions to regulate the effects of an increasingly interconnected world in which national sovereignty must coexist with international rules. To solve complex transboundary issues, states resorted to create ad hoc institutions and special regulatory regimes (Alter and Raustiala, 2018), rather than using their own political capital and resources in order to avoid conflicts between states (Abbott et al., 2015). Specifically national authorities seek to engage stakeholders rather than enacting international legal orders (Green and Auld, 2017). This is meant to encourage self-organisation and experimentation, allowing national governments to set transnational agendas discretely (Keohane and Victor, 2011).

In international regime complexes, IGOs - like UN Habitat - receive the mandate from national governments to encourage experimentation, projects and good practices to solve complex global issues without giving them the political authority nor the budgetary muscle and organisational stability to do so. In the case of UN Habitat before the 2018 reform, the IGO was funded mostly through voluntary donations and was economically dependent on income from earmarked consultancy projects.

IGOs that renounce to govern under this conditions are perceived as ineffective by their national government patrons, and progressively lose their resources and sponsorship until they disappear (Karns et al., 2004). Most IGOs attempt to govern by providing expertise and rising awareness regarding the issues they have been mandated to solve, and also by establishing alliances with independent funding organisations such as regional and international development banks. As the evolution of UN Habitat illustrates, these approaches often offer insufficient results (Mukhija, 2006; Parnell, 2016). Lastly, IGOs may try to mobilise actors who are aligned with their organisational goals. IGO's mobilisation activities, such as prizes and themed campaigns, attract the attention of other actors in the regime complex. With such activities, IGOs attempt to place themselves in a stronger position to circulate their agenda and govern their policy issues through indirect means. Therefore, in regime complexes it is not only national governments who rely on stakeholders, epistemic communities and policy actors but also successful IGOs.

Also, in the context of regime complexes, power relations between actors of different types are dynamic, to the point of appearing chaotic to external observers (Green, 2013a). Also, these governance dynamics cause redundancies and parallel solutions to similar problems (Orsini et al., 2013) which despite being inefficient in an strict sense, are useful to avoid to improve resilience (Hawkins et al., 2006) and minimise the risk of gridlocks (Acuto and Rayner, 2016). In other words, features of regime complexes that are perceived as weaknesses from a planned, top-down and direct governance perspective are useful mechanisms in regime complex scenarios.

Lastly, the use of soft governance tools such as agenda setting and the creation of policy champions favours the mobilisation of non-government and private

stakeholders and encourages experimentation in policy sectors which are difficult to govern by strictly regulatory means (Abbott, 2017).For example, the governance of global environmental affairs is characterised by the reluctance of states to impose environmental regulations on each other; in this context, the UN is delegated to oversee the environmental global governance regime (Biermann and Pattberg, 2008).

Considering the characteristics and the dynamics of regime complexes explained in the previous paragraphs, I situate UN Habitat as an IGO within the regime complex for sustainable urban development. This regime complex, in turn, is connected to the largest regime complex of environmental sustainability governed under the umbrella of the United Nations. Because of it, UN Habitat coexists with other UN organisations which seek to enhance their authority and their financial autonomy. Both authority and financial autonomy derive from their good standing with the patron national governments in the UN.

The regime complex for sustainable urban development (Jones, 2010) has the particularity that urban areas have become spaces for public-private collaboration, experimentation, and implementation of large infrastructure projects to tackle environmental degradation and climate change (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013). The promotion of decentralised experimentation in the sustainability sector is known as the Rio Model (Jänicke et al., 2015). This particularity has the two main effects. The first effect is to make most global issues urban issues as well, erasing the boundary between overlapping policy issues if they are tackled at an urban level. The second effect is that the role played by local authorities as actors within the regime complex varies depending on the policy issue and has evolved significantly over time.

The last piece of the puzzle to better situate and conceptualise the role of UN Habitat within the regime complex of sustainable urban development consists in keeping track of the accumulation of organisational decisions in reaction to transformations in the broader UN system. For instance, the reaction of UN Habitat to the emergence of new policy issues and actors. In section 4, I analyse in more detail the reasons why UN Habitat went from not inviting local authorities to attend their governing councils years after the approval of the Local Agenda 21 (UN General Assembly, 1995) to publicly advocating for global support for local decentralisation and the promotion of local voices and achievements through the World Urban Forums (UN General Assembly, 1999; UN General Assembly, 2001). Devoid of context, this decision may appear completely irrational for the governing goals of UN Habitat but was in fact logical from the perspective of the IGO's governing body at the moment.

3 International regime complexes through the lenses of orchestration and historical institutionalism

As explained in the previous section, this article conceptualises UN Habitat as a weak IGO within the complex regime of sustainable urban development. As such, UN Habitat has been tasked with promoting an international agenda to promote sustainable practices and standards from the perspective of human settlements. The empirical sections 4 and 5 show that UN Habitat has tried different governance styles during its existence, using direct tools – like implementation agreements with third partners – and indirect ones – like the convening of like-minded actors in forums. Due to the organisational weakness of UN Habitat, it has been more successful when resorting to soft and indirect governance strategies. Orchestration theory offers a conceptual framework to identify and organise the use and soft and indirect governance tools and

power dynamics in institutional contexts where IGOs have a limited enforcement capacity (Viola, 2015).

Despite its usefulness to organise the apparent chaos of governance relationships in these scenarios, most applications of orchestration theory present a fixed picture of governance relationships. I consider these fixed pictures a limitation of the orchestration theory as a tool since they appear to imply a high degree of awareness and tactically in the way weak IGOs approach their governance efforts. This implication is not supported by empirical evidence, which shows that IGOs in regime complexes are seldomly aware of systemic governance relationships, focusing instead on governing emerging and immediate issues. However, since orchestration theory remains useful to map the governing relationships in regime complexes and IGOs have a limited awareness of the consequences for using some indirect governance tools – e.g. like using convening in forums to mainstream their organisational agenda – I decided to combine it with concepts and tools from historical institutionalism, that are fine-tuned to detect the effects of contingencies and institutional path dependencies in decisions made by IGOs (Colgan et al., 2012).

3.1 Orchestration theory: general assumptions and governance techniques

Orchestration theory provides a conceptual lens to interpret governance dynamics when organisations use soft and indirect governance strategies (Abbott et al., 2015). Orchestration theorists summarise these governance relationships using the O-I-T model, in which each of the three letters correspond to a functional role: orchestrator, intermediary and target.

Orchestration is initiated by the incapacity of the governing actor to force their targets to act differently through hard and direct governance strategies. The actor who initiates

and sustains the governance effort is considered the orchestrator. The actors that the orchestrator is trying to influence - usually national governments since they have control or jurisdiction over the policy area - are considered the targets. Lastly, the actors in the ecosystem that are mobilised to influence the targets are what the framework considers as intermediaries.

Intermediaries are actors of different legal nature, but they share the characteristic of being able to influence the target in a way that benefits the orchestrator. The diversity amongst intermediaries causes variations in their capacity to further the goals of the orchestrator. Therefore, it is expected that successful orchestrators focus on the most promising intermediaries when they appear to suit their governance strategy. Since IGOs in regime complexes have limited authority and no enforcement capacity, their capacity to mobilise intermediaries and influence targets relies almost exclusively on voluntary adherence of intermediaries. IGOs further support their intermediaries by facilitating those platforms, contacts with actors from which they could obtain resources and even singling them out as policy champions. In orchestration scenarios, IGOs create spaces and situations in which the most effective intermediaries contact the targets in the hopes that these will change their behaviours either by societal pressure or by example.

Orchestration differs from other forms of harder and indirect governance, such as delegation, in which states have set a clear task for IGOs through a contract that can be overseen and revised. In orchestration scenarios, IGOs are forced to produce solutions to justify their existence and made themselves useful to their national government patrons. For IGOs specifically, this circumstance adds a level of complexity that is often overlooked by orchestration theory scholars: the fact that their

survival relies in orchestrating successfully both outwards – i.e., mainstreaming their agendas – and inwards – i.e., proving the donors their support has been well spent.

Orchestration also differs from soft and direct forms of governance, such as collaboration, typical of stable international regimes, in which the IGOs can arrange with the target a framework to deliver outcomes in common. Hard and direct forms of governance, such as hierarchical approaches, are completely out of question for orchestrators since they have not been given the authority nor the means to enforce their organisational agenda over sovereign nations (Abbott et al., 2015). In orchestration scenarios, IGOs must respect the independence of their target's national agendas and resort to peer pressure and environmental stimuli to modify their behaviour. Orchestration is not an exclusive governance strategy as IGOs may still use their limited resources to enter contracts and collaboration agreements within other actors in their regime complex, but the scope of these activities is comparatively limited.

As a viable option in regime complexes, the orchestration model is based on four main assumptions: complementary capabilities assumption, goal seeking assumption, correlated goals assumption, and the orchestration assumption (Abbott et al., 2015). The complementary capabilities assumption states that both orchestrator and intermediaries have capabilities the other party wants, and to some extend needs, to achieve their individual policy goals (Van der Lugt and Dingwerth, 2015), while the goal-seeking assumption and the correlated goals assumption consider that orchestrators and intermediaries identify as beneficial building on each other's work in the rational pursuing of their own individual goals (Abbott et al., 2015:21). Finally, the orchestration assumption recognises soft and indirect governances arises from the

orchestrator's lack of means to exert sufficient influence directly over their targets, and therefore, the support and coordination of intermediaries becomes necessary. Therefore, when compatible intermediaries do not exist, or do not share goals with the orchestrators, the viability of orchestration as a possible governance strategy declines (Dai, 2015:141). Orchestrators often use their activities to further empower their intermediaries and benefit from the complementary capabilities, and also to foster correlated goals by mainstreaming the orchestrator's agenda (Abbott et al., 2015: 359). In some occasions, self-aware orchestrators can go further and cultivate their own intermediaries in situations in which non are available (Abbott et al., 2016).

Orchestrators use five categories of organisational techniques individually or in combination to interact with intermediators, ranging from softer to harder mechanisms of governance: convening, coordination, assistance, endorsement, and agenda-setting (Abbott et al., 2015:17-19). Convening is a technique that relies in wielding the orchestrator's influence to gather stakeholders, intermediaries, and targets in a shared spaces such as forums, thematic seminars, and high-level talks. Attracting large numbers of actors with resources reflects positively on the status of the orchestrator. Locating actors in the same space can increase the chances of experimentation and learning by coordinating international policy communities that foster exchange and collaboration around a topic proposed by the orchestrator like regional platforms and issue-oriented campaigns. Assistance provides intermediaries with material and knowledge-based gains to augment their capabilities to influence targets. Endorsement is the orchestrator's use of their name recognition and reputation to recognise policy champions and benchmark examples in policy circles, research, and media. With increased notoriety and stability, intermediaries can be more effective influencing the

orchestrators' governance targets. Lastly, agenda-setting consists in the orchestrators' ability to generate debates and consensus amongst intermediaries and stakeholders on specific topics and definitions. In venues and debates, through position papers, and in the promotion of specific indicators, the orchestrator attempts to mainstream a socially dominant perspective about a particular policy issue. Once this is achieved, targets are constantly introduced to these perspectives in spaces that lay beyond the reach of the orchestrator.

Most orchestration analyses and case studies disregard the use of orchestration techniques within the governance of the IGO itself. This dimension is relevant for my analysis, since I argue that a key explanatory factor in the institutional evolution of UN Habitat and its agenda has been the degree to which it ensured the support of their patron national governments. Before the governance reforms of 2018, UN Habitat was governed by a body of UN appointed professionals – the Habitat Secretariat – that were bound to follow the decisions reached by an assembly of national government patrons – the Habitat Governing Council, from now on Habitat GC. The Habitat GC met every two years approximately to evaluate the direction of the IGO and set the agenda and the priorities until the next session. As it is explored in more detail in section 4, the Habitat Secretariat had no power over the deliberations and the agenda approved by the national representatives at Habitat GC. To defend their performance and influence the agenda they would be later bound to implement, Habitat Secretariat could only provide reports and use the welcome address by the Habitat Executive Director – from now on Habitat Exec Dir – to draw attention to some key issues. I identified the introduction of orchestration tools over time by Habitat Secretariat, such as convening and agenda setting through side activities including non-governmental actors as

testimonies and observers. In these cases, the non-governmental actors performed as intermediaries with varying degrees of success. Section 4 and 5 show the feedback loop between internal and external orchestration activities, and the impact of such loop on UN Habitat´s organisational success.

3.2 Historical Institutionalism: Timing and Context in Institutional Development

Governance relationships do not occur in a timeless vacuum in which the most efficient and rational decisions prevail. On the contrary, governance relationship occurs against the backdrop of accumulated circumstances and decisions made with the bounded rationale of actors who may no longer be in play (Blyth et al., 2016; Jones and McGee, 2018; Keohane and Fioretos, 2017). Therefore, I argue that the actions of orchestrators and their intermediaries must be analysed accounting for the historical events that influence the origin and the development of the regime complex in which they operate.

To produce historically accurate analyses of governance relationships within a regime complex, I must consider the dimensions of context, sequentiality, causality and contingency to produce historically accurate analyses of governance relationships within regime (Andrews and Burke, 2007). These are useful considerations in combination with orchestration theory, since they allow us to go beyond a fixed snapshot of governance relationships and interrogate the causes for why some actors' influence and relevance as intermediaries vary over time. Furthermore, an historical analysis of the interplay between governance relationships and institutional evolution helps us recognise subtilties and explain why similar streams of contingent events may determine different outcomes when comparing the development of multiple IGOs within the same regime complex.

The historical institutionalist perspective favours the identification of the rationale used by decision makers in IGOs, and weight it against the institutional and historical context in which the decisions were made and implemented. While actors' strategic choices are contextual to the circumstances in which the decisions are being made, the accumulation of prior decisions and events already shaped and constrained the range of options available to them. In other words, orchestrators do not have access to all theoretically viable options but rather to the options that previous decisions and circumstances allowed for them. Most individual actors would not even consider the alternative governance decisions that lay outside the range of possibilities in front of them. This also occurs because deviating from the path set by previous decisions is often associated with significant costs.

According to the path dependency assumption, actors' preferences and decisions are informed by point-to-point comparisons in which "individuals are thought to balance evaluations of the costs and benefits of adapting to new circumstances with the costs and benefits of maintaining or losing their investments in past arrangements" (Fioretos, 2011:373). In the case of IGOs, investments could include political capital, economic resources, and time spent in policy programmes. As a result, the standard operating procedures and the relationships between the actors tend to be stable over time, perpetuating frameworks and decisions that the same actors would not adopt if they had to decide them from scratch without being informed by their knowledge of previous contexts (Fioretos et al., 2016). Path dependency explains why institutional arrangements tend to remain stable over time, disregarding windows of opportunity.

Windows of opportunity emerge when new elements – e.g., actors, technologies, issues – are introduced in the regime complex. Some windows remain open for some time

along with the presence of the new element, while others are tied to a time-period, like deciding to support a campaign or to attend a conference. As explained in the previous paragraph, the accumulation of actors, rules and technologies caused by following a specific path exercise a pressure over decision makers to stick to the previous course of action. However, in occasions the introduction of new elements is too destabilising, to the point of minimising the pressure and the benefits of sticking to the previous path. Historical institutionalism defines these periods as critical junctures (Capoccia, 2016).

Critical junctures are a partial exception to path dependency. History and institutional inertias still influence the actors who must navigate the critical junctures, but similar to policy windows (Pal, 2014), during critical junctures decision makers enjoy a wider range of possibilities to propose alternative power arrangements (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). Critical junctures are resolved when a new trajectory is set for the institution, with varying degrees of deviation from the previous institutional path: ranging from the evolution of the initial institution to its complete end. Due to their transformative potential, critical junctures are an interesting element to be identified and analysed separately to understand the fundamental characteristics of the institutions. In this paper, I analyse the critical juncture of the UN Habitat crisis in section 5.

3.3 Methodological approach

My analyses in this chapter are based on the study of dozens of primary and secondary documents on UN Habitat's governance and activities between 1968 and 2016. Among the most important documents for the study are the official reports of twenty-seven sessions of the UN Habitat Governing Council, along with their respective annexed

documentation and background papers. Documents of note amongst the abovementioned background documentation include the Habitat GC preparatory papers, summary conclusions and country statements. In addition, I have analysed the published documentation for each of the three Habitat summits; as well as documents referencing UN Habitat produced by UNEP and ECOSOC in the period 1968 - 2016. All these sources are of enormous value, as they combine the official positions of various actors - as reported in statements - with speeches, interventions and debates – included in reports and background papers. Gathering these documents has been a considerable archival effort, since primary and secondary sources on IGOs are often scattered and difficult to access.

By contrasting and comparing these documents over time, I have been able to go beyond sanitised and incomplete official accounts provided by a handful of UN Habitat publications (UN Habitat, 2011; UN Habitat, 2021).

When interrogating documents, it is imperative to consider the position of the authors and the intentionality of the document in its context. In my analysis, therefore, I have not taken the content of the texts at face value, rather, have interpreted their content through the postulates of orchestration theory and historical institutionalism. First, I have assumed UN Habitat wated to facilitate the governance of a diverse group of actors in the regime complex of urban sustainability. As I have argued in section 3.1. I applied the principles of orchestration theory in my analysis of the documentation to identify evidence of governance attempts by UN Habitat – or to document their absence if that had been the case. Second, I have assumed that the organisations that authored these documents did not remain immutable over time. As I have explained in section 3.2. it was relevant for my analysis to capture the agency of individuals and

organisations alike, since their priorities and opportunities for governance changed over time affecting to their rationale. Approaching the analysis of the documentation was challenging, as I could not compare my findings with those of previous historical analyses of UN Habitat. Nevertheless, developing a factual understanding of the trajectory of the organisation was key to further the understanding of the governance dynamics at play in the UN system during this period.

4. The Four Historical Phases of UN Habitat Governance Strategy

In this section I analyse the evolution of UN Habitat Governance strategy between 1975 and 2018. I keep track of the evolution of the governance efforts both internally – at the Habitat GC – and externally – promoting the IGOs agenda in the UN system, and the interplay between the governance dynamics in both levels. These sections highlight the importance of considering institutional conditions to explain the emergence and the continuation of modes of governance within the US system, but without neglecting the role of contingent situations and individual entrepreneurs in the making of said institutional conditions. Both institutional conditions and contingent influences must be considered to understand the effectiveness and the nuances of soft and indirect governance.

Based on my analysis I identify four distinct institutional periods for UN Habitat, each of which corresponds with a different governance approach. The section is structured in two sub-sections. The first one identifies and defines the main participants in the governance scenario, both internally and externally, and explains the overarching objectives they pursued during the period. The second one summarises the four distinct institutional periods UN Habitat experienced until 2018; this section contextualises

each period and explains the governance techniques deployed by UN Habitat both internally and externally.

4.1. Introducing the Actors in UN Habitat's External and Internal Orchestration

Working with the definition of regime complexes presented in section 2, it makes sense that governance in those scenarios involve large numbers of diverse types of actors whose agendas and power dynamics are in constant evolution. Even though all these actors perform a role in the governance system, identifying and mapping the nature of their interactions is impractical and does not offer much insight into the crucial issues governed by the regime complex. In this section, I choose to present the actors that I assess as most influential for the governance of the sustainable urban development agenda. In the next paragraphs I describe the characteristics and the position of the main actors operating internally – at Habitat GC – and externally – at the UN system - , stressing the connections that support my analysis of the interlocking effect of orchestration in both areas.

I identify UN Habitat as the orchestrator of the sustainable urban development agenda externally; and nested within the IGO, the Habitat Secretariat headed by Habitat Exec Dir as its orchestrator internally. The target of both UN Habitat and Habitat Secretariat are national governments, with some nuanced distinctions for the period before the UN Habitat reforms of 2018. Lastly, there are many different actors that have performed the role of intermediaries both internally and externally. In section 4.2 and section 5 I argue that the most consistent type of actor at both levels of governance has been local authorities. Moreover, I argue that they have made the difference between the collapse and survival of UN-Habitat during its worst crisis period.

As I further develop in section 4.2, UN Habitat became an organisation with the mission of supporting national authorities in the UN system to deal with environmental concerns related to human settlements. The IGO has tried different approaches to fulfil this mission and ensure its organisational survival. As the original commitment by national authorities to create UN Habitat evolved and new related issues emerged in the agenda, the organisation experienced several instances of instability associated with not being able to fulfil the expectations placed on it by its national government patrons. It should be noted that national authorities have had diverse and sometimes incompatible agendas in relation to sustainable urban development - hence the creation of UN-Habitat in the first place - and thus the issues addressed by the IGO mobilised support from some countries while alienating others. The remedy to this impossible situation has been to proactively support the establishment of a common principles around a basic agenda. However, UN-Habitat has no authority to do so by design (Abbott and Bernstein, 2015).

Internally, UN Habitat is made by professional UN bureaucrats under the leadership of Habitat Secretariat. The leadership group is headed by the Habitat Exec Dir, a UN employee who is appointed by the Secretary-General and ratified by the General Assembly. The Habitat Exec Dir has often been an appointee with a recognisable political or technical career outside the UN. Habitat Exec Dir embodies and carries the voice of the organisation but had no authority to influence the deliberations of the governments represented at the body that periodically set the organisation's priorities and budgets, Habitat GC. Furthermore, in following the respect for the national sovereignty of their patron organisations, UN Habitat refuses to acknowledge any

governance role and presents itself as mainly the most relevant think tank for urban issues.

Habitat Secretariat had four tools to generate influence and income beyond the direct control of Habitat GC: discretion on how to implement the periodic mandates, discretion on how to manage emergent issues between Habitat GC sessions, capacity to be contracted to support projects, and capacity to generate and circulate analyses and reports.

National authorities at the UN began to take an interest in the connections between pollution, conservationism and human settlements in the early 1970s. However, the potential redistributive effects of addressing these issues and the international climate of the Cold War led to indirect consensus solutions, such as the creation of the environmental regime complex. Both UNEP and UN-Habitat were created as sister organisations to operate in this regime complex, making national authorities their targets. The UN system's national agendas on urban issues combined national priorities with ideological and bloc dynamics (e.g., free market versus planned solutions, developing versus industrialised economies). The end of the Cold War evolved the national preferences regarding urban sustainability and generated two loose blocs: on the one hand, the group of the Global North that preferred to prioritise effective climate solutions in urban areas; on the other, the group of 77 + China – from now on G-77/China - who preferred to prioritise pro-development and urban-specific solutions in the agenda of UN Habitat. National authorities are the main source of income and legitimacy for UN Habitat, and fund the IGO through regular pledges, voluntary contributions and earmarked projects.

Despite UN Habitat's universal mandate, before the reforms of 2018 the Habitat GC was made of representatives from fifty-eight member states allocated proportionally across the five regional groups and selected by the UN Economic and Social Council for a four-year period mandate. Countries not selected for the Habitat GC could send observers and participate in the activities and discussions but had no voting rights during the session. Habitat Secretariat had to periodically convince the Habitat GC that it was worthwhile to maintain a course of action and to continue funding the organisation. Shifting significantly and failing to secure support internally reflected on UN Habitat's capacity to act and remain relevant to all countries in the UN assembly.

Finally, there are numerous actors in the sustainable urban development regime complex that can support the UN-Habitat agenda: financial institutions, research groups, NGOs, civil society groups or businesses. These actors engage in complex dynamics of opposition, competition and collaboration among themselves, but generally benefit from sharing the vocabulary and frameworks provided by UN organisations such as UN-Habitat. Moreover, these actors fulfil the assumption of the orchestration theory with respect to intermediaries, as far as most of them have capacities and objectives compatible with those of UN-Habitat. Among them, local authorities stand out as they enjoy intrinsic legitimacy and administrative power.

Political legitimacy and administrative power make local authorities effective champions for the sustainable urban development agenda. Examples of projects and experiences implemented by local authorities can be perceived as experiments by national governments and inspire nationwide reforms. Furthermore, through collaborations and publications, UN Habitat can empower active local authorities by attracting other stakeholders to collaborate with them (e.g., attracting funding from

private developers and funding organisations to test a pioneering policy or a new technology supported by the IGO's recommendations).

Internally, the presence of intermediaries in Habitat GC sessions increased over time. For the first decade, few intermediaries – mostly NGOs - were invited to showcase documentaries and photographic expositions (UN General Assembly, 1981) about urban issues. Eventually, small groups of guests were handpicked by Habitat Secretariat to witness the discussions of Habitat GC (UN General Assembly, 1997) and have informal side-contacts with national government representatives. As I explain in section 4.2. this move reflected the emergence of stakeholder groups in the UN system at that time. However, these invitees were not local authorities but NGO representatives and academics. Local authorities did not become a recurrent and relevant presence in Habitat GC sessions until the second decade of UN Habitat's history, as I contextualise in section 4.2. and section 5. Table 3 below summarises the Habitat Executive Directors since 1978.

Name	Period	Nationality	Notes
Aracot Ramachandran	1978-1992	India	
Elizabeth Dowdeswell	1993	Canada	*Interim. UNEP Executive Director between 1992 to 1998*
Wally N'Dow	1994-1997	Gambia	
Darshan Johal	1997-1998	Canada	*Interim. Habitat's Director – Called in by Kofi Annan*
Klaus Töpfer	1998-2000	Germany	*Interim. UNEP Director between 1998 to 2006*
Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka	2000-2010	Tanzania	
Joan Clos	2010-2017	Spain	
Maimunah Mohd Sharif	2018	Malaysia	

Table 3. List of UNCHS/UN Habitat Executive Directors since 1978.

4.2. The Four Periods of UN Habitat's Institutional Development

The antecedents for UN Habitat and the sustainable urban agenda can be found in the reorientation of the World Bank's mission towards infrastructure and poverty reduction projects in other territories after the reconstruction of Europe (Parnell, 2016: 531). The confluence of activists, international fundings and the voice of recently decolonised countries sparked debates on issues such as rural exodus, urban homelessness, the improvement of slums, and the negative consequences of the interaction between humans and their natural environment. In 1972, the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm led to the establishment of the UNEP, and motivated the UN General Assembly to hold a human settlements conference-exposition for highlighting the urgency of the worldwide human settlement problems [and] the need for international efforts to develop new and additional approaches of these problems." (UN General Assembly, 1972). A key outcome from the Habitat I conference was the adoption of the voluntary Vancouver Action Plan (UN General Assembly, 1976: 145) followed by the creation of the UNCHS – i.e. UN Habitat - to be located along with its sister organisation UNEP (UN General Assembly, 1977). From this point onwards, Habitat conferences and frameworks would work as the basis for urban policies in the UN system.

From 1978 to 1986, the UN Habitat's first historical period was characterised by the emergence of environmentalism, the concept of sustainable development, and the concerns about the impact of human settlements in the environment. In this period, UN Habitat struggled to project a clear mission and engage with their national government patrons. The organisation's topics and issue areas overlapped with the ones of UNEP and other IGOs, which distracted the attention of national governments – who were

already distracted by the international block dynamics of the Cold War. These issues can be observed through the summaries of the speeches and discussions recorded at the Habitat GC reports. The reports also show a lack of international consensus regarding the priorities UN Habitat should embrace, including repeated calls to produce a "definable work programme with indicated priorities, resource allocations and evaluation of results that did not duplicate the work of existing institutions" and doubts "about the value of the [Habitat GC] meetings in terms of cost-effectiveness" (UN General Assembly, 1980: 10).

I interpret that Habitat Exec Dir, Aracot Ramachandran, struggled to launch and generate international consensus around an urban agenda. As stated in section 4, the failure to generate internal consensus and interest translated into poor results at the external governance level. The second Earth Summit in 1982, co-organised by UN Habitat and UNEP to be held in their headquarters, was a disastrous failure in terms of attendance and lack of compromise (Seyfang, 2003). The Habitat GC that followed the debacle registered the disappointment from northern countries with UN habitat, stating that "the level of programme envisaged [by UN Habitat] was far too low compared to the scale of the problems to be addressed" (UN General Assembly, 1983: 30).

The failure to generate consensus and govern urban issues in the UN system translated to internal opposition, which in turn, lead to budgetary constraints: "most voluntary contributions [began to be] pledged by developing countries" (UN General Assembly, 1985: 11). I further identify that the lack of progress diminished the importance of UN Habitat and the urban agenda, since national governments began to use Habitat GC as a platform to express their positions on geopolitical issues barely connected with the

work of UN Habitat – e.g., opposing the occupation of Palestine and South Africa's Apartheid.

I identified the first attempt of orchestration from Habitat Secretariat to build consensus and raise the profile of UN Habitat in 1986 Habitat GC. For the first time, Habitat Secretariat invited NGOs as observers and included a side event showcasing the impact of several projects lead by UN Habitat (UN General Assembly, 1986: 31). Yet, this innovation had limited success as Habitat Exec Dir had to remind in his closing statements that "resources [remained] inadequate [and] governments must recognize the need for additional investment in human settlements as a fundamental contribution to economic and social development" (UN General Assembly, 1986: 41).

The second historical period for UN Habitat, from 1987 to 1996, started with a new wave of momentum for environmental issues. The failure of the Earth Summit in 1982 motivated countries from the group of the Global North to revitalise the environmental regime complex. This year, the concept of sustainable development was introduced in the UN system (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). However, as UNEP became increasingly relevant along with the global environmental agenda, UN Habitat's funding and authority worsened during this period, entering a descendent trajectory due to national governments disinterest.

I observe the interplay between ineffective governance internally and externally during the period. The lack of stable resources forced the organisation to chase earmarked contracts and scale down sub-programmes (UN General Assembly, 1991: 49), which further blurred the institutional mission and magnified national authorities' disinterest. This can be seen in the warning by Habitat Exec Dir that unless patron national authorities "speak up for the human settlements sector and [UN Habitat], then no one

should be greatly surprised if … the cause they represented … would once again be short-changed" (UN General Assembly, 1991: 8) in the UN system. Despite the opening up of the UN system to parliamentarians and civil society actors after the Earth Summit of 1992 (Parnell, 2016: 535), UN Habitat was unable to take advantage of the new voices to promote an independent urban agenda.

Habitat Secretariat attempted to carve out some attention for UN Habitat and decided instead to regain attention by drawing a multi-year plan around the singular topic of homelessness and shelter. This choice allowed UN Habitat to utilise additional but limited in the extent orchestration techniques, such as convening and coordination around the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, as well as assistance through the International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment (UN General Assembly, 1993). Yet, Habitat Secretariat failed to adopt new approaches to internal governance and maintained a transactional view of UN Habitat's relationship with their stakeholders (Ramachandran, 1988). In other words, Habitat Secretariat focused on instruments such as direct funding and contracts with NGOs to show results to their national government patrons, instead of attempting to orchestrate them.

As explained in section 3.3, I argue that the failing to adopt a different approach to govern internally was a sign of path dependency. Habitat Exec Dir Ramachandran had been calling out national authorities in Habitat GC to step up to their commitments and fulfil the pledges they made when he inaugurated UN Habitat almost two decades prior. Habitat Secretariat evaluated the success of UN Habitat against the previous years of lack of interest by national authorities on urban topics, and the moderate interest in homelessness and shelter could be perceived as an improvement. Lastly, UN Habitat did not experience the same revitalisation UNEP did with the concept of

sustainable development. While new actors and a more decentralised agenda were being promoted at the Earth Summit of 1992 in Rio, Habitat Secretariat failed to understand the potential implications of these elements in their line of work.

Even when mandated by the UN General Assembly to collaborate in the implementation of the Local Agenda 21, UN Habitat regarded local authorities as just another voice amongst other experts and stakeholders (UN General Assembly, 1993: 30 - 31). This period ended with discussions in Habitat GC about the merger of UN Habitat and UNEP, preferred by developed nations, but opposed by the G77/China (UN General Assembly, 1995: 52 , 38). It is worth noting an explicit attempt to use NGOs as intermediaries during the preparation of the Habitat II conference, with explicit recommendations by UN Habitat to fund and empower those actors at the national level (UN General Assembly, 1995: 34 - 35). However, non-governmental organisations felt they had little recognition during Habitat II and organised their own parallel forum (Cohen, 1996: 432; Magebhula et al., 1996). Despite UN Habitat's approach, local authorities had gained enough visibility in the previous years to be "for the first time in any UN Conference […] accredited as full participants" (Leaf, 1997: 5).

I see the underwhelming result in the use of NGOs as intermediaries as a testament to the importance of goals and capabilities compatibility between orchestrator and intermediaries (see section 3.1).my interpretation is that NGOs fulfilled a similar role, albeit in a minor scale, to UN Habitat in the regime complex for urban development (i.e., raising issues and providing expertise). Also, NGOs and UN Habitat lacked enough economic or material resources to assist each other meaningfully. Since the Habitat Secretariat was not used to engage in useful decentralised collaboration with

other actors, they failed to register the emergence of local authorities as potential effective intermediaries. It is likely that the retirement of Exec Dir Ramachandran shortly before the organisation of Habitat II would have prevented the experimentation with new governance approaches by Habitat Secretariat. This situation exemplifies the importance of accounting for how the bounded rationality of individual actors operating in specific context carries institutional effects.

The third historical period for UN Habitat lasted five years, between 1997 and 2002, and was characterised by a moment of deep crisis after the apparent success of Habitat II. UN Habitat emerged from Habitat II with a renewed mandate based on an international consensus regarding global urbanisation. However, the unresolved issue of the merging between UN Habitat and UNEP that continued to be discussed by the group of the Global North and the G-77/China re-emerged after a financial scandal that set the IGO in a deep crisis. I interpret this crisis as the critical juncture that facilitated the reinvention of UN Habitat lead by an entrepreneurial acting Habitat Exec Dir. I explore this critical juncture in more detail in section 5.

The internal debate regarding who should implement the outcomes of Habitat II, either UN Habitat or a reinforced UNEP – after absorbing UN Habitat – reached a critical point after an external audit indicated possible mismanagement of donations by Habitat Secretariat to fund the Habitat II conference (UN General Assembly, 1997: 30). All contributions were automatically frozen. There were resignations as well in Habitat Secretariat, including the then Habitat Exec Dir, Wally N'Dow. His successor, a career UN bureaucrat who participated in the funding of UN Habitat only lasted for a couple of months before going into retirement.

UN Habitat entered then in an interim period, in which the recently appointed Exec Dir for UNEP co-directed both organisations. In section 5, devoted to explaining what I consider a critical juncture for UN Habitat, I analyse in more detail what I consider a counter intuitive resolution for this situation. UNEP Exec Dir, Klaus Töpfer, was uniquely placed to side with the group of the Global North countries and to absorb UN Habitat under the structure of UNEP. This would have mean to formally submit the urban agenda to the environmental goals espoused by UNEP. Instead, Töpfer took upon himself carrying out the organisation renovation mandated in Habitat II and protected UN Habitat's independence, to the extent of recommending UN Habitat to be elevated from a mere UN centre to a full-fledged agency (UN General Assembly, 1999: 17). This would mean expanding their staff and the size of the based budget allocated by UN Habitat, on top of recognising the IGOs primacy regarding urban issues within the UN system.

I consider Töpfer's period as the interim Habitat Exec Dir a pivotal moment in the reorientation of the governance strategy of UN Habitat. The most consequential reform of this period was to engage local authorities in Habitat GC sessions and support their permanent representation in UN activities through the creation of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA). Local authorities that had been active in lobbying individually and through their city organisations – such as ICLEI – for a localisation of UN agendas after the Earth Sumit of 1992 demonstrated a significant engagement with UN Habitat during this period. ICLEI itself had been created in 1989 due to the initiative of the mayor of Irvine (United States) and under the auspices of UNEP.

Simultaneously, Töpfer's UN Habitat supported international campaigns to further local decentralisation such as the World Charter of Local Self-Government. However, it is important to note that moves in the late 1990s and early 2000s to aggregate networks and organisations of cities under umbrella organisations - such as UCLG in 2004 - responded to criticism by UN organisations that local governments were not a unitary interlocutor with which to engage in meaningful dialogue (UCLG, 2004).

Through UNACLA, UN Habitat empowered local authorities' representatives to speak up at Habitat GC and international urban events organised by the IGO – such as the World Urban Forums. This approach derived from the Rio Model (Jänicke et al., 2015) that entailed encouraging decentralised experimentation and learning through the elevation of policy champions and the promotion of public-private partnerships. The availability of a rotating group of local authorities converted in policy champions for the UN Habitat agenda was well received by national representatives at Habitat GC. In under two years, the interim Habitat Exec Dir was praised for his progress in the revitalisation of the centre, as well as for providing a "clearly focused, campaign-oriented work programme and new vision" (UN General Assembly, 1999: 9) and the mismanaged funds were forgiven in exchange for improved budgetary management practices (UN General Assembly, 1999: 30).

Töpfer's internal reforms helped his successor, Anna K. Tibaijuka, to take significant advantage of the change of period started by the Millennium Development Goals - MDGs. These goals included several objectives related to slums and environmental degradation in human settlements (UN General Assembly, 2001). Furthermore, the successful campaign to elevate the status of UN Habitat was ratified by the UN General Assembly in 2002 (UN General Assembly, 2002). This period ended with the launch

of the World Urban Forums that became one of the largest periodical events organised by the UN in the following decades (UN General Assembly, 2001: 21).

The fourth historical period for UN Habitat included in my analysis goes from 2003 to 2017. I interpret this period under the lenses of orchestration theory as the moment in which UN Habitat finally became a focal IGO within its regime complex. The period is characterized by an incremental consolidation and expansion until becoming the custodian agency for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 11, which mission statement is to "cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" (UN General Assembly, 2015b: 23). Despite the rotation of several executive director and the approval of relevant UN resolutions during this period, UN Habitat did not experience challenges or transformations like previous periods. Furthermore, the Habitat GC reports show that the change of Habitat Exec Dir became characterised by normality and the lack of tensions between national authorities.

The organisation opened national and regional offices around the world (UN General Assembly, 2003: 30), and slightly began to prioritise resilience and sustainability in its post-2008 agenda (UN General Assembly, 2009: 29). The organisations' handling of slum reduction and upgrading in developing countries was considered a success by most patron national governments, and there was a growing recognition of the role of urban areas in climate change adaptation, and the importance of local governments in creating new environmental solutions (Revi et al., 2014). This move towards resilience and environmentalism led UN Habitat to compete more frequently with UNEP for projects and earmarked budgets. Given the institutional culture accompanied by the continued perception of being an underfunded organisation, the tendency towards being a project-oriented organization has been an integral part of UN Habitat's

mindset. This raised some criticism by patron governments since "[the organisation's] need to generate revenue potentially diverts the focus away from core mandates, limits their ability to mainstream activities and increases competition among partners" (Economic and Social Council, 2005: 13). The orchestration activities of UN Habitat continued during this period, being in full display during the post 2015 discussion period (Habitat, 2016; UN General Assembly, 2015a). Along with local authorities and city networks (Birch, 2018; UN Habitat, 2016), the agency lobbied successfully for the adoption of SDG 11 and launched the New Urban Agenda at the 2016 Habitat III conference (UN General Assembly, 2016). However, even though local authorities remained active intermediaries for UN Habitat, the agency remained lead by and focused on serving national authorities (UN Secretary-General, 2017: 5). The IGO did not adapt to offer local authorities a larger role in decision making activities beyond UNACLA, although the two last Habitat Exec Dir appointed during the period had been city mayors (UN Secretary-General, 2017: 5). The period ended with a deep institutional reform, following the approval by the UN General Assembly of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the New Urban Agenda at Habitat III (UN General Assembly, 2016). Even though the scope of the reforms and the new direction of the agency lay beyond the focus of my analysis, it is worth highlighting that the reforms included the end of Habitat GC system, that was substituted by an annual meeting with universal membership (UN General Assembly, 2018).

All in all, this historical analysis of the evolution of UN Habitat shows that the orchestration hypotheses formulated by Abbott et al. (Abbott et al., 2015) and the tools of historical institutionalism are useful to interpret the governance decisions of the IGO during its entire life-cycle. I explained how UN Habitat emerged as an IGO after

Habitat I (1976) as an attempt to address environmental and urban concerns by the international community. However, the IGO struggled in its task due to its lack of capabilities and legitimacy to generate consensus. The persistence of the global urban issues, however, lead the international community to attempt a new effort with Habitat II (1996). UN Habitat almost disappeared due to lack of confidence on its usefulness and its inability to capitalise on stakeholders to mainstream its agenda. This crisis was resolved by the combination of environmental factors in the regime complex – e.g., the emergence of local authorities as active stakeholders – and the entrepreneurship of interim Habitat Exec Dir. The incorporation of local authorities as intermediaries in internal and external orchestration activities after the critical juncture shifted UN Habitat towards an upward trend. The last historical period between Habitat II and Habitat III (2016) was marked by institutional stability regarding UN Habitat's structure and budgets, as well as by the increased recognition of the IGO as a focal point within the regime complex for sustainable urban development.

5. The Period of Critical Transformation: 1997 to 2002

In this section I focus on the critical period between 1997 and 2002. This period saw UN Habitat transition from being a struggling UN centre in danger of being absorbed by UNEP to become an independent UN agency - with expanded budget and personnel - As I suggested in section 4 using the combined lenses of orchestration and historical institutionalism, I attribute this shift of trajectory to the entrepreneurship of the interim Habitat Exec Dir. His entrepreneurship, however, was only possible thanks to the crisis that generated a critical juncture in which the IGO could not continue with the same practices than before. Moreover, I argue that his decision to enlist local authorities as intermediaries for the governance of the sustainable development urban agenda was

possible due to a combination of correct timing and individual predisposition to understand them as potential allies.

Habitat II marked a renewed interest of the international community on urban sustainability (Cohen, 1996; Magebhula et al., 1996). Habitat GC defined the preparation of Habitat II as the main priority for the newly appointed Habitat Exec Dir, Wally N'Dow, while also challenging the usefulness of the IGO by asking Habitat Secretariat to "reduce administrative costs in order to allocate more resources for substantive activities [and] explore the scope for increasing the level of inputs from National Governments in the execution of joining programmes and projects" (UN General Assembly, 1995: 38).

Habitat Secretariat had little margin for experimenting governance alternatives in the time running to Habitat II, with the Habitat Exec Dir focused on re-gaining national governments support through a successful conference. Habitat Secretariat did acknowledge the enhanced role given to stakeholders since the Earth Summit of 1992, recommending national governments to develop mechanisms to cooperate with NGOs and community-based organisations in the field of human settlements. However, these recommendations reflect a top-down approach to such collaborations, implying the stakeholders should be involved in implementation of "research, training, advocacy and dissemination [of UN Habitat's recommendations] (UN General Assembly, 1995: 34). Even UN Habitat Exec Dir admitted to consult with NGO representatives for the preparation of Habitat II "to the extent possible with the available resources" (UN General Assembly, 1995: 35). Despite the leadership of several municipalities in environmental topics since the Earth Summit of 1992, UN Habitat did not mention

local authorities as a distinct stakeholder within the constellation of community-based organisations.

Before 2001, the Habitat Secretariat oversaw two distinct entities under the umbrella of UN Habitat: the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements – UNCHS – and the Human Settlements Foundation - HSF. Each entity had its own budget, and the HSF was meant to centralise voluntary donations and direct them towards funding urban projects. Even though the responsibilities were never fully adjudicated, an internal audit flagged a decision made by Habitat Secretariat to borrow a over 2 million USD from the HSF to fund UN Habitat's contribution to Habitat II without Habitat GC authorisation (UN General Assembly, 1999: 30). The audit highlighted how Habitat Secretariat was unable to organise the return of HSF funds, which in turn was interpreted as a case of mismanagement of funds donated by national authorities. The ensuing crisis forced the resignation of Habitat Exec Dir N'Dow, as well as several officers in Habitat Secretariat.

I identify two arguments to characterize N'Dow's resignation as the trigger for the critical juncture in the institutional trajectory of UN Habitat. First, it created the opportunity for the group of the Global North countries to defund UN Habitat and force UNEP to absorb the urban agenda. This move would have preserved the international interest in dealing with urban sustainability that was expressed in Habitat I and expanded in Habitat II, but through a platform that was more sensitive to the environmental agenda supported by countries with industrialised economies from the Global North. Second, the veteran from Habitat Secretariat appointed as Habitat Exec Dir, Darshan Johal, failed to restore normalcy and solve the crisis. According to my analysis, Jorhal - who had the support of the UN Secretary General and an insider

knowledge about the workings of UN Habitat - failed to return the organisations to its usual business because the previous model of governing by Habitat Secretariat had been exhausted. I interpret the appointment of then UNEP Exec Dir, Klaus Töpfer, as the interim Habitat Exec Dir instead of a new candidate from the UN Secretary General as a favourable sign to the pro-merger camp. This sign was ambiguous, however, since there had been a precedent in 1993 of a UNEP Exec Dir – then Elizabeth Dowdeswell – becoming the interim Habitat Exec Dir for less than a year. But just as Dowdeswell 's appointment in 1993 did not bring any notable changes to the UN Habitat, Töpfer's appointment in 1997 did mark a turning point in the organisation's future.

Töpfer, a former German Federal Minister for the Environment who had previous responsibilities supporting local authorities, was a supporter of experimentation and decentralisation by them regarding environmental and urban issues (Töpfer, 1996; Aldecoa and Keating, 1999). During his time in government, Germany was amongst the countries that recognised cities as relevant places for the implementation of environmental policy and for public-private experimentation (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Hale and Roger, 2014). Instead of supporting UNEP's absorption of the urban agenda, he defended that it would be more advantageous to preserve UN Habitat as a "UN agency for cities" (UN General Assembly, 1999: 17) and enlisted the support of local authorities and their city-network organisations to promote a compromise amongst national authorities to re-fund and reshape UN Habitat as a new organisation capable to carry out the mandate from Habitat II.

In contrast to traditional UN Habitat stakeholders such as universities and NGOs, local authorities had significant advantages that made them good intermediaries for UN Habitat. Local authorities had resources and capabilities complementary to the IGO,

such as say over local budgets, real state, and infrastructure. More importantly, local authorities had constitutionally recognised regulatory powers and political legitimacy. These capabilities are especially effective when showing the potential of experiments and urban initiatives to national governments. Furthermore, local authorities are key partners to provide other UN Habitat stakeholders with opportunities to experiment and disseminate urban solutions to sustainable development. With Töpfer's approach, both UN Habitat and local authorities increased their chance to target governments in the international community by acting together. Contrary to the more centralised approaches to collaboration adopted by UN Habitat before 1997, the structural characteristics of most local authorities – e.g., high turnover of elected officials and limited budgets – made decentralised collaboration a more desirable option. In other words, UN Habitat could benefit more from fostering spaces in which willing local authorities can be empowered by the IGO resources and allow them to become policy champions in their own terms – mainstreaming UN Habitat's agenda – than from formalising collaboration agreements with individual local authorities for the same ends.

Under Töpfer's mandate, Habitat Secretariat began to invite individual municipal representatives to participate in Habitat GC sessions. In contrast with the Habitat GC of 1997 – were no local authorities were invited – the firs Habitat GC with Töpfer as caretaker invited the following municipal representations: Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Bamako (Mali), Barcelona (Spain), Blantyre (Malawi), Boulsa (Burkina Faso), Bucharest (Romania), Douala (Cameroon), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Johannesburg (South Africa), Ibague (Colombia), Lusaka (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya), Oslo (Norway), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Seongnam (Republic of Korea) and

Trencin (Slovakia). Furthermore, Töpfer's Secretariat invited representatives from the following city-networks and urban organisations: Arab Towns Organization, Asociación Municipios de Honduras, Association of Finnish Local Authorities, Association of Urban Authorities (Mauritius), Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya, International Union of Local Authorities, Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities, South African Local Government Association, United Towns Organization/Fédération Mondiale des Cités Unies, United Towns of Africa and World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC).

The measure of inviting municipal representatives to Habitat GCs was reinforced by initiatives to strengthen the collaboration between UN Habitat and emerging city-networks. This process of collaboration culminated in the Venice Declaration (UN Habitat, 2000b) that introduced two new advisory platforms in the UN system: the World Charter of Local Self-Government and the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities, or UNACLA (UN Habitat, 2000a; UN Habitat, 1999). I interpret these activities as exercises to strengthen local authorities as intermediaries, using coordination, assistance, endorsement and convening techniques. Moreover, Töpfer participated in the creation of the Cities Alliance (Cities Alliance, 2022) an initiative connecting the World Bank with the city network Metropolis to fund sustainable development projects in urban areas.

In addition to these activities, Töpfer's Habitat Secretariat promoted an enabling approach to urban development which gave "[national] governments a central role in setting the framework for development, but a lesser role in direct implementation [noting that] one way in which enablement finds concrete expression is through partnerships with relevant stakeholders" (Commission on Human Settlements,

1999:1). In support to this approach, Habitat Secretariat made the case to national authorities at Habitat GC to allow UNCHS to offer stakeholders training to become better partners (i.e., to generate better intermediaries in places where they were not appearing spontaneously):

It is thus appropriate that mayors, local councillors and parliamentarians are being targeted by United Nations organizations as participants in their conferences and training workshops in a more intensive manner than in the past, when professionals were the main target group. Although leadership emerges from social and political processes, it can be enhanced by training (Commission on Human Settlements, 1999:3).

Töpfer's secretariat also stressed the importance of convening and agenda-setting activities, such as international forums, to generate dynamics of collaboration amongst the IGO's stakeholders to mainstream the Habitat agenda. In 1999, UN Habitat and UNEP jointly organised the Urban Environment Forum while UN Habitat promoted the International Forum on Urban Poverty by itself. Both forums would be merged to create a biannual forum "with the capacity to agglomerate all the relevant [urban] stakeholders [and] in which experts could exchange views" (UN General Assembly, 2001:21): the WUF. The role of the WUF was soon expanded to become a sort of think tank of experts who advise the Executive Director of UN-Habitat on issues concerning international cooperation in the area of shelter and sustainable urbanization"(UN General Assembly, 2003: 52). The WUF has since become a pillar of UN Habitat's strategy to mainstream its agenda within the sustainable urban development regime complex. The first WUF in Nairobi was followed by an explosion of national urban forums supported by national governments themselves. By the end of Töpfer's interim

directorship in 2000 the period of crisis had been overcome, finalising the critical juncture.

The consensus that emerged by the end of Töpfer's time as Habitat Exec Dir was built around the idea that the urban agenda should include sustainability and environmental aspects but not be diluted into them. This consensus remained through the last period I analysed in section 4. Habitat Exec Dir Tibaijuka enjoyed a long mandate that ended with her voluntary resignation to run as a political candidate in her home country. Her successors continued to pursue the strategy of using local governments as intermediaries, although they did so by default by not modifying key Töpfer reforms such as UNACLA's position in Habitat GC or the biannual convening of the WUFs.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The trajectory of UN Habitat's organisational evolution from a declining UN centre to the lead agency for UN urban policy illustrates two issues that are often overlooked in studies on the governance of sustainable urban development: the power of soft and indirect governance (orchestration) and the power of historical contingency.

The institutional configurations that emerged after Habitat I had a significant impact over the rationale of the actors involved in governing global human settlement issues. The frameworks of reference, the practices, and even the structure of the organisations themselves – with UN Habitat divided between UNCHS and the HFS – weighted significantly over the rationale of the Habitat Secretariat and its national government patrons. Furthermore, through the analysis I demonstrate that UN Habitat was previously unable to become an effective orchestrator both internally and externally. This resulted from a top-down approach to the governance of stakeholders and a lack of complementary intermediaries.

Exemplifying the notion of path dependency, I was able to identify how the Habitat Secretariat was unable to recognise and capitalise local authorities as complementary intermediaries once they became active between 1992 and 1996. I was also able to identify how national authorities detracted support from UN Habitat when the IGO was struggling to fulfil its role generating consensus. This process is well exemplified by the chronic lack of funds and the use of the Habitat GC sessions as a platform to talk about issues unrelated to UN Habitat programmes during the early 1990s. Even after organising a successful conference – Habitat II - that revitalised the interest of national governments on urban issues, UN Habitat seemed to be headed towards being absorbed by UNEP. This period also exemplifies the historical institutionalist notion that actors immersed in an institutional setting do not adopt the most optimal and rational alternatives to the issues they govern, but instead the ones they perceive to be the least costly. Even when presented with external resources and stimuli, like the emergence of local authorities and the popularisation of the Rio Model after 1992, it took them a crisis (the critical juncture described in section 5) to abandon their path dependency and react to them.

In this paper I identified how during the period of critical juncture the range of possibilities for UN Habitat expanded significantly, and also, how an individual entrepreneur – the interim Habitat Exec Dir – had more room to mauver and introduce reforms than his predecessors who were handpicked by the UN Secretary General. This is a reminder that individual agency still matters when explaining developments in systemically intricate scenarios such as regime complexes. Töpfer's personal views and preferences produced results contrary to what an outside observer might have anticipated. Instead of advocating for the absorption of UN Habitat by UNEP –

strengthening the resources of the later – and the subordination of the urban agenda to its environmental elements, Töpfer preserved and strengthen UN Habitat and he pushed a decentralised response by empowering local authorities as the IGOs intermediaries. For example, by putting his weight behind UNACLA and the World Charter of Local Self-Government. While the first of this actions was successful, the World Charter of Local Self-Government was killed in 2003 by governments arguing it infringed their national constitutions (Engel and Loyd, 2003). Figure 1 below reflects the timeline of UN Habitat's attempt to orchestrate this charter:

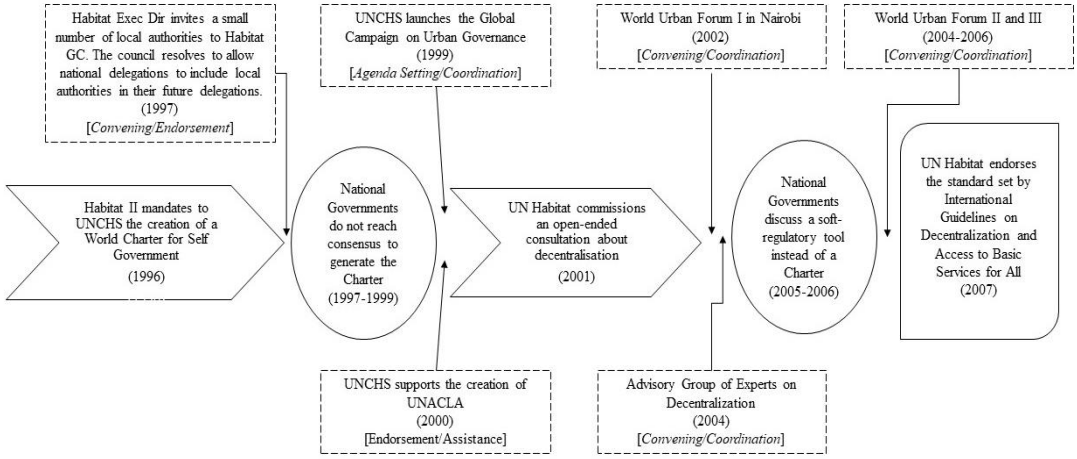

Figure 1. Timeline of the Orchestration process of the International Guidelines on Decentralization and Access to Basic Services for All

In this chapter I have offered two types of contributions. The first type of contributions relates to the study of the global governance of sustainability by IGOs since the late 1970s. The second type of contributions relates to the application of orchestration theory to applied cases of study. This paper offers the first simplified account of the first four decades of UN Habitat's governance history. This contribution is valuable beyond those who are particularly interested in UN Habitat as an organisation, since it offers a model for contextualising the study of the government efforts of other IGOs

nested in the constellation of regime complexes that conform the field of global sustainability. A particularly valuable contribution is the empirical confirmation that both intra-organisational and external levels of analysis must be considered simultaneously when trying to contextualise activities and decisions made by IGOs. For instance, the decision by UN Habitat to promote the WUFs could seem far less consequential than it has been if researchers do not consider the internal legitimation the IGO obtained by significantly mainstreaming Habitat's urban agenda amongst actors who can showcase success stories to the international community.

Regarding orchestration theory, the consideration of internal and external orchestration simultaneously could be also considered an interesting contribution. Orchestration theory implies these two levels exists when it states that national governments are the ones who create IGOs as third-party actors and remain vigilant of their effectiveness generating consensus and advancing the conversation in complex policy areas. However, previous case studies have focused exclusively on accounts of the IGOs failures and successes gaining focality within their respective regime complexes. These narratives underplay the role those internal dynamics and historical context may have played in the outcomes of these IGOs. Furthermore, including the notions of critical juncture and bounded rationality in the mapping of orchestration governance relationships contributes to identify how individual entrepreneurs in particular moments of history enable reforms that may have lasting impact. Conversely, it also shows how elements – like new frameworks, or active local authorities – by themselves may have minor impact on organisations and institutional arrangements that are too stable to be affected by them.

My conclusions in this paper open new questions and new avenues for research. For instance, it would be interesting to consider how the emergence of local authorities as potential intermediaries has affected the development of other IGOs in the UN system. Similarly, the contributions made by this paper could be challenged and expanded by replicating a similar analysis of internal and external orchestration over time with other IGOs. Lastly, it would be interesting to study the perspective that UN Habitat stakeholders, such as local authorities, have over their own role as intermediaries in the global governance of the sustainable urban development agenda.

CHAPTER 2 Patterns of attendance of local authorities to the World Urban Forums between 2002 and 2014

1. Introduction

Local authorities have been playing a visible role in the international governance of sustainability since the late 1990s. Despite this, the conceptualisation and the measurement of such influence remains under debate. Municipalities lack the attributes that make other actors – such as national governments, international banks, and international companies - influential global actors. In recent years, single (Beal and Pinson, 2014; Clerc, 2020; Roig et al., 2020) and comparative case studies (Stren and Friendly, 2019b) of international activities show that local authorities appear to be global catalysts for policy entrepreneurship. Since not all local authorities play this catalyst role to the same extent, in this paper I explore if local authorities active in international fora share enough common traits to be categorised in clear typologies.

Previous attempts to identify common causal mechanisms for patterns of municipal international engagement, such as the CITTA project (Lefèvre and d'Albergo, 2007) had limited success, finding that decisions to join in or abandon international governance spaces were too diverse to be catalogued comprehensively, even within the same municipal government. In my view, these findings prove the limitations of straightforward comparative case studies to provide explanations for the systemic role of local authorities in international governance. Since local governments remain highly responsive to emerging global issues due to their proximity to citizen feedback (Calder and de Freytas, 2009; Portney and Berry, 2014) I proposed instead to analyse the participation of local authorities in a forum over time to identify potential patterns and similarities.

Even though local politicians with larger international profiles and multi-national city-networks existed through most of the 20th century (Jayne et al., 2011), their participation in UN activities and forums was anecdotal until the late 1990s. Moreover, local representatives were often grouped alongside civic organisations and NGOs instead of being singled out as priority partners for global sustainability (Parnell, 2016). I propose that international government organisations – i.e., IGOs – such as UN Habitat, owe much of their current influence and survival to the increasing importance of local authorities and urban issues in the international agenda. For example, before becoming the focal point for Sustainable Development Goal 11 in 2016, UN Habitat had amongst its key activities the organisation of non-legislative biannual forums known as the WUFs. These events grew to become the second largest events in the UN system, only behind UN assemblies in terms of attendance.

I consider it is worth illuminating the patterns of attendance of local authorities to the WUF, since these appear to be paradoxical considering what urban scholars and IR scholars have researched regarding the behaviour of local authorities as actors in the international system. I propose that a solution to this apparent paradox lies in the framework of soft and indirect governance known as orchestration (Abbott et al., 2015). I hypothesise that UN Habitat designed the WUF to attract as many local authorities as possible indiscriminately, to favour the exchange of knowledge and resources amongst urban actors and justify the IGOs' role to the national governments who back them.

I have divided this chapter in four sections. In section one, I offer some context to well documented motivations for local authorities to attend international forums and events.

In section two, I summarise the sources and methods I have used to identify patterns of local authorities' participation in the WUFs over time. In section three, I break down the answer the question of the potential typologies of attending local authorities by describing it quantitatively, and analysing the results under the lenses of geographical, geopolitical, political and institutional explanatory factors. Lastly, in section four, I conclude the paper with a closing section summarising my findings and proposing avenues for further research.

2. Local authorities' attendance to international forums

Non-legislative UN forums are often portrayed as inconsequential as they do not produce binding international agreements. However, these forums "offer sanctioned setting for the (re)configuration of social relations and structures, and the (re)codification of positions and perspectives" (Silver et al., 2015). In other words, they contribute to create and sustain a diverse ecosystem of political actors around policy areas and help them to adopt basic concepts and agreements about how to frame the issues.

The function of international events as venues for community development and coordination becomes even more relevant when I conceptualise the global institutional spaces for governance as regime complexes. A regime complex is an "array of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area" (Raustiala and Victor, 2004). Authors such as Abbot and Sindal (2015) regard forums as sanctioned spaces in which some actors, like UN Habitat, attempt to produce and reproduce mainstream positions and values in line with their organisational objectives. These actors, called orchestrators, are unable to force other actors to assume these positions but they can persuade them through soft and indirect ways (Abbott et al.,

2015). For instance, by encouraging their public discussion. By gathering stakeholders and set them to discuss the agenda of the forum organiser. However, what are then the incentives for local authorities to participate in these events? Is there a typology or a profile of local authorities that have been more prone to participate in these types of events?

Previous research regarding the participation of subnational actors in international spaces and multi-lateral organisations does not provide a cohesive answer to these questions. Both IR and urban studies spouse a multiplicity of perspectives to approach the study of local authorities as international actors, leading to conceptual confusion and methodological gaps (Herrschel and Newman, 2017). Rodrigo Tavares exemplifies the lack of theoretical and terminological consensus by listing over ten labels for the international activity of local authorities, each of which with its own theoretical and methodological baggage (Tavares, 2016). In my research, I have considered my units of analysis – i.e., local authorities – to be I the local executive led by their equivalent of the mayoral figure. Therefore, whenever I refer to local government or city government, I mean specifically and exclusively the members of the municipal executive and the public workers of this government organisation.

2.1. Incentives and Constraints

Multiple authors agree on the local authorities' need to attract new and complementary resources – e.g. technologies, investment, expertise - to face the challenges of the globalised world (Herrschel and Newman, 2017; McCann, 2013). Urban scholars in particular theorise that in post-Fordist economies, that foster specialisation and global competition, local authorities cannot rely on central governments to equally develop the national territory (Van der Heiden and Terhorst, 2007). The surge of development

corridors (Stoker and Mossberger, 1995) and global economic networks of cities (Huang et al., 2007) encourage cities to look abroad for these additional resources. Sometimes, these resources come in the form of private sources of authority (Green, 2013b). These sources may include IGOs and city-networks specialised in specific policy issues (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005b). This behaviour by local authorities coincides with the principles described by the network management literature (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004).

Globalisation made complex issues part of the local political agenda (Graute, 2016). Local authorities are particularly reactive to local pressure groups and external interest influencing their government coalitions (d'Albergo, 2006; Jouve, 2007; Minkoff, 2012). Such reactiveness affects the coherence of local international activities (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Jayne et al., 2011) to the point of leading municipal departments in the same city to conduct parallel, and even contradicting, international strategies (Lefèvre and d'Albergo, 2007).

Lastly, the process of global local decentralisation from the late 1990s has expanded the legal and bureaucratic options local authorities have to pursue their agendas and establish beneficial partnerships beyond their national borders (Gutiérrez-Camps, 2013; Lequesne and Paquin, 2017; Nganje, 2014). However, despite the jurisdictional and administrative capacities gained by subnational governments in this process, the legal and institutional grounds to justify international activities remain unclear in most national contexts (Nijman, 2016).

Table 4 below summarises the main incentives and deterrents for local participation in international activities highlighted in the literature.

Incentives/Deterrents	Description	Literature Group
Incentives	Attract external resources, authority and expertise.	Urban Studies / IR
	React to the population concerns over issues originated beyond their local borders.	Urban Studies / IR
	Use the bureaucratic and political power gained with decentralisation	IR
Deterrents	Preserve internal resources.	Urban Studies
	Avoid backlash from populations contrary to these activities	Urban Studies
	Confusing legal grounds for these activities, and lack of coordination required to make them meaningful for the local population.	Urban Studies / IR

Table 4. Summary of Incentives and Deterrents for Local Authorities International Activities According to Literature Groups

2.2 Explanatory Variables

In all its diversity, the literature on the international agency of municipalities lacks a clear typology of the type of cities that most frequently participate in international events such as the WUF. Municipal participation in non-legislative fora, remains an understudied topic.

A common perspective is that larger cities can support more extensive bureaucracies, with corresponding greater depth of professional expertise. Consequently, larger cities should be amongst the most frequent attendants and field larger delegations (Walker et al., 2015). Furthermore, the concentration of population and wealth within 200 km of coastal areas (Kummu et al., 2016) means that there are more cities in these areas, and that they are also more vulnerable to problems caused by unsustainable urban development. Local delegations from these cities would therefore be expected to attend WUFs more frequently and in greater numbers than other delegations.

The budgetary and regulatory constraints highlighted by the literature suggest that geographical proximity to the venue is likely to be a key motivating factor for attendance. However, cities play a key role in the international competitiveness of their

respective nation states (Jonas and Moisio, 2018b) and this specialisation causes that some municipal governments cannot fulfil all their learning needs from among their neighbouring cities. Therefore, despite the inconveniences, these governments may need to seek inspiration from their policies in distant venues (Lester and Reckhow, 2013).

Subnational diplomacy scholars link decentralisation with opportunities for non-national governments to develop legitimate diplomatic apparatus and agendas (Criekemans, 2010). Studies in the area of commercial paradiplomacy show that sub-national governments in regions with an asymmetric position regarding the national economy are more likely to engage in international activities, compared to rich and export-oriented regions in their same countries (Rioux Ouimet, 2015). For local authorities, electoral density and degree of decentralisation seem likely to determine the budgetary discretions cities have in attending international events (Berry and Gersen, 2009; Green, 2013b).

Finally, national governments benefit from their cities being favourably represented on the international stage. It would be expected that national governments use instruments to entice cities to participate in international forums, furthering their opportunities to engage in backdoor diplomacy (Herrschel and Newman, 2017; Puybareau and Talom, 2020) and soft power influence campaigns (Pérez, 2014; Winter, 2015). One of such instruments is financial support to the attendant local authorities, minimising the budgetary burden of travelling to international venues (Craw, 2008). Capital cities, due to their closer connection with supra-national government structures and their political legitimacy are perceived to be more active in international activities than other local governments. However, authors like Mocca

consider this perception to be a product of lack of research dedicated to the activities of non-capital municipalities (Mocca, 2020).

3. Methods and sources to identify typologies of attendants to the WUFs (2002 – 2014)

To identify the existence of typologies amongst the local authorities that attended the WUFs, I made use of secondary sources elaborated by UN Habitat and published shortly after each forum: the official lists of attendants and the official WUF reports. These documents allowed me to identify and document all the participants to the WUFs, and to the different types of activities in them. From all participants, I have tracked the attendance of individuals who self-identified as affiliated to a municipal government – including civil servants and political representatives.

Official Lists of Participants: These contain the names and affiliation information provided by the attendants registered to the WUFs. This makes the official lists of participants reliable sources to demonstrate the intention to participate in the WUFs. However, they are less reliable to track the participation for individuals who attended a single WUF. The format in which the information about the attendants is presented varies between editions of the WUFs, but UN Habitat attempts to group the participants in several categories including national government, local government and United Nations. A superficial review of the documents reveal that participants where often misclassified. Also, since participants introduced their own registration information, it is common to find misspellings and multiple variants of expressing the same affiliation (e.g., participants from the city of eThekwini Municipality in South Africa often use the alternative name Durban). These circumstances made the automatic coding of the participants unfeasible.

Official Reports: These offer official accounts of the WUFs, being their intended readership UN Habitat's governance organisms and the IGOs stakeholders. The format of the document varies between editions of the WUFs, but all documents feature at least the following parts: 1) a summary of the event and the discussions, 2) a summary of the participation numbers by group, 3) a summary of the topics discussed during the sessions and the main conclusions, 4) a summary of the dialogues and roundtables indicating the speakers and summaries of the interventions, 5) a summary of side events and network events organised by the participants, and 6) an annex section with the speeches at the opening and closing ceremonies.

There are three main reasons for which I decided to limit my analysis to the WUFs between 2002 and 2014. The first reason is that this period covers the ascendent trajectory of UN Habitat from a newly formed agency to becoming the focal point for urban governance and sustainability in the UN system. The second reason is that after the Habitat III forum in 2016 – inextricably tied to the SDG 11 and the proclamation of the New Urban Agenda – the UN Habitat underwent governance and institutional changes that modified the governance dynamics for UN Habitat. Therefore, if the typologies of attendant local authorities had been linked to the governance dynamics of the IGO, this could have made local authorities' attendance after 2014 incomparable to previous editions. Lastly, reporting of the attendants at the WUFs changed after 2018, with new data protection laws preventing UN Habitat from releasing the attendants' names. The attendants I identified between 2002 and 2014 had been complied in an attendants' database, which was later populated with potential explanatory variables suggested by IR and the urban studies literature.

To make valid comparisons, I had to identify several characteristics for each local authority identified. Furthermore, to allow for comparisons over time, I had to collect accurate data for these characteristics for each of the seven moments I have studied. For example, I had to identify the party in control of the mayoral office both for times the local authority participated and for the times they did not in order to consider the effects of political orientation of the local authorities as a factor for participation. To limit the amount of data required for my analyses, I decided to gather this information only for the 214 local authorities that attended at least two WUFs.

4. Attendance Patterns and Characteristics

4.1. General Trends

The first step to determine whether there was a typology of local authorities attending the WUFs is to understand what the general attendance trends in the period were 2002 to 2014. It can be said that across the board attending international events is a costly endeavour for local authorities, even in the case of free events, such as the WUFs. Municipalities must bear the costs of transportation, accommodation, salaries and other economic compensations for the public workers and technical assistants accompanying the elected officials. Furthermore, in the case of the WUFs, local authorities had just one official event dedicated exclusively to them: the mayors' roundtable.

From this perspective, it is easy to infer the deterrents to participate for local authorities outnumber the potential incentives. Yet, Table 5 below shows how the presence of local authorities in the WUFs grew consistently between 2002 and 2014.

Year	***City***	***Topic***	***Attendees***	***Local Govs.***
2002	Nairobi (Kenya)	*Sustainable Urbanization*	Almost 1,200	49
2004	Barcelona (Spain)	*Cities: Crossroads of cultures, inclusiveness and integration?*	Over 4,300	159
2006	Vancouver (Canada)	*Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas into Action*	Over 10,400	287
2008	Nanjing (China)	*Harmonious Urbanization: The Challenge of Balanced Territorial Development*	Almost 8,000[2]	170
2010	Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	*The Right to the City: Bridging the Urban Divide*	Almost 13,800	304
2012	Naples (Italy)	*The Urban Future*	Over 8,200[3]	229
2014	Medellin (Colombia)	*Urban Equity in Development – Cities for Life*	Over 22,000	313

Table 5. Number of Local Governments Attending to Each World Urban Forum Between 2002 - 2014.

A superficial outlook to the patterns of attendance shows that up to 1065 individual local authorities from around the world have attended at least a single edition of the forums. The goal of this analysis is to determine if there were identifiable types of participants amongst them.

Frequency is the first characteristic that allows for an initial categorisation of the participant local authorities. The result of applying this classification, however, seems to expose an incongruity: despite the steady growth of local authorities participating in

[2] Attendance numbers for WUF 4 was affected by the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, and the protests surrounding the Olympic Games.
[3] Attendance numbers for WUF 6 was affected by the last-minute relocation from Bahrain to Naples due to the Arab Spring protests.

each consecutive edition, a staggering 79.90% of them – i.e., 815 local authorities – attended just a single WUF. One-time attendant local authorities are diverse in most terms – geographic, political, economic, etc. – including cases as difficult to compare as and Viet Tri (Vietnam), Valparaiso (Chile) and Valladolid (Spain). Therefore, I argue that a typology cannot be stablished for one-time or non-participant cities.

A closer analysis of the attendants for each editions shows that, however, reveals that a bit under 50% of the attending local governments came from the host country, or from neighbouring countries. This would indicate that despite not being a single typology amongst one-time attendant municipalities, geographic proximity does have an impact on their likelihood to attend a WUF. This finding is consistent with the explanations provided by IR and urban studies, showing that convenience and exposure in relationship to positive values – e.g., sustainability and the UN – were powerful magnets for local authorities of all sizes and political orientations.

This high ratio of one-time attendants amongst local authorities contrasts with the consistent attendance performed by national authorities. Of the 177 attending national governments identified, 163 (i.e., 92.09%) attended over one edition of the WUFs, and up to thirty-nine of them (i.e., 22.03%) attended all seven editions of the WUFs. Figure 1 below plots the level of government and the total times that government entity attended a UN Habitat conference. A couple of facts about attendance are readily demonstrated. While many national governments were repeat attendees to these conferences, the conferences were attended by a rotating cast of municipalities. This presents a theoretical quandary. If the UN Habitat WUFs are valuable to local governments, why would they not be repeat attendees? And how is that despite

producing these elevated levels of turnover amongst local authorities the WUFs are still regarded as the prime forum for urban issues?

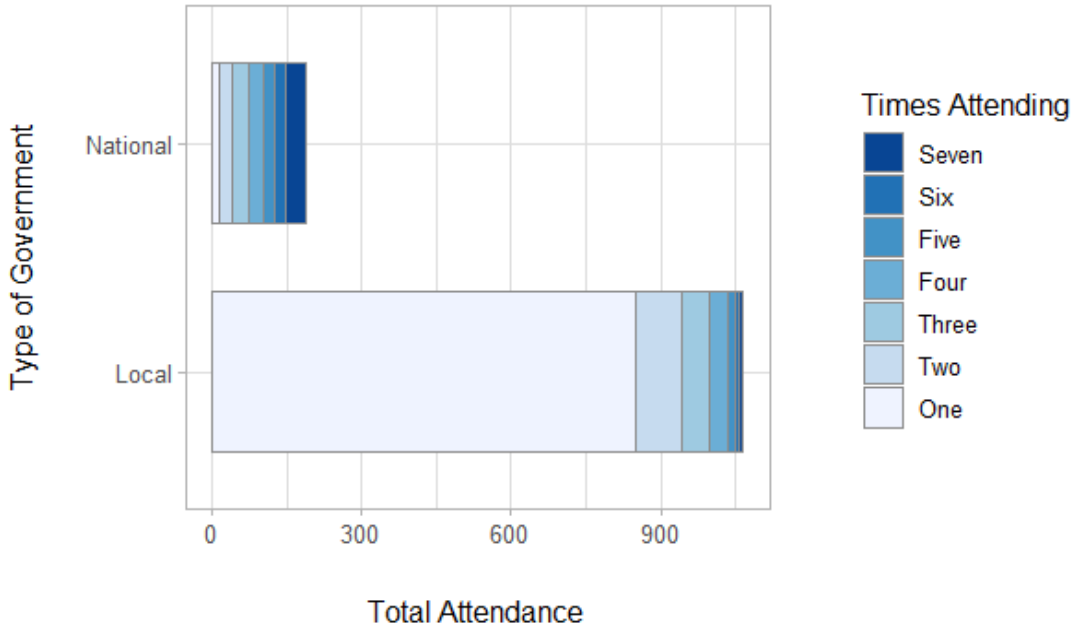

Figure 2. Frequency of Attendance by Level of Government

Patterns of attendance of the remaining 214 local authorities (i.e., 20.09%) attending at least two WUFs were difficult to stablish. Although geographical proximity to the events could explain the attendance of a handful of these local authorities, they represented only a 10% of the total attendants.

Before delving into more specific explanations, I thought prudent to consider if local authorities who frequently attended the WUFs would do it due to being invited to participate in keynote events. Figure 2 analyses the percentage of WUF keynote events in which at least one representative of a local authority participated as a speaker, including roundtables.

The speakers at these events are curated by UN Habitat, which must take into account the complexities of stakeholder management and financing of the WUF when drawing up the final list of participants (UN Habitat, 2011a). The comparison shows how the percentage of keynote events including local government representatives as speakers decreased significantly following the second edition of the WUF. As shown in Table 5 above, the decrease in the visibility of local governments at official events coincided with a significant increase in the number of participants at the forums. This trend continued until WUF 7 in 2014, where barely half of the official events include a local government representative. It is also worth noting that in 2014 UN Habitat's campaign to achieve an urban SDG and push for the New Urban Agenda was in full swing. Considering these factors, I discarded the possibility that frequent attendance by local authorities was linked to being invited to have a representation in keynote events. In fact, most attending local authorities never did.

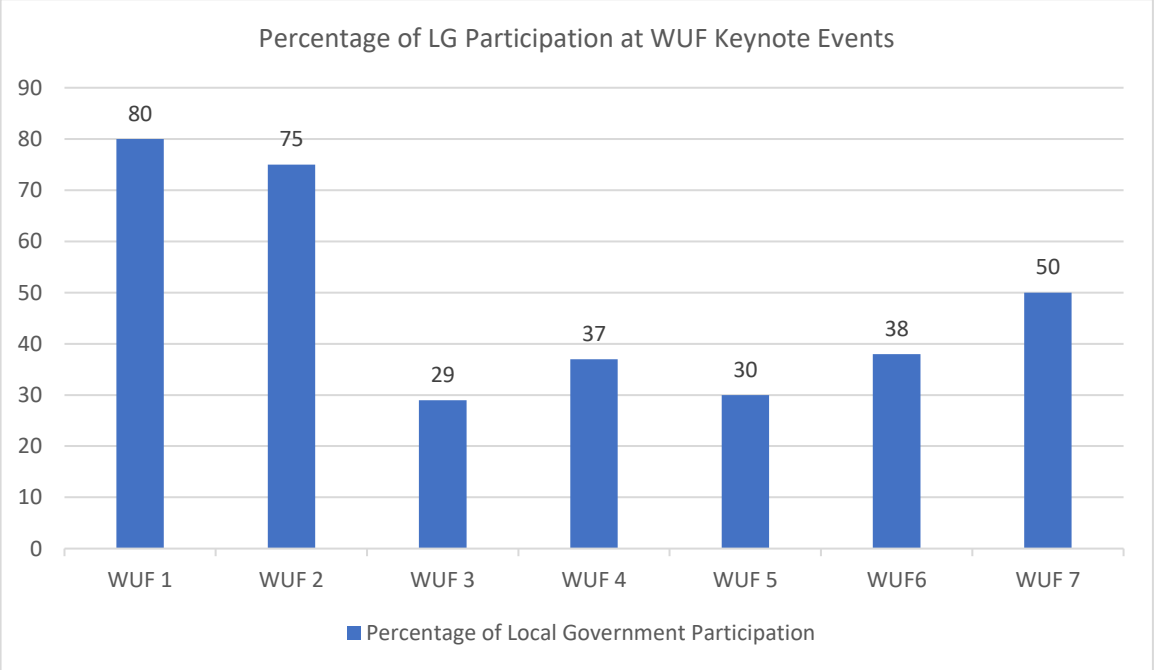

Figure 3. Percentage of Keynote Events Featuring Local Government Speakers WUFs

Given that for most local authorities' attendance at WUFs was a one-off affair, I decided to proceed to describe the characteristics and attendance patterns of the delegations of the 214 local authorities that attended them at least twice. The size and composition of the local delegations varied significantly depending on multiple factors, but I identified that the delegations generally consisted of fewer than six members. I classified their members into three categories: civil servants, local politicians and mayors.

Within the sample of local authorities that attended over five WUFs (30 cases, i.e., 2.81%) I identified that civil servants were the most common type of attendee, followed by local politicians and mayors. I observed that not a single local delegation included a mayor in all seven editions of the WUFs, and eight of the thirty delegations never sent a mayor to the forum. For example, the cities of Mexico DF (Mexico) and Moscow (Russia) were never represented by their mayors at the WUFs.

Among the sample delegations whose mayors participated in the WUFs, only six African delegations attended more than half of the possible editions: Johannesburg (South Africa), Nairobi (Kenya), Dar Es Salam (Tanzania), Kampala (Uganda), Kisumu (Kenya) and Mavoki/Athi River (Kenya).

The proportion of attendees from public administration, mayors and politicians was also consistent across delegations when sorted by geographical location. Figure 3 shows the UN-Habitat conference delegates sent by world region. In this graph, each local authority is assigned to its world region and summed or averaged by the respective region. On the left is the total number of delegates sent across multiple events. The Sub-Saharan Africa region far outnumbers the other regions in number of attendees. On the right, there is a choropleth showing the average size of delegations.

This illustrates delegations from South America, and to some extent also from North America, are larger. The results suggest systematic, though unexplained, differences in participation.

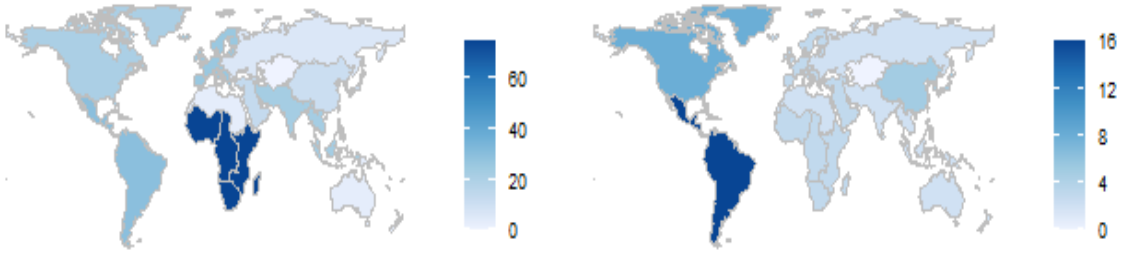

Figure 4. Number of Municipal Delegates Sent by Region

Following the previous sample of thirty local delegations, I found that turnover was remarkably high. Of the 672 people who attended as part of these local delegations, only 56 (i.e., 8.3%) were repeat attendees, and only 2 (i.e., 0.29%) people attended over five WUFs. No local delegations had a member attending over six WUFs.

Considering the previous results, I identified that the typical local delegation at the WUFs had fewer than seven members and was made mostly by civil servants. Despite the possibilities of political projection offered by WUFs, local politicians and mayors attended less frequently to the forums than civil servants. Mayors from Oceania and North America were a very unusual sight at these events, in contrast to African mayors. The high ratios of participants' turnover amongst the delegations attending over five WUFs seem to indicate that participants' personal projects and connections were not as significant as predictors of continued attendance as I originally thought.

4.2 Geographic and Geopolitical Factors

I identified some geographic patterns in the participation of local authorities at the WUFs. Of the 214 that participated at least twice at the WUFs, over a third were from

African countries. This made the largest group by geographic location. These were followed by Asian local authorities as the second largest group, and later by European local authorities. Both North America, South America and the Caribbean had in total a similar amount of participant local authorities as Europe. Oceania had the least number of local delegations in this group, being limited to the Australian cities of Melbourne and Brisbane – both being three-time attendants.

A break down the participation of local authorities by country shows that the largest number of local delegations came from Brazil (15 cities), Kenya (13 cities) and Mexico (10 cities). Other countries with significant representation were Canada (8 cities) South Africa (7 cities) and China (6 cities).

Figure 4 attempts to capture some of the dynamics underlying city attendance as the UN Habitat conferences. A composition of attendance patterns shows three distinct dynamics of attendance. These patterns are reproducible using standard matrix reduction techniques. I considered as early attendees those that attended the firsts UN Habitat editions but have not proven steady attendees. On the contrary, I considered late attendees those delegations that have taken recent interest in the WUFs despite not have not been a participant to prior conferences. Lastly, I considered steady attendees those delegations that participated regularly in WUFs.

Each point on the diagram in Figure 4 represents a single city, with the relative positioning of the dot representing the appropriate mix of dynamics seen in attendance patterns. So, for instance a city located between the early and steady poles of the chart showed an initial interest in the UN Habitat events but have trailed off in participation in recent years even if they still attend. The size of the dot on the plot shows the relative interest in the event, whether total delegates sent or the average delegation size. The

plot shows that the bulk of cities are recent attendees and have sent delegates in some numbers. This bodes well for the continuing participation and future of UN Habitat conferences.

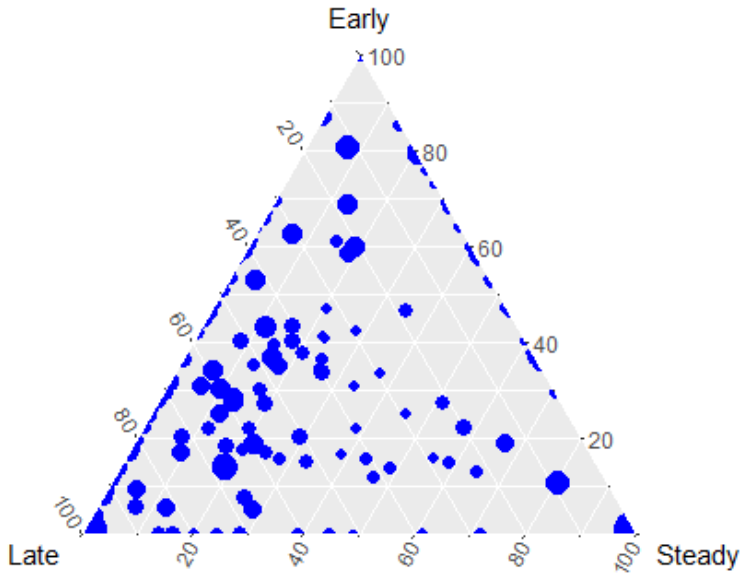

Figure 5. Patterns of Attendance of the Local Delegations to the WUFs

Beyond country origin, I considered other geographic factors to determine the existence of typologies of local authorities that attended the WUFs. For instance, I hypothesised that coastal local authorities would be more participative in international forums on urban sustainability due to three factors: the greater concentration of wealth, their larger populations on average, and the disproportionate impact that global warming may have over their inhabitants. However, the distribution of attending municipal delegations disproved by hypothesis. Both types of local delegations were almost equally distributed: 119 delegations (i.e., 55.60%) from continental settlements, and 95 delegations (i.e., 44.39%) from coastal ones. When divided them by continent,

the analysis showed most countries were non-coastal communities except from Africa and Oceania – which as stablished previously, had a small representation at the WUFs.

Population size did not correlate with higher attendance rates either. I identified that most local authorities in the sample of at least two-time attendants had under a million inhabitants in 2014. Furthermore, when I focused in the group of cities that attended over five WUFs (n = 30) the distribution of population sizes varied considerably between them. For example, the local authority representing the two largest populations were Moscow (Russia) and Sao Paulo (Brazil), while the two smaller populations were represented by Mavoki/Athi River (Kenya) and Maseru (Lesotho).

I also considered the potential correlation between geopolitical factors and the attendance of local authorities to the WUFs. First, I explored the distribution of attendant local authorities according of their country's membership to the OECD. Close to a third of them (63 cities, i.e., 29%) came from OECD numbers. This could be considered a high number considering that only thirty-six of the 195 countries in the world are members of the OECD. Furthermore, I identified that only three of the thirty local authorities that attended five or more WUFs belong to OECD countries. These were Barcelona (Spain), Mexico City (Mexico) and Malmö (Sweden).

Considering these factors, I conclude that there was not a singular typology of attendant local authority to the WUFs based on geographic and geopolitical characteristics. However, I had been able to identify some interesting geographic trends. For instance, Local authorities from Africa and Asia attended in larger numbers and more frequently than others. Considering the relative populations and number of countries in both territories, it is noticeable that European local authorities attended in similar numbers to those of the Americas. This could indicate that European local

authorities are less constrained to participate in international events. It is also noteworthy that local authorities from Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Canada, South Africa and China participated in larger proportion and most frequently than municipalities from other countries. Local authorities from Oceania were largely absent from the WUFs.

Contrary to my initial expectations, I identified a lack of clear correspondence between attendance and geographic location (coastal or continental) as well as with population size of the municipality, furthermore, I were surprised by the fact that continental local authorities were slightly better represented in the sample. Even though I expected a larger number of local delegations from non-OECD countries, the results exceeded my predictions as a third of the participants came from the OECD.

4.3 Political and Institutional Factors

An alternative way to categorize and identify a type of local authority that frequently attended the WUFs could be to focus on the political and institutional factors that motivate and constrain the activities of the municipal governments. As the literature reviewed indicates, factors such as legal legitimacy and responsiveness to citizens are generally regarded as key elements to anticipate the international agency of subnational governments.

Even though not all federal systems give local authorities the same degree of institutional recognition, it is generally accepted that local authorities in federal systems enjoy high degrees of political autonomy (Steyler and Kincaid, 2009). However, I observed in the sample of local authorities that attended at least twice to the WUFs (n= 214), those from unitary states (149 cases) almost doubled the number local authorities from federal states (65 cases). The disproportion was consistent,

although slightly reduced, amongst sample of local authorities that attended over five WUFs (n= 30). In this sample, 23 cases came from unitary countries and only 7 cases from federal countries. A feasible explanation for this disproportion could be that unitary states (165 countries) are far more frequent than federal states (28 countries) in the international community.

To measure the correlation between degree of decentralisation and attendance to the WUFs I have used the score elaborated by the Regional Authority Index – Regional Scores dataset (HOOGHE et al., 2021). The score in this index reflects the degree of decentralisation for the subnational political division in which the cities are nested (i.e., State, Department, Autonomous Community). The score ranges between 0 (minimum self-rule) and 27 (maximum self-rule). Unfortunately, the index covered less than half of the cases in my sample of 214 local authorities (just 96 cases). However, since the cases covered were distributed across all continents, I decided to use it as a valid (although imperfect) indicator of the relationship between political decentralisation and the local authorities' frequency of attendance to the WUFs. To simplify the comparison, I divided the index in six different tiers incrementing by five points (e.g., tier one ranged from 0 to 5). In this comparison, most attendant local authorities (81 cases) scored between 10 and 25 in this scale. Interestingly, although only cities scoring above 15 attended over five WUFs, no cities scoring above 25 points ever attended over three WUFs. Of the municipalities attending five or more WUFs (n= 30), the lowest punctuation was held by Quito (Ecuador) while the highest corresponded with Barcelona (Spain).

I interrogated another dimension of political autonomy and administrative capacity: the capital status of the attendant local authorities. Up to three quarters of all

municipalities in the sample (159 cases, i.e., 74.29%) were national or regional capitals. The proportion of local authorities with capital status increased even further (25 cases, i.e., 83.33%) in the sample of local authorities that attended over five WUFs.

I tested notion that national governments could have encouraged the participation of capital cities to showcase the country's strengths internationally. To do so, I considered the correspondence between the co-attendance of local authorities and their national governments as a sign of support to the international activities of their local authorities. Of the 177 countries attending the WUFs in the period of my study, 137 of them (i.e., 77.40%) attended 3 or more WUFs, meaning that the chances for most local authorities to coincide with representatives from their national governments was high. Yet, 121 national authorities (i.e., 68.36%) never coincided with local authorities from their same country at the WUFs. Moreover, forty-two national authorities (i.e., 23.72%) attended more WUFs than local authorities from their countries, and only seven national governments (i.e., 3.95%) attended less WUFs than local authorities from their countries.

I also explored internal political factors of relevance to explain local authorities' attendance to the WUFs. One of such factors was the correspondence between the ideology of the party in power and the turnover to the WUFs. To make the ideology of the local executives comparable, I established four broad ideological groups: Social Democracy, Conservatism, Liberalism and Other. These groups were based on political self-identification by the municipal parties, except in the category "Other", which covers parties that did that either do not self-identify as any of the three previous options or parties that are in non-democratic countries according to the Polity IV index. To establish the relationship between ideology and turnover to the WUFs, I calculated

the total number of opportunities that governments from each of these ideological groups had to attend and identified how many of these opportunities resulted in attendance to establish its percentage of turnout. I identified that local authorities governed by Social Democratic and Other parties had more chances to participate than those governed by Conservative and Liberal parties; and yet, the turnout amongst all ideological groups remained under 50%. Local authorities governed by conservative parties were slightly less likely to attend the WUFs, with a turnout of 36.45%.

After reviewing these political factors, I identified that contrary to the expectations set by the geographic analysis - in which most of the countries providing larger groups of local delegations were federal countries - local authorities from unitary countries attended as much as those from federal countries. In the case of political decentralisation, I was able to identify that most local authorities had a similar degree of self-rule (between 10 and 25 points) and neither city with higher or lower degrees of self-rule were frequent attendants to the WUFs, attending three or less editions.

I identified a strong correlation between capital status (both regional and/or national) and higher ratios of attendance to the WUFs. This factor, however, did not correspond with co-attendance of local authorities and delegations from their national governments.

Lastly, when I considered the internal political orientation of the local authorities, I were able to identify that WUFs were not linked to ideological projects. Any political ideology was liked to ratios of attendance over 50%, with mayors from Social Democratic, Liberal and Other tendencies displaying similar ratios of attendance. Local authorities governed by Conservative mayors attended slightly less often than others, having a turnout of 36.45%.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of my analysis of local authorities' attendance to the WUFs between 2002 and 2014 shows that random and episodic patterns of attendance do not account for the behaviour of steady attendants. These results leave us with several questions that contrast with the expectations I had based on the current IR and urban studies literature.

The analysis of the attending delegations showed that most local authorities attended the WUFs sporadically, and neither the size of the delegation nor the frequency of attendance to the forums was closely related to their cities' population size.

The analysis of geographic factors showed that there was not a clear typology of local authority despite the anomalous diversity in the distribution of city attendance. For instance, despite coastal cities being larger and more economically dynamic on average and being particularly vulnerable to the effects of unsustainable practises and climate change, I identified cities in both areas participated almost equally being continental cities the ones that attended more frequently. Moreover, even though African and Asian local authorities featured slightly more often than others, the only definitive finding regarding geography was the low ratios of attendance by cities in Oceania. Physical proximity to the venue was a factor to be considered for one and two-time attendants but did not explain the patterns of attendance for local authorities that attended three or more WUFs.

In terms of political geography, I identified that capital status (both regional and/or national) had a higher correlation with attendance to the WUFs than being in a federal country or enjoying high degrees of political decentralisation. Furthermore, I identified that the highest scores in political decentralisation had a negative correlation with the attendance of a local delegations to the WUFs. These results indicate that attendance

to the WUFs was less related to geopolitical structural explanations and suggest that political and governance variables could be more significant.

The analyses exploring the relationship – positive or negative – between the attendance of national government delegations and local delegations from their same countries showed a general lack of co-attendance between both. I interpret these results as evidence for lack of systematic coordination to attend between local and national government delegations, and therefore, speak against the notion of a directed soft diplomacy strategy in most cases.

I analysed the composition and turnover of local delegations as well, with the intention of exploring the effect that political ideas and leadership projects had over the frequency of local participation. The results showed an elevated level of individual turnout even amongst cities that participated in five or more WUFs, which is coherent with the notion that local authorities may pursue inconsistent international engagements but challenged the notion that personal projects and political leadership were a major explanatory factor. In fact, I identified that mayors attended in lesser proportion than local politicians and public officers despite the international appeal of the forums. I interpret these results as being caused by the lack of venues in the forum where mayors could be seen in the centre stage. Regarding ideological influence over attendance, I was intrigued to identify that urban sustainability did not seem to be primarily an ideological project. Even though cities led by conservative mayors took slightly less chances to attend, no ideology in government was associated with ratios of attendance equal or above 50%.

I conclude that these findings are compatible with the explanations from the literature regarding the incentives local authorities face to periodically look for external

resources and showcase their strengths, while avoiding backlash and getting caught in unproductive commitments. However, these conclusions were not sufficient to explain why despite individuals in the local government not attending to avoid backlash, their same local authorities were attracted again to participate in the forums.

To complete this picture, I argue that it would be necessary to explore other explanatory factors related to the position of cities within global institutional spaces. Future research can explore if cities that are well connected with the global economic system, such as centres of command and control, are more likely to engage in international activities such as the WUFs. Also, I suspect that governance relationships between UN Habitat and the local authorities must have had a significant correspondence with the sustained attendance of local delegations to the WUFs. It would be meaningful to explore if cities that host UN Habitat regional offices or are connected to the IGO through projects or through the UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) are more likely to attend the WUFs.

To conclude, I consider that these results open several interesting avenues for further research. The first of these avenues correspond to the apparent lack of randomness in the patterns of attendance amongst the local authorities that attended the most, as it had been seen in the high participation of capital cities and the anomalous proportion of attendants coastal and continental local authorities. Studying the patterns of co-attendance amongst these frequent attendant cities could be useful to identify governance dynamics that could not have been detective by a descriptive analysis. Also, I consider that additional research is required to explore the unexpected low attendance from cities located in Australia and other countries in Oceania (despite the regular attendance of their national governments). The unexpected high levels of

turnover amongst individual members of the delegations have led us to identify the need to contrast the results of my analyses with the perceptions of the same events (the WUFs) by a sample of those same participants using qualitative methods. Moreover, the results also invite to a revision of UN Habitat's policies towards municipal stakeholders, to evaluate to what extent the agency has used orchestration as a governance strategy of sustainable urban development issues since the early 2000s.

CHAPTER 3 Drivers of local government participation in the UN World Urban Forums between 2002 and 2014

1. Introduction

Scholarship on the role of cities as international actors has grown exponentially along with the recognition of local governments as global actors in sustainability. Up to 80% of the 1,246 mentions to cities playing an international role in UN frameworks were published after the year 2000 (Kosovac et al., 2020). Moreover, since 2016 there is a Sustainable Development Goal - SDG 11 - dedicated exclusively to cities and communities in urban areas (UN General Assembly, 2015b: 14). Local governments have become a frequent sight in international fora, favouring the mainstreaming and consolidation of the global agenda for sustainable urban development (Parnell, 2016; UN Habitat, 2009: 3). Despite the proliferation of urban forums and the activities focused on cities there is a lack of research examining why local governments attend these events in the first place. In my previous work I identified patterns of attendance by local governments to international events, like the World Urban Forums - or WUFs - that are not easily explained by the current. I decided to explore these irregular patterns by asking directly to municipal policymakers. I aimed to capture the individual experience of elite informants who participated in such events to shed light on the issue of local participation in major international fora - which remains largely unexplored.

In this paper, I identified that local authorities that reported being satisfied with WUFs and that they were meeting a local need by attending the forums - e.g., obtaining funding, sharing expertise – correlated with the least frequent attendees. I hypothesize this could be explained by trade-offs involved in participating in such international events on a regular basis, that I explore in the next section. I further argue that the local

governments that attended most WUFs were driven by reasons capable to offset such trade-offs, exceeding the resource seeking and needs fulfilment drivers mentioned above. I claim that such alternative drivers could be found in the assertion of political responsibilities in the international system (e.g., being an active member of the international community) or in pursuing an active role as members of a global community (e.g., leading and representing city-networks and similar city organizations).

To test my hypotheses, I conducted semi-structured interviews with local government representatives who attended WUFs between 2002 and 2014. In section 2, I provide a summary of the most relevant literature I have identified to build my explanation for the local government drivers to participate in international events. In section 3 I conduct a methodological overview on the structure of the interviews, the selection of the cases and the presentation of the results. In Section 4, I analyse the responses structured around three categories of drivers, each of which represented in its own sub-section. Finally, the paper closes with Section 5, in which I synthesize and discuss the main findings followed by Section 6, in which I present my conclusions.

2. Known Drivers of Local Government International Activity

Research on the role of local governments in international arenas and transnational policy development is burgeoning (Acuto et al., 2018; Curtis, 2021; Lara, 2020; Mocca, 2020). Several books and articles have been published in recent years offering tangential responses to these questions, either as compilations of IR and urban studies takes on these issues (Acuto and Steele, 2013; Aldecoa and Keating, 2013; Amiri and Sevin, 2020; Johnson, 2017; Oosterlynck et al., 2018; Herrschel and Newman, 2017) or in the form single-authored reflections on these issues, with a tendency to include

self-contained chapters (Alger, 2014; Kuznetsov, 2015; Curtis, 2016; Ljungkvist, 2016). There have been several companion books written by scholars with professional experience in municipal international offices as well. These works combine theoretical explanations with practice-focused advice aimed at supporting practitioners in the field of sub-national diplomacy (Grandi, 2020a; Zapata Garesché, 2007).

I argue these publications provide tangential responses for several reasons. One is that they combine studies adopting different levels of analysis such as case-studies focused on individuals and municipal governments (Barber, 2013; Beal and Pinson, 2014; Jayne et al., 2011), structural analyses based on the evolving exchanges of goods and services between global cities (Jonas and Moisio, 2018a; Roig et al., 2020; Sassen, 2010) and studies on institutional frameworks that allow local governments to engage in sub-national diplomacy (Gordon and Johnson, 2017; Haider-Markel and Agranoff, 2014; Abbott et al., 2016). Another reason is the coexistence of multiple methodological approaches that coexist to explain the myriad aspects of international activity by local governments. This can be observed by comparing the academic trajectories of the authors in the compilations mentioned above, as well as in the frequent calls from their editors to build an international urban approach around multidisciplinary collaboration and share case-studies (Acuto and Leffel, 2020; Acuto et al., 2018; Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014). Although this fragmentation of approaches can be criticized from the perspective of paradigm building, I understand that it also reveals the richness and liveliness of this field of study.

I chose to focus on two narratives about what drives local authorities to perform as international actors. On the one hand, there is an inward-looking narrative that explains local governments' drive to attend international venues is the need to meet local needs

with external resources – e.g., investments, technologies, expertise. – and to be competitive in the globalized world – e.g., get name recognition, attract talent, tourists – On the other hand, there is an outward-looking narrative that explains that the driver is instead the performance of political responsibility. According to this narrative, local authorities are aware of the global phenomena emanating from their cities – e.g., climate change, pandemics, migrations – and they are willing to step up to the global stage to engage in the response to those challenges. Authors such as Lonrenzo Kihlgren Grandi (2020a) have noticed the conventional wisdom of sub-national diplomacy practitioners by arguing that the distinction between the two narratives does not hold in practice:

Not unlike countries, cities act internationally mainly to achieve two apparently opposed sets of goals: universal moral good and local self-interests [...] These sets of goals of city diplomacy are often intertwined. This is particularly evident in sustainable development. (2020a: 9 - 10)

While broadly accurate, Grandini's conclusion offers little insight into the specific reasons why local governments have turned to the WUFs to meet their economic and political needs. It certainly does not explain why only a minority of local authorities attended the majority of the WUFs, despite these events attracting larger crowds of municipal governments to each edition: from forty-nine local authorities in 2002 to 313 in 2014. Furthermore, it does not explain why most attending local authorities did not participate a second time despite reports reflecting above 80% rates of satisfaction among attendants regarding the usefulness, local applicability and quality of the forums (UN Habitat, 2008; UN Habitat, 2010b; UN Habitat, 2014b).

These trends in local government participation are worth studying because international forums are spaces were actors build capacity, trust, and informally

discuss concepts around which to build consensus for soft regulations and voluntary contributions. Several authors have identified these factors as key pillars to the regulation of complex transnational issues such as sustainable development (Abbott, 2012; Alter and Raustiala, 2018; Fischer and Leifeld, 2015; Silver et al., 2015). The WUFs, in particular, are envisaged to be as universally attended as possible, and the reports produced after each edition are meant to inform UN governance on global sustainable urban development. (UN General Assembly, 2003: 45).

I have identified the emerging literature on local government participation in city-networks as the most relevant to analyse participation trends, since it also considers the drivers leading local governments to select and engage in an increasing number of such organizations (Acuto and Leffel, 2020; Bansard et al., 2017; Davidson et al., 2019; Denters et al., 2018; Gordon and Johnson, 2018; Mocca, 2017; Vormann, 2021). I consider that the categories of drivers are similar enough for both forums and city-networks, and following Michele Acuto and Mika Morrissette (2017) classification I structured them into three broad blocks: 1) economic, reputational and market access benefits; 2) technical and implementation benefits, and 3) active belonging to a global community of local authorities.

I identify the first two categories with the first conception of local authorities' international activity I mentioned above: the inward-looking drive to satisfy local needs with external resources and be globally competitive. I identify the last category with the second conception: the outward-looking drive to perform a political role on the global stage. I argue that the first two categories of drivers were generally predominant, explaining the high percentage of local authorities who reported to be satisfied with the WUFs despite attending few of them, – i.e., content having fulfilled

an internal need by attending the forum. In turn, I argue that the third category of drivers would be particularly important for the minority of local authorities that attended most WUFs, since they would be performing an outward-looking global political role by keeping up with the international discussion at the forums.

3. Methodology

What motivates local authorities to engage internationally is but one piece of a highly fragmented literature, characterized by the complex interrelationship between local and international issues and the enormous diversity of actors that intersect in and around cities. This has led authors such as Michele Acuto (2018) to problematize who should be the subject when analysing the international agency of cities. In my previous work, I explored the incorporation of local authorities into the international system through the lenses of UN Habitat governance. This made me aware of the constant feedback between individual and institutional drivers for all types of actors involved, as well as the feedback between local and international dynamics. In this article, I chose to follow a single type of actors – local authorities – being conscious that this would render an incomplete explanation of all the potential factors that could explain their participation. Despite being limited in its scope, these interviews provide another piece in the complex jigsaw to explain cities' engagement with international forums.

I have relied primarily on semi-structured interviews (n = 30) with elite informants working in local governments. As I were interested in the bureaucratic and political drivers – and deterrents – to participate at the WUFs, I interviewed both civil servants and elected officials. All interviewees have had to personally attend the WUFs in a local delegation and also be involved in their local delegation’s decision to attend. To capture the diversity of local situations, I selected interviewees from different

continents and whose local governments had shown varying levels of frequency of participation in the forums. During my analysis of the responses, I provided context, when necessary, by relying on archival sources about the WUFs.

I selected my interviewees by using the list of individual participants included in the UN Habitat reports for the WUFs between 2002 and 2014. I identified all the individuals who reported attending the WUFs as members of a local government delegation and classified them according to their position in the local government, municipal affiliation, and their pattern of attendance. Table 6 below summarizes those details. The interviews were collected between November 2018 and June 2019.

Interview	City Type	Attendance	Profile	Interview Date
1	Large European City	> 4	Civil Servant	14-Nov-18
2	Large European City	< 4	Civil Servant	14-Nov-18
3	Large European City	< 4	Elected Official	14-Nov-17
4	Medium European City	< 4	Elected Official	22-Jan-19
5	Medium European City	< 4	Civil Servant	22-Jan-19
6	Medium European City	> 4	Elected Official	22-Jan-19
7	Medium North American City	> 4	Civil Servant	23-Jan-19
8	Medium North American City	< 4	Elected Official	23-Jan-19
9	Large African City	> 4	Civil Servant	5-Feb-19
10	Large African City	< 4	Civil Servant	5-Feb-19
11	Medium African City	< 4	Elected Official	5-Feb-19
12	Large African City	< 4	Civil Servant	16-Apr-19
13	Medium South American City	> 4	Civil Servant	16-Apr-19
14	Large South American City	> 4	Civil Servant	10-May-19
15	Large South American City	< 4	Civil Servant	10-May-19
16	Medium South American City	< 4	Elected Official	10-May-19

17	Medium Oceania City	< 4	Civil Servant	14-May-19
18	Large Oceania City	< 4	Elected Official	14-May-19
19	Large Asian City	> 4	Civil Servant	21-May-19
20	Medium Asian City	< 4	Civil Servant	21-May-19
21	Medium Asian City	< 4	Elected Official	23-May-19
22	Medium Asian City	< 4	Civil Servant	23-May-19
23	Medium European City	< 4	Elected Official	25-May-19
24	Medium European City	< 4	Elected Official	25-May-19
25	Medium African City	> 4	Civil Servant	28-May-19
26	Medium South American City	> 4	Elected Official	28-May-19
27	Small North American City	< 4	Civil Servant	29-May-19
28	Medium African City	< 4	Elected Official	29-May-19
29	Medium European City	< 4	Civil Servant	29-May-19
30	Medium European City	< 4	Civil Servant	4-Jun-19

Table 6. List of interviewees organized by city affiliation, attendance, profile and date of the interview (n=30).

Conducting interviews with direct eyewitnesses and protagonists of the local authorities' engagement at the WUFs helped me to go beyond the highly curated narrative of archival sources pertaining to these types of events.

The semi-structured personal interviews consisted of a written questionnaire with fourteen questions about basic facts and motivations for their participation at the WUFs, followed by a face-to-face interview. I formulated three broad categories of questions: 1) about the interviewee's opinion on the relationship between local governments, states, and international organizations, 2) about the reasons why their local government decided to participate, and 3) about their personal experience of participating.

The semi-structured interview method sought to activate the interviewees' recollections and professional opinions, with the questionnaire, obtaining a set of comparable responses. Afterward, face-to-face interviews capitalized on this state of activation to encourage interviewees to speak freely, associating ideas and sharing anecdotes as they saw fit. My role as an interviewer was limited to initiating each thematic block using the same wording to facilitate coherence between interviews, ask for clarifications, and follow-up questions were appropriate. The interview questions and the method of ensuring confidentiality were previously approved by my the ethics committee of the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde.

4. Local Authority Experiences at the World Urban Forums

The results showed us that all delegations sought benefits in the three blocks of drivers mentioned above. The following sub-sections explore the responses associated with each block.

4.1. Block 1: Economic, Reputational and Market Access Benefits

Economic development is often characterized as the strongest driver for local authorities to engage abroad (Grandi, 2020b: 83). Local authorities often perceive themselves to be underfunded, as one of the interviewees expressed:

> *The first principle is that all of us [municipalities] seek funding. Always. (Interview 5: < 4)*

However, local authorities could not expect direct economic gains by attending the WUFs, considering that the forums are not linked to awards, beyond the mostly symbolic UN Habitat Scroll of Honour (UN General Assembly, 2009: 17). Moreover, UN Habitat's budget has been historically unstable and has made the

intergovernmental organization – i.e. IGO - economically dependent from consultancy and project-related activities (Economic and Social Council, 2005: 17; UN Habitat, 2011b: 38). In words of an interviewee:

> *[…] you don't go to UN [agencies] to get money, on the contrary, they always take it from you […] sometimes it is in exchange for services but mostly for the branding. It is never free. (Interview 7, > 4)*

However, the multitudinous and the diverse nature of the attendants at the WUFs means that local authorities could find multiple indirect opportunities for economic development and investment. These opportunities included partnerships, exposure, and access to international service providers. Furthermore, even though direct funding to participants is not within UN Habitat's means, the IGO uses its convening power (Abbott et al., 2014) to intermingle thousands of urban actors of all profiles, private companies and international development agencies in the same space. All interviewees reported in the questionnaire that the chance of meeting funding bodies and other economic opportunities mainly manifested due to informal conversations and private meetings after workshops and around the exhibition area. What varied was the type of funding organization being targeted depending on whether the interviewees' delegations came from. Municipal delegations from the Global North attempted to start and cultivate relationships with development banks and IGOs to fund regional projects and decentralized development activities:

> *We never went [to the WUF] to discuss specific projects with the World Bank or the EU. At that time, the MDGs were only for developing countries and we were funding projects through decentralized cooperation elsewhere […] what our delegations did was to get in touch the right person […] to schedule a meeting later on [Once] we used the contact to get the support of our regional government to come up with a project for the whole metropolitan area (Interview 1, > 4)*

Municipal delegations from the Global South (Interview 12, < 4; Interview 14, > 4) regardless of the pattern of attendance to the WUFs, were interested in obtaining international resources and funding from any source. National development agencies, as well as the EU, were high in the list of targets for these delegations:

> *The European Union itself, always has been and still is a very important partner for decentralized cooperation […] the French government and the Italian Government had a strong decentralized cooperation activity as well […] That wasn't the biggest objective [for us] at the WUFs but it was important to engage them. (Interview 12, < 4)*

> *[Our city] had a couple of projects in partnership with the German development agency, UNDP and UN Habitat. We were very interested in protecting that partnership [and] attracting some expertise regarding resilience and private investments […] It is easier to raise funding for a project if you manage to showcase it at a big conference like WUF. (Interview 14, > 4)*

Attracting momentum for a flagship project or municipal policy was a theme repeated throughout the interviews, particularly among interviewees from cities that had participated in less than four WUFs. Sometimes this policy boosterism (McCann, 2013) was justified by the narrative of inspiring the international community with local examples of ingenuity and resilience (Interview 16, < 4). In any case, all interviewees were aware of media coverage as a key point in coming to present local projects at WUFs.

> *For a modest municipality like ours, that the WUF was happening so close [to their city] was a blessing. [We couldn't miss the opportunity] to present [our municipal policy in a] venue such as a UN forum […] We were very appreciative of the kindness we received […] and it is worth noting that our local press became more aware about this policy thanks to being able to be presenting it [there]. (Interview 16, < 4)*

> *The city that does not play the international game makes a mistake. It is already losing out. Having a presence at events as important as the WUF shows dynamism, vibrancy, and opportunity. Shows that we are an outward-looking city […] I wouldn't be surprised if we received more tourists and students after seeing at the WUFs what we were doing to constantly improve our city [...] For a medium or large city to have a media piece of its mayor with other famous mayors and the emblem of the UN in the background […] It is like being in the Champions League*

of cities. Sure, there is concern about backlash from the opposition [but] many citizens also like to see their city […]in the news. (Interview 2, < 4)

Civil servants seemed to regard the media spotlight during the WUFs differently than elected officials. All interviewees were in favour of being known in their field and cultivating friendships. However, civil servants were generally more comfortable with the idea of their projects receiving attention rather than themselves:

[…] we are free to continue our work despite changes of government [...] and it is nice to be recognized for a job well done, but in the end, you are part of a larger project. (Interview 15, < 4)

A single civil servant interviewed took a different stance on this issue, noting that some level of recognition can be positive for a hypothetical career outside the municipal government:

It is true that in the field of cities and sustainability there are many ways to contribute with your knowledge: through networks, research centres, consultancy firms, foundations, etc. Being known to have contributed to […] transformative experiences may provide a foothold in these other spaces. (Interview 9, > 4)

Elected officials did not always welcome the spotlight. One of the interviewees (Interview 8, < 4) explained that in their local council the consensus between government and opposition is to support local universities and companies in leading the internationalization of their city. Another interviewee, a civil servant (Interview 14, > 4) expressed how a new administration redirected priorities for local delegations to participate in international events:

Taking care of sister city agreements and supporting university and industry exchanges is something we are onboard with […] We have joined city-networks to encourage learning but going physically overseas […] that is something very exceptional. The mayoral office prefers to direct the municipal budget towards local priorities. (Interview 8, < 4)

Finally, none of the interviewees indicated that their delegation had been directly encouraged to participate in the WUF by a local company or NGO. Some had included a representative of such organizations in the delegation if they were part of a partnership whose project, they were going to present at the side events (Interview 10, < 4). Some interviewees (Interview 18, < 4; Interview 23, < 4) sought out other organizations from their region at the forums to share impressions and contacts with them. Only one interviewee (Interview 4, < 4) participated in a delegation organized by the national government of his country, which included another local government, the national development agency, an NGO, and several entrepreneurs from sectors related to urban issues.

4.2. Block 2: Technical and Implementation Benefits

Knowledge and technical expertise are valuable resources for local governments (Davidson et al., 2019; Robin and Acuto, 2018). The sharing of opinions, experiences, standards, and best practices featured prominently amongst the titles of the official activities and side events at the WUFs (UN Habitat, 2010a: 90 - 97; UN Habitat, 2014a: 114 - 120). UN Habitat's reports on the WUFs include questions regarding the practicality and the usefulness of the forums' discussions as a key element in their evaluation (UN Habitat, 2008: 11 - 15; UN Habitat, 2010b: 16 , 26; UN Habitat, 2014b: 47 - 49). Arguably offering local authorities access to shared urban narratives (e.g. the right to the city), academic and technical knowledge is one of the IGO's main contributions (UN Habitat, 2009: 30 - 32). The association of WUFs with knowledge production and dissemination was shared by civil servants and elected officials alike. Three key themes mentioned were: 1) improving the implementation of public services; 2) adopting solutions to unprecedented challenges; and 3) adopting common

frameworks and indicators. Three interviewees (Interview 9, > 4; Interview 17, < 4; Interview 22, < 4) provided examples for troubleshooting local policies with external experts and agreements for cooperation and development.

Not all comments and exchanges are gold, but we met international colleagues with similar issues [and] were able to participate in some interesting chats with experts from academia and the private sector. Adapting indicators is a lot of work but it makes sense [if the town is going to] conduct meaningful benchmarking [exercises]. (Interview 17, < 4)

Once again, even though knowledge exchange at the WUFs was generally well regarded, local circumstances influenced how these exchanges were perceived. I have selected two contrasting testimonies to illustrate the perspective of a city that was offering a solution (Interview 14, > 4) and a city that was at the WUFs looking for training and expertise (Interview 18, < 4).

[…] we had been selected [to present]. This helped [us] accessing the main plenaries and bring forth the perspective of the research we carried out. By that time, we were also launching a report with [a regional development bank] which was of great interest for the wider community, and we became a learning platform for other cities […] working or who wanted to work with the bank as well. (Interview 14: > 4)

I think local authorities have a very pragmatic approach and most of us cannot afford fishing expeditions. We were inspired by examples [at the WUF]. However, we went [because we] were attending two trainings we identified previously. (Interview 18, < 4)

For a local authority that attended a single WUF, the process of deciding to participate helped their city to become familiar with the concepts of sustainable urban development:

It was a very engaging experience. We were attracted by the main theme of the conference and the large number of attendees from previous years […] The whole process of preparing […] making reports to justify travelling, looking at previous editions, identifying activities in the agenda […] it was a learning process for the city council. And that helped us then to follow up and participate in the debates. It

was very inspiring. […] since then, we have been following the publications of UN Habitat and regional city-networks for specific issues. (Interview 29, < 4)

Collaborative knowledge development, the establishment of partnerships and the sharing of experiences were important outcomes for most interviewees regardless of how frequently they attended the forums:

We find more interesting to share our experiences with sustainability and pick the minds of international practitioners and other experts for feedback. Even when their national context has nothing to do with ours, we have so many problems in common (Interview 9: > 4).

I was surprised hearing the experience from delegations of developed and developing countries, because as an elected official I don´t think there is any difference in our bottom line […] We did not attend WUFs to learn per se [but being there] we gravitated towards cities in our own region to exchange contacts and […] good practices. (Interview 8, < 4)

However, frequent attendees manifested concerns about the pedagogical value of the content disseminated at UN-Habitat-sponsored flagship events:

The quality of the dialogue is often inconsistent, even more so when the speakers are politicians. Some seemed to have memorized their talking points for their country's domestic consumption and stick to them despite the conference theme […] WUF […] should be our party, but we have another former minister repeating the same platitudes. (Interview 1, > 4)

Training workshops are good, especially those of specialized agencies dealing with indicators because it is not always easy to adapt them to your local situation [but] some of these round tables are like going to preach to those who are already convinced [...] the real exchanges happen in the corridors and in the cafeteria. [Also] the achievements of the home country cities get eclipsed by the global examples. (Interview 25, > 4)

One interviewee (Interview 19, > 4) expressed that the mainstreaming of certain terms was not accompanied by a real understanding of them. Which the interviewee thought led to the banalization of discussions about sustainability:

Another major concern is terminology. [Despite using the] same words to talk about sustainability but sometimes you notice that the definitions don't mean the same for everybody. Every WUF you see two or three new trends in sustainability

[but we] should pay more attention to what we mean when we talk about basic concepts. (Interview 19, > 4)

Lastly, some interviewees were disappointed with the case studies promoted at the forums:

[Keynote events] are often repetitive, or [the topics] shallowly explored. Also, it seems to me that the international community mistakenly looks for the biggest and most cosmopolitan cities, and that is not the most common urban experience in the world. (Interview 6, > 4)

4.3. Block 3: Belonging to a Global Community of Local Authorities

Divergence between satisfaction with WUFs and participation behaviour was present in the most political dimension of the forums: membership in a global community of local governments. Local delegates, usually mayors, feature in WUFs main events representing local perspectives alongside representatives from national governments – usually ministers and heads of state – development organizations, and activist groups. Local representatives also participate in workshops and side events. There, they interact mostly with experts, specialized agencies and among themselves.

The interviews showed that interviewees who participated in fewer WUFs were more optimistic about the growing importance of cities in international governance, and about UN Habitat's role as a reference point for coordination. Interviewees who have participated in multiple WUFs remained positive about the forums but pointed out that navigating the overwhelming number of activities being offered was a challenging task. Interestingly, interviewees that attended most WUFs were vocal about the need for local authorities to be regarded as key international actors for sustainability in their own right and expressed scepticism about UN Habitat's capacity to help them achieved such recognition.

It is worth remembering that my sample of thirty interviewees represented a small percentage of the 1,065 local governments attending at least one WUF in the period I covered. Furthermore, they represented an individual point of view, albeit being an authoritative one. That being said, it is noteworthy that all interviewees indicated in the questionnaire that local governments were compelled to act locally in the face of global challenges. Also, they all agreed that local authorities must develop a municipal position regarding international debates that affected them – such as climate change. What varied significantly between respondents was the degree of enthusiasm and involvement they thought local authorities should display. Remarkably, regardless of their attendance to the WUFs, all interviewees shared the pragmatic position that responsibility for citizens' development remains with the national state.

> *National governments are giving more and more responsibilities to cities, and our own citizens are demanding things they did not demand a few years ago. However, responsibilities are not matched by adequate funding. [It] is out of balance and many [local authorities are] asking for real multi-level governance. (Interview 13, > 4)*

The differences between interviewees extended to the usefulness of WUFs as community-building exercises. On the one hand, interviewees who attended less than four WUFs remembered them primarily as global demonstrations of the strength and importance of local governments:

> *[Participating] was an educational and powerful experience. To see mayors talking to ministers and representatives of neighbourhood groups [it] made us feel that we were part of a wider world. We made contacts and friendships, and I would say that the WUFs are useful for creating a broad constituency for sustainable urbanization. (Interview 11, < 4)*

On the other hand, opinions among interviewees who attended over four WUFs ranged from those who expressed that the forums were useful tools that needed to be further

appropriated (Interview 26, > 4) and to those who saw the WUFs as a lesser evil when it came to keeping the urban agenda afloat (Interview 1, > 4).

> *WUF helps [local authorities] to raise awareness, access networking experiences and inspire each other with good practices. [The forums] are a safe space to find other "doers" with whom to build collaborations […] By sharing we also persuade each other to raise the ambition of our goals […]. However, despite being a forum for cities, UN Habitat does not ask [municipalities] to make any significant contributions during the planning stage […] This should change […] (Interview 26, > 4)*

> *[…] Creating a personal relationship [with partner cities] is essential. Even if staff changes over the years, having a contact point and keeping tabs on what is being talked about […] makes things happen. [WUFs remain] "the forum" for cities. To see the same amount of key people, from all over the world, that you meet in three days of WUF you would have to be getting on and off the plane non-stop. [However, the WUFs] are too crowded, the official conversation makes little progress and local governments have very few dedicated events (Interview 1, > 4)*

The remark regarding the changing of faces among local staff (Interview 1, > 4) speaks to the fact that personalizing relationships between municipal departments went beyond inter-personal friendships. It was generally a matter of being able to show a previous positive relationship with the department they wanted to engage with, even when the “friend” in the department was no longer working. Further, I expected that interviewees who attended most WUFs would be able to recognize the names of other frequent local representatives (n=70) in a list – that also indicated their municipal affiliation. However, twenty-seven of the thirty interviewees only recognized three or fewer names from the list. This happened independently of how many times they attended the WUFs. The three respondents who recognized more attendants were themselves included in the list and recognized mostly individuals from their own municipality, or from city-networks they represented together at some point. Nevertheless, the trio of outlier respondents recognized under twelve names.

Since city-networks are a popular tool for engaging in international and sustainability-related activities, I asked interviewees whether their cities had been affiliated to one of such organizations during the period covered by my study. I used this question to indicate the degree to which their municipalities were involved in the global community of local governments. All responded that their local governments were affiliated with at least a country-based city-network. Only five municipalities were exclusively affiliated to such city-networks, while the remaining twenty-five were members of international city-networks as well. Municipalities affiliated exclusively to national-based city-networks were among those attending under four WUFs.

Two interviewees from cities that attended over five WUFs reported that their mayors had leadership roles in the city-networks that form the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities – UNACLA – between 2002 to 2014. Since UNACLA is an observer during the UN Habitat Governing Councils, I inquired about this indirect connection with the IGO as a potential factor that motivated their participation at the WUFs. Both respondents indicated that their local governments had shown staunch support for the international community of local authorities, but their drivers to attend WUFs obeyed their local interests rather than their previous relationship with UN Habitat. As one of them explained:

> *It is not as if UN Habitat specifically handpicks us and gives us a particular invitation. [Our] commitment in taking on leadership positions in the city network is to represent it at international events […] At the WUFs [in some events we] participated in as the city network, and in others as [ourselves]. (Interview 19: > 4)*

Considering the responses, I observed that discourse in favour of local decentralization and collaboration between governments (in networks of cities) is widespread among all the cases studied. However, it seems that as interviewees gained experience in

WUFs – by participating in multiple editions – they seemed to develop a more critical and pragmatic view of the forum's role as a platform to coordinate the global local government community.

5. Discussion

This paper assesses whether there was a systematic variation in what drives local authorities to attend global events such as the WUF. This question arose from my identification that only a handful of local authorities attended most WUFs despite widespread reports of support for the forums. This seemed inconsistent with the growing numbers of municipal attendees to the WUFs between 2002 and 2014. From the two types of narratives about what drives I identified in Section 2 – i.e., inward-looking needs drivers, or outward-looking political drivers – the respondents show that inward-looking needs were the most influential drivers to attend the WUFs. All interviewees, regardless of the number of times they attended or their opinion about the forums, expressed their local governments benefited from attending. These benefits came in terms of obtaining resources, networking, or calling attention to their local projects and policies. As it can be seen in Section 4.3, all respondents were supportive of the notion that local authorities' activities had an international dimension and that global challenges affected them locally. However, they were unanimous in the opinion that the national government was responsible for ensuring citizens development.

Respondents corroborated that economic and market benefits – first block of drivers – and technical and implementation benefits – second block of drivers – attracted local authorities to the WUFs, regardless of the size or the region of their city. As expected, these results were in line with previous case-studies regarding city-networks (Bansard et al., 2017; Denters et al., 2018). These results also illustrate how factors such as the

profile of the respondent and local circumstances lead respondents to emphasize some drivers above others. For instance, elected officials and civil servants attributed different value to presenting a local policy or project at the WUFs. For Interviewee 16 (< 4, p. 11), an elected official, this was a means to promote their policy and obtain external endorsement – i.e., projecting to their local press that they obtained positive feedback from international experts in an UN-sanctioned venue. For Interviewee 9 (> 4, p. 14) and Interviewee 17 (< 4, p. 13), both civil servants, viewed it as a way to troubleshoot the policy and obtain expert feedback. Similarly, the role of national development agencies as sources of funding and expertise was only mentioned by interviewees from the Global South (see Interview 12 and Interview 14, p. 11). Concerns about local backlash, however, were a deterrent (see Interview 2, p.11; and Interview 14, p. 12) as well as being perceived as misspending local resources (see Interview 8, p. 15).

An interesting insight was that establishing interpersonal connections with local authorities and other types of organizations was a key activity for participants, but not in itself a driver for attending WUF. All interviewees mentioned that interpersonal contacts and networking were essential for establishing institutional connections and accessing funding and expertise - with most of these exchanges taking place outside its main events – Most interviewees ended up meeting new people within local governments and organizations with which they already had a working relationship (Interview 1, p. 17). Thus, interviewees who attended more WUFs did so mainly to maintain institutional contacts and not to reconnect with friends. Moreover, only three of the interviewees - who attended over 4 WUFs and were from the same continent – did recognize each other's names.

Lastly, the interviews revealed city-networks as a common tool for all local authorities to engage in external affairs. Only five respondents – who attended fewer than three WUFs – were from cities not affiliated to an international city-network. However, being a member of an international city-network did not correlate with higher attendance in most cases. I identified that the minority that attended most WUFs were active in other international spaces dedicated to urban issues as well. I argue that this led them to develop higher expectations regarding what the role of local authorities should be at the WUFs, compared to the more complacent view of municipalities that attended fewer forums.

6. Conclusions

With this article I want to shed light on the drivers of local government participation in large international forums such as the WUFs, and also on the dynamics in which these governments engage while they attend. By eliciting this information from the protagonists in a format that favoured the expression of their recollections, I have obtained some rather candid insights into these processes. I interpret these results as showing how a greater consensus on the importance of local governments for global sustainability was forming without the need for active and sustained participation by most local governments. Considering the criticisms by the minority of most frequent attendants, I argue that the high numbers of participants helped WUFs to remain relevant and maintain their reputation as "the forum" for cities despite internationally active municipalities discontinuing their attendance.

Our results showed that international gatherings, despite their non-legislative nature, deserve more attention by IR and urban scholars. These spaces contain complex dynamics of international city participation. The interviews partially corroborate

findings from the existing literature in explaining the motivations of individuals and local governments attending the forums. However, an interesting contribution is that respondents generally thought that their local governments had benefited from their participation in the WUFs: whether it was a single time to booster a local policy, or as frequent attendees showing leadership and nurturing a community of practice around the urban agenda.

These results open multiple avenues to continue studying similar international events in more detail. One could be to replicate this study by expanding the number and geographical diversity of the respondents. Or even selecting other respondents within the same local authorities. Given that the lists of participants in WUFs were no longer made public after 2014, it might also be interesting to obtain that information and expand the comparison to the present day. In this way, it could be tested whether the adoption of SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda in 2016 have had significant effects on participation. Lastly, a promising avenue for research could be to replicate the paper including other forums with a strong urban component, such as technical forums or large UN policy events.

General Discussion and Conclusions

1. Introduction

My doctoral dissertation addresses how and why UN Habitat and local authorities collaborate to advance the urban sustainability agenda. Through the three empirical chapters that make up the dissertation I have established that UN Habitat adopted in the late 1990s a strategy to influence national governments operating in its regime complex based on decentralised cooperation with local governments. In this strategy - orchestration - UN Habitat sought to empower local governments in the area of sustainability, offering them a common vocabulary and facilitating the creation of standards. Crucially, UN Habitat gave local authorities a visible international platform - the WUFs - from which to disseminate their local success stories and interact with regime complex stakeholders. In particular with national governments.

UN Habitat adopted this strategy as a result of its weakness as an organisation since it has limited capacity to govern by other means. This gave the IGO a second life after the crisis it had experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, helping it to gain support and fulfil its mandate to mainstream the Habitat Agenda. Local governments participated in this UN Habitat strategy to varying degrees according to their capacities and local interests. Being intermediaries for UN Habitat helped them to attract the interest of national governments in urban issues over which these local governments had competence. For example, the city of Belo Horizonte (Brazil) became a champion of participative budgeting and financing of sustainability projects.

Being intermediaries of UN Habitat also helped local authorities to acquire knowledge, resources and publicity to carry out sustainability projects and experiments in their

cities. Nairobi can be considered one of the most paradigmatic examples, as through their connection with UN Habitat became an international referent in experimentation regarding the improvement of informal settlements.

In the following paragraphs I summarise and compare the empirical results of the three chapters to discuss why I do not believe these results can lead to alternative explanations.

2. Comparative of the results

In my three chapters I have been able to ascertain the intermediary role of local governments *vis-à-vis* national governments through the study of the role of cities in the evolution of UN Habitat's trajectory. This governance relationship has led UN Habitat to become the agency that oversees the implementation of SDG 11.

More specifically, by studying the participation of local delegations in UN Habitat's largest events – the WUFs – I have been able to identify how and to what extent city governments have performed this role. In chapter 1 I explained how and under what conditions local governments went from being only stakeholders to becoming intermediaries for UN Habitat. In chapter 2, I have shown how local governments adopted this role with various levels of intensity, reflected in their attentiveness to WUFs. And in chapter 3, I have given evidence of how WUFs provide an attractive platform for both more governance-oriented local governments and those pursuing primarily local objectives.

Is there a possibility, however, that local governments were fulfilling a role other than that of intermediaries in this regime complex? In the following sub-sections I explore whether the results of the three chapters would support the following alternative

explanations: 1) that local governments have led the governance of the urban sustainability agenda, 2) that local governments were an extension of national governments in this governance process, and 3) that local governments have been passive actors in this process.

2.1. Local Authorities Leading the Governance of Urban Sustainability

The argument that local authorities are leading the global governance of urban sustainability echoes in numerous publications that analyse the action of local governments as international actors. As I have indicated in each of the chapters, city organisations around these issues have multiplied in recent decades (Acuto and Leffel, 2020). While it is true that local governments do not have any decision-making power at the United Nations (Alger, 2014), it is also true that mentions of local governments as international actors in UN frameworks have multiplied exponentially in the last two decades (Kosovac et al., 2020). Why then the results of the three chapters do not support the hypothesis of local government leadership in sustainability governance?

The first argument against this hypothesis is historical in nature and can be found in chapter 1. In it I show how from the late 1970s to the early 1990s municipal stakeholders were a minority voice in the international fora in which UN Habitat participates. The IGO itself was born out of environmental concerns linked to human settlements and its documents made little reference to local governments until the 1990s. At this time, UN Habitat's governance strategy was based on securing direct contracts with national governments and establishing partnership agreements with stakeholders. One can even see how when some cities sought to get involved in climate change governance – e.g., ICLEI at the 1992 Earth Summit - they did it hand in hand with UNEP and barely gained any recognition in the UN system afterwards. Nor did

Local Agenda 21 make a significant difference, as UN Habitat met with local representatives only shortly before Habitat II (1996) and always treated them as mere stakeholders in their area of responsibility. Even after overcoming the internal crisis and starting to use orchestration in its governance, UN Habitat continued to prioritise national governments in its projects and publications, as can be seen in the slum eradication campaign within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals - between 2000 and 2015.

The second counterargument is of institutional nature and is linked to the previous one. In the texts of the Habitat GC and the WUFs analysed for this dissertation, local governments are referred to only as priority partners for sustainability. Proof of this is that their capacity to innovate and to facilitate the innovation of others is highlighted, i.e., their capacity to boost the Rio Model. Experiments inspired by this model, however, are paid for directly or indirectly by national governments - through grants and development banks. Public-private partnerships and peer learning are promoted by the United Nations, as can be seen in chapters 1 and 3. Even city organisations, which are the main tool of international engagement for many local governments, are financially dependent on support from national governments.

The third argument stems from analysing the attendance of local governments and national governments at WUFs. As I have argued before, these forums are the largest concentration of international actors related to the governance of urban sustainability and their outcomes were analysed in the Habitat GCs. On the one hand, local government attendance to these forums is massive but inconsistent, with only 20.09% attending at least a second time – as it can be seen in chapter 2, section 4. Moreover, when analysing the presence of local governments in the keynote events - see chapter

2, figure 2 - hey dropped below 50% after the first two editions and did not reach this number until 2014 - amid the SDG 11 campaign. On the other hand, in contrast, the attendance of national governments at these forums is massive and consistent. Almost all UN countries have attended WUFs at one time or another, and 92.09% of them have done so repeatedly. It is also significant that national governments have been represented at all keynote events.

Finally, considering the testimonies of the local representatives who participated in the WUFs - see chapter 3, section 4 - it can be seen how all respondents highlighted that it is the responsibility of national governments to promote sustainability. Moreover, the results show that the motivation of local governments to participate in the WUFs was primarily to address a local need. This was the case even among those respondents who showed the greatest interest in governance issues and whose local governments attended most of the WUFs.

After comparing the results of the three chapters, it can be affirmed that local governments have not acted as autonomous leaders in the case of urban sustainability governance. The results indicate that it is national governments that have initiated and maintained this agenda throughout the period covered by this analysis. As I have indicated in the introduction to the dissertation, and also in the chapters, as a complex regime, national governments cannot risk governing these issues directly. This is why they create IGOs to build consensus and advance governance, as is the case for this research with UNEP and UN Habitat.

2.2. Local Authorities as the Extension of National Governments Leading Urban Sustainability

If it is national governments that initiated and sustain the international debate on urban sustainability - with their funds and with their legitimacy at the United Nations - could local government action be seen as a subtle extension of national government policies in this area? There is certainly historical precedent for the use of local governments to conduct indirect diplomacy. For example, the twinning and cultural activities of some Japanese (Jain, 2006) and American (Kincaid, 1999) municipalities during the Cold War. In order to address this hypothesis, I follow a comparison process similar to the one I used in the previous section.

First, the first two decades of UN Habitat's activity - reported in chapter 1, section 4.2 - show that there was a great deal of disunity regarding the issues that the IGO was to prioritise in this period. Countries shifted their positions constantly, seeking angles to advance the agenda in directions that were in their interest or that would attract resources to their country. During this time, no national government invited a local government to Habitat GCs, nor did they involve them through proposals to the Habitat Executive. It is worth recalling that the initial impetus for UN Habitat and UNEP came from the environmental concerns of countries in the global North, but these concerns took a back seat in UN Habitat projects and research. When the ICLEI network of cities - at the time mostly made up of cities from the former capitalist bloc - participated in the 1992 Earth Summit to demand a Local Agenda 21, it did so mainly represent environmental interests and the hand of countries from the Global North. However, local governments continued not to be invited to participate in any capacity in the Habitat GCs, and the G-77/China bloc insisted that the urban agenda not be diluted by environmentalism. Local governments would remain largely absent from UN Habitat

activities until the late 1990s, almost four years after Habitat II indicated that local governments should be regarded as priority stakeholders in sustainability issues. From this perspective, if there were attempts to use local governments as foreign policy tools, they were limited and relatively successful. Proof of this was the failure of the World Charter of Local Self Government, the achievement of which was one of UCLG's foundation raisons d'être.

At the institutional level, the continued use of local governments as international tools by national governments is not widespread practice. Firstly, this would imply that the national government is taking an explicit position within the regime complex with the reputation repercussions that this entails. Secondly, to do so on an ongoing basis would mean that the national government is prioritising some cities over others, which could cause internal unrest. This factor is compounded if I consider the changing role of the national state in not compensating for territorial imbalances that I mentioned in the introduction and in chapters 2 and 3. And thirdly, given the weight of local politics and interests in local council decision-making, it is unlikely that these interests will be stably aligned with the interests of the national government in most cases.

The strategy of systematically using local governments as soft tools of national foreign policy in the field of sustainability does not seem to be reflected in patterns of co-attendance at WUFs either. Local government participation data show that capital cities are over-represented in the sample of cities that participated in at least two WUFs. However, they remain a minority compared to the total number of local governments that have attended any of the forums. In fact, although there was some overlap in the attendance of local governments and their national governments - see chapter 2, section 4.3 - most of these national governments attended more WUFs than

their local governments. That is to say, even among the countries that participated in most WUFs, co-participation with local governments was not common practice. Testimonies from local participants - chapter 3, section 4 - relate how, on an ad hoc basis, some governments included local representatives in their national delegations. However, in these cases they do so in the company of other national stakeholders such as businesses or NGOs.

Indeed, a common position among the testimonies was that their local governments participated in the WUFs in order to obtain resources and go beyond their own national context in terms of urban sustainability. Not to the extent of antagonising their national governments, but to develop their participation in an autonomous way.

After comparing the results of the three chapters, it can be affirmed that most local governments have not acted in coordination with their national governments when discussing urban sustainability. In the cases when coordination existed, this was anecdotal or in the context of a national delegation that included other stakeholders.

2.3. Local Authorities as Passive Actors in Governing Urban Sustainability

A reality that emerges from the results of the chapters is that the number of local governments actively involved in global governance activities and discussions is still in the minority. This is especially true in comparison to the thousands of local governments that potentially exist around the world. It is legitimate to ask then whether the local governments that appear to be engaged in sustainability issues may not be a minority of cities that share certain characteristics. In other words, the emergence of local governments as international actors does not correspond to a generalised reality. Based on the other results, my assertion is that this is probably not the case.

A I have mentioned previously, municipal international activism precedes the recognition of local governments as actors by UN organisations. In chapter 1, section 4.2, I show that as local governments gained recognition in the field of sustainability in the 1990s, they soon merged their pre-existing regional platforms. They did this in order to appear as a united interlocutor in the regime complex. Moreover, of the nine Major Groups of stakeholders recognised in Agenda 21, only local governments acquired a stable platform as observers in the governance of UN Habitat - through UNACLA. The organisations of cities that make up UNACLA bring together thousands of towns and cities in all the world regions.

It is also worth remembering that IGOs such as UN Habitat lack the legitimacy and means to impose sustainability standards and solutions on local governments. As the testimonies in chapter 3 show, UN Habitat relies on the distribution networks of city organisations to circulate its news, standards and research. In fact, city organisations do much more than collect and distribute information from UN Habitat. They launch their own advocacy campaigns at national and regional levels, issue joint statements on behalf of their members, produce white papers on emerging issues, and compile local experiments in their sphere of action. This produces a positive feedback loop with UN Habitat publications and activities, helping to generate solutions and consensus in the field of urban sustainability.

The attendance patterns of cities at WUFs show that there is no specific type of local government attending WUFs. There are no clear correlations in terms of geography, income or population with the constancy of cities' participation in these events. What can be observed is that regardless of the size of the city, local governments geographically close to the event show interest in attending and networking within this

community - see chapter 3, section 5. It is not anecdotal then that most testimonies pointed to the exchange of ideas and resources as a main reason for deciding to attend WUFs. This, together with the fact that most of the testimonies - with quite different profiles - came from cities that are members of city organisations, challenges the idea that local governments may be passive actors in the governance of urban sustainability.

2.4. Local Authorities as UN Habitat Intermediaries

In the previous sections I have discussed alternative explanations of the governance relationship between local governments and UN Habitat in the light of the results of the three empirical chapters. In this section I will do the same with the explanation of this relationship that I find most convincing: that local governments have played the role of intermediaries in UN Habitat's orchestration of the Habitat Agenda.

First, UN Habitat meets the orchestrating assumption requirement as an organisation with limited power and resources whose founding objective is to influence national governments. This influence has both internal and external aspects. Internally, UN Habitat needs to influence national governments in order to continue to exist and receive stable funding. Externally, UN Habitat needs to build consensus around urban issues - focusing primarily on sustainability - to inspire the international community to adopt common regulations and standards with minimal risks. For its first decades UN Habitat suffered in fulfilling this mission, as it was unable to exert this influence directly and the partnerships it initiated did not generate the consensus - or the funds - necessary to fulfil its foundational mission. These circumstances are explained in more detail in chapter 1. The fate of the IGO changed when it began to complement its regular governance activities with orchestration, and specifically, when it began to lean on local authorities as intermediaries in its governance strategy. As intermediaries,

local authorities were meant to provide examples of the Habitat Agenda implementation and rise urban sustainability issues to their national governments – see chapter 1, section 5. It was in this moment when UN Habitat campaigned, successfully, to become the UN agency on cities. The IGO used several orchestration techniques to enhance the leadership of willing local leaders through training, in order to make them better collaborators. It also enlisted the help of other intermediaries, such as parliamentarians, but with less visible success.

UN Habitat used considerable resources carrying out convening and agenda setting activities. The WUF became the principal of such activities, and the forums counted with the attendance and the support of local authorities. This support was material, ideological and also technical. In exchange, local authorities gained access to common standards and vocabulary to tackle the local consequences of transnational issues such as climate change. Also, local authorities were able to meet a high number of key stakeholders at these forums including funding organisations and national governments. This model was so successful that national governments began to replicate it organising national urban forums autonomously. Both the WUF and the National Urban Forums enabled local authorities to engage in urban sustainability debates and projects on their own terms, increasing the chances of benefiting their local populations and minimising backlash. Since the results of the WUFs were used to inspire the Habitat GC, this allowed UN Habitat management to show consistent metrics of success to the countries represented in the General Assembly and in the orbit of ECOSOC. Local governments, represented by UNACLA at Habitat GC, had the opportunity to participate as observers and interact with these international representatives - though always without the ability to vote or formally set agenda items.

The Habitat GC and WUF attendant documents show that it was not necessary for the local governments involved in these activities to be the same in order to achieve successful effects. As this was a global conversation, any example of Habitat Agenda implementation was useful in itself to show what kinds of projects and regulations could be supported by national governments. This fact helps to explain why WUFs continued to be perceived as useful and successful despite the considerable level of turnover among municipal assistants. What is more, this number game had a positive effect even among local governments themselves. As can be seen in the findings of chapter 3, the perception of success of the forums and the international community for sustainable urbanism was higher among attendees who had participated sporadically. Individuals with more experience with both the forums and UN Habitat were more sceptical. My reading of this is that their scepticism stemmed from a greater awareness of the weaknesses of IGOs and local governments themselves in the governance of these issues. And yet even they expressed these doubts in the form of acceptance of a lesser evil.

Overall, the voluntary and decentralised collaboration between UN Habitat and local governments has raised the profile of urban sustainability issues over the past two decades. The achievement of a specific sustainable development goal - SDG 11 - and of international partnerships to implement it in all cities of the world exemplifies the success of this governance strategy.

3. Reflections and Conclusions

The aim of this section is to make explicit what the overall findings of my doctoral dissertation are and how they contribute to the current state of the study of governance in the regime complex of urban sustainability. In this section I also include some

personal reflections on the implications these findings may have for the general understanding of governance dynamics in this field.

Probably my main contribution, has been the identification of local authorities as intermediaries in the global governance of urban sustainability. Previous studies on the international engagement of local authorities could not stablish whether local governments were leaders or recipients in global sustainability governance. My empirical contribution in this case has been to show that local authorities have agency and play and important role in the governance of urban sustainability. However, they do so as intermediaries and as such, it is not an issue that they engage inconsistently on international affairs – since their collective presence as catalysts for policy change in this regime complex has been sustained since mid-1990s.

This empirical contribution is linked to a methodological contribution: the use of orchestration theory to analyse the role of local governments in global governance. Previous studies of international stakeholders failed to explain why local authorities were gaining recognition in this policy area, setting them apart from other traditional stakeholders such as multinational companies and NGOs. This framework has allowed me to show that by using local authorities as intermediaries, IGOs, national governments and local authorities themselves are able to advance their bottom lines without having to agree on rigid frameworks for collaboration. Furthermore, the use of this framework has helped me to identify how by using local authorities as intermediaries helped UN Habitat to gain centrality within its regime complex, attracting support to its mission from countries and other IGOs operating in the orbit of ECOSOC. The involvement of local authority champions in Habitat GCs - such as Barcelona (Spain) and most local authorities attending the first WUF in 2002 –

strengthened the internal leadership of Habitat Executive Directors. In the last two decades, this allowed UN Habitat to attract more stable founding and become more efficient and influential. All things considering, the orchestration framework has been a more useful analytical tool than alternative governance frameworks such as delegation or cooperation.

Orchestration theory also allowed me to find coherence in ever changing motivations of local authorities to participate in international events. The lack of clear typologies of participant cities at the WUFs and their disparity in attendance (see Chapter 2) make more sense when considering that local authorities can advance both their immediate local agendas and their long-term sustainability needs by sporadically engaging at the WUFs. Accepting that local champions may change, while city-networks and IGOs keep and disseminate common vocabulary and standards, could be a valuable lesson for sustainability stakeholders.

WUFs became spaces for UN Habitat and their national government patrons to measure the mood of international stakeholders, and also a space for socialisation and resource exchange. Therefore, local authorities, and other types of stakeholders – e.g., NGOs, scholars, etc. – could take advantage of this knowledge to prioritise participating in workshops and networking activities instead of paying much attention to what is being said at their main events. Personally, I found interesting that municipal actors from all ideological tendencies found reasons to continue engaging in this policy area in almost the same percentages.

What is clear from my results is that theories about the substitution of the national state by local governments causing the emergence of "a modern version of the medieval city-state order" (Vaz and Reis, 2017: 17) do not correspond with reality. Local

authorities themselves, and IGOs, still recognise the primacy and the responsibility of national authorities in matters as apparently decentralised as urban sustainability. However, as I explained when addressing the concept of regime complexes, sustainability is a topic that conduces to conflictive if states attempted to regulate from a purely national perspective.

I argue that the results of my three chapters support my conclusion that local governments play a key role as intermediaries – i.e., catalysts - in the global governance of sustainability. This conclusion is valuable both for scholars interested in global urban governance, as well as for practitioners currently engaged in this field – e.g., city officials and consultants. I consider this classification contributes to the two predominant positions in the literature, showing that while local governments are not on the way to replacing national governments in a new global governance structure, their presence and international activity do have notable consequences. Even if local governments are individually inconsistent with these activities, there is a strength in their collective role experimenting and lobbying national governments.

The role of local governments as intermediaries for UN Habitat has influenced global governance in multiple ways. Some of these influences confirm previous research; others qualify the previous research or even challenge commonly accepted conception of the international dimension of local governments. I have already discussed some of these questions in the conclusions of the three chapters that make up the dissertation, but I would like these lines to reiterate and expand on some of them.

First, as I can see in Chapters 1 and 3, local governments becoming nodes for sustainability experimentation helped to anchor the Rio Model, i.e., decentralised experimentation supported by public-private partnerships. Private does not necessarily

mean profit-driven, but collaboration between state and non-state actors with several types of funding such as co-funding and external grants. According to the testimonies of participants in chapter 3, municipalities seek both material resources - e.g., technologies, funding - and other more subtle resources: publicity, casual discussions with external experts or common standards. These insights are consistent with previous findings in IR and urban policy literature.

As it has been thoroughly discussed through the dissertation local governments are inconsistent in their external actions. The proliferation of city networks and similar spaces serves in part to alleviate this inconsistency, allowing different departments in local governments to take the pulse of the global conversation in different areas and providing them with a stage through which they can act publicly when it suits them best. The patterns of participation in the WUFs analysed in chapters 2 and 3 show that most local governments participate openly in international governance spaces on ad hoc basis and are driven by their local needs. Even those local governments that participated in most WUFs did so following their own agendas, and with a limited degree of communication with UN Habitat.

Far from emerging as a threat or a replacement for the international order established by the United Nations, national governments seem to support the role of local governments as intermediaries. As I explain in Chapter 1 - Section 4.2 - it was Global North countries such as Sweden and Canada that put the issue of pollution and other human settlements problems on the international agenda. The G77/ China advocated that the urban issue remains on the international agenda without being absorbed into the purely environmental agenda, even when the IGO charged with urban issues did not have many successes to show for over two decades. The emergence of local

governments as stakeholders and examples of progress on the issue of urban sustainability was welcomed by national governments. Not only were they interested in rehabilitating UN Habitat, but the WUFs' reports for national government consumption became a regular part of Habitat Governing Council meetings. Moreover, since the first WUF in 2002, several countries have decided to replicate the model by supporting independently organised national urban forums. Chapter 2 shows that the level of national government participation in WUFs has remained consistently high, with high percentages of national government participation even when there was no local government from their nation attending the forum. Other national governments, as I report in chapter 3, even brought local government representatives as part of their national delegations to the forums. To conclude on this point, national governments were able to prevent local authorities from adopting a different role when they killed the World Charter of Local Self-Government without too much trouble during the globalisation process and the expansion of the power of cities.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, the results of chapters 2 and 3 showed that there was no clear typology of a city whose local government catered to the forums, and that urban sustainability did not seem to be clearly identified with an ideological project. It is worth recalling that the only geographical characteristic of relevance correlated with more active participation in WUFs was capital status - national or regional. Also, differences in frequency of participation between local representatives of progressive and conservative parties - or directly, non-democratic parties - were minimal. This could be partly explained by two factors identified in chapter 3: first, that local delegations were largely encouraged to participate by their own local needs; and second, that the agenda and vocabularies appeared to be broad enough to stimulate

conversation without being exclusionary. This last point is a frequent point of criticism when it comes to voluntary regulation and sustainability standards, and interviewees themselves expressed differing views on their usefulness.

Another contribution I made in my dissertation, also methodological in nature, has been to introduce institutional inertia from a historical perspective as an analytical tool. This helped me to explain changes that appeared to be random in the way actors interacted within the regime complex for sustainability. Most studies rely on the adoption of new frameworks, such as Habitat II, to indicate changes in how stakeholders interact with each other. However, I was able to identify other factors such as new leadership or the collapse of established operating procedures – i.e., a critical juncture – were necessary to trigger a real change. Also, it was important to identify how once the stability has been restored organisations may try to combine innovations with their old ways. For example, with UN Habitat still focusing heavily on raising non-earmarked funds through consultancy work.

It is important to remember that IGOs and the governments that support them are also actors that change, and whose inertias influence the extent to which new frameworks may alter the usual interactions with stakeholders. The primary sources show that UN Habitat's soft governance strategy, was hardly a conscious decision on the part of its leadership. Within the complex regime for sustainable development, most decisions are taken within a long chain of actions and reactions in which isolated events create ripple effects. Similarly, the results in chapter 2 and the interviews with local representatives in chapter 3 indicate that ever-changing domestic circumstances have a greater bearing on local governments' international decisions than these other structural factors. My results corroborate than in practice, some decisions or

approaches made under specific circumstances survive through the day-to-day life of the organisations and unintentionally affect their operational procedures.

These findings have implications for the research of other IGOs, and also for the evaluation of their effectiveness by political actors and advocacy groups. In my research, I often found that when ascribing reasons and identifying the strategies of organisations, these were treated mostly as atemporal and unitary entities – when in reality, there are multiple internal interplays that affect the evolution of their behaviour.

The final contribution I will include in this section concerns the international context in which soft and indirect government can take place effectively. In the conclusions of chapter 1 I have indicated the lack of complementary intermediaries as one of the factors that prevented UN Habitat to adopt orchestration early on. However, it is worth highlighting that the international willingness to collaborate around sustainability issues worsened towards the end of the Cold War. This can be clearly seen in the Habitat Governing Council reports of the late 1970s and 1980s, in which national representatives questioned the effectiveness of their investment in the IGO and used their speaking slots as platforms from which to make political statements on Cold War issues tangentially related to urban settlements. This politicking attitude also boycotted the Earth Summit of 1982 and contributed to UN Habitat ignoring the role of local authorities as potential partners despite the wave of local decentralisation and the incipient wealth and power of cities tied to globalisation.

Throughout my research I have faced multiple challenges and limitations. One of the biggest challenges I have had to face has been the lack of references from studies like mine. While the literature I have consulted in IR and urban studies is extensive and provides many coordinates for understanding municipalities as international actors and

their context, I have not found previous studies that take a similar approach to the one I have adopted. For example, my chapter 2 on local government participation in non-legislative governance spaces such as WUFs has been instrumental in detecting that there was no obvious international city profile, and in detecting many of what would become my research questions. However, the necessary descriptive burden of such papers makes them unattractive to most academic journals. This makes it rather challenging to find relevant examples and an adequate methodology to address this type of research.

To give an example, I was surprised by the fact that this dissertation may be the first archival study or UN Habitat. Despite its growing visibility and influence, to date, I have not been able to identify previous research on UN Habitat or the World Urban Forums. The occasional references to the IGO and the forum are strikingly brief and scarce. The UN Habitat itself has produced few publications tackling its own history and trajectory, always offering a rather sanitised and incomplete official account. Furthermore, the archival material on the IGO is scattered and difficult to access. Summaries of the Habitat GC can be found in UN repositories, although not always properly catalogued. Much of the reports and other documentation on WUFs can be found on websites that are no longer maintained or attached to press releases produced by third parties. Many of these documents are at risk of disappearing or becoming difficult to access in the future. Personally, it was interesting to discover through conversations with local representatives and even with IGO workers themselves - which I have decided not to include in this dissertation - that there is a general lack of knowledge about the intra-history and trajectory of the organisation.

In the case of the WUFs, issues such as high participation, the elevated level of turnover among participants, memory problems and even language barriers meant that I was only able to collect a limited - though representative - sample of experiences in the forums. Furthermore, I have had to leave out of my analyses some interesting aspects that were beyond the scope of my current dissertation. For example, I have left to explore other avenues where institutional inertia definitely plays a role in local government decision-making. In the interviews I was able to identify that the type of decentralisation created different local conditions and expectations relevant to international engagement. These factors may explain to some extent the notable absences of large Australian and US cities in WUFs. The results in Chapter 2 - Section 4.3 - seemed to indicate that federalism and the degree of decentralisation seemed uncorrelated with patterns of attendance at WUFs. However, I would argue that these results should be interrogated through the prism of multi-level governance and national political cultures. Another example of a path left unexplored is the role of city organisations in opening local authorities to international engagement. As the testimonies in chapter 3 suggest, most local governments maintain a degree of international involvement in sustainability governance through membership in city networks. It would have been interesting to explore if this factor prepared them to attend sporadically to international events.

To conclude, this research project has led me to realise that hard and direct governance of sustainability has never been a possibility for the international community. Moreover, I have seen how the emergence of local governments as champions in this field is not a challenge to international governance, but the activation of a mechanism to deal with complex global issues with potential redistributive effects. Interestingly,

this system of governance does not require conscious action by all actors involved but can work through the mainstreaming of agendas. Thus, barely connected actors seek to satisfy their own institutional objectives through commonly accepted vocabularies and standards.

However, my research has also helped me to understand that this system of soft and indirect governance comes with its own limitations. For instance, a loss of momentum or lack of successful experiments can seriously damage international interest in the area in which this model is being applied – i.e., urban sustainability in the case of UN Habitat. It is also significant that issues related to environmental sustainability - where investments and technological by-products are easier to imagine - have received more attention than other foundational issues of the urban agenda, such as land redistribution or the eradication of homelessness.

I would like to conclude with the idea that the governance system and participation tendencies I have described in my research reflect a climate of imperfect collaboration. In this system, international polarisation had not prevented collaboration on issues of funding and knowledge sharing in sustainable development. However, recent events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the end of February 2022 could mean a return to the attitudes and public performances of the 1980s in UN bodies. This could be a very unfortunate scenario for the governance of complex issues that despite not being at the core of the UN's functions impact billions of lives.

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