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## **City-to-City Cooperation and the Promise of a Democratic “Right to the City”**

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## Abstract

In this paper, I draw on the example of partnerships between Brazilian and Mozambican cities to critique attempts to democratise urban governance and development through city-to-city cooperation. As an expression of the notion of technical cooperation among developing countries, city-to-city cooperation in the global South has the potential to catalyse inclusive urban governance and development by exposing local authorities and communities to useful experiences, best practices and innovative ideas. However, I argue that the predominantly technocratic and depoliticised approach to city-to-city cooperation, reflected in the exchanges between Brazilian cities and their Mozambican counterparts, is incapable of inducing the kind of urban transformation inspired by Henri Lefebvre's notion of a right to the city. When city partnerships are designed and implemented in a manner that fails to challenge unequal power relations, the urban elite tend to use their position as gatekeepers of the institutional landscape of cities to determine which foreign ideas are localised and how, undermining the transformative potential of city-to-city cooperation. In worse cases, city-to-city cooperation can become a tool to reinforce the disenfranchisement of marginalised urban communities. I conclude the paper by making the case for repoliticizing city-to-city cooperation in the global South in order to unlock its transformative capacity.

## Keywords

Right to the city; city-to-city cooperation; South-South cooperation; decentralised cooperation; inclusive urban development

## Bio

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## Introduction

The challenges associated with rising urbanisation in Africa, and elsewhere in the developing world, have brought renewed attention to the way cities and other urban areas are governed. In particular, against the backdrop of the neoliberal restructuring of global capitalism and its adverse impacts on urban politics and development, there have been growing concerns about the erosion of democracy in cities, with many academics and social activists calling for new forms of urban governance that allow urban residents to reclaim control over the decisions that shape the city. It is in this context that the idea of the “right to the city”, coined in the 1960s by French philosopher and sociologist, Henri Lefebvre, has been resuscitated and given prominence in the works of academics and social activists. Initially introduced by Lefebvre to challenge the exclusion and disempowerment inherent in functionalist urban planning, the right to the city is invoked today as a democratic response to the urban manifestations of neoliberal globalisation. In recent decades, the notion of the right to the city has not only inspired social movement struggles in cities across the world, but has also gained traction with UN agencies that promote inclusive urban governance such as UN-Habitat and UNESCO. However, it is in Brazil that the idea has taken on concrete institutional form with the adoption in 2001 of the City Statute, which enjoins federal, state, and local governments to promote social justice and the democratic management of the country’s cities. As detailed in subsequent sections of this paper, the implementation of this legislation has produced mixed results. However, against the backdrop of the contemporary discourse on South-South cooperation, many Brazilian cities have been at the forefront of efforts to transform urban governance processes in other developing countries, notably in Africa, based on their own experiences with institutionalising and implementing the idea of a democratic right to the city.

This article analyses the contribution of Brazilian cities to efforts aimed at institutionalising and implementing the “right to the city” and enhancing democratic local governance in Mozambique through city-to-city cooperation. It departs from the premise that city-to-city cooperation has the potential to improve urban governance and development by exposing local authorities and communities to useful experiences, best practices and innovative ideas. However, I argue that the ability of city-to-city cooperation to enhance urban democracy and inclusive development in a manner that gives expression to the idea of the “right to the city” has been undermined by its predominantly technocratic and depoliticised approach. This has enabled the urban elite to thwart the transformative potential of city-to-city cooperation, by using their position as gatekeepers of the institutional landscape of cities to determine which foreign ideas are localised and how.

The argument is developed in five sections. I start by reviewing the neoliberal dynamics that breed urban inequality and exclusion, and which have given rise to advocacy for the right to the city. I then examine the Brazilian experience in implementing the right to the city, before discussing attempts to export this experience to Mozambique through city-to-city cooperation. The fourth part is dedicated to a critique of city-to-city cooperation as a tool for promoting inclusive development. I conclude the paper by making the case for repoliticizing city-to-city cooperation in the global South in order to unlock its transformative capacity.

## Neoliberal Urbanism, Disenfranchisement, and the Right to the City

Cities around the world find themselves at the coalface of the current restructuring of global capitalism. Not only do they constitute the strategic nodes of an increasingly networked global economy, but as scholars such as Simon Curtis (2011, 1927) and Saskia Sassen (2005, 27-31) have observed, they have also become sites where many of the contradictory processes of neoliberal globalisation assume concrete and localised forms. More importantly, the prominence of cities in the current phase of global capitalism has been accompanied by far-reaching changes in the way these urban areas are governed, with significant implications for democracy and enfranchisement in cities. Mark Purcell (2002) has identified three ways in which governance is being reconfigured in deference to the dictates of neoliberal capitalism. Firstly, governance is being rescaled to allow new supra-national institutions and sub-national governments to assume more powers and responsibilities alongside nation-states. Secondly, as cities have become relatively autonomous entities that are connected more to the global economy than their national economies, the policy orientation of city governments has also shifted from demand-oriented redistribution towards promoting the economic competitiveness of their localities. Thirdly, in a bid to enhance their competitiveness in a global economy, cities have embraced a corporate governance ethos that prioritises efficiency over all other considerations, and many have resorted to outsourcing some of their functions and powers to quasi-state and non-state entities that are “not directly accountable to the local electorate and conventional democratic control”. Thus, out of all these changes have emerged new forms of urban governance that are largely undemocratic and “exclude local inhabitants from the decisions that shape their cities” (Purcell 2002, 100-101).

In response to the neoliberal disenfranchisement of a large segment of the contemporary urban population, many scholars and social activists have invoked Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city to advocate for more inclusive forms of urban existence and greater democratic governance in the city. The right to the city was originally advocated by Lefebvre as a critique to modernist conceptions of the city as a technical object that must be planned and built by technocrats with objectivity and scientific accuracy. Lefebvre argued that “the city was not a backdrop but a space produced ideologically and politically, and a medium for strategies and struggles” (Morange and Spire 2015). In this regard, he criticised the functionalist approach to urban planning, which while pursuing the ideal of an orderly and efficient city, was accompanied by the eviction of the working classes from the inner city, and the stifling of the autonomous social practices through which city-dwellers took part in the production of urban spaces (Morange and Spire 2015). The Lefebvrian right to the city is, therefore, a call for the radical transformation of “the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants” (Purcell 2002, 101-102).

Somewhat different from its original and radical conception, the right to the city is deployed today mainly as a progressive response to the urban manifestations of neoliberal capitalism, which, as pointed out above, has brought about the democratic disenfranchisement of urban residents, excluding the vast majority of the urban population from the making of decisions that shape the city. It advocates for enhanced urban democracy to redress traditional and elitist forms of urban governance, which create cities that prioritise the interests of business and the wealthy class while generating urban poverty, socio-spatial exclusion, gentrification, and environmental degradation (Morange and Spire 2015; Attoh 2011, 674-675). However, some scholars have cautioned against embracing the notion of the right to the city as a panacea to the problem of

neoliberal disenfranchisement in the city. In particular, attention has been drawn to the challenge of putting into practice the right to the city given the contradictions and tensions inherent in the idea. For example, Kafui Attoh (2011) has argued that because rights are understood differently by different groups in society, instituting the right to the city may come at the expense of other equally important rights. This is bound to generate political conflict, which may only be resolved through negotiations and trade-offs. Purcell (2002) makes a similar case, arguing that rather than offer a precise and more progressive alternative to neoliberal urbanism and its undemocratic structures, Lefebvre's right to the city only opens up the possibilities of a new "urban politics of the inhabitant", the outcomes of which cannot be known *a priori*. As a catalyst for a new political struggle, the right to the city may give rise to either greater urban democracy or new forms of political domination.

## Implementing the Right to the City: The Brazilian Experiment

Brazil presents a unique case where the idea of the right to the city has been translated into binding legislation, and could therefore be seen as a socio-political laboratory that holds significant insights into the practical challenges associated with the implementation of the right to the city. Brazil went through a process of rapid urbanisation in the 1900s, becoming one of the most urbanised developing countries by the end of the twentieth century. In 2015, 85.7 percent of Brazil's total population of just under 208 million people were living in urban areas. In the words of Leonardo Avritzer (2010, 153), during this period "Brazilian cities grew in an unfair, disorderly and illegal way". With the exclusion of the poor from urban planning and development processes in major Brazilian cities such as São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre, the illegal occupation of state land by the homeless and the proliferation of slums, the so-called favelas, became two key features of urbanisation in the Brazilian context. These conditions would subsequently give rise to social movements of mainly neighbourhood associations and favela residents, which advocated for access to better housing and the legalisation of occupied state land (Avritzer 2010, 153; Friendly 2013).

However, it was Brazil's transition from military dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s that inspired the emergence of a national urban reform movement, which was at the forefront of efforts to legalise and institutionalise the right to the city. The National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU), today the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNUR), was established in 1982 as a coalition of diverse social actors, including popular movements, neighbourhood associations, NGOs, professional groups, and trade unions. Its activism during Brazil's constitution-making process, from 1987-1988, succeeded in enshrining the fundamental principles of the right to the city in the 1988 Constitution (Friendly 2013, 161-162; Avritzer 2010, 156-158). Articles 182 and 183 of the Constitution recognises the social function of urban property, and makes provision for the legalisation of the illegal occupation of urban land by the homeless poor (Federative Republic of Brazil 1988). Against the backdrop of a protracted legislative process characterised by lobbying, political horse-trading, and even legal battles, the constitutional principles on urban reform policy were elaborated in a federal law, the Statute of the City, that was adopted in the Brazilian Congress in 2001.

As a legal embodiment of the right to the city principle, the Statute of the City enjoins and enhances the capacity of Brazil's federal, state and local governments to promote the social function of cities and urban property, as well as the democratic management of cities, with a

view to realising the collective interests of all urban inhabitants. Among the innovative instruments designed to foster social justice in the production and use of urban space, the Statute empowers local governments to progressively raise taxes on undeveloped urban land belonging to private property developers, and even expropriate unused urban buildings. These, and a related tool that authorises local administrations to raise revenue for social projects by taxing certain categories of private property development, are intended to discourage land and real estate speculation while redistributing the costs and benefits of urban development. Additionally, the Statute of the City makes provision for city governments to protect poor communities from being evicted from urban land they occupy; formalise favelas; and legalise, under certain conditions, the illegal occupation of urban land by the poor. With regard to the democratic management of cities, the Statute mandates the effective participation of urban residents and their associations in all significant decision-making processes of city governments, and institutes a set of mechanisms through which this should be realised. These include participation in the formulation of compulsory master plans for cities with a population of 200,000 inhabitants or more, public hearings, municipal conferences, and participatory budgeting (Friendly 2013, 164-166).

The implementation of the principles and provisions contained in Brazil's Constitution and Statute of the City has produced mixed results. On the one hand, this new legal order has allowed some Brazilian cities to experiment with progressive strategies for democratising urban governance and development, such as the innovative participatory budgeting process pioneered by Porto Alegre in the 1990s, resulting in improved access to housing and other social services for the urban poor (Friendly 2013, 162; Avritzer 2010, 154). In such cities, exemplified by Porto Alegre, the dominance of left-wing political parties and a strong tradition of grassroots social activism, have been key contributing factors to the relatively successful implementation of the democratic ideals embodied in the Constitution and City Statute.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, against the backdrop of Brazil's neoliberal turn in the 1990s, the urban reform initiatives inspired by the right to the city have faced significant resistance and backlash from conservative segments of society, to the extent that "[i]mportant local elections have been lost, ground-breaking programmes have been discontinued, forced eviction has taken place in some cases, and bills of law altering the City Statute have been proposed" (Fernandes 2007, 218; Larmaca 2011). In cities like São Paulo and Salvador where property interests are well organised and conservative and right-wing political parties have had a stronghold on local government, the implementation of the Statute has been particularly prone to conflict (Avritzer 2010, 162-168).

Notwithstanding these setbacks, Brazil's experimentation with the idea of a right to the city has attracted significant international attention, as it is seen to provide a useful model of democratic urban planning and management. Not surprisingly, against the backdrop of President Lula's foreign policy commitment to promote South-South solidarity, there have been a number of initiatives to leverage the Brazilian experience, through city-to-city cooperation, to inspire democratic governance and inclusive development in other cities across the developing world. We will now proceed to analyse the dynamics of these learning initiatives and explore their

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, the legalisation and institutionalisation of the right to the city in Brazil owes much to the strong activism and resilience of local and national civil society, as well as the improved political fortunes of the Workers' Party (PT), which took over the reins of the federal government in 2003. Not only did PT parliamentarians serve as allies of the MNRU in the Brazilian Congress, but once in power, President Lula da Silva established a Ministry of Cities, with a mandate to assist municipalities to implement the provisions of the Statute of the City. For more on this, see Avritzer (2010).

potential to institutionalise the right to the city, drawing on the case of cooperation between Brazilian cities and their Mozambican counterparts.

## City-to-city cooperation and the right to the city: Exporting the Brazilian experience to Mozambique

Brazil's relatively successful urban reform process coincided with a period of renewed belief in the benefits of South-South cooperation, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has evolved to include exchanges between an array of sub-state and non-state actors including city and other local governments. City-to-city development cooperation in this context, therefore, embodies the key principles and features of South-South cooperation, including the primacy of autonomous local development, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, and a strong statist approach to cooperation.

Partnerships between Brazilian and Mozambican cities for enhancing the democratic rights of urban residents have been driven by four key factors. The first driver is the aspiration of Brazilian cities for global recognition and influence. Major Brazilian cities such as Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Porto Alegre have used place-branding strategies to project a positive image of, and position, themselves favourably in a global economy that is also increasingly being organised around the productivity of cities and other urban areas. In this context, many Brazilian cities have taken interest in sharing their innovative urban policies and practices with their counterparts in Mozambique and the rest of the developing world, as a way of building a positive global reputation and developing networks of influence. City-to-city cooperation in this context has also afforded Brazilian cities, especially those governed by anti-neoliberal parties such as the left-wing Workers' Party, the opportunity to legitimise their pioneering urban policies and build a transnational network that is capable of influencing global policy discourses in favour of pro-poor and pro-democracy approaches to urban governance and development (Nganje 2016, 665).

A second driver of cooperation between Brazilian and Mozambican cities was Brazil's foreign policy during the presidency of Lula da Silva from 2003 to 2011. With its focus on strengthening South-South cooperation as a strategy to project Brazil's influence globally and challenge the neoliberal hegemony of the West, Lula's foreign policy created sufficient space for city governments, especially those governed by the Workers' Party, to assume a proactive role in international relations. Salomon argues that during this time, the attitude of the federal government towards the international activities of Brazilian states and cities shifted from mere acceptance to actually incorporating them into its own foreign policy strategies, especially in the domain of development cooperation (Salomon 2011, 60-61). Against the backdrop of the central role played by the Workers' Party in championing Brazil's pro-poor and pro-democracy urban reform process, Lula's administration would actively encourage Brazilian cities to disseminate their experience in institutionalising the right to city to Africa and other developing countries.

To this end, Brazil partnered with the French government in 2011 to establish a programme on trilateral city-to-city cooperation, which allowed French and Brazilian cities to jointly provide technical assistance to their counterparts in Haiti and Africa. Among the projects that have been supported under this framework is the trilateral cooperation initiative involving the Brazilian city of Guarulhos, its French counterpart of Seine-Saint-Denis, and the Mozambican cities of



Maputo and Matola (Leite et al. 2014, 52). This project built on existing sister-city partnerships between Maputo and Guarulhos on the one hand, and Matola and Seine-Saint-Denis on the other hand, and provided resources and institutional support, which enabled the Mozambican cities to learn from the experience of their Brazilian and French counterparts in sustainable and inclusive urban waste management.<sup>2</sup> In February 2012, the Brazilian government launched another programme on decentralized South-South technical cooperation, through which the country's state and municipal governments received financial and technical support from Brazil's development cooperation agency to share successful public policies with their counterparts in other developing countries. Under this programme, the Brazilian city of Vitoria has shared its participatory urban planning techniques and its agricultural development technologies with the city of Xai Xai in Mozambique (Leite et al. 2014, 52).

The third driver of cooperation between Brazilian and Mozambican cities is related to the role of western donors, multilateral development organisations, and city networks. Organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN-Habitat, and Cities Alliance played a major role in supporting Brazil's progressive urban reform process in the 1990s and early 2000s. Not surprisingly, these organizations have championed initiatives intended to transfer lessons and best practices from this experience to other developing countries, including through South-South knowledge exchanges between cities. Notable examples of cooperation between Brazilian and Mozambican cities promoted by international organisations include an initiative undertaken under the auspices of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. This project created a framework for the Brazilian cities of Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, as well as Durban in South Africa, to share their experiences and insights into managing informal inner-city trading with Maputo and other Mozambican cities. This knowledge exchange initiative and its potential contribution to instituting the right to the city for all urban residents in Maputo is elaborated below. Another example of a city-to-city cooperation initiative sponsored by an international organisation is the technical exchange programme between Maputo and the Brazilian state of Paraná and its associated cities. Supported by the World Bank, this initiative sought to improve the Mozambican capital city's capacity to collect property taxes and raise revenue for the enhanced delivery of municipal services (Nganje 2016, 666-667).

A fourth major driver of cooperation between Brazilian and Mozambican cities has been their active membership of the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG), a global network of local and regional governments. Among other activities, the UCLG promotes mutual learning and cooperation among its members with a view to overcoming common urban challenges and promoting solidarity. Since 2005, the network has encouraged and supported learning exchanges and mentorships between cities in Mozambique and Brazil as part of a decentralised cooperation programme that seeks to leverage the benefits of South-South cooperation to enhance urban management policies and practices in the developing world. The first phase of this programme, code-named City Future project, was funded by the Norwegian government and Cities Alliance, and brought together eight cities from Mozambique and six from Brazil into a loose collaborative framework that allowed the latter to share their experiences and best practices on urban management and development with their Mozambican counterparts (UCLG 2013; UCLG 2014). The second phase of the programme was launched in January 2013 and

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<sup>2</sup> Personal conversations with official in the international relations directorate of the Maputo city council, October 2014 and April 2015.

ended in June 2015. Building on the initial City Future project, this phase of the programme adopted a rather ambitious goal of democratising the participating cities in line with the concept of a right to the city. In the words of the UCLG, “the project’s aim was to improve the management of local development in terms of effective governance, sustainability and participation to extend the population’s right to the city” (UCLG 2015). As the table below suggests, the areas chosen for this city-to-city cooperation mirrored the democratic imperative at the heart of the project.

Table 1: UCLG’s Brazil-Mozambique city-to-city partnerships to democratise the city

<b>Brazilian city</b>	<b>Mozambican partner</b>	<b>Area of cooperation</b>
Canoas	Matola	Participatory budgeting
Belo Horizonte	Maputo	Management of informal settlement
Porto Alegre	Inhambane	Participatory budgeting, urban management
Guarulhos	Dondo	Participatory budgeting and social participation
Guarulhos	Nampula	Urban planning and inclusive cadastre
Vitoria	Xai-Xai	Urban planning
Maringa	Lichinga and Manhica	Inclusive cadastre

*Source: author’s construction based on UCLG project report 2015*

According to a post-project report produced by the UCLG, the exchanges between Brazilian cities and their Mozambican counterparts “effectively fulfilled the [promise] of contributing to the strengthening of municipal capacities” (UCLG 2015, 63). In particular, the report underscored the contribution of the project in empowering Mozambican city officials with the knowledge and capacity to use inclusive cadastres to improve the use and management of urban land, develop urban plans through participatory processes, as well as design and implement effective participatory budgeting mechanisms. More importantly, the report argued that by adopting a methodology that involved both technical experts and the political leadership of cities, the city-to-city exchanges “allowed local leaders to follow innovative routes and make direct commitments to their citizens” in terms of governing and developing the cities through democratic, participatory, and inclusive processes. The only challenge that was foreseen in securing the gains in democratic local governance and inclusive urban planning resulting from city partnerships was the sustainability of learning exchanges once the resources and institutional support associated with the project were withdrawn (UCLG 2015, 57-61).

However, I argue in the next section that the difficulty in institutionalising the democratic right to the city through city-to-city exchanges is more fundamental than the uncertainty of financial resources or institutional commitment to sustain cooperation between cities. The major weakness of city-to-city cooperation as a tool for delivering on the promise of enhanced local democracy and inclusive processes of urban development is the inability of the mechanism to influence power relations in Mozambican cities in favour of marginalised poor urban residents. City-to-city cooperation in this context has generally assumed a rather technocratic and depoliticised approach to urban reform, which also fails to take into account the politically contested nature of the process to institutionalise the right to the city in Brazil.

## The limits of city-to-city cooperation as a tool for democratic urban reform

The introduction of local government in Mozambique in the 1990s was championed by Western donors and development agencies as a tool to foster both democratisation and socio-economic development, especially in urban areas such as Maputo, which were struggling to cope with a population explosion amid an economic crisis (Ginisty and Vivet 2012). However, the creation of, and the devolution of power to, democratic local authorities has for the most part failed to engender inclusive development and participatory governance in Mozambique's rapidly urbanising cities. As the capital and largest city of Mozambique, Maputo embodies most of the challenges that have undermined Mozambique's experimentation with democratic local governance. In addition to the weak financial and technical capacity of the municipal government, the embrace of neoliberal economic policies in the city has privileged urban management practices that have benefited mainly the economic and political elites. The majority of the urban population has been excluded from formal housing and land use, and without access to basic social services in the city (Jenkins 2000, 137-152). Moreover, as Ginisty and Vivet (2012) have argued, the decentralised structure of governance that was designed to promote participatory local democracy and give urban residents a voice in the management of the city has largely been reduced to a tool for entrenching the hegemony of the ruling Frelimo party, and its system of patronage and corruption in Maputo (see also Maschietto 2016, 103-123).

It is in this context that the Maputo city council, under the political leadership of a relatively progressive mayor, Eneas Comiche (2003-2008), and encouraged by Western donors and city networks such as the UCLG and Cities Alliance, turned to Brazil for lessons and ideas on alternative and more inclusive forms of urban management and development. Presently, Maputo has sister-city partnerships or has engaged in technical cooperation with a number of metropolitan and intermediary cities from Brazil, including Rio de Janeiro, Guarulhos, Porto Alegre, and Belo Horizonte. It also has a partnership on technical cooperation with the Brazilian federated state of Paraná. As was the case with other Mozambican cities, Maputo's "Look South" policy in its city-to-city cooperation was motivated by a desire to replicate Brazil's urban reform "miracle" in the Mozambican capital city, with the promise of extending the democratic right of the city's marginalised poor population to produce, use and participate in the management of urban space.

Turning this noble vision into an urban reality, however, has proven to be a challenge for Maputo city officials and their international sponsors, owing primarily to socio-political differences in the Brazilian and Mozambican contexts, and the failure of the design of city-to-city cooperation mechanisms to reflect these disparities. As detailed above, the institution of the right to the city as a legal principle in Brazil, and its relatively successful implementation in a number of Brazilian cities resulted from the convergence of favourable socio-political dynamics, most notably Brazil's strong culture of grassroots social activism and the influence of the anti-neoliberal Workers' Party in Brazilian politics at the time. The combined strength of these two forces did not only contribute to diluting the traditional liberal politico-legal order that had for centuries bred marginalisation and poverty in Brazilian cities, but has since the adoption of the City Statute in 2001 also provided a formidable bulwark against the onslaught of

neoliberal and conservative constituencies that have sought to reverse the gains in democratic urban reform.

The Mozambican context lacks both of these key determining factors for democratic urban reform. Although cities like Maputo have seen the emergence of grassroots associations of marginalised and poor urban residents, these remain weak and have been unable to effectively defend and promote their respective interests, let alone constitute the nucleus of a broad urban reform movement. What is more, with the advent of political and economic liberalisation in Mozambique, the ruling Frelimo party, which has also governed the city of Maputo since 1998, has been reduced to a vehicle for protecting the interests of the elite, through a system of clientelism and corruption (Sumich 2008, 111-125). In such a society where political and economic power is wielded by a highly conservative and elitist class, and the mobilising ability of civil society remains weak, the contribution of city-to-city cooperation to institutionalising a transformative urban agenda that embodies the idea of a right to the city has been limited. As gatekeepers of the institutional landscape of the city, the local elite have determined which ideas and best practices derived from city-to-city cooperation are localised and how this is carried out. Needless to say, ideas and practices that are perceived to threaten the power and interests of the elite have been fiercely resisted.

The ability of Maputo's political and economic elite to undermine the transformative agenda of city-to-city cooperation is reinforced by the rather depoliticised nature of the process through which lessons and tools from Brazil's democratic urban reform experience have been transferred to the Mozambican context. City-to-city cooperation between Maputo and its Brazilian counterparts has been a predominantly technocratic exercise, which focuses on broadening the knowledge, awareness and expertise of municipal officials, without challenging the political dynamics that reproduce poverty, inequality and exclusion in the city. Admittedly, Maputo's knowledge exchange and capacity building initiatives have had the backing of the city's top leadership, and in some instances have actually been championed by reform-minded mayors. However, without incorporating an element that seeks to empower marginalised urban communities and groups to better mobilise and challenge existing power relations as was the case in Brazil, city-to-city cooperation has achieved little more than improve the technical and administrative capacity of the city government. The goal of democratising the city and broadening the right of all residents to produce and use urban space has largely remained a pipe dream. In what follows, I draw on three examples of Maputo's city-to-city cooperation with its Brazilian partners to illustrate this argument.

### Promoting the right to trade in the inner-city

In 2012, the UCLG and the ILO initiated a city-to-city cooperation project involving the city of Maputo, the Brazilian cities of Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre, and the South African city of Durban. As Kamete and Lindell (2010, 889-912) documented, Maputo has since the 1980s struggled to reconcile the aspirations of the local elite to create and project a modern city image with the rapidly increasing informal trading activities of the urban poor. The initiative thus aimed to assist Maputo to develop a more inclusive approach to managing the use of its inner-city space by drawing on the experiences of the Brazilian and South African cities. The latter have earned a reputation for experimenting with urban planning policies and practices that recognise and seek to protect the right of street vendors to use the inner-city space as a source of livelihood. As a number of scholars have observed, even in the context of relatively progressive

urban management policies, upholding the right to the city of street vendors in Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, and Durban has been a constant struggle. These efforts have pitted informal traders on the one hand, and private property interests and conservative elements of society on the other hand (see, for example, Carrieri and Murta 2011, 217-225; Alcantara et al. 2014, 81-84; Salej 2010, 16; Skinner 2009, 101-109).

The Maputo mentoring and learning exercise made use of collaborative exchanges and reflective workshops, including site visits to informal markets in the Maputo city centre, to explore ways in which the experiences of participating Brazilian and South African cities in promoting the inclusive use of the inner-city space could be adapted to the local context in Maputo. A key outcome of the exercise was a change in attitude on the part of municipal officials in Maputo, who came to acknowledge the right of street vendors to use the inner-city space for their livelihood. Among other changes, this required the city to reconsider and possibly end its practice of arbitrarily evicting street vendors from the city centre and relocating them to sections of the city which were not economically viable, thereby compromising the livelihoods of informal traders. It also put an obligation on the authorities to consult and collaborate with street vendors and other stakeholders in making decisions on the use of the inner-city space (UCLG 2012).

Implementing these best practices has, however, proven to be difficult in the context of Maputo where, as Kamete and Lindell (2010, 902) note, the local political and economic elite are traditionally opposed to the idea of street vending in the city centre, and the approach of local authorities has been to restrict these activities. The tension between the right to city space and welfare of street vendors, and the interests of the local elite has determined the extent to which the progressive ideas emanating from the city-to-city learning exchange have influenced Maputo's attitude towards street vendors.<sup>3</sup> In the context of the weak mobilising power of street vendors, the preferences and interests of the local elite have generally trumped the right of the former to use the inner-city space to secure their livelihood. A draft municipal policy proposed by city officials and which would have institutionalised the lessons and best practices derived from the city-to-city exchange was rejected by the Maputo Municipal Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

### The struggle to institute participatory budgeting in Maputo

The political dynamics around early attempts to implement the idea of participatory budgeting in Maputo also illustrates the limitations of city-to-city cooperation as a mechanism for institutionalising the democratic right to the city. In 2003, the then mayor of Maputo, Eneas Comiche, launched a process of introducing participatory budgeting to the city's planning processes based on the experience of Porto Alegre in Brazil. In addition to deploying two municipal employees to intern in Porto Alegre, Comiche himself visited the Brazilian city to personally appreciate its participatory budgeting processes (Nylén 2014, 28). Moreover, at the invitation of the mayor of Porto Alegre, a group of technical experts from Maputo visited Porto Alegre in 2006 to learn more about participatory budgeting processes (Carolini 2015, 276).

Following these city-to-city exchanges, and with the support of the World Bank Institute, UH-Habitat and Cities Alliance, Maputo adopted a model of participatory budgeting that gave

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation with officials of the Maputo City Council, Maputo, 7 October 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with officials of the Maputo City Council, Maputo, 7 October 2014.

expression to the idea that all urban residents have a right to actively participate in the management of their city. The Brazilian-inspired model of participatory budgeting allowed residents in Maputo's 63 neighbourhoods and seven districts to deliberate and identify priority public works projects that the city council would invest in. Approximately 15 percent of the city's investment budget was dedicated to projects emanating from this process (Nylen 2014, 2-10, 28-29, 52).

However, in the absence of a dedicated grassroots civil society movement and a governing party committed to participatory local democracy, as was the case in Porto Alegre, Maputo's experimentation with the Brazilian model of participatory budgeting struggled to take root in the city. On the one hand, anti-reform elements within the ruling Frelimo party adamantly opposed any process that would challenge the entrenched system of patronage through which the city was managed. On the other hand, because of the conflation of Frelimo and local government structures in Maputo, participatory budgeting turned out to be "an instrument of partisan mobilisation or manipulation rather than empowerment or oversight" (Nylen 2014, 18). In the end, the Brazilian model of participatory budgeting, infused with the radical democratic idea of a right to the city, was abandoned in favour of a so-called community development version of participatory budgeting, which was championed by the World Bank, and accommodates the system of clientelism in Maputo (Nylen 2014, 59-63).

### Securing the right of "catadores" to earn a living through an inclusive solid waste management system

Maputo's technical cooperation with the Brazilian city of Guarulhos on solid waste management also highlights the difficulty in promoting democratic urban reform through a predominantly technocratic approach to city-to-city cooperation. Guarulhos, like many other Brazilian cities, is reputed for its integrated and participative approach to solid waste management, which hinges on collaboration between the municipality and waste recycling cooperatives. More importantly, consistent with the right to the city principle, Guarulhos' approach to solid waste management recognises and actively promotes waste picking as a source of livelihood for the urban poor. Since 2011, and with partial support from the decentralised cooperation programme sponsored by the Brazilian and French governments, Maputo and Guarulhos have engaged in a series of technical exchanges with the aim of giving the Mozambican city the opportunity to learn from Guarulhos' experience in integrating waste pickers (*catadores*) into the city's solid waste management system.

However, efforts to transform Maputo's solid waste management system into an inclusive and participatory enterprise that secures the livelihood of *catadores* have largely been stymied by the fact that the latter are marginalised in the Mozambican society. According to officials directly involved in the technical exchange with Guarulhos, part of the challenge in localising the Brazilian model of waste management in Maputo lies in the enduring negative attitude of local communities and authorities towards *catadores* and their activities. *Catadores* are generally stigmatized as criminals, outcasts or failures, and although the municipality's attitude towards them is believed to have improved over the years as a result of the exposure to Brazil's urban reform experience, there is still significant resistance to their official recognition and incorporation into Maputo's solid waste management system (Allen and Jossias 2011, 9-10).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Information in this section was obtained partly from personal conversations with officials in of the Maputo city council, October 2014, April 2015, and January 2016.

As Allen and Jossias (2011, 11-12) have correctly argued, the continued marginalization of *catadores* in Maputo is reinforced by the fact that this constituency is not fully conscious of its potential, and that it has had limited exposure to the experiences of their peers in other countries, including, for example, “the achievements of the *catadores* in Brazil in obtaining legal recognition and rights and self-respect...” This perspective brings into sharp relief the shortcomings inherent in promoting democratic urban reform through a predominantly technocratic approach to city-to-city cooperation. Arguably, a more holistic approach to the cooperation between Maputo and Guarulhos, which, in addition to exchanges between municipal officials and technicians, also made provision for networking between *catadores* and other civil society actors from both cities, would have a much greater impact on the transformation of solid waste management practices in Maputo, by empowering *catadores* to assert their right to earn a living from the city’s landfills.

## Conclusion: bringing back politics to city-to-city cooperation

The combination of rapid urbanisation and neoliberal capitalism has turned modern cities into new sites of political contestation, as different constituencies in the city assert their right to produce and use urban space, in pursuit of diverse interests and aspirations. In the developing world, Brazil stands out as a country where a radical democratic constituency, inspired by Henri Lefebvre’s idea of a right to the city, was able to secure major urban reforms in favour of impoverished and disenfranchised city residents. Despite the increasingly fragile nature of Brazil’s experiment on democratic urban reform, it has inspired similar efforts in Africa and other developing countries. In this article, I have used the example of partnerships between Brazilian and Mozambican cities to critique attempts to democratise urban governance and development through city-to-city cooperation. I have argued that a narrow and technocratic approach to city-to-city cooperation, reflected in the exchanges between Brazilian cities and their Mozambican counterparts, is incapable of inducing the kind of democratic reform that the right to the city demands. As was the case in Brazil, this requires significant redistribution of power in the local political society. Without aiming to transform urban power relations, city-to-city cooperation can at best improve the capacity of local authorities to plan and deliver social services in an inclusive and efficient manner. At worst, it can serve to reinforce the disenfranchisement of marginalised urban communities.

What is required therefore is a re-conception of city-to-city partnerships, not as neutral technical exchanges, but as inherently political tools that can either reinforce unequal power relations in cities, or be fashioned into catalysts for inclusive urban transformation. Against the backdrop of the discourse to undo the inequalities that have become pervasive in urban spaces, the challenge then is to design these partnerships in a manner that is sensitive to their implications for the distribution of power among stakeholders in the city. One way to do it is to democratise this aspect of urban governance by incorporating exchanges between a cross section of relevant stakeholders into the design of city-to-city partnerships. This would ensure that key social groups with a stake in a particular urban issue are actively involved in the transnational linkages that shape the governance of this issue. The implications of such an inclusive design for the fight against inequality and exclusion in the city are two-fold. First, by broadening the actors involved in city-to-city cooperation and embedding these exchanges in the social dynamics in the city, these exchanges are transformed into a site for renegotiating power relations in the city

rather than just reinforce them. Second, an inclusive approach to city-to-city cooperation would afford marginalised urban groups the opportunity to network with, and draw inspiration from, their peers in other countries, with the potential for effective social activism.

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