LINKING UN-HABITAT AND UNIVERSITIES

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIPS

UN@HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne Centre
for Cities

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A REVIEW BY THE MELBOURNE CENTRE FOR CITIES
FOR UN-HABITAT'S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING UNIT

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Information and data are pervasive aspects of the way in which we manage cities and how billions of urban dwellers go about their everyday lives. Knowledge-intensive partnerships are critical for urban development worldwide. UN-Habitat has recognised this seeking to position itself as "centre of excellence and innovation" and "a thought leader" in sustainable urbanization. Engagement with one of the prime knowledge industries, *academia*, is well recognised as central to this mission. UN-Habitat has collaborated, experimented, and engaged with university partnerships across a vast array of programs. Yet, this variety has to date lacked clear and systematic identification as to its modalities, challenges, and possibilities. This is where this report comes in, gathering evidence with the explicit task to provide UN-Habitat with **an assessment of both challenges and opportunities to strengthen university partnerships**. This report also takes a deeper dive in one such formal and explicitly university-focused initiative, that of **Habitat UNI**, as UN-Habitat's "main mechanism for partnerships with academia", seeking to input explicitly into its direction.

REPORT OUTLINE

This report includes several sections aimed at unpacking university partnerships from UN-Habitat's point of view. First, we provide a summary review of Habitat UNI's history between 2008 and 2021 – an analysis that is also more extensively detailed in Annex 1 to this report. This is then followed by two empirical sections providing both an 'insider' and a 'partner' perspective detailing UN-Habitat staff and academics' insights as to the opportunities and challenges of partnering. This is followed by a summary of the key 'knowledge products' of university partnerships – an analysis that also draws on the more extensive 'compendium' of partnership case studies in Annex 2.

These considerations are, in the following chapter, applied specifically to the issue of implementing the New Urban Agenda. The report is then rounded off by two sets of conclusions. First, one detailing more generally the key lessons for university partnerships emerging across all the empirical material we gathered. Second, presenting a suite of recommendations as to how to enhance Habitat UNI in relation to these more general themes.

METHODS

This project focused explicitly on university partnerships with higher education institutions (henceforth 'universities'), and specifically on those formally set up by or with UN-Habitat. The study underlying the report was carried out between November 2021 and March 2022. It involved **five main methods**.

First, a desk review of the relevant documentation available from UN-Habitat on the progress and development of Habitat UNI (29 documents). This also involved a review of 13 case studies of partnerships (summarised in Annex 2 to the report), further validated with direct input by UN-Habitat staff involved in the cases. Second, a series of 12 anonymised in-depth interviews with key informants engaged with Habitat UNI and UN-Habitat-university partnerships. Third, three semi-quantitative surveys inquiring about the challenges and opportunities of universities partnerships. These relied on responses by 84 UN-Habitat staff and 121 academics. Fourth, this approach was complemented by 2 focus groups, one held with UN-Habitat staff, one academics drawing on Habitat UNI member institutions and individuals. Qualitative and quantitative data generated through these mixed methods were analysed between late-December 2021 and February 2022, leading to the production of this report and its annexes in March 2022.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

To frame its analysis the report details and applies a proposed **university partnerships framework**. The framework is designed as a method to compare the modalities of university partnerships via three sets of features (nature, scale and anchor) each identifying different principal focuses of university partnerships - designed for specific elements of these features to also work in overlap.
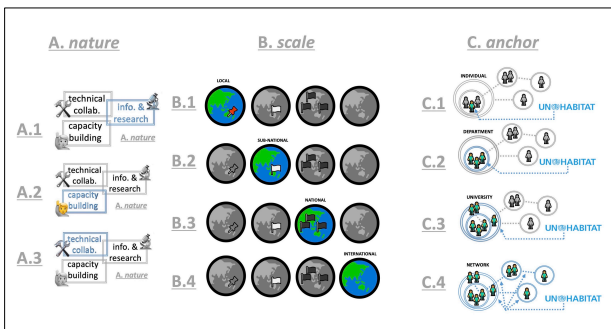
The framework goes hand in hand with a **typology of knowledge products** of university partnerships. These partnerships are seen to entail the production of six main types of knowledge products: Instruction, Data and Research, Education, Advocacy and Policy, Convening, Technology and Digital Tools. The framework and typology of knowledge products are applied in the report to both Habitat UNI specifically and a discussion of UN-Habitat-university partnerships more generally. They also underpin the compendium of case studies detailed in annex 2 to the report.

1. Instruction products
KPs aimed explicitly at providing guidance and direction
Guides; Analytical toolkits; Frameworks ; Agendas (application/implementation); Advice and consultancy

2. Data and research products
KPs aimed principally at providing analysis and assessment and/or at information dissemination
Profiles and monitoring; Datasets; Reviews; Reports

3. Education products
KPs aimed capacity building and skills enhancement
Courses and modules; Curricula and degrees; Academies and training institutions; Staff development; Studios and student competitions

4. Advocacy and policy products
KPs aimed explicitly at shaping urban governance and management
Strategies and plans; Policy (design, delivery, implementation); Campaigns; Awareness programs

5. Convening products
KPs aimed linking and convening stakeholders
Summits; Workshops; Networks; Participatory processes

6. Building and technology products
Material KPs resulting from the development of new infrastructures or technologies (including digital ones)
Planning and designing; Construction analytics; Certification and operation management; Prototypes and patents; Technologies and tools

UNIVERSITIES AND THE NUA

In chapter 8 of the report, we turn to a specific consideration of how UN-Habitat-university partnerships can be leveraged to implement the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (NUA), an action-oriented statement adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016. We do so by analysing the UN Secretary General's two Quadrennial Reports on the NUA (2018 and 2022) as well as the academic literature available to date on this theme. We stress how the New Urban Agenda text itself called explicitly to work with academia and research institutions, but also how academia has received mixed attention in the Quadrennial Reports and in turn how academia has

offered a mixed scorecard of its actual implementation. We note how other agendas have taken greater and more documented purchase onto academia especially when it comes to SDGs and climate action, and that the implementation of the NUA via and with academia still requires much more significant buy-in (both financially and capacity wise) from universities. We stress three opportunity points. First, that of better **leveraging educational networking opportunities to strengthen visibility of the NUA**. Second, that of **valuing the boundary positioning of universities**, which could be able to provide valuable bridging and brokering governance functions to better mainstream the NUA. And third, the urgency of **enhancing the profile of university-city partnerships** in NUA practices, marketing and implementation.

KEY REPORT THEMES

There are broadly five major themes recurring throughout our study:

1. Re-balancing and **reconciling individual and institutional-level engagements** in university partnerships
2. Focusing on **the 'next' generation of urban thought leaders**
3. Understanding how the location of these partnerships within **broader circuits of knowledge** and wider academic networks shape UN-Habitat's university collaborations.
4. Recognizing both how to leverage academic expertise but also to **value education-based engagements**.
5. Tackling endemic and **enduring resource challenges** hindering university partnerships.

SURVEY DATA SNAPSHOT

Whilst we offer a wide discussion of the landscape and features of university partnerships in chapters 4 and 5, we detail in the next page a brief visual comparison of some key issues pertaining to major challenges and opportunities identified by 205 survey participants.

**UN-HABITAT STAFF
survey responses**

**ACADEMICS
survey responses**

**How often do you
engage with each
other?**

UN-HABITAT STAFF:
- Not at all 9%
- Very often 17%
- Not very often 30%
- Once a month 26%
- Others 4%
- Every 2 weeks 13%

ACADEMICS:
- Very often 6%
- Once a month 5%
- Every 2 weeks 6%
- Others 23%
- Not at all 20%
- Not very often 39%

**What is the value of
engaging with each
other?**

UN-HABITAT STAFF:
- capacity for long-term collaboration 12%
- reputation 11%
- Access to education 10%
- Access to research materials 10%
- Access to experts 16%
- Access to data 11%
- Others 30%

ACADEMICS:
- capacity for long-term collaboration 13%
- Access to funding 7%
- project reputation 10%
- Access for education/students 8%
- Access to research materials 6%
- Others 25%
- Access to UN system 11%
- university reputation 11%

**What are the main
challenges hindering
engagement?**

UN-HABITAT STAFF:
- Lack of partner flexibility 11%
- timeframes 9%
- lack of funding 22%
- Lack of UN-Hab. flexibility 15%
- UN system problems 16%
- Others 27%

ACADEMICS:
- Lack of partner flexibility 9%
- timeframes 8%
- lack of collab. funding 8%
- Others 12%
- Lack of UN-Hab. flexibility 9%
- UN system problems 12%
- academic funding problems 14%
- lack of underst. of the UN 11%

**Who are the major academic 'influencers'
in urban research?**
(aggregate survey answer for both UN-
Habitat and academics)

HarvardGSD
SheffieldUI OxfordContEd
KULeuven Chicago
Melbourne NYU KwazuluNatal
JNU Berkeley UCLIIPP Durham
LSECities HKU IIHS DPU Manchester
Bocconi LSE
AUBeirut UCT MITPlanning
NUS UCT PennIUR
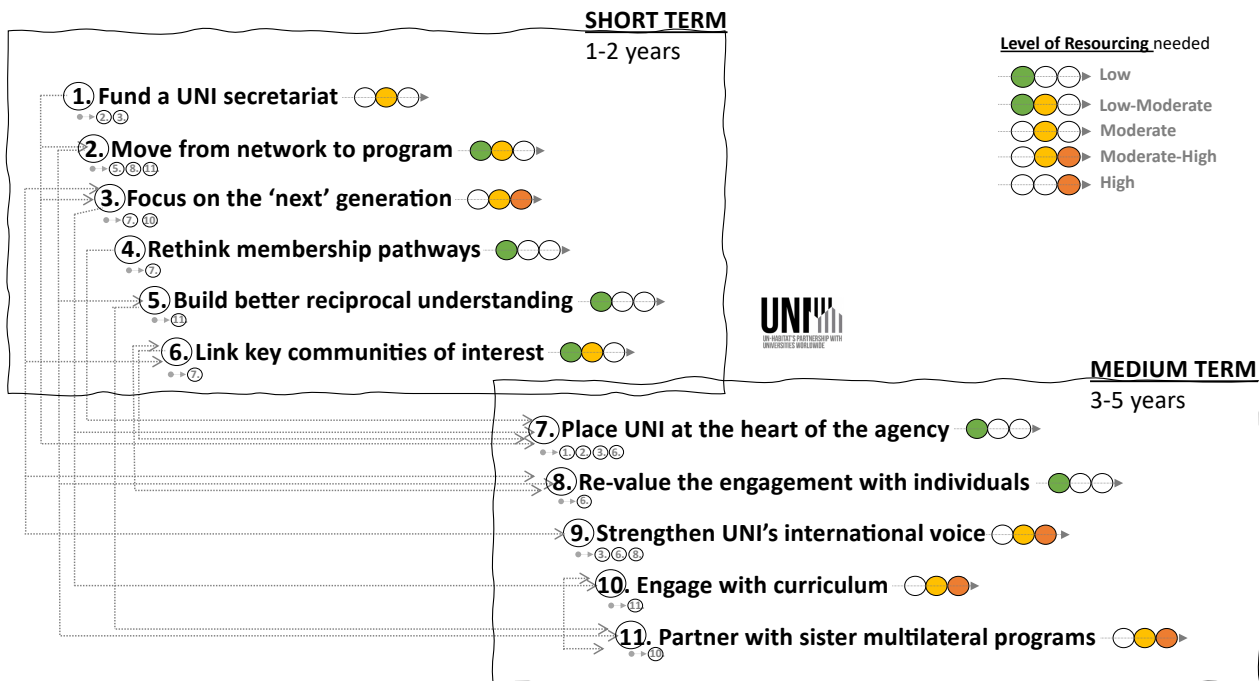MITSenseable
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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HABITAT UNI

Analysis of university partnerships and the Habitat UNI initiative point to the need for a series of reforms aimed at enhancing Habitat UNI's capacity and influence. In particular, empirical evidence stresses, in our view, the need for shifting the aim of UNI from more generic academic exchange loosely in relation to UN-Habitat to a tight presence in the agency's core business. It calls upon UNI to project a clear identity and offer a simplified mission to those keen to engage, whilst sharpening what the 'ask' for support is by UNI and what the possibilities for fundraising might be. This would also, in our view, need a greater drive for attention and engagement with UNI beyond CDTU and beyond currently active members. To do so persuasively across UN-Habitat programs and a wider variety of universities, UNI would need to present a more tangible value proposition. To these ends the report outlines a series of 11 practical recommendations for UNI's operation in the years ahead with a focus on the short (1-2 years) and medium (2-5 years) term of action.

Our advice takes place along three core axes of proposed reform of Habitat UNI:

A. focus the purpose of UNI explicitly as **the** **official university partnership program of UN-Habitat**,
B. with its main activities aimed to **connect directly UN-Habitat programming and services** to university expertise and education, and vice-versa
C. and its governance designed to be a **shared commitment by UN-Habitat staff and scholars** with a clear eye at institutional and 'next generation' engagement

SHORT TERM
1-2 years

1. **Fund a UNI secretariat**
2. **Move from network to program**
3. **Focus on the 'next' generation**
4. **Rethink membership pathways**
5. **Build better reciprocal understanding**
6. **Link key communities of interest**

MEDIUM TERM
3-5 years

7. **Place UNI at the heart of the agency**
8. **Re-value the engagement with individuals**
9. **Strengthen UNI's international voice**
10. **Engage with curriculum**
11. **Partner with sister multilateral programs**

Level of Resourcing needed

► Low
► Low-Moderate
► Moderate
► Moderate-High
► High

2. INTRODUCTION

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This section introduces the context of the study, set within UN-Habitat's emphasis on its role as centre of excellence, and the more specific background and methodology that led to the development of this report and its annexes. In doing so it also highlights the framework of university partnership analysis used to frame the project (and suggested by us as a base for a more evaluative approach to partnerships for UN-Habitat) and sketches the analytical ground for the following sections. Core to this introduction is the importance that knowledge-based partnerships have in UN-Habitat work and the pervasiveness of university engagements that, as we stress throughout the report, can be a real asset to UN-Habitat's mission if managed effectively.

A knowledge-intensive agency

Knowledge[1] is ever more critical to the future of cities on our planet. Information processes and growing amounts of data are pervasive aspect of the way in which we manage cities and how billions of urban dwellers go about in their everyday lives. From the impact of digital technologies to community advocacy and business dynamics, and not least a turbulent time of information needs and misinformation challenges such as that of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, managing knowledge is increasingly central to urban practitioners and indeed researchers seeking to understand the built environment.[2] This intersection is now critical for as much scholarship as multilateral action.

UN-Habitat, as the major city-focused agency within the United Nations system, is deeply steeped into these dynamics. The agency's latest *Strategic Plan for 2020–2023* (now further extended to 2025) sought to re-position

UN-Habitat as a "major" and "global" "**centre of excellence and innovation**" setting knowledge production, mobilisation, and delivery close to the heart of its mission. This has been repeated as central to UN-Habitat's purpose time and time again over the past three years at the very least. Current Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif has argued for the need to position the agency as "a thought leader in sustainable urbanization"[3] at the start, and again at the recent extension, of her mandate. With ample knowledge-intensive efforts at work over the longer history of UN-Habitat, not least via milestone processes like those leading to the Habitat I, II and III conferences, knowledge collaborations between the agency and other actors have repeatedly been stressed as key to its operations.[4]

The intersection of UN-Habitat's work (and aspirations) and a major sector in knowledge production, management and circulation such as that of academia becomes crucial at this historical juncture. It purports to shape how the agency might engage with cutting edge research, training, and technology development, whilst universities in themselves reach progressively out of their 'ivory tower' toward more and more tangible applications of the information and data produced in the tertiary education sector.[5] This overlap is the subject of this report and study.

UN-Habitat's university partnerships have already born repeated fruits in the work of the agency. UN-Habitat initiatives that to some degree rely on the support of academic institutions have ranged from broad sweeping international collaboration programs to ad hoc projects, applied technical support initiatives and convening platforms like networks and events. University

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[1] In this report we refer to "**knowledge**" as collected information applicable to a purpose (either as 'explicit' or 'implicit' knowledge), whilst "**information**" refers to integrated/processed data, and "**data**" as a set of discrete symbols and signals. To that end we subscribe here to the continuum of data-information-knowledge based on degree of processing and application. To this end knowledge is not just a synonymous with research here and encompasses also the exchanges of information and knowledge embedded in training, capacity building and expert advice. For more see Liew, A. (2007). Understanding data, information, knowledge and their inter-relationships. *Journal of knowledge management practice*, *8*(2), 1-16.
[2] Bai, X., Colbert, M. L., McPhearson, T., Roberts, D., Siri, J., Walsh, B., & Webb, B. (2019). Networking urban science, policy and practice for sustainability. *Current Op. in Environmental Sustainability*, *39*, 114-122.

[3] The expression has been variously repeated in UN-Habitat press releases and can be found in the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023, available at https://unhabitat.org/the-strategic-plan-2020-2023
[4] For a review of this history of knowledge mobilisation between 1976 (Habitat I) and 2016 (Habitat III) see Cociña, C., Frediani, A. A., Acuto, M., & Levy, C. (2019). Knowledge translation in global urban agendas: A history of research-practice encounters in the Habitat conferences. *World Development*, *122*, 130-141. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10075280/1/WD_Habitat%20paper_Green%20access.pdf
[5] McCowan, T. (2016). Universities and the post-2015 development agenda: an analytical framework. *Higher Education*, *72*(4), 505-523.

partnerships vary far and wide across UN-Habitat. For instance, they range from capacity building programs like the Global Network on Safer Cities[6], which seeks to equip local authorities to provide urban security, to research partnerships is at the basis of the Global Network on National Urban Policies[7] program, which links UN-Habitat, the OECD, the Cities Alliance, and several academic institutions. Similarly, the agency has relied on specific university units (departments, centres, and institutes) as well as individual academic consultants to develop tools, guides and other 'normative' products attention to urban stakeholders, as with the setup of Global Land Tool Network[8], a collaboration to increase access to land and security of land tenure, or with the global Urban Observatory program and its guidance on how to set up urban analysis hubs around the world.

In short, UN-Habitat has initiated, experimented, and engaged with knowledge-intensive partnerships that explicitly aim at linking and connecting with academia as a prominent partner of many such programs. Yet, this variety of partnerships has to date lacked clear and systematic identification as to the modalities, challenges, and possibilities of UN-Habitat-university connections.

Report Background

UN-Habitat's Capacity Development and Training Unit (CDTU) has sought to reframe and enhance how the encounter between UN-Habitat programs and universities can be more effectively leveraged to drive sustainable urban development. In November 2021, seeking to address the challenges presented by a growing variety of UN-Habitat-university relationships, but also to garner the opportunities presented by sprawling relationships with the academic world, CDTU set out to develop a strategic review that would deliver a systematic assessment and concrete recommendations to strengthen the collaboration between UN-Habitat and universities. The launch of UN-Habitat's "Communities of Practice" in 2021 (CoPs), a major current internal knowledge-intensive initiative, has provided further impetus toward better understanding how knowledge mobilisation can be more effectively integrated in normative UN-Habitat work.

CDTU initially focused on strengthening the operate of Habitat UNI as a program. This effort stems not in minor part from issues emerged in UN-Habitat's *Capacity Building Strategy*, which CDTU is explicitly tasked for, and that stresses the need for an expanded, closer, and coordinated collaboration with universities worldwide.[9] The Strategy highlights the need to: 1) multiply the dissemination and utilization of UN-Habitat's normative and operational tools and instruments in curricular activities, and 2) utilize the existing knowledge, research and human capital vested at the various departments and think tanks of universities to increase the quality, quantity, and outreach of the capacity building activities of UN-Habitat. These themes remain recurrent throughout this report and are central to our inquiry over the three months of project work to this end.

Whilst recognising the centrality of university partnerships as per UN-Habitat's *Capacity-Building Strategy*, the CoPs have been launched as "spaces for new ideas" bringing together groups of UN-Habitat staff with "similar passions and interests" to support and develop UN-Habitat's knowledge sharing and solution searching on emerging urban issues and to promote the tools and methodologies of the agency. From this point of view, they have been focused on reducing knowledge silos and sense of competition for resources, and increased collaboration and sharing. Their engagement with a wealth of external knowledge institutions, not least academia, has been clear from the start. Habitat UNI, as one of the most recognizable and longer standing university-focused initiatives by UN-Habitat, was to that end deemed as central to this review, but this investigation of UN-Habitat-university collaborations also sought to surface more broadly effective modes of cooperation between the agency and academic institutions. Hence, the deliverables set in the study's Terms of Reference (See box 1 for a summary) were centred as much as on UNI than on wider lessons and challenges emerging from the broader context set by the *Capacity Building Strategy*.

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[6] See more on the GNSC inititive at:
https://unhabitat.org/network/global-network-on-safer-cities
[7] Kundu, D., Sietchiping, R., & Kinyanjui, M. (2020). *Developing National Urban Policies*. Springer: Singapore. Also see: https://unhabitat.org/the-evolution-of-national-urban-policies
[8] Augustinus, C. (2020). Catalysing global and local social change in the land sector through technical innovation by the United Nations and the Global Land Tool Network. *Land Use Policy*, 99, 105073. Also see more generally: https://gltn.net/

[9] We take a wide definition of capacity building in line with CDTU's mandate drawing on the United Nations Academic Impact program that understandings it as "a process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and individuals need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world". Definition available at: https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/capacity-building. For more academic review of the relevant literature on this see, amongst others, Black, L. (2003). Critical review of the capacity-building literature and discourse. *Development in Practice* 13(1), 116-120. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4029828

Habitat UNI (henceforth "UNI"), as UN-Habitat's "main mechanism for partnerships with academia"[10], was launched in 2011 to promote cooperation between UN-Habitat and higher education institutions, as well as "to facilitate exchange and cooperation among universities globally"[11]. The initiative was seen to respond to the need to promote universities as close partners of cities, actively engaged in urban problem solving, seeking to 'close the gap' between academia and practice, and encouraging collaborative learning between universities and UN-Habitat. UNI also aspires to support the creation of the 'next generation' of urban leaders, managers, researchers, and practitioners. Our study's scope was therefore to understand how to effectively leverage the work of Habitat UNI to this end after a decade of UNI programming. This was framed explicitly by CDTU to better align UNI to both the wider 'thought leadership' and 'centre of excellence' aspirations of the *2020-2023 Strategic Plan*, and to gather key insights into what makes UN-Habitat-university partnerships valuable, but also challenging.

After this introduction, this report includes a number of sections aimed at unpacking university partnerships from the point of view of UN-Habitat's staff and projects. First, we provide a summary review of Habitat UNI's history between 2011-2021, as an initial insight into a program explicitly designed to foster university partnerships – an analysis that is also more extensively detailed in Annex 1 to this report. This is then followed by two empirical sections providing both an 'insider' and a 'partner' perspective detailing UN-Habitat staff and academics' insights as to the opportunities and challenges of partnering. This is followed by a summary of the key

'knowledge products' (our broader suggested term beyond 'normative tools') to couple the considerations on the form of university partnerships in the previous chapters, with their outputs – an analysis that also draws on the more extensive 'compendium' of partnership case studies in Annex 2. These considerations are then, in the following chapter, applied specifically to the issue of implementing the New Urban Agenda. The report is then rounded off by two sets of conclusions. First, a more general chapter summarising what we think are the key lessons for university partnerships emerging across all the empirical material we gathered. Second, a more specific chapter focusing on providing a suite of recommendations as to how to enhance Habitat UNI more specifically. The report is also complemented by two annexes. Annex 1 provides a more extensive discussion of Habitat UNI between 2008 and 2021, offering an extended review and including alongside our recommendations also a suggested set of key elements of a revised Terms of Reference document for Habitat UNI. Lastly, Annex 2 details in depth a 'compendium' of 12 university partnership case studies referred to and used in the compilation of this report, to highlight the diversity of partnership modes and knowledge products at play in the landscape of UN-Habitat's university partnerships.

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box 1 – STUDY ToRs (TERMS OF REFERENCE) SUMMARY

Within the project timeframe (end November 2021 to end February 2022) UN-Habitat tasked the project team with six key terms and deliverables, which are provided within this document and annexes as per bracketed information below:

1. **Deliverable 1**: Mapping the **current state of play in UN-Habitat-university relations** and developing a practical typology of engagements applicable to the intersection of UNI and the CoPs. [state of play provided in chapters 4 and 5, and in summary key themes in chapter 8 including some preliminary consideration of CoPs alignment].
2. **Deliverable 2**: Delineating opportunities for strengthened partnerships and collaborations through Habitat UNI to better deliver on UN-Habitat's normative capacity building mission. [provided in chapter 9].
3. **Deliverable 3**: Developing a **proposal for adjusting Habitat UNI's Terms of Reference** accordingly. [ToR revision provided in annex 1, with review of UNI work in chapter 3 and more extensively in annex 1 and specific UNI recommendations in chapter 9].

In addition to these UNI-specific goals, in January 2022 was also deemed that the project would focus on

4. **Deliverable 4**: **identifying key normative tools**, and advise on ways to further disseminate these, including through higher education, learning programmes and other innovative partnerships. [provided in chapter 6, chapter 8 and annex 2].
5. **Deliverable 5**: delivering **a 'compendium' of effective practice case studies** of these partnerships, leveraging successful experiences of collaboration between UN-Habitat and academic institutions [provided in summary in chapter 6 and extended form in annex 2].
6. **Deliverable 6**: identifying opportunities to strengthen capacity building and learning for the **implementation of the New Urban Agenda** [provided in chapter 7]

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[10] As defined as per UN-Habitat's Uni mission statement in current UN-Habitat materials. See: https://unhabitat.org/habitat-university-network-initiative-uni

[11] In the report's annex 1 we detail the list of documents and materials analysed to piece together UNI's history, with quotes coming from these directly.

Study methodology

The project's methodology involved both primary data analysis, of both qualitative and statistical nature, as well as extensive secondary data analysis of materials available through UN-Habitat. Our overall methodological approach underpinning this report has been that of gathering a wide input from both UN-Habitat staff and university academics. In the three months between the end of November 2021 and February 2022, primary material has been collected through **surveys** but also direct engagement with UN-Habitat staff and key informants. This has been complemented by a **desk review** of the relevant documentation available from UN-Habitat on the progress and development of Habitat UNI, focusing on key UNI documentation (strategic plans, public documents, consultations and review, presentations, and conference material) made available by the CDTU team. This involved a total of 29 core documents (listed in Annex 1) and a variety of other additional materials like presentations, minutes and meeting reports, or workshop notes provided by the CDTU team, UNI Steering Committee members and UN-Habitat staff. This also involved a review of 13 **case studies of partnerships** (summarised in Annex 2 to the report), further validated with direct input by UN-Habitat staff involved in the cases.

At the same time, a series of 12 anonymised **in-depth interviews** with key informants engaged with Habitat UNI and UN-Habitat-university partnerships was designed to offer frank and confidential spaces for assessment of opportunities and challenges emerging from the desk review. At the same time, three semi-quantitative surveys inquiring about the challenges and opportunities regarding collaborations with universities were conducted (through the Qualtrics platform) with academics (members of UNI) and UN-Habitat staff. These were disseminated directly by CDTU to UN-Habitat staff engaged in the CoPs, and separately to two email lists of Habitat UNI partner institutions and individual partners respectively.[12] These resulted in responses by 84 UN-Habitat staff and 121 academics (74 individual members of UNI and 47 institutional members of UNI). The interviews and surveys were complemented by 2 **focus groups**, one held with UN-Habitat staff, and one with Habitat UNI members from higher academic institutions, alongside 2 consultation sessions with UNI Steering Committee members and 8 project review meetings with

CDTU team. Qualitative and quantitative data generated through these mixed methods was analysed between late-December 2021 and mid-February 2022, leading to the production of this report. Key in our methodological approach has also been the development of framework for comparative analysis of university partnerships that is described in the next section of this chapter. This was devised through literature review and practice analysis of other multilateral agencies that conducted similar studies to the one commissioned in the ToRs detailed in box 1 for this study.

A few brief caveats to our inquiry are inevitably necessary: to put an emphasis on universities, our study explicitly leaves out other knowledge institutions beyond academia, such as think tanks, knowledge-focused NGOs, and private sector actors (e.g., consultancies and knowledge-intensive firms). Yet we still seek where possible to set our discussion in relation to this broader reality of knowledge mobilization, as outlined for instance in chapters 4 and 5. Similarly, the study limits its inquiry to university partnerships formally set up by or with UN-Habitat, but we of course recognize there is a wider world of both non-academic research institutions involved in these dynamics as well as indeed a bigger context of informal university relationships and collaborations at play across most of UN-Habitat's work. The project also did not attempt to capture the wider and more complex reality of UN-Habitat knowledge management across the whole of agency, or venture into the realm of tacit knowledge exchange.[13] These limits were introduced to ensure feasibility of a project that was time-limited (to three months) and geared mainly at preliminary advice.

University partnerships: a framework of engagement

When we set out to make sense of the vast variety of university partnerships taking place both within Habitat UNI as well as more broadly across UN-Habitat, it became clear to us (and the CDTU team) that a more systematic mode of organising our understanding of partnerships was needed. Conversely, we believe such a systematised approach could be shaping how the agency reviews, strategizes, and promotes university partnerships. To do so, we developed a '**university partnerships framework**' that can be used practically by UN-Habitat, but also potentially by its university partners (and indeed

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[12] Membership of UNI is divided in 'institutional' members, represented by scholars acting as 'focal points' for universities formally engaged with Habitat UNI, and 'individual' members representing single academics acting in their own expert capacity.

[13] See for instance: Venkitachalam, K., & Busch, P. Emerald Article: Tacit knowledge: review and possible research directions. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *16*(2), 357-372.
https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/13673271211218915/full/html

replicable by other UN agencies), to map and assess the landscape of university partnerships and their resulting outputs. For the purpose of this report the framework is put to use to compare different university partnerships (e.g. in chapter 6 and the compendium of case studies in Annex 2), foreground a systematic approach to the questions set in the surveys behind chapters 4 and 5, and to frame the language we use across the report.

To develop the university partnerships framework, we initially reviewed similar approaches used by other multilateral institutions that had commissioned similar studies to the one in question here. This was for instance the case of the November 2012 *Building a Stronger Knowledge Institution* review carried out by the Asian Development Bank as a "special evaluation study of ADB knowledge products and services".[14] Critically, we also drew on a prior 2012 UN-Habitat feasibility study that was set as the background for UNI's development by looking at the need for an Urban Research Network as part of the then-called Habitat Partner University Initiative (HPUI, UNI's predecessor) of UN-Habitat.[15] Taking a cue from these and other[16] approaches to unpacking university partnerships, we delineated a framework centred, first, on the **form of university partnerships** through descriptors of the *scale*, *nature* and *anchors* that characterize university partnerships. Second, we aligned this to a typology of the **function of university partnerships describing the variety of possible** *outputs* resulting from the varied forms of partnerships identified.

In fact, the framework is in itself a knowledge partnership output, or 'normative tool' in the current parlance of the Global Solutions Division of UN-Habitat, and we encourage scholars and UN-Habitat staff to take a similar reflexive approach when reviewing their own engagements with the agency. As we outline in chapters 6 and 8, we believe this form-function framework could also be put to work as an evaluation framework to understand the *outcomes* of university partnerships by paying closer attention to the intensity and impact of these partnerships – an assessment that we explicitly avoid providing within the stringent time limits of a three-month project without practical on-the-ground of first-hand evaluative capacity to review the impact and localised complexities of case studies and knowledge products depicted here.

Our goal here is therefore that of offering a preliminary, and if needed comparatively, analysis of the form and function of UN-Habitat-university collaborations and apply this to the review of challenges and opportunities requested by the CDTU team. Overall, in view of the cases gathered for this report, UN-Habitat's engagement with knowledge institutions (universities and other research-based institutions) seems ripe for strengthening and development, building on UN-Habitat's aspiration for thought leadership in the built environment.

Whilst the modes of engagement between the United Nations more broadly, or UN-Habitat specifically, and higher education institutions, vary substantially, we would argue there are currently three main types of cooperation mechanisms that characterize the **nature of knowledge collaborations** (the framework's 'feature A'):
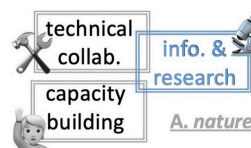
A.1. *Information & research*, in the form of knowledge development and mobilisation
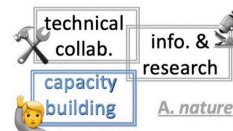
A.2. *Capacity-building*, in the form of activities geared toward the improvement of individuals and organisations' capabilities
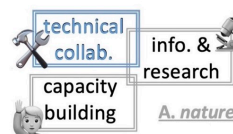
A.3. *Technical collaboration and innovation*, in the form of applied knowledge deployment on bespoke problems

Similarly, whilst the geographies of these partnerships can vary substantially, often even within one single initiative, we speculate the **scale of cooperation** ('feature B') in university partnerships could broadly be typified as taking place at:

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[14] Asian Development Bank. 2012. *Special Evaluation Study: Knowledge Products and Services: Building a Stronger Knowledge Institution.* Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/11540/3580.
[15] Mathey, K. and Gotsch, P. *Feasibility Study for a New Urban Research Network as Part of the UN-HABITAT Partner University Initiative*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat, November 2012

[16] For the sake of brevity this report does not contain an extensive academic literature review on university partnerships but point the reader to the further reading section at the end of this report
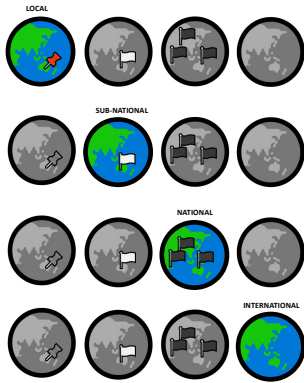
B.1.   local (e.g., city or neighbourhood),

B.2.   sub-national (e.g., a province or region, like South Africa's Gauteng),
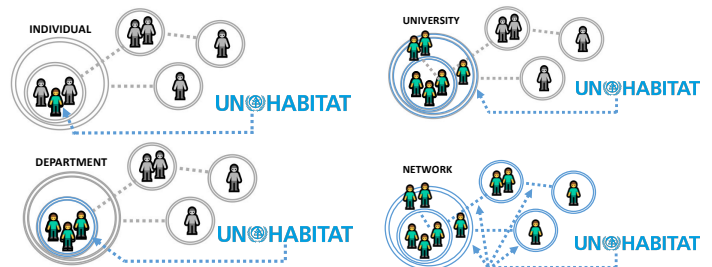
B.3.   national (e.g. Vietnam),

B.4.   or international[17] contexts.

(or sub-institutional/indivi...   e
same time.

Lastly, but not least importantly, we would argue it is essential to understand what the counterpart to UN-Habitat is in a 'university partnership'. Universities are often invoked in projects generally (e.g. "this project has engaged with the University of X to deliver activity Y"). Yet *who* the university is tends to be a variety of different counterparts, from an academic in their own personal capacity working on consultancy contract, all the way to a formalised memorandum of understanding with the whole of a higher education institution stipulated through a joint president/vice chancellor-senior UN-Habitat staff signatory ceremony.

The diversity of collaborators across UN-Habitat programmes that engage 'universities' (on the surface at least) might be bewildering and need some degree of more systematic organisation. We define this feature as 'anchor' that characterizes the formal linkage into the academic world. To this end we would argue that the **anchor of university collaborations** (feature C) could broadly be placed at:

C.1. an *individual* academic level (such as individual Habitat UNI members),
C.2. at *sub-institutional* level (like a university centre or department) without necessarily implying a partnership with the whole of a university,
C.3. at the *university* level more formally, or
C.4. at university *network* level by partnering with a group, alliance or other networked form involving multiple higher education institutions

These three forms of features, and their specific typologies, are not however an attempt to rigidly pigeonhole collaborations in any single 'type'. Rather, our framework represents three sets of characteristics (nature, scale and anchor) that can overlap. In fact we believe these are more correctly defined as a typified set of features a UN-habitat-university collaboration might have, often non-exclusively, rather than a stringent typology. We encourage UN-Habitat staff and academics to sue them as 'tags', to invoke social media parlance, that can go next to each other when describing a university partnership.

There are several cooperation schemes that can be classified under two or three university engagement features simultaneously. Hence, our framework is designed as **a method to compare the modalities of university partnerships** via three sets of features (A [nature], B [scale] and C [anchor]) each identifying different principal focuses of the partnership. It is thus designed for features to also work in overlap (e.g. the case of a partnership involving information and capacity building). When applied, our framework offers a nature-scale-anchor map of a specific partnership. For example, a partnership focused on capacity building and technical support (A.2+A.3), delivered in a specific city (B.1), working with a university centre (C.2), as per the visual example in figure 2, with the three sets of features in the framework 'tagging' the partnership and allowing comparative assessments as well as more systematic unpacking of their core features.

Lastly, as we detail more in depth in chapter 6, we believe this three-pronged framework is best applied by linking

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[17] We resist here the terminology of 'global' as most initiatives taking part above the world region scale tend to take place at multiple international contexts but rarely on a planetary scale.
[18] We group in here also professional associations (as examples of networked individuals) or networked programs (as examples of

networked sub-institutional units) too for the sake of simplicity and stressing that a networked institutional anchor can take varied shapes not just that of university alliance).

forms of partnerships with their outputs as defined through our typology of partnership outputs ('knowledge products' as we define them in chapter 6). We encourage the reader to consider that outline too when consulting the rest of the report.
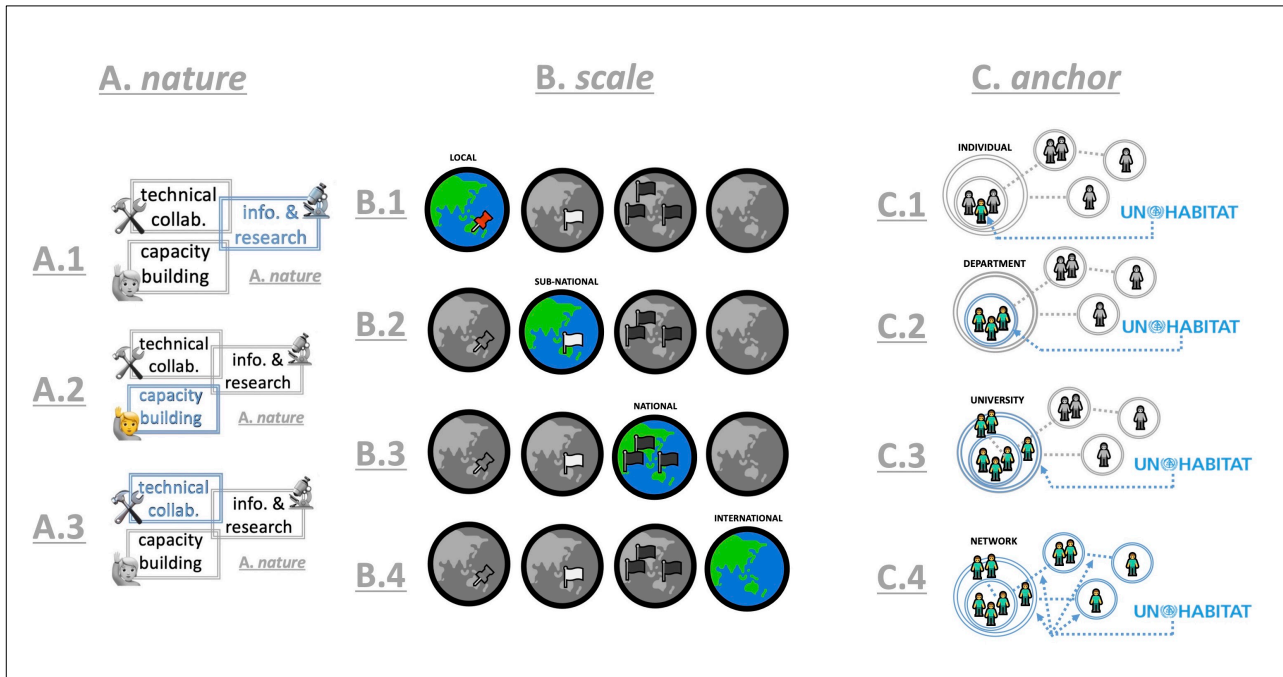

Figure 1: summary of the framework for university partnership analysis
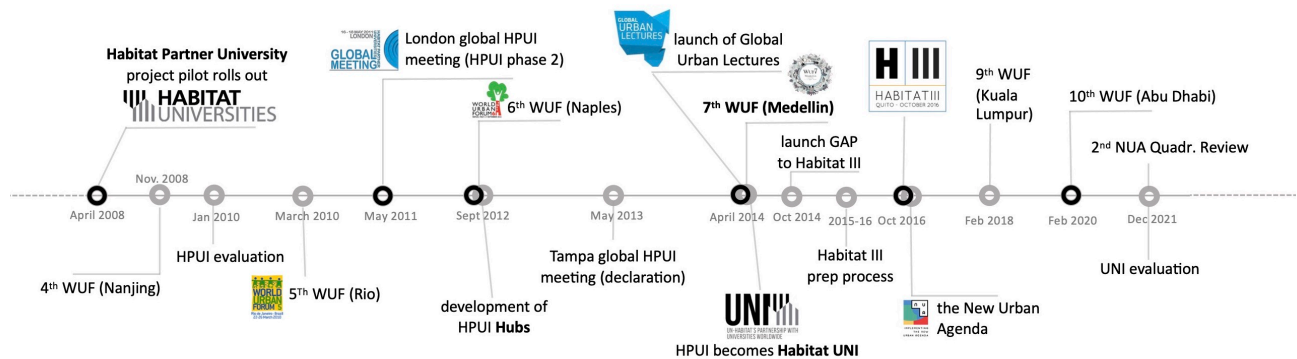
3. HABITAT UNI, 2008-2021

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Figure 2: a timeline of UNI's development 2011-2021

This section presents some initial reflections emerging from an historical analysis of more than a decade (2008 to 2021) of Habitat UNI programming. As noted in the previous chapter, this was compiled through extensive document analysis, in-depth interviews and consultation with current UN-Habitat staff and UNI steering committee members. In Annex 1 of this report we provide a more extensive discussion of the various historical 'phases' of UNI and its main efforts and challenges throughout the years. Here, for the sake of brevity and accessibility of this report, we focus more specifically on a summary of, and the key lessons that emerge from, this analysis. We encourage the reader to consult this chapter alongside that document for context and more direct evidence of some of the findings reported here.

It is clear to us that Habitat UNI has, over a decade of operations, since its original 2008 pilot, presented a prime example of UN-Habitat-university partnerships.

In the annex, this story is organised in three main 'periods' of activity. It is preceded by a pilot phase from 2008 to test the viability of a formalised university partnerships program. It then starts perhaps more officially in 2011 with the origins of UNI in the then-called Habitat Partner University Initiative (HPUI). It follows with a section starting in 2013 with the shift of HPUI to a newly branded UN-Habitat University Initiative (or in short "Habitat UNI"). It is then rounded by a final historical section on UNI's recent evolution after the Habitat III conference in 2016, alongside some more recent 2021 development and the current period of analysis and reflection as to the longer-term future (and viability) of UNI that this study is directly part of.

The history of UNI is already telling of some success in convening, and in many cases highlighting publicly, the place of universities in the work of the agency. It also stresses the **relevance of establishing and maintaining a formal bridge between the academic world and UN-Habitat operations**. In doing so the story of UNI is one that speaks volumes to how a well-funded and managed program of this type would have the capacity to provide evidence to, and in many cases concretize, the vast range of university partners of UN-Habitat across global North and South. It also stresses the pervasiveness of university partners across a wide variety of topical and geographical issues, as well as the breadth of what 'universities' really are in UN-Habitat work, from individuals to departments, institutions and networks, spanning far and wide across Northern and Southern realities. Likewise, it also testifies to the **relative self-organising potential and resilience of academic collaborations in urban research** and education across borders, even in the wake of lack of funding for, and at times institutional recognition of, initiatives like UNI.

The story we summarise equally sheds light to challenges pertaining to the size of activity versus size of membership of UNI, and the enduring internal resourcing problems that cannot go underestimated. It stresses the limits to dissemination of network knowledge both internally and externally, and the questions of identity clarity and recognition. These opportunities and challenges are leveraged in this report as a springboard for the more in-depth conversations of survey and focus group methods. Here we would like to focus first on the power of bridging UN-Habitat and academia presented by the case of UNI, and then move on to a brief summary of its inherent challenges.

2008 to 2021: a summary stock-take

The aspiration of UNI, and HPUI before it, was always to offer a formal and recognized platform for UN-Habitat to encounter universities, and vice-versa. This was established clearly in the setup in 2011, after a period of piloting (2008-2010), of the 'Habitat Partner University Initiative' (HPUI), that was introduced by UN-Habitat to promote cooperation between the agency and higher education institutions. This was done in recognition of the knowledge capital and resources that universities could have contributed toward UN-Habitat's goals to push for positive change in sustainable urban development. HPUI was aimed at encouraging universities to become closer to both UN-Habitat as well as to 'city partners', seeking to prompt universities to actively engage in solving complex urban problems, but also toward closing the gap between academics and practitioners.

Early in the life of what is now UNI, starting from the 6th World Urban Forum held in Naples in 2012, HPUI's Steering Committee introduced 'thematic hubs', each one led by a particular university. The hubs were defined as consortia of universities, or sub-networks HPUI, that agreed to work on the same thematic priority under the principles of mutual collaboration, exchange, and learning, producing outputs that strengthen the role of universities in forwarding sustainable urban development. Engagement with UN-Habitat was implicit here, but one issue that was to gradually become challenging as Hubs progressively focused on convening academic work and as different (directly relevant) areas of UN-Habitat responded in different degrees of interest and engagement with them.

In 2014, HPUI was reformed into what became known as the UN-Habitat University Initiative (Habitat UNI), as the Initiative redefined its focus and sought to better leverage the network established to date. This was predominantly in direct response to UN-Habitat's launch of its six-year strategic plan for 2014-2019. In the following years the number of individual and institutional partners involved with UNI had steadily increased, and the network continued work through thematic Hubs whilst also maintaining some presence in regional UN-Habitat fora. In 2015 and 2016 UNI was then variously engaged, often via either individual members or specific Hub inputs, into the preparatory process that led to the October 2016 Habitat III conference and launch of the New Urban Agenda. This was done in many different formats from individual expert input into texts, meetings and preparatory committees, or hub and individual inputs into the Habitat II 'General Assembly of Partners' (GAP) program representing key constituents to the upcoming New Urban Agenda (not least universities) or through bespoke Habitat II process and conference projects.

After Habitat III, activity through UNI took a variety of formats, and Hubs priorities were partly redesigned accordingly, however largely a similar approach that had been in place at least since the UNI reform in 2014. UNI Hubs and academics took part in various UN-Habitat knowledge exchange platforms like UN-Habitat's Urban Thinkers Campus program. Once again, the organisation of a World Urban Forum in 2018 was an important driver in prompting whole-of-network engagements with individual Hub work had been continuing separately (e.g. in gender, informal urbanism or governance) beyond relatively regular steering committee meetings. In 2018, building on the 9th WUF in Kuala Lumpur, an effort to catalogue the variety of university experiences engaged in UNI was rolled out through the *Big Blue Book* Initiative, as a 'tool' (or perhaps more correctly a compendium) that provided the wider public an opportunity to get acquainted with 70 university partners of Habitat UNI.

Yet in the following years activity across the UNI hubs remained mixed, and the UNI website a central repository largely dormant. At the end of 2020, a more robust integration of Habitat UNI into the work of UN-Habitat was proposed by the CDTU in response to the Capacity Building Strategy approved by the Member States in October 2020 and the new work model developed in the *2020- 2023 Strategic Plan*. This brings us to the current context (described more in depth in the following two chapters) and the thrust behind this current study. Yet we should not discount that a decade of networking, Hub work and presence at events like the WUF conferences has had some important imprint on the bridging between academia and UN-Habitat – an issue we stress here before moving to a summary of key findings from our historical analysis.

A bridge between UN-Habitat and academia

Our brief historical reconstruction of the evolution of Habitat UNI is telling of a series of key features, but also enduring and emerging challenges, of this partnership approach with universities. To our reading, the story of UNI (and HPUI before) serves as evidence of the value of maintaining an initiative that centralizes the lessons learned, projects, and products developed with academic institutions through a system dedicated to promoting its growth. In short, to the best of our evidence-based judgment, UN-Habitat should really make effective use, and better recognize the potential, of its "main mechanism for partnerships with academia".

Despite the challenges that Habitat UNI has faced in its decade of operations and still faces to date, the relevance of a formal bridge between academic world and UN-Habitat operations remains relatively well recognised and

seen as valuable on both fronts of this partnership. Our historical excursus speaks to variety of knowledge collaborations HPUI/UNI spurred, or at least engaged in (more on this below) over the years. This has ranged from the organization of conferences, courses, and workshops, to the preparation of manuals, strategies, and plans, or the production of reports and toolkits aimed at achieving the sustainable urbanisation objectives now enshrined in the NUA and the SDGs.

Furthermore, an enduring strength of a program like UNI is its **capacity to provide evidence to, and in many cases concretize, the vast range of university partners of UN-Habitat** across global North and South. In many cases this also supported strong advocacy internally to the agency and externally to the wider international 'urban' community. It did so by calling for attention to the value of university partnerships within UN-Habitat's work and of academic research and in driving urban development. Equally, UNI's **explicit UN-Habitat branding** has proven time and time again to be a feature in raising the interest of urban development stakeholders at local, national, regional, and global levels in the types of university partnerships represented in the network.

Moreover, the Initiative has also facilitated greater appreciation across UN-Habitat operations of the potential of universities as themselves representing spaces and partners where to implement the UN-Habitat mandate. This has been mainly done by UNI initiatives and partners through educational programs that engaged UN-Habitat staff. Yet in some cases it also stressed the potential for UN-Habitat to connect with universities as trainers of urban developers and as urban developers in themselves, through their significant footprint in the design of cities, presenting the opportunity for a more hands-on approach to education and university operations. In sum, the value proposition for maintaining a program like UNI, at least at this point of our review, seems sensible and relatively well defined. Yet, challenges to delivering on this potential also run deep in the decade of work of the network, as we note below.

From a convening standpoint, UNI has had an important function in stressing the value of academic partners to UN-Habitat, whilst also often acting explicitly **as a source of academic contacts** that, identified through UNI, have been engaged with and plugged into UN-Habitat programs. For instance, UNI and UNI Hubs have facilitated access to scholars and universities engaged in the *Global Reports on Human Settlements*, various editions of the *World Cities Report*, *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning*, and a variety of UN-Habitat toolboxes. Similarly, UNI has been leveraged to support larger convenings and platforms UN-Habitat has sought the engagement of academics in, as with developing and

delivering program items for Habitat III in Quito, several World Urban Forum editions since the 6th one in Naples in 2012, as well as for instance the more recent Innovate 4 Cities conference.

To many respects, then, UNI has had success in convening and in many cases highlighting the place of universities in the work of the agency, but it has also often struggled to harness its full potential as 'the' UN-Habitat-university bridge. In several iterations throughout its decade of planning and convening, strategic discussions have been held by and with UNI to better focus its operations as a key hub for university collaboration. Yet these in turn have repeatedly stressed the limits of the initiative to effectively present opportunities for its members to take full advantage of the Initiative, and for the Initiative to sit more centrally in flagship UN-Habitat work. Recent reviews and convenings, as with the 2018 and 2020 WUF in Kuala Lumpur and Abu Dhabi, noted how UNI's current structure, built on a variety of topical Hubs but also with the aspirations of being a network of both scholars and at the same time academic institutions, faces constraints that might prevent its smooth functioning. At this stage of the review some of these barriers appear to be predominant, including the issue of network size and activity, the internal resourcing needs, limits to knowledge dissemination and initiative identity. We tackle these briefly before offering an initial forward-looking reflection and stepping into more in-depth voices from UN-Habitat and academia in the next chapters.

Challenges to the effectiveness of UNI
First, a key issue emerging for us in reviewing the history of UNI is that of **size of activity versus width of membership**. UNI is repeatedly referred to as a (large) network of universities and scholars. Yet it often exhibits limited features of what other such networks, in academia specifically or in urban governance more generally (e.g. trans-local solidarity networks and international municipal networks) look like. UNI has for instance matched some of these in terms of convenings and events but has not typically set up a central 'secretariat' (which was originally provided by UN-Habitat), developed flagship all-of-network outputs like publications or delivered cross-network capacity building. Despite having near to 250 institutional members ('universities') and more than 2,000 individual scholars as members, what could be considered as *regularly active* members in the network might be much fewer. The quantum of the work done *through* the network, as a single and coherent initiative and as for instance opposed to done by members and communicated to the network, has been limited in the last decade. Whilst it is relatively easy to point at outputs (and in some cases outcomes) of the specific topical work done by at least some of UNI's bespoke Hubs, this becomes

much harder for results of the initiative. Even a flagship product like the Global Urban Lectures, that has certainly proven its outreach and worth, has mainly involved UNI members (individually in their own expert capacity, not institutionally) but has also done so alongside many other non-UNI voices and experts, resulting more in a product that is engaged to some degree with UNI rather than a result of the existence of UNI.

Our overview also notes that this issue with network activity might be due to a **lack of incentives for partners to contribute actively**, as through the provision of regular engagement opportunities to academics, brokering of access to key UN-Habitat programs and a much clearer value proposition vis-à-vis the vast variety of other international networks currently mobilizing knowledge and connections between urban researchers. This might also have to do with a lack of **all-of-network programming and resources**. Interestingly this also emerges as a relevant assumption when speaking of UN-Habitat staff, which have occasionally and in an *ad hoc* fashion engaged with UNI albeit expressing repeatedly interest in the potential of a program/initiative that would facilitate greater and more effective access to university knowledge and resources. This might also be due to the variation on size and activity of specific Hub activation programs throughout the history of UNI. Varying substantially from single-purpose projects (like the Safer Cities Hub around HIII) to long-lived experiences of convening (like the Governance Hub), this wide array of Hub activity and presence in UN-Habitat programs has in turn spurred a mix of types and effectiveness of partnerships between academic institutions and UN-Habitat. However, it has also **pushed the fulcrum of UNI activities downward** to self-organised sub-networks and sub-projects centred on specific academic groups' interests and proactivity. Moreover, several of the most active Hub realities have been mainly facilitating collaboration between thematically aligned universities rather than between these and core (operational or normative) work of UN-Habitat, with **limited bearing on and recognition through UN-Habitat's flagship initiatives**.

Relatedly, this of course has to do with **internal resourcing challenges that cannot go underestimated**. Whilst some initial funding was provided toward the HPUI program in 2011 and the early days of UNI in 2013-2014, it is notable that not only this initial pump-priming has not been scaled up to levels needed to maintain and expand an international network, but that in fact resources for UNI have now been cut. A critical limitation for UNI in its recent history is then that of its management being left to a voluntary Steering Committee, intern support, and to UN-Habitat CDTU staff tasked with coordinating the initiative amidst already wide knowledge-focused responsibilities.

UNI currently (February 2022) has **no dedicated UNI staff or budget**, which in turn affects critically UNI's operational capabilities, prospects for long-term planning and capacity to concretize interest (internal by UN-Habitat staff and external by academics) in its work.

Moreover, from document analysis and interviews used to reconstruct this historical excursus, the Initiative's work seems to be relatively seen as a lower priority activity in the agency, rather than its prime university partnership network, generally lacking the proper resources for functioning adequately. Potentially, in the same vein, the **voluntary nature** of UNI membership, makes core network initiatives (but also UNI's thematic Hubs) highly dependent on the willingness of their institutional and individual members volunteering their time beyond academic workloads that are all but decreasing in higher education institutions around the planet.

Third, another pressing issue UNI has been facing for much of its recent history, except for a few limited examples like the 2018 *Big Blue Book* initiative, are its **limits to dissemination of network knowledge both internally and externally.** Notably, we would argue this significantly hinders networking functions as well as visibility. While Habitat UNI's activities create considerable knowledge, information, and data, little of it is organized or published in a way that allows efficient and broader dissemination. Virtually none is appropriately branded in a consistent manner. And often much of this is either subsumed in UN-Habitat operational work with minimal acknowledgment of UNI or indeed into academic outputs and conversations where references to UNI are often at best translated as general statements on 'collaboration with UN-Habitat'. This, in our reading of the history of UNI, has been a recurring issue. The platforms through which UNI has operated have remained relatively inert for quite some time (currently an archived website) or *ad hoc* for specific Hub work.

Fourth, the question of **identity clarity and recognition** has been repeatedly articulated in UNI visions and missions and yet has to date remained unclear in its trajectory. The presumed status of UNI as 'the' anchor for UN-Habitat-university partnerships has mainly been translated into a growing membership but not necessarily growing visibility and understanding across the agency, on key programs and flagship outputs, or indeed by presence in major academic networks. Rather, throughout the last decade the identity of UNI has mainly been realised in the operation of its specific Hubs and their specialised foci, potentially at the detriment of a greater international recognition as bridge, facilitator or repository of collaborations between academia and the agency.

These limitations, along with changing partner engagement as much as internal staffing changes at UN-Habitat, have in several cases led to loss of legacy knowledge, further highlighting the need to better capture the lessons generated at the network, agency, and Hub level. For instance, UNI has in large part struggled to capture the tacit knowledge from departing staff and members associated with the Initiative, representing an area of improvement moving forward. The inadequate dissemination of tacit knowledge is a constraint that prevents Habitat UNI from creating a competitive advantage for its partners at the Hub level. Overall, the knowledge generated through UNI's activities **could be a critical source of effective information on knowledge partnership models** and for designing projects and programs in the field. Still, this information is often not easy to locate or is not available to the public, leading to overlaps, limited usage of UNI programs beyond their immediate active members and perhaps **a degree of network fatigue**. This is at play whilst academics, on the one hand, have the capacity to engage in many other such networked initiatives both within the university world but also available across the multilateral sector. Similarly, on the other hand, UN-Habitat staff also has ample access to other UN-Habitat networks engaging universities and knowledge institutions and is enmeshed into a wide geography of connections across the multilateral sector that already leverage university partnerships. The potential for **adverse forum shopping**[19] at both ends, with both staff and scholars opting for more efficient, resourced and visible networks, is blatant and a major factor in the limitation to UNI's growth and impact over at the very least the last five to seven years. In this regard, more attention must be given to modes of effective dissemination for more general audiences with clear take-away messages and improvements in internal communication both between UNI partners and UN-Habitat staff.

Figure 3: HPUI meeting at the 6th WUF in 2012
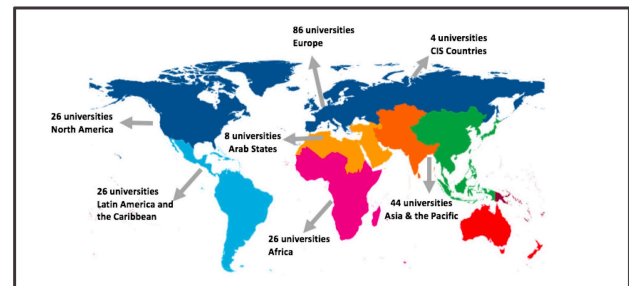
Figure 4: latest Habitat UNI membership (as of 2021)

Figure 5: a sample of the first season of the Global Urban Lectures

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[19] Whilst originally a legal term (choosing the court or jurisdiction that has the most favorable rules or laws for the position being advocated), 'forum shopping' has been applied in global governance and network analysis to stress the capacity of network members to choose between different networking options, underscoring the inherent fragility of networks that are embedded in bigger and busier geographies. See: Murphy, H., & Kellow, A. (2013). Forum shopping in global governance: understanding states, business and NGOs in multiple arenas. *Global Policy*, *4*(2), 139-149.

4. VOICES OF PARTNERSHIP: THE 'INSIDERS' VIEW

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To evaluate how different types of engagements between UN-Habitat and the academic sector have been playing out, and then more specifically how they might affect UNI, we carried out a consultative assessment between November 2021 to February 2022. This involved two semi-quantitative surveys involving responses from 84 UN-Habitat staff and 119 academics engaged in UNI (74 in individual from headquarters and country offices, and 45 as institutional members of the network). This was complemented by two focus groups with UN-Habitat staff and with UNI members respectively. The surveys focused on both value proposition and challenges of UN-Habitat-university relations, and offered also an opportunity to identify key institutions in urban research, capacity building and thought leadership. Quantitative multiple-choice with write-in options for additional answers focused on:

- Tempo of engagement (how often academics and UN-Habitat staff collaborate)
- Main topical focus of the partnerships
- Main value proposition for these partnerships
- Main challenges preventing effective collaboration
- Main venues/platforms that facilitate collaboration

The survey to academics also allowed to identify differences in these questions at three scales, from the individual to the specific department/centre the respondent works in, to the whole-of-institution (e.g. university).[20] Here we provide a summary of these findings split into quantitative survey results and more qualitative learning from the internal focus group and interviews, starting internally with UN-Habitat staff. In the following chapter we provide a review of the scholars' point of view and compare that to the results derived internally from UN-Habitat staff.

Key staff survey data
An initial matter emerging from the survey is that of the degree of engagement UN-Habitat staff has with universities. Regarding the frequency with which the participants collaborate with academic institutions in their line of work, 20% of the respondents specified doing it at least once a week, 17% once every two weeks, 26% once per month. Notably, **31% mentioned not working with universities at all or doing so rarely**. Almost 6% of those surveyed indicated "other" as an answer, implying that the frequency of collaborations has some degree of variation between these tempi. However, it is still notable that **more than half of staff (63%) engaged regularly and altogether quite frequently with universities**. This proves the importance of recognizing relationships between academia and UN-Habitat. It also stresses the size of these connections which cannot certainly be easily captured, networked, or indeed managed by UNI in its current format. As we note below, we see **great knowledge brokering opportunity for UNI** hiding in this finding. A program like UNI is potentially able to better engage these many and frequent connections, provide internal and external guidance and act equally as a facilitator of opportunities and as a vehicle to underline the size of knowledge intensive collaborations that seem afoot in UN-Habitat.
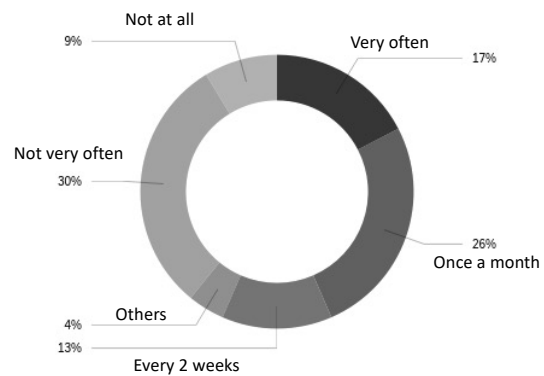
Figure 6: how often do you engage universities? tempo of engagement (UN-Habitat Staff)

Yet what does UN-Habitat staff do when engaging so frequently with universities? When asking respondents about the main types of collaborations, activities surrounding the **production, dissemination, and circulation of knowledge ranked first**, with more than half of the respondents, 54%, specifying this type of

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[20] We are grateful to UNI co-chair Bruce Stiftel for the valuable suggestion to disaggregate these scales in our review.

partnership. Partnerships involving capacity-building ranked second with 25% of the responses. Finally, partnerships that generate innovation, either through the application of pilots or programs, ranked third with 14% of the responses.

Why partner then? In terms of the primary added value of effective collaboration between academic institutions and UN-Habitat, the responses show that having **access to experts has the perception of bringing the most significant added value**, with 17% of participants mentioning it as their first option. 11% of the participants indicated access to data as their first option and 9% access to published research materials, while 10% and 8% specified access to students and personnel, respectively, as their first option.

Importantly though, there seems to also be some perception by staff that by collaborating with academic institutions, the reputation of the projects increases, with 11% of those surveyed marking the improvement in standing as their first option. So overall the value proposition remains skewed toward the role of the 'expert' as partner, or the expert's data, but it is indeed interesting to underscore the reputational value that universities bring to programs ran by the agency.

Interestingly, amongst those UN-Habitat staff that chose to input a more bespoke value proposition in our survey (clicking the 'other' write-in option, approximately 9% of the respondents), a few pointed to the value of **accessing new generations of urban thinkers**. If 'other' replies included "new thinking", "scientific rigour", or "no political correctness", staff also pointed at "student training, intern selection" and "access to fresh new thinking from emerging scholars" and "next generation approaches beyond established names". This is a theme that is echoed even more loudly in more qualitative consultations of our project.
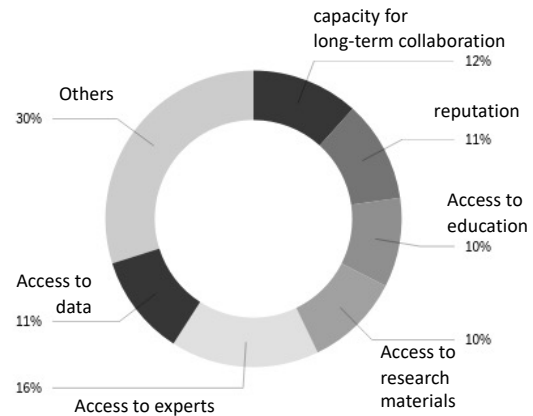
Figure 7: what is value of engaging universities? (UN-Habitat Staff)

Concerning the main venues to carry out effective collaborations, most respondents indicated prominent events of international relevancy. For instance, 19% named major UN-Habitat summits, 16% mentioned bespoke UN-Habitat project events, 10% pointed out to academic conferences, 7% said international UN summits, and 5% specified private sector summits. Joint fieldwork activities were selected as the first venue by 15% of those surveyed, and 8% cited visits from UN-Habitat to partner institutions – which seems to be uncommon with **universities typically seen to be 'going to' UN-Habitat rather than vice-versa**.
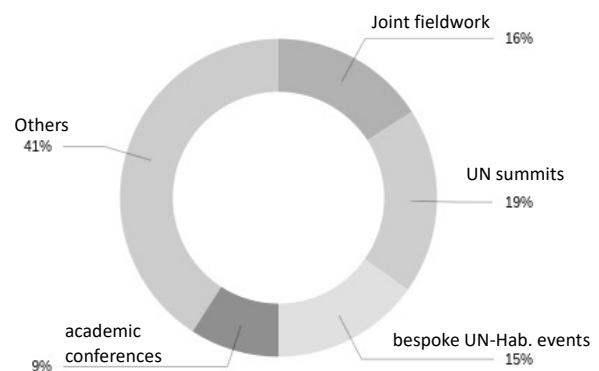
Figure 8: *where* do you engage universities? (UN-Habitat Staff)

Regarding the perceived challenges for effective collaboration, 22% of the respondents identified that the **lack of funding to carry out initiatives is the main obstacle** when collaborating with academic institutions. In the second place, the responses indicate a tie between the following reasons: 1) lack of institutional flexibility by the partners, 2) lack of institutional flexibility by UN-Habitat, and 3) issues with UN system processes, with 13.5% of the

responses each. Timeframes are in third place, with 9% of the responses. Political issues in the work area and differences of opinion with academic institutions occupy the fourth and fifth place with 6% and 5.5% of the answers, respectively. So, whilst funding is a recurring theme, the fundamental problem presented in aggregate by **reciprocal lack of flexibility** and the enduring challenge of working with UN systems is, at the tune of 40.5% of cases, **a critical barrier to collaboration**.
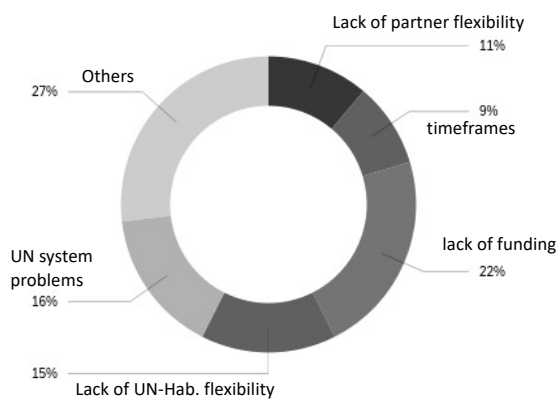
Figure 9: what are the key challenges of engaging universities? (UN-Habitat Staff)

Internal focus group and interviews

Of course, a semi-quantitative survey can only get us so far in terms of appreciation of challenges and opportunities. To this end, to deepen survey results and provide an additional layer of analysis on partnerships with academic institutions, UN-Habitat staff were invited to participate in a follow-up focus group held on December 9, 2021. At the beginning of the session, a summary of the different types of engagements with universities (our 'partnership framework') was presented to encourage the participants to reflect on the form and function of collaborations in which they had been part. A direct prompt to think through the challenges encountered, and the type of engagement they considered most effective, framed these discussions. At the same time, a series of interviews with selected UN-Habitat staff (current and previous with direct UNI experience) were conducted with people who had been part of the Initiative to complement the responses of the focus groups. The interviews served as a further guide to interpret some of findings emerging from survey and focus group.

Both the focus groups and interviews revealed that respondents consider **collaborations with universities fundamental to advancing the UN-Habitat agenda**; however, linking such partnerships to the Habitat UNI is also by far and wide not seen as a straightforward process.

The theme of partnership with universities, as institutions, versus individuals attached to universities also surfaced repeatedly. Of course, individual collaborations with members of academic institutions are perceived as significant in producing results, typically in the format of **individual consultancy agreements**. Yet focus groups and interviews, mirroring survey results, suggested that there is enormous potential in generating projects that can be **scalable and replicable through university networks** and that **institutional collaborations could be more effective formats to draw on expertise** present in university centre/groups than in many cases individual collaborations. Even more so, several participants in the focus groups expressed the importance of having an institutional commitment on the part of universities rather than commitments from individual members as key to the long-term success of their projects. Correspondingly, in the interviews, the difficulty of coordinating individual members was highlighted, which slows down the already tricky operation of UN-Habitat projects, with individual contracting processes often relaying on the goodwill of those individuals to start being implemented notwithstanding delayed payments, contracting processes and recognition. These are of course problems also emerging at the institutional scale too, underpinning the solution cannot be as simple as replacing individuals for institutions or vice-versa. According to the interviewees, having institutional members also facilitates monitoring and coordinating members' activities more efficiently, and allows in many cases for repeated, or longer-term, partnerships, whilst also drawing on the advantage of pooled group resources and expertise versus a specific individual's own knowledge. Furthermore, the possibility of having focal points per university simplifies the collaboration and communication processes, leading to more practical engagements.

In both focus group and interviews, the **examples of successful collaborations were those in which UN-Habitat worked on a specific project**, where the objectives were clearly defined, with one or a limited number of universities. The scope of these projects is focused, and they tend to work exclusively on one of the thematic areas of UN-Habitat. The feasibility of generating massive projects involving a vast number of universities remains to be seen, as no examples of successful partnerships on this scale were mentioned.

Resources and limited ideas as to where to find these were repeatedly raised as an ongoing issue by staff. This echoes challenges emerged during the study's in-depth interviews, where for instance the lack of funding and human resources to support the Initiative were recurring themes. Therefore, most interviewees expressed the need

for the Initiative to be financially sustainable. In the past, it has been proposed to charge members a fee; however, since several academic institutions in the Global South do not have resources, and seeking equity in the participation of universities, this plan was shelved. The requirement to generate a model that allows Habitat UNI to have resources for its expansion and follow-up is key to UNI's longer-term viability.

The need to incorporate the NUA and the SDGs into the study plans of the participating academic institutions, as well as to share curriculums and academic materials between universities, was an issue that was stressed in both focus groups and interviews. In particular, the importance of working with universities that have fewer resources or are less well-known in the urban development environment to enhance their capacities was noted.

Yet the issue of buy in on global agendas and pressing action on internationally shared challenges like climate also often ushered an additional theme resonated that repeatedly in interviews of a focus group conversations. Closer **collaboration with early-career researchers and students** was highlighted as critical area of opportunity by several staff. Since most of the university partnerships currently involve academics who have more experience and are more established figures in urban research and practice, many pointed at the need to "look more broadly" at those "poised to make a difference" in the long term – as one interviewee put it. Here a key theme is that of paying greater attention to the voice, outputs and focus of the 'next generation' of urban academics but also to students likely choosing career pathways in urban practice. This was as much about getting more input from emerging scholars in UN-Habitat work, from those that at times are seen as 'more innovative' or more attuned to next generational thinking, that it is about diversity of viewpoints and capacities. Some interviewees and focus group participant for instance noted how, especially lacking clear institutional partnerships or mechanisms for early career voices engagements, UN-Habitat's practice of relying on 'experts' (often in an individual capacity) might be hampering access to more insightful and 'attuned' modes of urban research.

Finally, the focus group also signalled the **need for a greater number of practical projects** as part of university engagements since academic institutions are ideal spaces to incubate initiatives and generate innovation. Interviewees also mentioned that academic institutions often have an important capacity visibility to connect with governments and other relevant stakeholders, which should serve as a catalyst for projects in the field. Notably, another type of collaboration mentioned through the

focus groups was the participation of UN-Habitat staff as speakers, guest lecturers, or members of doctoral committees and assessments in universities, since students have shown a predisposition to become more closely engaged with the work of practitioners.

Focus group challenges for UNI
Challenges for UNI more specifically were also apparent from the get-go of interviews and focus group. Through the focus groups, many participants expressed a lack of knowledge about the requirements "to be part of" or engage with UNI, or about the specific objectives of the Initiative and its focal points within UN-Habitat. Overall, apart from a minority of cases, there seemed to be general confusion as to both the scope and focus of UNI, but also the **practical issue of 'how to' engage and take part in UNI activities**. In addition, focus groups participants voiced issues like not knowing tools or platforms that communicated the progress or the work of the Initiative on a recurring basis. This could in part explain why being part of UNI is not a priority for many UN-Habitat staff and teams that work with academic institutions. Lack of knowledge about the work of UNI was an issue that was also highlighted in the interviews, relating it particularly to the Initiative's lack of resources, which hinders not only proper operation and management of UNI but also a sound campaign of socialization and visibility across UN-Habitat. Many of those engaged in focus groups and interviews but not actively part of UNI Hubs stressed repeatedly to us their interest to engage but lack of understanding as to how this can be done and how this could enhance their everyday work.

Expressly, when talking about UNI Hubs, it was repeatedly noted that often their **work seems siloed in 'mini networks'** existing within the broader network and with too strong of an academic focus. The level of clarity as to how academic outputs might be linked to UN-Habitat, and the degree of success of the Hubs is also seen as proportional to the resources and operational capacity of the university that leads them, with the universities with the most resources seen as being the ones that provide the most results – perhaps more of a stereotypical view than actual evidence-based consideration as little evaluation studies have been conducted in the Hubs. The interviewees also agreed that the participation heterogeneity at the Hub level is connected as much to the resources of the lead universities that it is in the individual members that lead the Hubs, with a bias here on how active and visible Hubs are depending on how connected their leaders might be across UN-Habitat. However, in the interviews, it was accentuated that the lack of standardized communication between UN-Habitat staff and UNI, and across the network as between the member universities, might also be a main impediment to

developing initiatives that involve a more significant number of academic institutions. Both in the interviews and the focus group, it was stated that the potential of the Initiative is reduced to that "of a directory of universities" (as a focus group participant put it) if most members of the network are not active.

Through the interviews and in parts of the focus group, it was also implied that the mission and vision of the Initiative require revision. This with the aim of narrowing its scope to communicate UNI's objectives more clearly, strengthen its operational contribution to UN-Habitat's mandate, and external reputation. Interestingly, this issue also (in several interviews but also in focus group breakout conversations) mapped onto the question of 'influencers' that we tackle more in depth in the next chapter. Questions were raised repeatedly as to whether the **'thought leaders' of urban research** and capacity building are in fact 'there' in UNI to be engaged or if the network did not offer those who are perceived to be the key drivers of the cities' conversation today. This is an issue we pick up below comparing the geographies of perceived thought leadership in urban research and training by UN-Habitat staff and academics.

5. VOICES OF PARTNERSHIP: THE 'PARTNERS VIEW

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The second part of the evaluation of the types of collaborations between Habitat UNI and the academic sector consisted of an external assessment carried out through focus groups with members of higher academic institutions, a series of confidential interviews mirroring the internal UN-Habitat ones, and a survey directed at UNI partners. Like the internal survey, the external survey consisted of 8 multiple-choice questions and 4 open-ended questions. A total of 121 UNI partners completed the survey: 45 'institutional' partners and 76 'individual members'. We detail these here with some comparative insight to the staff survey data, before moving on to a brief section mapping the issue of what geographies of urban research and training emerge from the two internal-external surveys and focus groups.

Key partner survey data
When asked about the frequency with which the respondents' institutions or respondents collaborate with UN-Habitat, 6% of the participants specified that their institution works with UN-Habitat at least once a week, another 6% once every two weeks, and 5% once every month. Most respondents, 58%, mentioned their **academic institution rarely works with UN-Habitat** if at all. This signalled a marked difference with the internal survey and a distinct area for improvement.
Importantly, compared to 6% of internal respondents who indicated 'other' as their answer, almost 19% of external respondents checked this option, often pointing at very specific events, working engagements and initiatives where they have engaged with UN-Habitat. 'Other' responses also flagged that whilst engagements "with UN-Habitat" might be happening rarely, connections with "UN-Habitat individuals" or "specific officers" might be more frequent but informal, raising important questions as to what counts as 'official' engagements. By comparison, when respondents were asked how often their institutions collaborated with other UN agencies, 6% indicated at least once a week, 3% at least once every two weeks, and 17% at least once a month. As well as collaborations with UN-Habitat, 59% of respondents revealed that they do not collaborate with UN agencies or rarely do so. On this occasion, 13% of surveyed partners marked 'other' as their answer, showing a greater consistency in the frequency of collaborations with UN agencies compared to those with UN-Habitat, but again pointing at similar issues as per above with either event-

specific engagements or wondering what to make of more informal connections.
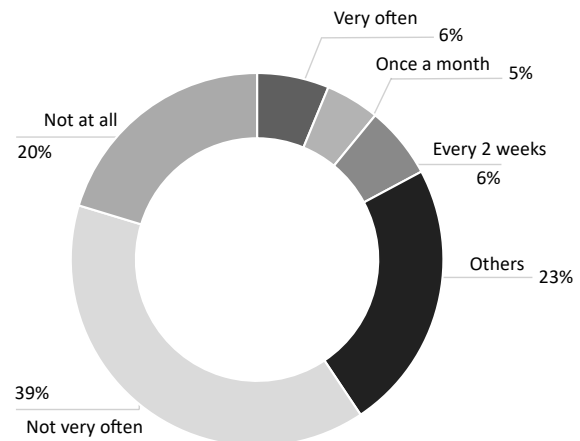
Figure 10: how often do you engage UN-Habitat? (academic partners)

If we separate the responses into those of institutional members and individual members, at the institutional level, no one indicated working with UN-Habitat very often, 6% marked the option once every two weeks, 12% once a month, and 67% did not work with UN-Habitat or rarely did. In contrast, only 3% of individual members reported working with UN-Habitat at least once a week, 6% once every two weeks, and 15% once a month. For individual members, those who do not engage with UN-Habitat at all or rarely do so account for 68% of the answers. The theme of **occasional, ad hoc, and rare contact with UN-Habitat** continues perhaps surprisingly strong in our academic survey.

Responses focused on the individual level show that only a small number of people are often actively involved in personal capacity when collaborating with UN-Habitat, demonstrating potentially an equally lost potential of not using the network of partners to its full capacity.
This might also be putting a question mark on the enduring emphasis on individual consultants and individual-level partnerships. In fact, **departmental-level collaborations seem the most commonly referenced and established**, **followed by individual ones**, with a few university networks engaged and few universities officially partnering as whole-of-institutions. More on these dynamics are outlined in both Annex 1 on the history of UNI, and Annex 2 through more general case studies of partnerships.

Furthermore, when we asked institutional partners if they knew how often their department or school engaged with other UN Agencies, none indicated "often" (at least once a week) as a response, 3% stated once every two weeks, and 12% once a month. Like the results of collaborating

with UN-Habitat, 67% of those institutional members who answered the survey revealed that their department or school did not collaborate with other UN agencies or rarely did so. Regarding their work with UN agencies other than UN-Habitat at the individual level, 3% of the respondents specified that they get involved frequently (at least once a week), another 3% stated that they work with other UN agencies once every two weeks, and 16% once a month. A sizeable majority, 68%, indicated that they do not work with other UN agencies or rarely do so, mirroring to some degree their responses to UN-Habitat.

In terms of the focus of the collaboration when working with UN-Habitat, most respondents (22%) reported **knowledge mobilization as their primary type of collaboration**. This observation aligns with survey responses and focuses groups with UN-Habitat staff, who indicated a strong trend toward knowledge mobilization collaborations. Collaborations related to general capacity building ranked second with 17% of responses, followed by data generation and technical capacity building at 14% each. Innovation, consisting of piloting the application of new knowledge or programs, also ranked high with 11% of responses. When we asked respondents about the partnership's focus with other UN agencies, the responses were similar to those reflecting the direction of collaboration with UN-Habitat. 20% indicated knowledge mobilization as the first option, followed by general capacity building (17%), data generation (12%), and innovation (12%).

Once again, if we analyse the answers at the institutional level versus at the individual level, in institutional terms (at university and department level), 21% cite knowledge mobilization as the main focus, 20% general capacity building and 11.5% information translation. Technical capacity building and data generation tied in fourth place with 10% of the answers each. At the individual level, responses were highly like those of institutional members, with knowledge mobilization being the most cited type of collaboration (23%). Information translation occupies second place (17%), and general capacity building the third (15%). For individuals, innovation ranked fourth with 12% of responses, and technical capacity building fifth with 11%. Regarding the types of collaboration with other UN agencies, knowledge mobilization ranked first for both individual members (22%) and institutional members (19%), followed by general capacity building with 20% of responses at the individual level and 17% of the answers at the institutional level. The translation of information was positioned in third place for both groups, with 15% of responses at the individual level and 13% at the institutional level.

When asked about the primary added value of effective collaboration between academic institutions and UN-Habitat, most respondents indicated the chief value was the **capacity for a long-term partnership** (13%). This aligns with the internal survey responses and reveals that some university members and some UN-Habitat staff recognize the potential in learning from one another. although not in large percentages. The second most cited added value was developing an ongoing collaboration in the UN system, with 11% of participants marking it as their first option. Meanwhile, 10% of participants mentioned the high international reputation of the project, another 9% the high international standing of their university, and 8% access to educational resources. Access to funding accumulated 7% of the responses, whereas access to other not-for-profit sector institutions and access to published research materials represented 6% of the answers each.
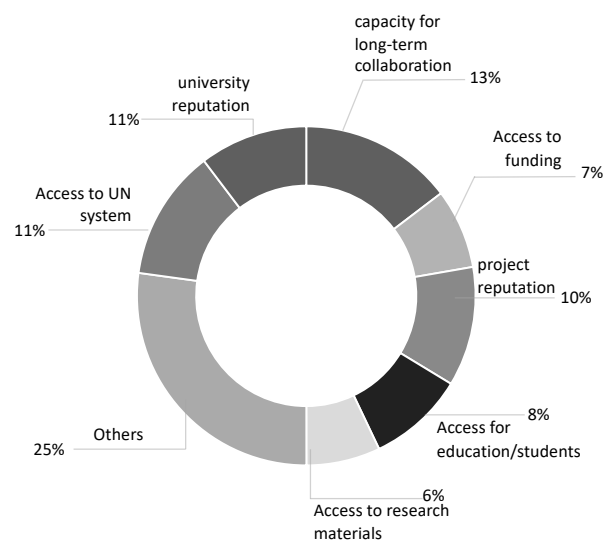
Figure 11: what is the value of engaging UN-Habitat? (academic partners)

Responses at the institutional level indicated a very high (15%) or high (47%) level of appreciation of the value of engaging with *UN-Habitat*. 19% indicated that the importance of collaborating with UN-Habitat was small or modest. Conversely, at the institutional level, 25% of respondents acknowledge a very high value to collaborating with *other UN agencies*, 37% marked high, and 16% specified seeing little to no value in engaging with other UN agencies. Regarding the types of collaboration with other UN agencies, knowledge mobilization ranked first for both individual members (22%) and institutional members (19%), followed by general capacity building with 20% of responses at the individual level and 17% of the answers at the institutional level. Responses at the individual level indicated a higher level of appreciation for

the work done in conjunction with UN-Habitat and other UN agencies. For example, 44% of the individuals specified that they consider the value of working with UN-Habitat very high, another 40% as high, and only 9% of the individuals reported that they did not see the value in this collaboration or that its value he was modest.

Responses for the value of collaborating with other UN agencies at the individual level were highly like those collaborating with UN-Habitat, with 41% implying very high importance to engaging with other UN agencies and 34% a high value. In this instance, 19% of the individuals reported that they did not see the value in this collaboration or that its value was modest, a significant increase compared to the opinion for UN-Habitat. So, overall, whilst appreciation for the value of partnerships with UN-Habitat remains solid (62%) at an institutional level, this institutional **recognition is not on par with the much higher (84%) appreciation demonstrated by individuals**, flagging some potential reputational, visibility or presence challenges for UN-Habitat.

The institutional responses showed that 17% of the collaborations started thanks to a direct approach to UN-Habitat, 15% initiated thanks to the contact established by UN-Habitat colleagues, and 10% more began through word of mouth. Collaborations started through information from professional associations or listed services accounted for 8% of responses, and those created through publicly advertised opportunities accounted for another 8% of responses. At the individual level, word of mouth from other colleagues ranked first with 18% of responses, information from professional associations ranked second with 16% of responses, the individual approach to UN-Habitat and speaking directly with colleagues from UN-Habitat tied for third place with 12.5% of responses, respectively, UN Consultant rosters ranked fourth with 7% of responses and social media ranked fifth with 5%.
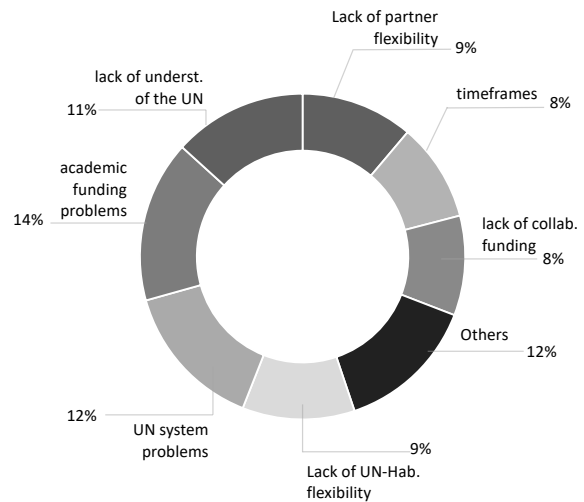
Figure 12: what are the main challenges of partnering with UN-Habitat? (academic partners)

As far as the perceived challenges for effective collaboration, 14% of the respondents identified **problems with the academic funding processes** as a main obstacle. Again, this response lines up with the most cited challenge in the internal survey. In the second place, 12% of those surveyed signalled a problem with UN system processes for collaboration, tying the main issue to processes again. In third place, 11% of the responses indicated having problems understanding how the UN system operates. UN-Habitat's lack of institutional flexibility and lack of institutional flexibility by the academic institution occupied the fourth place, with 9% of the answers each. This is still aligned with internal views, but stresses **other challenges not charted by internal UN-Habitat staff views**. Availability of funding for partnerships and timeframes for collaboration were tied as the fifth most cited reasons, with 8% of the answers each. Finally, the costs of UN-Habitat collaboration were ranked sixth, with 4% of the responses.

Most participants (17%) stated that major UN-Habitat summits, such as the World Urban Forum, are the main venues that facilitate effective collaboration between academic institutions and UN-Habitat. Major academic conferences, such as the Urban Affairs Association Annual Summit, were signalled as the second most cited venue (12%). Joint fieldwork activities and visits from UN-Habitat staff to partner institutions tied for third place as essential venues for effective collaboration, with 11% of responses each. Meanwhile, major city network summits, visits to UN-Habitat from partner institutions, major international UN summits, bespoke UN-Habitat project events, and government summits on cities such as the World Cities Summit, all tied in third place, with 8% of responses each. The fourth place was occupied by private sector or think

tank summits, such as the Smart City Expo and Pritzker Forum, with 3% of the answers. Lastly, when asked about the prominent academic institutions central to the CoP's work areas, the responses were extremely similar to those of the internal survey, with three institutions receiving the most mentions, the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities, London School of Economics' LSE Cities centre, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Senseable Cities Lab – an issue we pick up again below in this chapter.

Figure 13: where do you partner with UN-Habitat? (academic partners)

External focus group and interviews

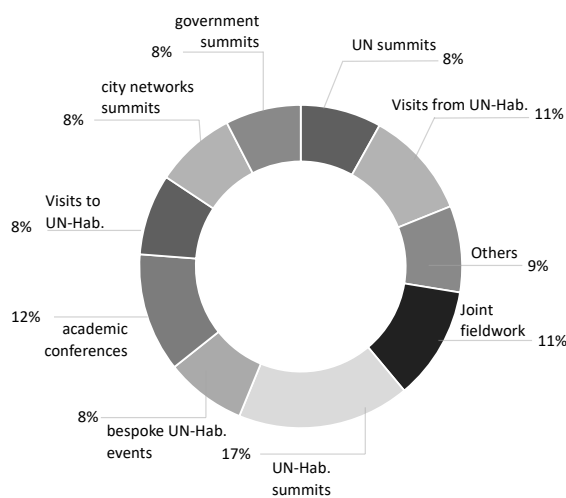To include an external qualitative insight into our evaluation, we mirrored the internal assessment methodology carried out with UN-Habitat staff with a similarly planned focus group hosting academics on 18 January 2022. Once again, at the beginning of the session, a summary of our framework approach detailing the different types of collaborations with universities was introduced to ask participants about the kind of partnerships they had been part of, the challenges encountered, and the typology of collaboration they considered most effective. Academics were, like UN-Habitat, split into small sub-groups to minimise the amount of input and balanced discussion in view of the relatively large number of participants.

The focus group offered an opportunity for the participants to discuss the challenges and opportunities of collaborating with UN-Habitat, share their experiences, learn about initiatives that are being carried out in other geographies and express suggestions for possible future collaborations. To a large extent, **the group reaffirmed the survey results**. For instance, participants overwhelmingly cited knowledge mobilization collaborations, such as reports, meetings, workshops, and conferences, as what they deemed as successful examples of engaging with UN-

Habitat. When it came to addressing the 'outputs' part of our study, academics in the focus group mainly centred their reflections on knowledge products we have tagged as Instruction, Education, and Convening, which emerged as the most cited and discussed types of knowledge outputs. It is important to note that several of the collaborations mentioned in the focus group had been taking place at an individual level and often not at an institutional level – as either sanctioned by universities and departments or set up formally through institutional agreements and MoUs with UN-Habitat.

By far and large, apart from individual collaborations based on educational activities (e.g. architectural and planning studios, thesis supervision, master student assignments), individual-level collaborations noted by participants have taken the shape of personal consultancy contracts and small-scale activities led by a main 'expert' as the bridge with the agency. If this is of course a continuing challenge for institutional-level collaboration emerging repeatedly in our review, it is also true that it also indicates an area of opportunity for the future of partnerships between Habitat UNI and individual members. These already serve as consultants to develop specific knowledge products by UN-Habitat, such as toolkits and reports. In particular, the participants highlighted the **relative advantages of having both individual and institutional partners**. Collaborations with a network of universities or single universities are recognized to provide visibility to UNI. Yet, partnerships at the individual level are also seen to be offering a level of practicality critical in the operationalization of projects especially vis-à-vis the flexibility barriers noted above.

Participants also stressed individuals, like partners, **struggle with evident engagement barriers around contracting, project timings and demands** placed upon them on short timelines. A recurring story in interviews and focus groups, as much as consultations with steering committee members, was for instance that of contracts completions occurring well beyond project deadlines, payment delays and severe difficulties in engaging with the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON) as the bureaucratic bridge for most consultants and institutions.

However, some participants also lamented the relative problems in these arrangements where limited capacity to leverage larger resources of their institutions, but also the resilience and continuity of projects otherwise repeatedly dependent on a single personal relationship. The **relative balance of opinions as to whether individual or institutional partnerships are preferrable** contrasts to some degree with the views of the interviewees we engaged and indeed the results of the internal focus groups, where it was largely common agreement that

initiatives like UNI should focus on institutional partnerships and that much of the value of single academics has to do also with their links with their broader institutions.

The focus group showed that members of partners are highly interested in collaborating with UN-Habitat and generating even more synergies than they have so far. The participants appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns when collaborating with UN-Habitat or more specifically Habitat UNI. Notably, s**ome participants expressed their intention to engage with UNI actively but were unsure of the processes** required to do so. This sentiment is similar to that expressed in the focus groups with UN-Habitat staff. Several participants in the internal focus groups revealed that they do not know how to take part in the Initiative. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the lack of communication about the processes and work of the Initiative is an area of opportunity, both internally and externally. Especially, Habitat UNI is seen as an initiative with sizeable potential in terms of networking and project generation, but at the same time one that seems often to have failed short of expectations.

Notably, as with interviews, several participants to the focus group stressed **UN-Habitat initiatives like UNI do not happen in a network vacuum**: rather, there is a clear appreciation that there are countless other programs and initiatives 'out there' that also offer collaborative platforms and pathways to impact for academics in urban research. A critical issue, then, is that of value proposition and distinctiveness of program like UNI in the wake of the countless networks (by cities, academics and multilateral organizations), associations and internationalization processes available to academics (and conversely to UN-Habitat staff to engage with) today. There seems to be, at least through focus groups and interviews, a common recognition that the potential value of UNI to this regard is in its purported role as 'the' gateway for UN-Habitat-university partnership.

In focus groups, but also in interviews and consultations with UNI's steering committee, participants emphasized the need to build collaborations aimed at influencing policy formulation and decision-making at different levels of government. Additionally, participants agreed that the practical experiences and know-how creation of collaborations must also be included in a more comprehensive and effective communication strategy so that they can be replicated or scaled. To this end, partners should be encouraged to share lessons learned on available UN-Habitat platforms. A more practical approach in conjunction with the potential of UN-Habitat to generate projects in which it partners not only with

academic institutions but also with the private sector, NGOs, and communities, are critical elements in applying research to the solution of urban problems.

Similarly, incorporating students and early career researchers into projects in the field presents a unique and intensive learning opportunity to develop the skills of future professionals and leaders in urban development. Importantly, the engagement with students and early-career researchers is seen as a potentially very effective mode of knowledge mobilization to develop practical solutions and applications when needed by testing ideas, approaches, tools and in the meantime contributing to shaping the next generations of urban thought leaders. Far more explicit focus and resource mobilization in this **'next generation' engagement** is often pointed out by participants to our study as **a critical area of development needed in UN-Habitat**, perhaps beyond student competitions, toward professional development, 'certification' and expertise recognition. This has for instance also emerged around the need for UN-Habitat and universities to foster new voices in urban practice and policymaking, or to **give space to new viewpoints** into pressing challenges for cities. It has also to do, in some cases flagged to us, with the issue of accessing different and potentially more innovative voices beyond those of the well-established "names" in the field, ensuring both renewal and continuity over the coming decades past recognizable 'thought leaders'.

Through the focus group, CoPs were highlighted as an additional vehicle for potential additional networking, capable of promoting the creation of strategic alliances more effectively through their topical approaches. Critically, **CoPs were seen as potentially more influential than existing UNI Hubs** because of the internal buy in to the CoP system and **direct access by CoPs to tangible UN-Habitat projects** scholars could engage in. Moreover, whilst CoPs might be seen by some as an interesting as mechanisms to develop, disseminate and apply knowledge to solve sectoral problems more effectively, questions as to their accessibility and value for university partnership emerged in droves across our focus groups and interviews. Participants agreed that the introduction of the CoPs presents an opportunity to facilitate collaboration and the creation of specialized knowledge in sectors of high relevance for UN-Habitat. However, questions were raised as to how they might be able to influence the focus of universities towards these sectors and, more importantly, offer bridges able to capture the 'state of the art' of urban research in the specific areas of the CoPs. Notably, some minor questions as to their actual alignment and engagement with UNI Hubs were raised again, whilst often participants also seemed unaware of

what the CoPs-Hubs links might or should be, or as to why **CoPs might not simply replace Hubs.**

Another issue that was repeatedly part of the discussion has been that of resourcing and financing partnerships. On several occasions, the **lack of funds is the main barrier** to carrying out events, developing materials, implementing field projects, and other types of collaborations. While universities that have a greater capacity for mobilizing resources are the ones that carry out most of the partnerships, for those with limited resources, it is challenging to generate initiatives or take a lead role. In internal interviews, the lack of funding was also a topic of frustration. Notably, though, even larger, and Northern institutions considered 'resource rich' were clearly highlighted as often not having the capacity to simply 'bankroll' the engagement with UN-Habitat, usually requiring at a minimum access to shared grants, financial incentives and base cost recovery mechanisms to be persuaded into tangible partnerships with UN-Habitat. Despite all the work that has been carried out to make UNI a successful initiative, the lack of human and financial resources is seen as a continuing deterrent to increasing the number of engagements with academic institutions or depending existing engagements. This might be a possible reason why some of the **major 'influencers'** (in our survey parlance, as we flag below) are **rarely engaged effectively through UNI's network or Hubs**. Discussions on resource matters revealed that to remain relevant to its individual and institutional partners, UNI must combine integrated knowledge identification, generation, sharing, and use with funding to achieve and sustain results.

Finally, participants provided suggestions on improving outreach to universities and increasing the agency's impact in the academic sector. One of these recommendations was the creation of a database that compiles the most relevant topics for the CoPs so that it can be used as a guide in the preparation of masters and doctoral theses. In this way, the agency would be using academic research for practical purposes, and the students would be developing pivotal studies conducive to achieving the objectives established in the NUA and SDGs. Furthermore, participants urged UN-Habitat to make calls for proposals public rather than, as one of our interviewees put it, "inviting specific pre-selected institutions or investigators". This has been a commonplace theme across most of our study: what

seems to be missing as a tangible opportunity, either through UNI or elsewhere, is both a clearly **accessible forum for academic partners** of UN-Habitat and **a practical platform for opportunity recognition** and supply-demand exchange where needs (at either end) can meet relevant expertise).

The demand to better advertise calls, open spaces for input (not always funded), and encourage this two-way engagement stems from the fact that by working with the same pool of organizations or people, the potential of incorporating expert leaders in crucial issues for the agency, who are not aware of the possibility of collaboration, is lost. So, for instance, participants agreed that more emphasis should be placed on the content of training and events organized by UNI being widely accessible and scalable by enhanced communication techniques. It also has to do with the pitfalls of the individualistic model stressed above, which would not be wholly eclipsed by this platforming approach but that would be able to go hand in hand with teams, departments and centres of expertise better recognizing opportunities to partake in and engage with UN-Habitat programs. This might also indicate that **knowledge translation is a persistent issue** with room for improvement in various aspects of the agency's work on science communication.

An inside-out view: the key 'influencers'

In both internal and external surveys, we included a set of optional write-in field to identify what key institutions represent 'urban' thought leadership in the eyes of survey respondents. This was done to address the request by CDTU to "map potential partner universities, research institutions, networks and initiatives conducting research at sub-regional, regional and global level and particularly relevant to UN-Habitat's current work and programmes". We did so to try and provide a snapshot of the landscape of those that 'stand out' in the eyes of UN-Habitat staff and academics when it comes to research, training, but also looking at a preliminary insight into those that drive this beyond academia, to identify key global referent points. Critically, we did so not to create a ranking of most-cited institutions.[21] Rather, our goal here is to understand, first, the geographies of key institutional voices animating urban research debates, the key hubs delivering the kinds of training UN-Habitat engages (or indeed should engage)

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[21] We explicitly sought to avoid compiling a list of individuals to emphasise the centres of expertise and institutions that constitute the imaginary of our survey interlocutors. This was both at the direct

request of UN-Habitat as much as in our effort to steer clear of rankings and 'top' lists.

in, and the balance of Northern-Southern imagination when it comes to **those that drive today's 'cities' conversation**. Four key issues emerge from this summary exercise, summarised in figures 12, 13 and 14 through worldcloud comparisons of internal and external points of view.

Figure 14: wordcloud of key academic influencers in research (UN-Habitat staff and academic partners)

One immediate issue that stands out to us when looking at the mix of academic influencers is to note the **diversity of scales people refer to**. In our picture we see a mix of whole-of-university mentions, as with KU Leuven in Belgium and NYU in New York, and department-level mentions as with Harvard's Graduate School of Design and the University of Sheffield's Urban Institute. Notably too, a few institutions are mentioned in a way simply by their home city, like with Chicago (University of), Manchester (University of) and indeed Melbourne (University of). In some cases too we need to look beyond the size of work cloud reporting to notice the 'depth' of referencing to certain institutions. University College London, for example, gets both specific departmental mentions, as with the DPU (Development Planning Unit) and IIPP (Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose), as well as overall "UCL" only mentions (potentially in some cases actually implying departments without naming them).

Figure 15: wordcloud of key influencers in education knowledge products (UN-Habitat staff and academic partners)

When tackling the issue of those that shape education knowledge products, a few additional issues stand out to us. First, it is important to note **this group is smaller** in absolute (i.e. with less survey respondents offering insights as to this question) and relative terms (i.e. with less institutions mentioned proportionally than with the influencers in research).[22] This group is, predictably as not restricted to academia only as a question, more diverse in the types of institutions. More importantly, this question gives us a sense of **major non-academic organisations** like C40 Cities, the World Bank Group or Cities Alliance **recognized on par with major higher education realities** like the University of Oxford's Department of Continuing Education. Equally, some common trends continue with the previous wordcloud of research influencers. Realities like the London School of Economics LSE Cities programme or UCL DPU, or the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) also stand out in this part of our review.

Figure 16: wordcloud of key non-academic influencers in research (from UN-Habitat staff and academic partners)

The picture of non-academic 'influencers' is as varied as the geography of academia. With a relatively well-**balanced mix of institutions**, this point of view by staff and academics scores highly both think tank realities like the World Resources Institute (WRI), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities (notably all very different in focus and constitution), but also major multilateral actors like World Bank and OECD, programs like Cities Alliance, or city networks like Metropolis and C40 Cities. Some private sector actors also stand out but in a lesser form than the above, and mainly in relation to built environment consultancy firms like Arup, but with a smaller (and perhaps surprising) minority of mentions of other types of private sector entities in the tech, construction or other sectors.

Lessons for UN-Habitat on partner engagement
So what have we learnt about current and potential partners that UN-Habitat can engage with?

First, at least in the imaginations of staff and scholars engaged here, **the geography of urban research is a broad one** with wide catchment **across both Global North and South** institutions. If there are recurrent anchors of this worldview, it is also true that a vast number of institutions noted by our respondents received one or two mentions signifying specialist views and recognitions localised to specific regional/country/topical needs. Encouragingly, with still several major Northern institutions clearly visible across the board, a series of **well-established Southern realities emerge as critical hubs** time and time again in the minds of both staff and academics irrespective of professional backgrounds or levels of seniority – as it is the case with the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities (ACC) or the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Bangalore.

Second, in training as much as research, the most common form of **repeated recognition is often given to unit level entities** at departmental/centre scales, rather than to whole universities or university networks. This is for instance the case with well recognised institutions like University College London's Development Planning Unit (DPU), the University of Sheffield's Urban Institute or MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning. However, significantly, when it comes to training, several **major non-academic but knowledge intensive institutions** like the World Bank and C40 Cities stand out in close comparison with some of these centres and departments.

Third, the **points of view by academic and staff are closer** than one would perhaps initially expect. The viewpoint of academics surveyed here presents possibly a slightly broader (more institutions) and wider (more countries and regional coverage) imagination of staff members, who however are perhaps the main drivers of localised recognition in the Global South in terms of mentions of institutions not commonly raised by others.

Fourth, in terms of a specific lesson for **Habitat UNI**, it is clear to us that UNI might be **missing explicit engagement with key international influencers**. Even if compiled in part by UNI members (121 in total), the picture of those recognized as key shapers points at a variety of institutions that are not active members of UNI, as through steering committee membership, UNI Hubs leadership, organization of major UNI events or participation in key UNI panels at WUF. This does not however mean that these institutions are not engaged with UN-Habitat more generally. Hence, we see both a challenge to UNI operations but also an opportunity to enrol in the aspiration and exchange offered by UNI key influencers.

6. A REVIEW OF KEY KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

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Understanding the variety of 'knowledge products'
As highlighted above, knowledge partnerships' nature, scale, and anchors need to be read as features (often hybrid ones) intertwined with the 'products' of these knowledge-based collaborations between universities and UN-Habitat. This association is a relatively well-understood reality across most programs by the agency which involve academic partners. It would be fair to say that through its work with academic institutions, one of the main objectives of UN-Habitat has been the creation of "**knowledge products**" (henceforth "KPs" for brevity). These are defined as **tangible outputs, activities, or services to exchange, share or apply information and knowledge content**.[23] Accordingly, KPs are outputs in which the addition of analytical value provided by UN-Habitat (and more specifically here by the university-UN-Habitat partnership) is significant, increasing the understanding of the relationships and causality between elements of a body of evidence. KPs are used and disseminated internally and externally to the agency by a wide range of stakeholders.

Key actors in development of UN-Habitat KPs include not only UN staff and academic institutions but also development partners, NGOs, the private sector, think tanks, and the media.

Different KPs have distinctive features in them or their formulation processes to achieve their intended outcomes and results and influence target stakeholders' thinking and decisions. Of course, the impacts of successful KPs are inherently challenging to measure and, to some extent, out of the scope of this review. However, there is evidence of a positive contribution to the formulation of good practices, the adoption of policy reforms, and the more straightforward and more sustainable implementation of projects, pointing toward the need to attend to the impacts of KPs, not just their typology. As we outline in the concluding section of this report, an additional evolution of the framework we present here would be to include a typology and evaluation frame to understand partnerships and products (outputs), as well as their outcomes.

Based on document review, interviews, and focus groups with UN-Habitat staff, we would assess the variety of KPs resulting from partnerships with academic institutions to six main types of products summarised below in figure 15.

Figure 17: types and examples of knowledge products

1. Instruction products
KPs aimed explicitly at providing guidance and direction
Guides; Analytical toolkits; Frameworks ; Agendas (application/implementation); Advice and consultancy

2. Data and research products
KPs aimed principally at providing analysis and assessment and/or at information dissemination
Profiles and monitoring; Datasets; Reviews; Reports

3. Education products
KPs aimed capacity building and skills enhancement
Courses and modules; Curricula and degrees; Academies and training institutions; Staff development; Studios and student competitions

4. Advocacy and policy products
KPs aimed explicitly at shaping urban governance and management
Strategies and plans; Policy (design, delivery, implementation); Campaigns; Awareness programs

5. Convening products
KPs aimed linking and convening stakeholders
Summits; Workshops; Networks; Participatory processes

6. Building and technology products
Material KPs resulting from the development of new infrastructures or technologies (including digital ones)
Planning and designing; Construction analytics; Certification and operation management; Prototypes and patents; Technologies and tools

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[23] We draw this definition both from the 2012 ADB strategic review of knowledge products, as well as from similar work conducted by the UN

Development Program in 2009 (on an *inventory of knowledge products*) and 2019 (on a *knowledge product production review*).

Yet, as with the three sets of features detailed in our partnerships' framework that outline nature, scale, and anchor of the knowledge partnerships between UN-Habitat and universities, the six types above are not mutually exclusive when it comes to the 'output' of a collaboration. Instead, in many cases, individual outputs perform double or triple functions. For instance, data and research outcomes have been regularly blended into advocacy and/or instruction knowledge products. Indeed, this report is one such example of what could be 'tagged' as joint research and instruction. As we did with the three types depicting the nature of knowledge partnerships, we outline here more in-depth examples and features of the six types summarised in figure 3, drawing from the case studies described in Annex 2 of the report, before then moving to a more detailed analysis of the work of Habitat UNI in the next chapter.

Instruction

KPs that we could call "instructional" correspond to those materials that are produced to convey information in an explicitly normative way (what UN-Habitat calls often "normative tools") aimed at shaping the operations of one of more institutions. These products include lectures, books, reports, journals, abstracts, frameworks, agendas, working papers, training-oriented teaching materials, and multimedia. Instructional KPs often incorporate suggestions, tips, or procedures to ensure the proper implementation of a policy, process, or practice. Moreover, these KPs represent a type of knowledge that

is less formal but is expected to impact project preparation, institutional diagnosis, or policy analysis and institutional reform of a particular sector, capturing the experts' tacit knowledge to enhance operational effectiveness. Instruction products aid in broadening competencies, providing the latest developments, and emerging trends, supporting the exchange of knowledge and experience with professionals and practitioners, and preparing participants to take on larger and more complex responsibilities.

Some examples of Instruction KPs developed by UN-Habitat are the Spatial Development Framework, a framework designed to provide technical support for the grounding of National Urban Policies and the formulation of subsequent action plans; the City Resilience Framework for Action, which identifies priority actions to build the cities 'resilience progressively; the Legal Frameworks to Plan Sustainable Cities, a tool designed to support national and local governments in assessing and reforming their urban planning legislative and governance frameworks to develop a solid context for participatory urban planning and rights-based approaches to development, and the guide for Climate Change Vulnerability and Risk.

Figure 18: summary of case studies in Annex 2
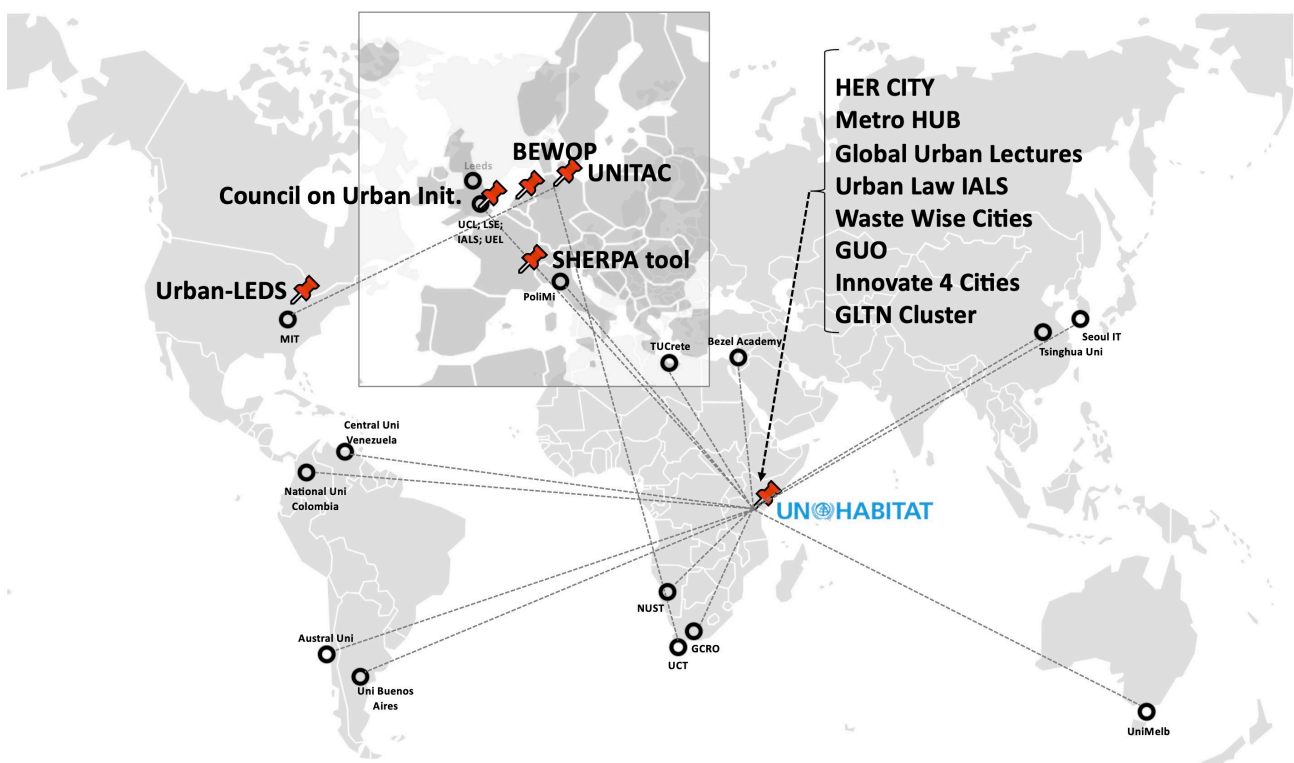
Data and Research

This type refers to products derived from research or used to provide up-to-date quality data and are used as authoritative references to inform policy dialogues, reducing information gaps and increasing understanding. These include datasets, surveys, infographics, indexes, catalogues, reviews, and statistical reports to influence key decision-makers and generate interest. Data and Research KPs are analytical, scholarly, research, or informational materials intended for public dissemination, whether sold or freely distributed. They represent the knowledge of specialists in different urban development subjects and are envisioned to be used as source material for other analyses and knowledge products. In addition, the data and research KPs provide information that enriches the current debate on sustainable urban development issues.

Some examples of Data and Research KPs developed by UN-Habitat are the Innovative City-Wide Slum Profiling and Enumeration, which is a city-wide data gathering approach for collecting settlement-level data and detailed household information on land tenure, housing, essential services, and socio-economic data; the Urban Migration Profiles, which are comprehensive assessments of the status of migration governance at the urban level, and the City Resilience Profiling, a tool to support local governments to lead the change process necessary to address resilience challenges in their cities through broad and cross-sector data collection, diagnosis and assessment of resilience.

Education

Education KPs are geared towards facilitating learning and the development of skills, differing from Instruction KPs in that they require an evaluation or assessment of the learning content. Some of the products pertaining to this typology are MOOCs, courses, specialized degrees, curricula, academies, and summer schools. Knowledge KPs can be assessed through their strategic alignment, accessibility, relevance, effectiveness, adequacy, the quality of shared knowledge, and the usefulness of knowledge. UN-Habitat developed the urban resource centres, One-Stops, as Education KPs that provide education for urban youth to attain employment and decent jobs.

In addition, some examples of Education KPs developed by academic institutions in conjunction with UN-Habitat include the new undergraduate minor program of study in Sustainable Cities offered by the Georgia Institute of Technology, the graduate course in Urban Innovation presented by the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, and the Spatial Planning in Growing Economies Program offered by TU Dortmund in Germany. Examples of Education KPs developed independently by universities but supporting the objectives of UN-Habitat include for instance the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University's (Morocco) master's degree program in sustainable and smart cities, the University of Cape Town (South Africa) massive open online course in Climate Adaptation in Africa, the undergraduate Sustainability Module offered at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), or the Emory University, Georgia State University, and Spelman College U.N. University Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development, which offers a variety of Education KPs. Centrally, it is also important to underscore how Education KPs can be a venue for addressing resource limits stressed throughout this report. There might also be an under-explored potential for enlisting greater flexibility for no- or low-cost university partners by providing opportunities for researchers, educators, and institutions to accomplish their own objectives. Facilitating classroom projects that are core curricular components at universities could in turn allow for access to decision makers, community stakeholders and field learning. Capstone projects and studio environments repeatedly emerged in reference to this.

Advocacy and Policy

This type of KPs aims to explicitly shape urban governance and management through adopting effective monitoring and feedback mechanisms to estimate better the willingness of key stakeholders to apply the knowledge captured, including the political will to adopt the reforms supported. Strategies and plans, campaigns, and awareness programs are part of the Advocacy and Policy typology. The Advocacy and Policy typology audiences are policymakers, government officials, and decision-makers on urban development at the local, national, regional, or global levels. The impact of this type of KP is in adopting policy frameworks or recommended reforms and improving political thinking and general knowledge. The critical components to the success of Advocacy and Policy KPs include:

- A strong collaboration between all stakeholders and, chiefly, consultation with involved countries.
- Effective monitoring and feedback mechanisms.
- Innovative nature of policy reforms.
- The political will to adopt changes.
- Availability of good quality and comparable data at the country level.
- Wide dissemination through the media and various forums.

Some examples of Advocacy and Policy KPs developed by UN-Habitat are the 'Slum Upgrading and Prevention Strategies for Poverty and Inequality Reduction,' which are strategies at the citywide and at national levels aimed at achieving the physical, social, juridical, and economic inclusion of all slums into the official planning and urban systems at the city level; the Sustainable Waste Management and Recovery of Waste as a Resource strategy, which is aimed at delivering municipal solid waste management (MSWM) services with equitable access to all, especially for the urban poor and other vulnerable groups, and the plan for 'Local Leadership for Climate Change Action,' which raises awareness about the environmental, economic and political implications of global warming.

Convening

These KPs aim to generate sectoral/thematic committees and networks in which the linking of participating actors is prioritized, bringing together experts in various sectors and topics and others of general interest. Summits, workshops, networks, and participatory processes belong to this typology. These types of products seek to generate spaces that allow thought-provoking discussions, debates, and the development of plans and pilot exercises to test innovative ideas. Some examples of Convening KPs developed by UN-Habitat are the workshop to learn the Block by Block methodology for co-creating safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces, seminars on participatory accountability systems for city policies, the World Summit on Leaving No One Behind, an event that brings together government leaders and funding agencies, and is expected to set off a stream of chosen projects that will address the challenges faced by those being left behind in the least developed countries, and the World Climate Summit, which convened both public and private sector leaders who spurred ambitious climate commitments and action to reach 2030 targets and net-zero transitions.

Convening KPs are a surprisingly common type of output by UN-Habitat. The often are a major part of developing guidelines and normative statements. For Instance, UN-Habitat's *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning* were produced with extensive involvement of a forty-person expert group that included significant university representation. Likewise, UN-Habitat is well accustomed to formalising convening platforms. For example, UN-Habitat launched in 2011 the Global Network for Sustainable Housing (GNSH), an international network of professionals, academics, and organizations that lead research and policy design for sustainable housing from an environmental, economic, social, and cultural point of view. GNSH members share experiences, knowledge, and strategies for slum upgrading, reconstruction, large-scale social and affordable housing,

and sustainable urban development through the network. In addition, GNSH encourages local building materials, vernacular architecture, and integrated neighbourhood design, supporting social processes towards realizing the rights to adequate housing.

Technology and Digital Tools

Technology and Digital Tools KPs aim at the seamless generation, sharing, and use of knowledge resulting from developing new infrastructures or technologies. In particular, storage and retrieval, dissemination, information exchange, and collaboration. These KPs include improvements in information technology systems, collaboration technology tools, electronic document repository systems, apps, software, technology infrastructure, including web portal and content management tools, virtual workspace platforms with collaborative authoring and editing applications, and better communications solutions, including messaging and online discussions.

The Technology and Digital KPs are characterized as secure, available, responsive, and reliable. Furthermore, they facilitate efficiency and effectiveness and enable direct external access and retrieval of statistical and other essential data, information, best practice examples, and critical information that development professionals and other key stakeholders need in their work. Some examples of Technology and Digital Tools KPs developed by UN-Habitat are the pro-poor, low-cost land information system, a land information system based on open and free software packages and implemented through participatory approaches; the application of Minecraft, a tool to help the community visualize public space planning and design; digital tools that facilitate training needs assessments for cities and local authorities; digital questionnaires such as the City-wide Public Space Assessment, and digital inventories of urban assets, houses, buildings, public spaces, utilities, and service centres. Furthermore, UN-Habitat also developed a technical tool to support low-emission development strategies through the Urban-LEDS II project, focusing on integrated low-emissions and resilient development in over 60 cities in eight countries.

	Case Study	Type of Partnership				Main Knowledge Products
		nature	scale	anchor	main university	
1	UNITAC	Information/Technical	international	university	HafenCity University	Research/Technology
2	BEWOP	Information/Capacity building	international	university	IHE Delft Institute for Water Education	Instruction/Convening
3	HER CITY Crete	Capacity Building	local	department	School of Architecture, TUC Crete	Education
4	Global Urban Lectures	Information	international	Indiviudal	multiple indivuals	Education
5	MetroHUB	Information/Capacity Building	international	Network	multiple departments/individuals	Research/Education
6	UN-Habitat-IALS Partnership	Information/Capacity Building	international	department	IALS, University of London	Data-Research/Convening
7	Sherpa Tool	Technical	international	department	CRAterre, ENSAG Grenoble	Building-technology
8	Council on Urban Initiatives	Capacity building	international	university	UCL/LSE	Convening/Advocacy-Policy
9	Urban-LEDS	Capacity building	national	department	University of Michigan	Education/Data-Research
10	GLTN Training & Res. Cluster	Capacity Building	international	Network	UEL/NUST	Education
11	Comparing Urban Observatories	Information	international	Network	UCL/Melbourne/GCRO	Data-Research/Convening
12	Waste Wise Cities Toolkit	Technical	sub-national	department	University of Leeds	Building-technology
13	Innovate4Cities2021	Information/Capacity Building	international	Indiviudal/university	multiple departments/individuals	Convening/Advocacy-Policy

Figure 19: summary of Compendium case studies and their knowledge products (see Annex 2)

Mapping knowledge products in UN-Habitat's services: a test of our typology

So, what are commonplace knowledge products that characterize UN-Habitat's operate, and how do they link to university partnerships?

The landscape of products by UN-Habitat is far too vast to be sensibly unpacked in a brief 3-month project or indeed without a degree of contextual nuance. Hence, for the purpose of this project, we sought to take the considerations as to main 'types' of knowledge products above into a representative sample of UN-Habitat's outputs.
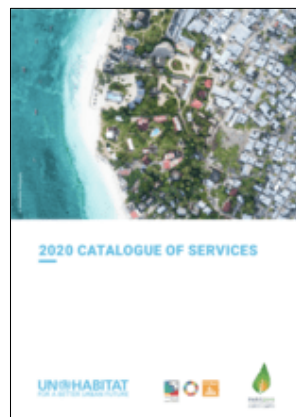
To this end, we reviewed a draft of the upcoming UN-Habitat *Catalogue of Services 2022* as a self-selected collection of flagship activities by UN-Habitat. We did so to couple the deployment of in-depth case studies contained in our report and 'compendium' (annex 2) to bound analysis upon which initial conclusions might be briefly drawn. In particular, we do so to assess the type of partnerships and knowledge products UN-Habitat develops to support national governments, local governments, and stakeholders. The *Catalogue* details a selection of the 'key' 60 examples of services the agency delivers, including programs, initiatives, projects, strategies, tools, and frameworks. It is divided into ten sections, each targeting a particular area of sustainable urban development, and flagship programmes.

Notably, the *Catalogue* only describes how UN-Habitat can support partners in solving challenges and advancing sustainable urban development. It does not seek to capture all UN-Habitat's services, expertise, and tools either. Hence, we focused on analysing the typology of products from the *Catalogue* to understand which KPs are seen as being the most common, which ones might be 'top' normative tools, and where efforts could be directed to increase the representation of specific types.

A few initial considerations emerge from this application of our typology to the Catalogue. Out of the 60 services included in the *Catalogue*, 28 services are centred on hybrid products coupling various types. 32 services, instead, have knowledge products under just one categorization. Most services develop Instruction KPs (26), which is expected given the strong emphasis of the agency on capacity building. Twenty-two services produce Advocacy-Policy products, which often accompany Instruction products to advance strategies, plans, public policies, and awareness campaigns aimed at changing the status quo of policymaking in various cities. Moreover, 13 services produce Data-Research KPs and another 13 develop Building-Technology KPs. It should be noted that although they are not among the most common types of products, the progress in these two categories is significant since creating them is challenging and takes considerable time compared to other KPs.

Markedly, the products with less representation are the *Convening* (6) and *Education* (7) ones, the two types in which the involvement of academic institutions is often needed, particularly in the case of Education KPs. Habitat UNI has specialized in developing Education and Convening products, which points to an area of opportunity for increasing the number of KPs generated in these two categories.

	Catalogue of Services 2020/ 2022	Nature	Scale	Main Knowledge Product
A	**Urban data, profiling, and monitoring**			
1	Innovative city-wide slum profiling and enumeration	Information/ Capacity Building/	International	Instruction/ Data-Research
2	Urban Migration Profiles	Information	International	Data-Research
3	City Resilience Profiling	Technical/ Building-Technology	International	Data-Research/ Building-technology
4	Supporting local alignment with the SDGs through unique SDG profiles	Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
5	Integrated urban and spatial profiling for strategic planning and sustainable development	Information/ Technical	International	Data-Research
6	Assessing vulnerabilities, socio-economic situations, and facilities for inclusive cities	Information/ Technical	International	Data-Research/ Building-technology
7	COVID-19 Readiness and Responsiveness Tracking Platform	Information/ Building-Technology	International	Data-Research/ Building-technology
B	**Participatory processes**			
8	Block by Block co-creating safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces	Capacity Building/ Building-Technology	International	Covening/ Building-technology
9	CityRAP: City Resilience Action Planning	Technical	International	Instruction/ Covening/ Advocacy-policy
10	Integrated urban planning in protracted crisis contexts	Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
11	Building participatory accountability systems for city policies	Capacity Building	International	Instruction/ Covening
12	Creating urban resource centres for young people in cities	Capacity Building	International	Education
13	HER City Toolbox	Capacity Building/ Technical	International	Data-research/ Advocacy-policy
C	**Policy, legislation, and governance**			
14	Strengthen housing, land and property rights for peaceful societies	Technical/ Capacity building	Country	Advocacy-policy
15	Legal frameworks to plan sustainable cities	Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
16	National and Sub-national Urban Policies	Technical/ Capacity building	International	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
17	Leaving no place behind: Strengthening urban-rural linkages	Capacity building	Regional	Instruction
18	Policy, law and governance for climate smart cities	Capacity building	International	Instruction
19	Urban law for informal settlements upgrading and prevention	Technical/ Capacity building	Country	Advocacy-policy
20	Urban Governance Labs: Leveraging the potential of youth, innovation, and technologies for a better urban future	Capacity Building/ Building-Technology	Country	Data-Research/ Building technology
21	MetroHUB: Supporting sustainable metropolitan and regional development	Information	International	Education/ Convening
D	**Planning and design**			
22	Integrating global goals into urban development plans to guide urban transformation	Technical/ Capacity building	International	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
23	Rapid planning studios	Capacity building	Country	Convening
24	City-scale plan assessment	Capacity Building/ Building-Technology	Country	Instruction/ Building-technology
25	Promoting safe, inclusive and accessible public space as a cornerstone of sustainable urbanization	Capacity building	Country	Instruction
26	Planning for healthy cities and territories	Technical/ Capacity building	Regional	Instruction
27	Our City Plans Toolbox	Technical/ Capacity building	International	Instruction
28	Spatial Development Framework	Technical	Regional	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
E	**Land, housing and shelter**			
29	National Housing Strategies	Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
30	Forced eviction prevention and Eviction Impact Assessments	Technical	Country	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
31	Pro-poor, low cost land information system	Capacity building/ Building-Technology	Country	Data-Research/ Building-technology
32	Support for sustainable, affordable housing with Sherpa	Building-technology	Country	Building-technology
33	Durable solutions for internally displaced populations and vulnerable communities in cities	Technical	Country	Advocacy-policy
34	Slum upgrading and prevention strategies for poverty and inequality reduction (city-wide and at national levels)	Technical/ Capacity building	Regional	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
F	**Basic services and infrastructure**			
35	Sustainable waste management and recovery of waste as a resource	Technical/ Capacity building	International	Instruction/ Building-technology
36	Water and sanitation planning and infrastructure investments	Technical/ Capacity building	International	Advocacy-policy
37	Sustainable urban mobility planning	Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
38	Creating energy and resource efficient buildings	Technical	International	Instruction/ Advocacy-policy
39	Enhancing sustainability and effectiveness of water utilities through Water Operators' Partnerships	Technical	International	Education/ Advocacy-policy
G	**Economy and finance**			
40	Enhancing Own Source Revenues (OSR) through rapid analysis	Building-technology	Country	Building-technology
41	Land-based finance for good governance and inclusive development	Capacity building	Country	Instruction
42	Innovative financing arrangements and Public-Private-People-Partnerships (PPPPs) for slum upgrading	Technical/ Capacity building	Regional	Research-data/ Advocacy-policy
H	**Climate change and cities**			
43	Integrating human settlements in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),	Capacity building	Country	Instruction
44	Supporting urban low-emission development strategies	Technical	International	Instruction/ Data-Research
45	Guiding Principles for City Climate Action Planning	Information	Country	Instruction
46	Planning for Climate Change: A Strategic, Values-Based Approach for Urban Planners	Information	International	Instruction
47	Climate Change Vulnerability and Risk: A Guide for Community Assessments, Action Planning and Implementation	Information	Regional	Instruction
48	Local leadership for climate change action	Information	International	Instruction/ Convening
I	**Capacity building**			
49	Sustainable transfer of skills and knowledge to governments and urban stakeholders	Information/ Capacity building	International	Education/ Building-technology
50	Advancing government capacities through regional training centres of excellence	Capacity building	Regional	Education
51	The Cities and Climate Change Academy (online)	Information/ Capacity building	International	Education
52	E-learning platform and capacity building package for participatory slum upgrading	Capacity building	International	Education/ Building-technology
53	The Academy of Sustainable Urban Mobility (AoSUM)	Capacity building	Country	Instruction
J	**Flagship programmes**			
54	Inclusive, Vibrant Neighbourhoods and Communities	Information/ Capacity building	International	Instruction
55	People-focused Smart Cities	Information/ Capacity building	International	Instruction
56	RISE-UP: Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor	Information/ Technical	International	Advocacy-policy
57	Enhancing the Positive Impact of Urban Migration	Information	International	Data-research/ Advocacy-policy
58	SDG Cities	Information/ Capacity building	International	Data-research/ Advocacy-policy
K	**Innovation**			
59	Challenge-driven innovation for local governments	Technical	Country	Convening
60	United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities (UNITAC)	Technical/ Building-Technology	Country	Convening/ Building-technology

Figure 20: summary of *Catalogue of Services 2022* knowledge products

7. UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP FOR THE NUA

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In this chapter we turn to a specific consideration of how UN-Habitat-university partnerships can be leveraged to implement the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (NUA), an action-oriented statement adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016 that seeks to mobilize UN Member States and other key stakeholders to drive sustainable urban development.

The chapter introduces the **existing intersection between NUA and universities** looking at challenges and opportunities our study raises to this extent. It does so first in the context of the first two NUA Quadrennial Reports issued by the UN Secretary General in 2018 and 2022. It then offers an insight as to the current academic assessment of the implementation of the NUA, before moving on to a brief set of preliminary recommendations for UN-Habitat more generally and for UNI more specifically as to better leveraging university partnerships for the NUA.

We do so in reference to the five major themes recurring throughout our study, that we discuss more in depth in chapter 8, and in particular: 1) the individual-institutional dynamics in university partnerships; 2) the 'next' generation of urban thought leaders; 3) the placing of university partnerships within broader circuits of knowledge; 4) the twin research-education nature of universities; and 5) the enduring resource challenges hindering partnerships.

As we note, the resource challenge (theme 5) rings true in Quadrennial Reports NUA implementation reviews alike, and so to some extent does the recognition that academia is both a space for leveraging research as much as linking into education (theme 4). Yet, we underline how 'next' generation considerations (theme 2), individual-institutional dynamics (theme 1), or engagement of NUA-focused university partnerships within broader circuits of knowledge (theme 3) are still largely overlooked. We highlight possible springboard actions to address these gaps, concluding here that the opportunities afforded by more purposeful university networking, well aligned to UNI's mission, could be key to these ends.

Universities and the NUA

The connection between the academic sector and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) has a well-established history. Universities were formally recognized as a key contributor to the process that led to the establishment of the NUA

through the Academic and Researchers Partner Constituency Group of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) for Habitat III. They were also embedded in the Issue papers development for the NUA, and the Policy Units set up to mobilize high-level expertise to develop independent policy recommendations on sustainable urban development for the draft texts of the NUA. Informally, however, the touch points with both higher education institutions and individually have been countless. **The New Urban Agenda text itself called explicitly to work with academia and research institutions** to promote the strengthening of the capacity of national, subnational, and local governments, including local government associations, in shaping their organizational and institutional governance processes, enabling them to participate effectively in decision-making about urban and territorial development. It also explicitly encouraged the set-up of "science-policy interface practices" for the implementation of the NUA, whilst establishing explicitly the need for academic input into the NUA's Quadrennial report by the Secretary-General.

This has led to a vast variety of NUA-inspired work across the academic sector **not just in terms of research but NUA advocacy and embedding the NUA in curricula and academic statements**. For instance, in 2017 TU Delft in the Netherlands organized an Urban Thinkers' Campus (an initiative of UN-Habitat's World Urban Campaign) on *Higher Education for the New Urban Agenda* focusing on how to prepare young professionals to understand and implement the New Urban Agenda leading to the publication of a report on education for the NUA at the 2018 World Urban Forum. The NUA has also been similarly embedded in university vision statements and public outreach material. RMIT University in Australia highlights explicitly that its educational offer and research is geared toward supporting the 'implementation of SDG 11 and New Urban Agenda'. The same applies to networks of universities and academics. For example, the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) has, including at the Habitat III summit, held various discussions and panels on the role of universities in capacity building for the New Urban Agenda.

Academic activity about the NUA, whilst **not as common as scholarly work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Paris Agreement**, has also emerged across academic circles. Some research has sought to qualify and quantify its applicability and ways to assess and monitor it. For example, the Bartlett Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) at University College London (UCL) and the MacArthur Foundation's Cities, Information and

Governance Programme published in 2019[24] a review of the use of smart data analytics in UK local government in the context of the objectives, principles and implementation of the NUA. Other research has come at NUA by linking it to broader agenda-setting discussions[25], or planning debates[26], and indeed in some cases with a more critical angle as to its viability[27].

In the meantime, a variety of UN-Habitat inspired initiatives have opened spaces for university engagement with the NUA. For example, the Urban Agenda Platform was launched as a recommendation from the UNSG Quadrennial Report 2018 to support Member States and partners in the adoption of universal norms and global frameworks on sustainable urban development and offers various touchpoints for the academic sector. So how can these various strands of activities be activated or enhanced toward implementing the NUA? And what contributions could university partnership bring to the efforts by UN-Habitat in rolling it out effectively across Member States? To tackle this, we consider two key areas of challenges to implementation: those highlighted in Quadrennial Reports, and those emerging from existing research on NUA implementation from an academic perspective.

The Quadrennial Reports scorecard
The two Quadrennial Reports issued by the UN Secretary General in 2018 and 2022, and their preparatory work, present interesting evidence as to opportunities to better leverage university partnerships toward the implementation of the NUA.
Formally, there appears to be limited acknowledgment of academia as central to NUA implementation in the latest 2022 Quadrennial Report, with but one mention of universities in relation to the Global Urban Monitoring Framework amidst six other types of relevant stakeholders. This is potentially a step back in recognition as the 2018 Report had a wider attention to academia. It had in fact stressed the value of partnerships between United Nations entities and universities worldwide, flagging explicitly the UN-Habitat University Network Initiative, and the potential for these connections to "gather large numbers of knowledge-based institutions and provide training and capacity development to

strengthen policy design, monitoring and reporting". In 2018, academia had been flagged as key to the "scale-up of capacity development" which was seen as needing engagement with "knowledge-based institutions" and with academia incorporating the Agenda (and the SDGs) in educational curricula.

Yet the Report also highlights important areas of challenges to NUA implementation that seem well aligned to the role of academia and to the potential of university partnerships.

A focus on **research and data for implementation** and monitoring appears like a clear win-win. The 2022 Quadrennial Report stresses that adequate and disaggregated data is still lacking at the local level in most contexts, potentially opening to a greater recognition of the role of universities not only as repositories of local information but as drivers in monitoring and analysis of urban contexts. Notably this could also extend to reporting and monitoring progress on the NUA irrespective of state action. The 2022 Quadrennial Report highlights that, during the reporting cycle (2018-2022), only 24 countries submitted progress reports on the implementation of the NUA. In the absence of comprehensive reporting by Member States (with 169 reports overdue and only 25 completed at the time of the release of the 2022 Quadrennial Report), the Report stresses, a "mixed methodology" must be deployed for evidence-based monitoring and reporting. Here again the capacity of some **universities to keep the pulse of the NUA** is key: leveraging universities as live repositories for updated information on the NUA, often with greater sense of the national state of the NUA than their specific local city contexts, could be a critical piece of the NUA implementation puzzle.

Yet to do so universities, university departments or even just individual academics need clear incentives that at present are not built in either the Reports or indeed their preliminary materials. Critical, amongst several barriers, is the fact that low Member States buy-in also translates into **limited funding avenues through State-based mechanisms** when it comes to the NUA: most academic institutions globally rely in quite some measure on direct

[24]https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/casa/sites/bartlett/files/casa_publication_macarthur_copy.pdf

[25] Earle, L. (2016). Urban crises and the new urban agenda. *Environment and Urbanization*, *28*(1), 77-86.

[26] Watson, V. (2016). Locating planning in the New Urban Agenda of the urban sustainable development goal. *Planning Theory*, *15*(4), 435-448.

[27] Kaika, M. (2017). 'Don't call me resilient again!': the New Urban Agenda as immunology… or… what happens when communities refuse to be vaccinated with 'smart cities' and indicators. *Environment and Urbanization*, *29*(1), 89-102.

central government funding schemes (like national Research Councils), which in turn need for greater appetite for how the NUA (but also in many cases broader agendas like SDGs and Paris Agreement) advance national interests in order to open up bigger funding pathways based on this. Short of this, university partnerships for the implementation of the NUA need to rely on alternative sources of funding. Central, then, also becomes the issue (which we pick up again below) of limited private sector buy-in, which is typically an alternative source of research and capacity building funding for academic institutions. This, inevitably, is often leaving the funders pool for NUA-focused university partnerships to sub-national levels of government, like cities and federated states, or the philanthropic and not-for-profit sector, with the former still poorly bought into the NUA too but clearly more proactive on other agendas like the SDGs. From this point of view, however, universities could conversely play a useful bridging role able to convene mixed coalitions of different funders centring implementation efforts on either education or applied research (with likely the former making greater headways with philanthropists).

This supplementary role of universities in the wake of lack of Member State action might also be true of their potential to **act as bridges to link global agendas to practical localised implementation**. This is for instance well aligned to the recognition of the power of SDGs localization as through Voluntary Local Reviews of SDGs progress, with many universities today not only **embracing the SDGs in curricula and research, but also in cooperation with local authorities through university-city collaborations**. Many universities across the Global North *and* South have already done so more generally in relation to the SDGs and could potentially do so more explicitly by focusing on the urban dimension of the SDGs and the implementation of the NUA – yet the incentive issues above are still critical impediments to success on a large scale on this front.

The 2022 Quadrennial Report also puts quite some emphasis on questions of governance coordination, where university partnerships could play an interesting role too. The Report repeatedly reiterates the recognition that many urban areas suffer from inadequate multilevel governance, unclear distributions of responsibilities between different spheres of government, weak

cooperative mechanisms, and limited participation of local governments in national coordination. As highlighted repeatedly by research on science-policy interactions[28], academic institutions can a play a role in coalescing disjointed governance and facilitating multilevel or international connections. The University and other research establishments could be seen as able to provide **bridging and brokering governance functions** as boundary institutions.

However, the potential for universities to offer monitoring capacity and localization action is hampered, as we have already stressed in our report, by a critical question of resourcing. That is, in turn, highlighted by the 2022 Quadrennial Report too as a more general hindrance on further progress for the NUA. The Report notes clearly how implementing the New Urban Agenda around the world continues to be "impeded by insufficient and inadequate financing", with the response to COVID-19 pandemic now exacerbating the situation. The pandemic (superimposed to the spur of action on climate prompted by COP26) has also potentially hindered greater buy in by Member States but also by the private sector, still lacking substantial reporting and statements of support as of 2022.

Of course, the two UNSG Quadrennial Reports are but the pinnacle of a broader NUA implementation assessment process. When considering preparatory documentation for the Reports in our assessment, the picture of recognition as to the value of university partnerships is certainly enhanced – not least as some of the drafting work for the Reports has in fact been done in exactly this format (involving for instance the London School of Architecture as key consulting facilitator for the 2022 Report).

Overall, the preparatory documents available from 2018 and 2022 make much wider reference to academia than the Reports, although again often in a grouped manner as part of 'stakeholder' lists with perhaps still limited specific advice as to how to leverage universities toward implementation. Yet several points emerge here as relevant to our discussion. For example, the 2018 documentation emerging from the writeshop for the Quadrennial Report held in Granada, Spain, noted an initial "eagerness of the academia to be involved in the 'operationalization' of NUA" especially in the global south,

[28] E.g. McPhearson, T., Parnell, S., Simon, D., Gaffney, O., Elmqvist, T., Bai, X., & Revi, A. (2016). Scientists must have a say in the future of cities. *Nature*, *538*(7624), 165-166; or Acuto, M. (2018). Global science for city policy. *Science*, *359*(6372), 165-166.

stressing examples in Iraq, Kenya or South Africa. Whilst the jury still perhaps out there on the buy in of academia as a whole (or indeed of major international institutions), as **other agendas have taken greater and more documented purchase onto academia** especially when it comes to SDGs and climate action (but increasingly on migration too), some of this evidence shows perhaps greater purchase by the NUA in academia than in Member States.

It also speaks volumes to the fact that the NUA, at least as a rallying call for urban-focused research and education across the world, has had some impact in shaping international collaborations. For example, several international partnership efforts like GPEAN, or purpose-focused collaborative grants like some of the UK's GCRF program, have made explicit their commitment to, and engagement with, the NUA. This has often been the case because some of the key institutions (or indeed lead ones in terms of grants) for these international university networking programs had previously been engaged in either, or both, the preparatory process of the NUA (e.g. via its policy units) or the post-Quito conversation kicked off at Habitat III.

The potential of these **international academic networks for strengthening the NUA** is still, as the 2018 and 2022 preparatory discussions evidenced, quite high and indeed one we stress again in our recommendations below. Realising this potential toward tangible implementation and an actual international movement of universities is perhaps the harder issue now, and indeed one highlighted in summary work from the virtual writeshop for the 2022 Quadrennial Report too. To this end, both 2018 and 2022 prep work stressed the prospective of **university-city collaborations as "interconnected accelerators** of knowledge and skills" – a theme we pick up again below, and in our recommendations, but unfortunately also one that fell off from the final versions of the two UNSG Reports. Before stepping into possible recommendations that our study surfaces to tackle these challenges and leverage these opportunities, let us turn briefly to what current academic assessments of the progress of the NUA also tell us about.

The academic research scorecard
Recent academic reviews of the implementation of the NUA, and its capacity to drive sustainable urban development in cities have centred on several different approaches to assessment but have a general recognition of the ambivalent standing of the NUA. Much of academic writing has endorsed many of the principles of the NUA and indeed many academic authors have been deeply engaged in preparatory, dissemination and quadrennial review processes for the NUA. At the same time many have pointed at critical challenges as to the agenda and its implementation. Two themes stand out for us in this literature as directly intertwined with university partnerships: governance capacity and information capacity.

Before diving into these two it is also worth stressing how much of the literature questions the political purchase and value proposition for the NUA. There is in fact repeated recognition of the limited degree of influence that the NUA can have whilst both cities *and* universities grapple with the likes of SDGs, Paris Agreement reporting and other agendas like Sendai on risk, Addis Ababa Action Agenda on development finances, or the Global Compact on immigration. The challenge of multiplicity of agendas and multiple drivers of action, along with growing demands and prompts on cities and universities in a context of tightening budgets and more pragmatic entrepreneurialism than perhaps in the early 2000s, echoes throughout most of the literature currently available. Two practical challenges stand out.

First, researches have noted how the lack of progress in implementing the NUA stems from the fact that many urban areas suffer from inadequate multilevel governance. Unclear distributions of responsibilities between spheres of government, weak cooperation mechanisms, and limited participation of local governments in national coordination mechanisms are stresses as serious drawbacks. Embedded in this consideration there is also a common criticism of the capacity to leverage national frameworks to local ends. This is explained in part across academic interventions because the NUA was developed by national governments, which means that its interpretation and implementation at the local level are not considered straightforward or easily applicable as the agenda seeks to speak to cities and states at the same time, perhaps with still a preference for the latter[29].

[29] Watson, V. (2016). Locating planning in the New Urban Agenda of the urban sustainable development goal. 15(4), 435-448.

Consequently, governance approaches to implement the NUA have been noted as needing to include horizontal collaborations between actors at the same level, leveraging for instance the international success of city networks, but also much better organized and financed vertical partnerships among municipal, city, state, and national levels of government. Academic assessments do note the variety of 'multistakeholder' alliances emerging around the NUA, although often excluding the private sector that remains largely on the side-lines and not 'bought in', with often the drivers of these activities left to civil society, and some academic institutions[30]. Hence, this is an area of NUA governance coordination that has been repeatedly flagged as lacking in many contexts. This has been ascribed by scholars to the challenge embedded in the breadth of the agenda, and at the same its "fuzziness", hampering its potential for guiding action by potentially "overburdening any realistic agenda for policy-makers".[31]

Raising the buy in by states is also seen as critical by some academic commentators. For the NUA to do new and much needed work, in practice, "in an era of globalised, marketised, multi-level and contested urban governance", it must become "an object of desire for governments, academia and the private sector as well as for [...] urban civil society interest groups"[32]. Researchers have highlighted that the capacity of national and local governments to implement the NUA remains limited, with essential challenges in its implementation framework as often too broad and easily superseded by agendas seen as more pressing or with greater political weight[33]. Yet this goes hand in hand with the need not to underestimate the private sector as an "active intermediary in the realignment of corporate and urban governance interests"[34] but also as a driver of academic work as many academic realities around the world turn to greater academic emphasis on **industry partnership, impact agendas and commercialization**.

Second, while the NUA encourages the development of local monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, implementing these mechanisms has been recognized as needing time and has been a slow process that requires adaptation and localization in most cases only making slow incremental progress. To that end, at the national level, countries have been initially seen as having the opportunity to establish various processes to involve local and regional governments, but also universities, in their monitoring and evaluation procedures, but these have been largely lacking internationally even in Global North contexts.

Digital and information divides remain critical, in the eyes of many academic observers of the NUA, shortcomings to its implementation. The **digital divide** between and within cities and countries, which has exacerbated disparities in digital access, capacity, knowledge, and affordability. As such, in the least developed countries, only one in five people were online in 2020. Globally, marginalized groups lacking internet access and digital skills are underrepresented in the data and do not fully benefit from the expansion of digital technologies, as was the case with the shift to remote work, telemedicine, distance learning, and the virtual provision of essential services in cities during the pandemic. This is also seen as requiring fostering dialogue between citizens and the different levels of government, harnessing the power of social media and digital platforms to share knowledge. However, reliable digital platforms for cities to engage citizens are deficient and local governments lack capacity to develop these platforms.

Yet academic reviews have stressed the need, on UN-Habitat's part as much as for universities, to **engage with the role of experts more critically** when it comes to data, measurement and their implications for the production, performance and promotion of specific visions[35]. This is far from a side-lined issue, and one that has animated much of the academic debate as of recent. NUA implementation could leverage far more effectively academic expertise, but it could do so with better consciousness of the critical commentaries that have stressed inequalities and unbalances in the past few years.

[30] Leck, H., & Simon, D. (2018). Local Authority Responses to Climate Change in South Africa: The Challenges of Transboundary Governance. 10(7), 2542

[31] Garschagen, M., Porter, L., The New Urban Agenda: From Vision to Policy and Action. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(1), 117-121.

[32] Horne, R., Nolan, M., Growing Up or Growing Despair? Prospects for Multi-Sector Progresson City Sustainability Under the NUA *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(1), 127-130.

[33] Valencia, S. C., Simon, D., Croese, S., Nordqvist, J., Oloko, M., Sharma, T., Taylor Buck, N., & Versace, I. (2019). Adapting the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda to the city level: Initial reflections from a comparative research project. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 11(1), 4-23.

[34] Horne, R., Nolan, M., Growing Up or Growing Despair? Prospects for Multi-Sector Progresson City Sustainability Under the NUA *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(1), 127-130.

[35] Caprotti, F., Cowley, R., Datta, A., Broto, V. C., Gao, E., Georgeson, L., Herrick, C., Odendaal, N., & Joss, S. (2017). The New Urban Agenda: key opportunities and challenges for policy and practice. *Urban Research & Practice, 10*(3), 367-378.

In fact, the **data-heavy nature of pandemic response** has accentuated the role of knowledge sharing and capacity building as essential tools in helping municipalities governments and other stakeholders. This is a potentially effective intervention space as several scholarly reviews of the implementation of the NUA have also repeatedly highlighted how paradoxically local governments and mayors have initially been underplayed in the agenda, with limited recognition for the advancement of transnational community and solidarity networks too, and that experimentation in city-university collaboration for the NUA remains still quite limited.[36]

In view of what we have learnt so far through our report, this seems to point to the opportunity for better leveraging applied research interventions, embedded more clearly in tangible UN-Habitat programs, but also making effective use of practice teaching spaces (like studios or project-based capstones) to act as catalyst for both engaging cohorts of scholars (and emerging urban voices like students and doctoral researchers) but also encouraging partnerships with local councils. We turn to these in the next section as we provide some preliminary recommendation toward better leveraging of university partnerships for the NUA.

Recommendations to strengthen university partnerships for the NUA

This brief review of the overlaps between our study and the current status of implementation of the New Urban Agenda highlights some common challenges present in NUA discussions and in our review, but also some potentially useful opportunities to better leverage university partnerships to this end. Here we provide a set of three main recommendations to strengthen this university-UN-Habitat engagement more effectively when it comes to the NUA, which in our view emerge from the above discussion. We do so conscious that some of these threads of analysis might overlap (or potentially diverge) with the upcoming high-level UN meeting in New York in April 2022 to revitalize the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Likewise, we provide some initial considerations as to the applicability of these to UNI, which we then embed more extensively in the UNI recommendations chapter at the end of our report.

However, underpinning these is a consideration that at this stage (eight years into the NUA's implementation process) a sizeable step change is needed in university partnerships.

Overcoming the challenges detailed above **requires significant buy-in (both financially and capacity wise) from universities**, especially with existing problems with university capacity, and limited university, Member State or private sector enthusiasm for NUA implementation. This could start from a much more explicit recognition of the power of university partnerships by UN-Habitat and ideally with a much more central positioning of university partners in the focus of key statements and documents like the Quadrennial Report. Building on this, our initial input focuses on three fronts: leveraging educational networking opportunities to strengthen the visibility of the NUA, leveraging the boundary positioning of universities, and strengthening the visibility of university-city partnerships.

⇒ **Leverage educational networking opportunities to strengthen visibility of the NUA**

Whilst leveraging networking already in some cases, educational networking for the purpose of NUA visibility and implementation needs to step up substantially. Academic networks can allow NUA initiatives to connect across Member States in spite of eventual disengagement of governments themselves - a successful strategy already leveraged by both city networks and university networks in other areas of global action.[37] Linking research, education and NUA implementation could for instance be delivered effectively by engaging more directly and purposefully with graduate studio and capstone environments where academic research meets higher education pedagogy encouraging greater buy in and advocacy of students and new generations of urbanists. UN-Habitat has already experimented in several cases quite effectively with for instance international urban design and planning competitions that could be applied more explicitly to this end starting with a launch at WUF11 in 2022.

[36] Satterthwaite, D., Will the New Urban Agenda Have Any Positive Influence on Governments and International Agencies? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(1), 121-123.
[37] Climate action is perhaps the posterchild of city and academia-driven action in spite of limited State buy in, but the same could be said of

cases like biodiversity or migration. See for instance: Oke, C., Bekessy, S. A., Frantzeskaki, N., Bush, J., Fitzsimons, J. A., Garrard, G. E., & Gawler, S. (2021). Cities should respond to the biodiversity extinction crisis. *Npj Urban Sustainability*, 1(1), 1-4.

⇒ **Leverage the boundary positioning of universities**

Collaborating with universities for NUA implementation could also recognize the capacity of higher education institutions to act not only as educational spaces or research consultants, but as conveners of multi-scalar conversations. This could for instance involve a greater effort toward 'independent' national reporting by university programs and coalition**s** (an approach that has already been proven in many areas like health, climate or resilience) as an effort that could rebalance the vast lag behind national reporting (with but 25 Member States actively involved in 2022). This could also much more explicitly connect with other multilateral programs that already connect university networks and higher education programs effectively, as via UNESCO or WHO programs. With limited funding (mainly for coordination, workshop hosting, communication support and exchange) UNI could effectively launch a program of independent NUA progress assessment by universities through its wide membership, encouraging a working group of universities to take greater initiative in demonstrating the status of the NUA locally whilst encouraging a working group of universities. UN-Habitat could also seek to work more explicitly with university networks (grant based like those in GCRF or membership based like U21, IARU etc.) to facilitate further data and advocacy exchanges on the NUA ideally targeted toward younger scholars and students, but also by facilitating and engaging more explicitly with private sector institutions as the supporters and implementers (not just funders) of these multi-scalar engagements.

⇒ **Enhance the profile of university-city partnerships**

University-city partnerships can be key to connect experimentation, brokering and networking of the NUA's implementation. If only few Member States would put a premium on specific NUA investment as donors (seen the very limited uptake in national reviews), it might be sensible to explore possible support by the few Northern contexts that have (e.g. Germany and Finland). This in turn could be done by linking to Southern Member States that have shown a similar level of interest (e.g. Brazil and Colombia). Notably, this could be done by linking city-university partnerships in different countries, bridging for instance commitments and partnerships in Helsinki with similar university-city partnerships in Cape Town. Yet, beyond this national focus, effective cases of university-city partnerships could also provide visibility as well as greater leadership toward cost-effective interventions that are exemplary of how greater commitment could be spurred at a national scale even in spite of lack of State commitment. Linking this to educational networking

approaches noted above can also present an attractive implementation-oriented package closer to the interest of philanthropic and private sector donors. This university-city approach has already been proven effective in several cases of SDGs implementation (e.g. for the VLRs linking City government and University of Bristol or of Melbourne). In turn, this could also be done very directly by supporting and enhancing the profile of studio/capstone projects that link university lecturers/students and city policymakers with international visibility sanctioned by UN-Habitat as suggested above. This, in turn, could leverage the research-education link noted above at point 2 as focus for explicit NUA monitoring and implementation

As we have begun outlining, Habitat UNI could potentially be key contributor to all these initiatives and a facilitator of UN-Habitat-university collaboration in this space beyond the lack of activity by Member States. Yet, despite an important and initial endorsement in the 2018 Quadrennial Report, UNI has also remained relatively side-lined in NUA implementation programs and limited resources have been made available to that end. For example, purpose running a facilitated international capstone/studio exchange could fit very effectively the Habitat UNI approach. We would argue that, beyond the topic-focused reality of UNI Hubs (where specific topical issues of the NUA could be tackled), the program could be leveraged more effectively to connect joint research-driven-education efforts and facilitate university-city partnerships to connect across borders. In chapter 10 we return more explicitly as to how the NUA can be integrated in a reform of UNI, and in reverse how UNI can advance recognition and implementation of the NUA.

8. KEY LESSONS FOR UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Capturing the complexity of university partnerships across the breadth of a UN agency is no easy feat. Yet in turn it is an exercise that unveils, even at a preliminary inquiry like ours, an extraordinary richness of knowledge translation pathways. Based on the initial evidence we gathered through various methods in our brief pilot study, it is apparent to us that there remains an interest and perceived high value in fostering university collaborations as a key driver of UN-Habitat's mission. UN-Habitat's capacity to convene university expertise, not least via mechanisms like Habitat UNI could, in turn, be enhanced and these partnerships strengthened. How, and to what end, are however not easy questions and issues we have encountered many diverging opinions on. Summarising the variety of views of what the encounter between academia and a UN agency like UN-Habitat surfaces is no simple task and easily prey to risky reductionism. We first tried to avoid this by, as outlined, setting out the approach to our assessment through a variety of analysis approaches, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, a survey, and several sources of document evidence. We believe these allowed for triangulation of findings and contributed in our view to the robustness of the conclusions we present here by capturing not only different, and at times uncomfortable, views but also different ways in which these are expressed from colloquial discussion to multiple choice surveys.

Before we jump into a set of practical recommendations with a specific eye to enhancing, if not revitalizing, Habitat UNI, we would like to focus this section on the report on overall learnings that might be applicable more broadly across the agency. These are key issues that have emerged commonly across the variety of inquiries depicted above throughout our study. The purpose of these overall learnings is to be less prescriptive and more analytical: these are not a list of recommendations (as we do in the next chapter) but rather a review of major issues that we believe could foreground most if not all university partnerships at play within UN-Habitat. Hence, this chapter is aimed at UN-Habitat staff more in general, as a manual and guidebook of core consideration we invite to consider when partnering with universities.

There are five major themes recurring in our study:

1. Re-balancing and **reconciling individual and institutional-level engagements** in university partnerships
2. Focusing on **the 'next' generation of urban thought leaders**
3. Understanding how the location of these partnerships within **broader circuits of knowledge** and wider academic networks shape UN-Habitat's university collaborations.
4. Recognizing both how to leverage academic expertise but also to **value education-based engagements**.
5. Tackling endemic and **enduring resource challenges** hindering university partnerships.

These themes are not to be an exhaustive list, but stem from our project's specific focus on university partnerships and challenges for cooperation. Below we outline each with an eye at both their critical challenges and their windows of opportunity, before moving on to an application of these to the case of Habitat UNI.

Theme 1. Reconciling individuals and institutions
The breadth and variety of collaborations between universities and UN-Habitat are considerable and, to some extent, expanding. However, when academics or UN-Habitat staff refer to 'university' or 'academic institution,' these terms often have different meanings depending on the context. Many of the university partnerships we encountered turned out to be partnerships with university staff, or even individual academics, rather than formal links with universities or university departments. This is no matter of semantics or linguistic academic whim. Critically, the issue of whether partnering with academia is better realised with a collaboration with individuals or broader institutions has been paramount in our study.

Representing one of the most common issues repeatedly emerging in our review, the differentiation between individual-level collaborations among UN-Habitat and academics and those involving more formally a partnership with academic institutions stands out as a key learning for us. Yet it is also a dualism that cannot be easily solved in favour of either end. Surveys and focus groups suggest that when discussing a collaboration with a university, what is commonly meant is a collaboration with a member of the academic sector, with formalised partnerships with institutions at both departmental and centre level scanter, and indeed with universities as a whole or even with networks of universities perhaps few and far between.

The individual-institution 'divide' often arises concerning the **sustainability of individual engagements**. This does not mean that one (individual) or the other (institution) is universally recognizable as the most sustainable collaboration mode. Institutions change priorities and funding capabilities, as evidenced by the rapid changes created by the COVID-19 crisis in the university sector. Yet individual scholars also change roles, universities, and priorities. One of the arguments in favour of institutional rather than individual linkages is the ability to collaborate with **local 'coalitions' of experts**. This is, in our review, mainly a recognition of the value of groups of academics, but also mixed *groups* of scholars, students, and professionals convened by a specific centre or department, or indeed in some cases by international networks. These collectives, in turn, could provide more significant input and potentially greater resilience to change than individual partnerships.

Notably, several insights from our study also point at the reflection by staff and academics that **institutional partnerships come with individuals but not vice-versa**. Access to groups of individuals via formal partnerships offers often greater capacity, diversity of input and clearer visibility for UN-Habitat in those academic contexts. As several noted in focus groups and interview, **individual engagements are often ambiguous** on key 'resources' that can accessed in academia such as the engagement with students, datasets, or academic facilities. Staff (and some academics) often refer to a partnership with "the University of…" when in fact the partnering entity is an individual in their own capacity.

Of course, **institutional partnership models are not free from change and hindrances** (changing leadership, agendas, and resources in institutions) and still needing investment in the partnership at both ends. Higher education institutions have been seen, quite like UN-Habitat and UNON (if not the UN system more broadly), as often slow, bureaucratic and not particularly agile in the wake of change. As interviews and UNI senior staff noted, individual outreach can in some cases "yield quicker and more sustainable curricular reform than institutional outreach", especially in contexts where "cumbersome institutional curricular reform procedures" affect many higher education institutions.

Equally, academics have prompted us to remember many projects and collaborations between universities and UN-Habitat are dependent on individual 'anchors' in UN-Habitat too, with regular contexts often pinpointed on a single officer's engagement with a small number or indeed even just a single academic. This is a further challenging issue if we consider, as several scholars reminded us, of current trends in academia toward developing greater entrepreneurial practices that are being pushed into the academic community through "impact" agendas. This involves a drive toward industry participation and commercialization, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, not just the natural sciences. Whilst well aligned to the common demand by staff and academic partners for 'practical' and applied collaborations, this shift also comes at the expenses of perhaps broader, longer-term and more 'blue sky' engagements.

Theme 2. Recognizing and supporting the 'next' generation

One key element of this shift in the appreciation of individuals in the long-term is, according to many (encouragingly among UN-Habitat staff too), the issue of more strongly **recognizing and supporting the 'next' generation**. This has in many cases taken the shape of ad hoc engagements with students or PhD researchers. It has taken place within occasional student competitions and in some cases, it has involved youth programs with a perceived great potential. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups have however underlined how this has not been done as systematically as a centre of excellence with aspirations to thought leadership could do with the emerging thought leaders of tomorrow. Recognition and support for the next generations could take the shape of a program of apprenticeship (not least facilitated by the likes of UNI). It could stress the value of betting on engagement with younger voices as consultants and experts, not just established names and well-known collaborators. It could also involve the empowerment of these new voices through leadership roles in programs like UNI and the opening of opportunities for voice at fora like WUF, which in turn could be critical here to ensure a step change within UN-Habitat on this front.

Theme 3. Placing UN-Habitat activities in broader knowledge systems

Time and time again in this study we were reminded by participants that initiatives like UNI, or indeed the many other of UN-Habitat's knowledge-intensive networks, do not happen in isolation. The many networks and programs depicted here and delivered through university collaborations take place in a global landscape that is densely populated by other networks, institutions, collaborations, and more academic and knowledge exchanges. A fundamental and, in our view, still widely overlooked challenge is that of **'placing' UN-Habitat initiatives within**, in relation to, and in some cases alternatively to, **broader circuits of knowledge mobility** available out there today in academia more specifically, but urban action and city networking more broadly. Often, the knowledge initiatives detailed in this report, not least UNI, have been taking place with limited strategizing as to how they might intersect with this vast geography of

knowledge networks, from professional and academic associations to large international partnership funding mechanisms available to academics, and the 'circuit' of urban-focused summits and conferences.

In turn, this means recognizing that networked initiatives like Global Land Tool Network or UNI are both directly and indirectly **subject to the broader political economy of urban knowledge** shaping exchanges of information, data, and training across continents. For example, learning initiatives like the NUA crash course on UN-Habitat Learn, UN-Habitat's online learning platform, must compete at least to some degree with bigger training platforms like online learning giants such as the 92 million-users Coursera platform, or other multilateral offers like the World Bank Open Learning campus. Similarly, UN-Habitat networks must account for the parallel realities of other multilateral agencies' own formats of organisation for academic collaborations, ranging from centre of excellence and hub programs (like WHO's Collaborating Centres scheme), named chairs and expert networks (like UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN programme), academic profiling initiatives (like the broader UN Academic Impact project for the implementation of the SDGs), and more.

This consideration works across multiple scales represented in this report. It has to do with considering the wide reality of academic networks with hundreds of international research collaborations (like those of the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund), or professional and academic associations (like ISOCARP for planners or the RC21 network for urban sociologists) that require according to many study participants a more proactive profiling and engagement by UN-Habitat, especially targeted toward building tangible shared track record with academia not just as a source of consultants.

Hence, in turn, these considerations could be considered by UN-Habitat as critical **springboards for development of a strong voice for applied urban research** that cuts across these platforms, circuits and networks, whilst for instance opening up both a space for greater fundraising for programs like UNI, but also for profiling of next generation thinking. Closer collaboration with other knowledge-intensive multilateral agencies and university networks could be critical here.

Theme 4: Recognising the value of education
Despite repeated mentions across case studies and discussions behind this study as 'great experiences' and 'inspiring engagements', partnerships for educational purposes remain limited in the landscape of UN-Habitat-university relations. This might be a critical shortcoming. Historically, a key differentiation of academia 'versus' other knowledge-intensive providers and institutions (like

consultancies or think tanks) has been its twin research and education function. Yet education-based partnerships have often come **secondary to project-based consultancies**, convening programs, and other forms of knowledge-intensive collaboration. To put it simply, whilst recognition of the value of engaging in teaching and training activities with and *in* universities has been a staple of focus groups and interviews, the actual practice of knowledge partnering still lags – with many of these engagements informal or ad hoc.

There is a sizeable benefit to engaging more formally in university education. An **educational mission for UN-Habitat can be critical development space**. In the eyes of many we engaged in the study, UN-Habitat could take part in education far more effectively and strategically. It can offer a place for 'proof of concept' and ground-testing of tools, guides, and methods, as well as a critical room for peer review and innovation with very diverse viewpoints. It can also build a stronger pipeline not only of aspiring urbanists and possible UN-Habitat staff, but also of more internationally savvy practitioners that have had direct exposure to the day-to-day of multilateral development. Student competitions, secondments, even career development fellowships could be far more common. Typically, these also require limited resources (and are often able to attract private and philanthropic investment) for an agency like UN-Habitat. In fact, several of our study participants also underscored the potential for UN-Habitat to in some form 'accredit' courses and career development processes.

There is a multiplicity of activities in the education sector in which UN-Habitat could be more actively involved, such as teaching, supervision, capacity building, accreditation, development of certifications. Nonetheless this needs to be done whilst **protecting education as a pedagogical space** and ensuring that the work, and intellectual property, of students and graduate researchers is adequately engaged with. **Inter-agency coordination is needed**. Collaboration with other knowledge-intensive components of the UN system, and more closely with both UNESCO (and its Chairs/UNITWIN program) but also potentially UNU, the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative in UNEP and UNITAR, for these initiatives could be essential. Likewise, some expert brokering (with appropriately trained UN-Habitat staff too) could also allow for building 'educational' components and outreach initiatives even in more technical and project-specific engagements.

Theme 5: Tackling the resources challenge
Finally, a central challenge we already knew to be critical from the get-go of this study is that of resource scarcity. Financing for programs like UNI is typically limited in UN-

Habitat's experience. Various attempts at fundraising have yielded limited results. This might be for a few key factors emerged from our study.

First, the world of **philanthropy** is referenced regularly, but often with little clarity about the value proposition and position of a partnership between universities and a UN agency, or the dominant philanthropic investment agendas. Philanthropic investments are often better suited to in-country programs rather than blue sky programs. But a small percentage of large philanthropic programs targeted to cities goes directly to urban research. Most investments from international philanthropic institutions are directed to local programs, advocacy, and technical /infrastructural development. Further, engaging philanthropic funding comes, as UN colleagues know all too well, often with deeply embedded agendas and skewed priorities tailored to particular needs and earmarks.

Currently under-explored areas of funded collaboration include not only major philanthropic funders but also **professional associations** in urban research and teaching, as well as the **built environment's private sector** – construction, consulting, real estate, and development firms. Both, however, need a clear identity and value proposition to 'get' what UN-Habitat is about. This might in turn stress the need to 'pivot' initiatives like UNI to align to current funder interests and to speak more directly to pressing private sector or professional association needs.

Similarly, **pay-for-service models** remain poorly understood, discussed, and often plagued with fundamental problems. For example, membership approaches to universities and individuals are subject not only to vast limitations of funding available to higher education institutions, but also 'competition' by other knowledge circuits and networks as described above. Why investing in cash or kind in UN-Habitat rather than, say, in the World Bank, WHO or UNDP, even when it comes to cities? According to some of the feedback we collected clearer value propositions for the engagement with UN-Habitat might be needed.

Donor interest has also emerged scantly and typically in reference to some "usual suspects" – as a senior staff member put it in reference to the likes of Germany, Scandinavian countries, and the UK. Yet in reverse it is clear from several of our data points that possibly institutional buy in by major national universities might be a possible **leverage point for greater national donor investment** especially in education-focused programs of knowledge partnership – although likely still coming with discrete geographies of interest with established ties (e.g. Africa for Sweden, the Pacific for Australia).

The issue of resources is however not just a question of money. Resource limitations also take the shape of **bureaucratic barriers to mutual engagements** emerging from the encounter of the UN and academic systems – notoriously bureaucratic and poorly flexible. Institutional inflexibility, as much as funding limitations, at both ends remain the strongest challenges to the operationalization of UNI-based partnerships. This is further compounded by the propensity by UN-Habitat (common to some other agencies too) to engage individuals in their personal/consultant capacity rather than expanding to more formalised collaborations.

Agreements between academic institutions and UN-Habitat are often not formal, ad hoc, and unplanned, with little guidance at both ends. However, despite the ambiguity in terms of reference, these agreements are perceived to be of very high value. In fact, there is a growing and widespread demand for more explicitly impact-oriented outputs beyond reports, workshops and events, often with greater interest on the technical or policy fronts and important resourcing potential from private sector, government tech transfer accelerators and philanthropy. Yet at the same time this tendency clashes in some respect with resistance (in many cases well founded) by many academics to the dominance of 'urban science' and technocratic approaches versus more critical or grassroots efforts.

9. ENHANCING UNI: A SUITE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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Our study of UN-Habitat-university partnerships has unveiled a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities. This is clearly characterized by a wide variety of modes of collaboration and of knowledge products emerging from these connections. In the previous section we have summarised some of the findings of this study into general themes of relevance in setting the direction of partnerships in the agency. So, what can be done now to tackle these challenges beyond aspirational advice often provided in these discussions?

Here, we move more specifically to a normative section aimed at strengthening one such avenue of partnership: Habitat UNI. The role of Habitat UNI as the purportedly main mechanism for promoting collaborations with academic institutions within UN-Habitat could in our view be strengthened and better leveraged by the agency. Building on this focus we outline a series of practical recommendations for UNI's operation in the years ahead with a focus on the short (1-2 years) and medium (3-5 years) terms of action.

Whilst characteristically these types of reports would also provide a speculative long-term detail, we would argue for immediate reforms, to ensure UNI's continuity (if not survival). These are designed as practical steps toward a better integration of UNI with UN-Habitat's core normative mission. In place of long-term speculation, we would instead propose, that CDTU should engage colleagues across UN-Habitat in **a more extended and more collective foresight and visioning exercise** that builds on better resourced initiatives and that, crucially, involves more overtly key voices in urban research not yet actively present in UNI, internal UN-Habitat staff and early career scholars and academics.

It is important to also stress how our recommendations are also all dependent on the capacity by UN-Habitat and UNI to strengthening visibility. We recognise CDTU is already working toward providing a **visible and resource-heavy online platform** for UNI, so we consider that action beyond the need for recommendation, but indeed a critical one that reflects well a set of the suggestions flagged below.

Our recommendations to UNI respond to the five themes in chapter 8 along **three core axes of reform**:

A. focus the purpose of UNI explicitly as **_the_ official university partnership program of UN-Habitat**,
B. with its main activities aimed to **connect directly UN-Habitat programming and services** to university expertise and education, and vice-versa
C. and its governance designed to be a **shared commitment by UN-Habitat staff and scholars** with a clear eye at institutional and 'next generation' engagement

In <u>Annex 1</u> we also detail more **specific advice as to how the Terms of Reference for UNI could be adapted** according to some of our recommendations.

These in turn would support shifting the aim of UNI from more generic academic exchange loosely in relation to UN-Habitat to a tight presence in the agency's core business. It would also project a clear identity and offer a simplified mission to those keen to engage, whilst sharpening what the 'ask' for support is by UNI and what the possibilities for fundraising might be. This would also, in our view, drive attention and engagement with UNI beyond CDTU and currently active members, whilst presenting a more tangible value proposition for less active or absent centres of urban scholarship that should be engaged in UNI.

Different degrees of resource investment have been given to each of our recommendations. This is shown below as low, moderate, and high resource commitments. We understand resources not only to mean finances (critical to these activities) but also dedicated staff time and capacity to leverage key UN-Habitat venues/programs. We present these recommendations as a menu of options currently available to UNI management and leadership, and UN-Habitat more broadly, to choose and combine. These are ordered in terms of urgency and detailed also in their interconnections. We also highlight (*starred) what we would argue, based on our review, to be critical points of action. Recommendations staggering and inter-linkages are summarised in figure 21 below.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:
In the short term, we believe that advice and evidence from our study points at urgent positioning and core operations support needs. With minimal adjustments, these steps could already strengthen Habitat UNI's operate within a short timeframe, starting with mid-2022 actions and bearing tangible fruits <u>within 12-24 months</u>. These include:

Level of Resourcing needed
- ► Low
- ► Low-Moderate
- ► Moderate
- ► Moderate-High
- ► High
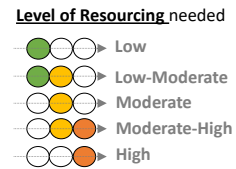
1. <u>*Pump-prime internally a **UNI secretariat**</u>.

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A key feature of successful international programs and networks is their capacity to leverage a well organised core management hub. This could be pilot funded by UN-Habitat and co-supported by a core group of Northern and Southern universities, ideally drawn from the key 'influencers' identified in this report. The secretariat would be establishing a **more effectively resourced core coordination function** whose costs could eventually be partly offset to external funding programs. Yet these remain in our view a necessary investment by UN-Habitat unless outsourcing scenarios are considered where UNI is effectively spun off UN-Habitat (see annex 1).

- o Resource need: MODERATE
  In the short term this should be funded directly by UN-Habitat with a dedicated <u>network convenor role</u> and some base <u>communications support</u> and could also involve a <u>small grant to a cohort of Early Career Scholars</u> from the group of institutions to refresh and implement some of the recommendations of this review through 'new generation' leadership.

- o <u>Practical actions</u>: appointment of a network coordinator and of support group of UN internship holders; appointment of a coordinating group of early career scholars from across a representative mix of UNI member institutions already engaged in UN-Habitat programs and projects; provision of a moderate operating budget to support core annual event, website maintenance (especially an 'opportunity board' for UN-habitat engagement and a resource sharing function), and possibly a student competition program to link UN-Habitat programs to university education (capstones/studios/thesis work).

- o Linked actions: closely connected to action 2 and 3

2. <u>*Move **from network to program**</u>.

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UN-Habitat should consider shifting the focus of UNI from an academic 'network' to that of ***the* flagship university partnership *program* of UN-Habitat**. This shifts the focus from maintaining a wide membership and convening activities to delivering on UN-Habitat-university partnerships with purpose and linking to other UN-Habitat programs. This would in turn require less focus on resourcing and supporting a networked exchange toward UNI's place in strategic facilitation capacity. This could entail re-designing <u>ownership of UNI to be shared by two UN-Habitat Divisions</u>. It would require revising UNI's ToR, building on secretariat resourcing (action 1) and working with a core group of partner institutions to generate suitable medium-long term external program funding principally through actions 2, 8 and 10.

- o <u>Resource need</u>: LOW to MODERATE
  Co-investment in secretariat convening by two UN-Habitat divisions; co-investment (possibly through bespoke funding proposals through actions 6 and 11) by academic institutional partners (e.g. via international networking funding programs and philanthropic donors).

- o <u>Practical actions</u>: shift of UNI program ownership across Global Solutions Divisions and External Relations, Strategy and Knowledge and Innovation Division; revised Steering Committee membership (to represent both universities and UN-Habitat staff involving key UN-Habitat branch/program leads and CoP representatives); revised UNI ToR to focus more sharply purpose and membership process

- o Linked actions: closely connected to action 5 but also 8 to 11

③ *Focus on the 'next' generation of urbanists.

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UNI needs to **better engage with the 'next' generations of urban voices.** This should facilitate access to the UN system and cutting-edge urban programs of UN-Habitat for emerging scholars, students and early career practitioners undertaking higher education. It can be delivered by identifying training opportunities UN-Habitat can facilitate collaboratively during their academic journeys. These opportunities need to be promoted and communicated to the network, ensuring that students, and early career researchers from universities with limited resources can also access them; this could be a relatively radical shift of focus for the network.

- o Resource need: MODERATE to HIGH
  Engaging with early career academics and practitioners (including UN-Habitat staff) often drives less directly available resources than more senior 'names' in the field; whilst a general shift in this direction would only require a change in ToR and language used by UNI, at limited costs, this initiative could require more moderate to high resources to support early career researchers in engaging meaningfully in UNI leadership, events and exchanges, as through fellowship programs. Possible sources of this founding could be university alliances (e.g. IARU, U21) or national donors (e.g. DFAT for Asia-Pacific scholars) but would also potentially appeal to foundations and private sector if implemented topically via Hubs/CoPs.

- o Practical actions: involve a group of early career researchers in UNI Steering Committee group; annual next generation urbanist summit, UN-Habitat Fellowship program of visiting/hosting for early career researchers at PhD/Postdoctoral stages.

- o Linked actions: connected to reform of UNI leadership (action 7) and educational engagement (action 10)

④ Rethink membership pathways.

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UNI's positionality within the broader knowledge partnership set up of UN-Habitat is still somewhat unclear and could be strengthened with an even clearer identity. For instance, membership of UNI could be extended to other institutions and individuals formally (by contract or MoU) engaging with UN-Habitat, making it **the default university partnership platform** in a non-exclusive way with other UN-Habitat initiatives. This requires limited resources but also, as stressed above, a sound support toward web-based capacity for UNI. The need for an efficient and accessible online platform speaks clearly to the well-recognized challenge for Habitat UNI to strengthen communication channels both internally and externally, facilitating collaboration between network members and UN-Habitat staff.

- o Resource need: LOW
  Membership adjustments would only require more formalised buy in and strategic setting of UNI within the broader knowledge system of UN-Habitat

- o Practical actions: increased institutional and individual membership of UNI; membership registration of non-active or missing 'influencers' and other key academic partners of UN-Habitat programs not represented in UNI; development of a repository of UN-Habitat university partners.

- o Linked actions: clearly linked to the need to recognise university presence in flagship UN-Habitat initiatives (action 7)

5. Build **better reciprocal understanding**.

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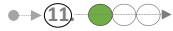
Better understanding of the specific challenges faced by universities on the one hand and by UN-Habitat on the other, not least the common ones (e.g., funding), is needed. In annex here we provide an initial element of this conversation in the form of a visual guide for UN-Habitat staff to common challenges and emerging opportunities from the academic sector, suggesting an exchange conversation or **a short academia 101 'masterclass'** on this might go a long way for staff to better strategize collaborations and tenders.

- o Resource need: LOW
  This could be cost-effectively provided by a group of UNI members and UN-Habitat academic partners in the style of the Global Urban Lectures, as a short self-paced set of a few learning sessions for UN staff – likely of appeal to agencies beyond UN-Habitat.

- o Practical actions: free (urban) academia 101 'masterclass' course; regular sharing workshop to share UN and academic challenges and identify possible collaborative solutions.

- o Linked actions: potentially well aligned to connect to other 'sister' multilateral program for this type of discussions (action 11)

6. **Link key communities** of interest.

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This would entail a partial redesign where possible of the Hubs structure to facilitate greater integration with key areas of UN-Habitat work, with Hubs co-chaired by a CoP lead and a lead academic institution representative with strong profile in these areas of action (e.g. a lead from the Climate Change CoP teaming up with a recognizable urban climate action scholar), with a well-defined core group of partner institutions but also an open membership for individual experts with a focus on this area. This is a **mission-driven co-led Hub approach** that needs to be aligned to CoPs, possibly with a smaller set of themes but greater emphasis on exchange and resource pooling, which in turn can play a critical role in resourcing through topically-oriented funding proposals to academic funding bodies, philanthropies and national donors with bespoke interest in the theme of the Hub/CoP – notably, as per above, core UNI management funding cannot come from these topical areas

- o Resource need LOW to MODERATE
  As already demonstrated by UNI the convening of a Hub through networking and event activities requires relatively low resources, but its expansion to a program of research and intervention does necessitate sizeable grant money, from funders like national research councils or philanthropies focused on that specific theme.

- o Practical actions: revised Hub structure and operations mirroring revised Steering Committee and requiring clear resource development and knowledge application plans by Hubs; targeted program of fundraising through bespoke proposals to national funders (e.g UKRI, NIH) and philanthropies with a focus on thematic programs in the Hub's area, supported jointly by UN-Habitat's Management Advisory and Compliance Services and university research development offices.

- o Linked actions: this could be seen as a first short-term step toward action 7 and its linking UNI as *the* UN-Habitat university program

MEDIUM-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:
In the medium term, <u>within 3 to 5 years,</u> a reform of UNI's program could effectively leverage stronger UN-Habitat-university collaborations, as well as the implementation of *some* of the short-term reforms above toward

7. *Place **UNI at the heart of the agency**.

A stronger internal UN-Habitat network of UNI champions across divisions and practices is needed. ASs we outline in annex 1, this needs to be reflected in a revised steering committee with greater UN-Habitat representation to ensure UNI **presence in flagship UN-Habitat knowledge products**.

○ Resource need LOW
This would only require central UN-Habitat management and flagship program buy-in to make use of UNI as a valid platform for engagement with universities or indeed recognition of existing collaborations, encouraging formal membership and content sharing

○ Practical actions: selecting partners in flagship projects through open calls for proposals/qualifications published on UNI site and otherwise disseminated to UNI membership and elsewhere UN-Habitat Branch directors and regional representatives aware and actively engaged in using new UNI platform

○ Linked actions: closer central buy-in and recognition would go hand in hand with stronger coordination resourcing (action 1) shift of scope (action 2), CoP alignment (action 6) and focusing on the 'next' generation voices (action 3)

8. Re-value the **engagement with individuals**.

UNI needs a better **redefined 'individual' academic membership strategy** that still values single participants as experts in their own right beyond the institutions but ensures this participation does not jeopardise continuity or coherence of a tighter and more effective network. This could be achieved by testing channels of communication (e.g. via an accessible catalogue of university centres and individual experts), opportunity raising (e.g. via a job/consultancy opportunity board) and dissemination (e.g. via a live blog with expert insights linking to current urban research and to current UN-Habitat knowledge initiatives). This would present an enhanced system of opportunity-raising (CoPs and projects, exchange, and events, needs by UN-Habitat staff that can be supported by universities and vice-versa) and of resource sharing, that could go hand-in-hand with – also of use to institutional members

○ Resource need LOW
This initiative mainly requires a shift in management focus and some bespoke individual membership facilitation. That could be either through some dedicated time of the secretariat or outsourced to a group of partner institutions; We would encourage resisting any tendency to charge membership fees.

○ Practical actions: website platform content across three sections with a job/opportunity board, an expert insights blog, and a repository of expertise searchable database.

○ Linked actions: This could go hand-in-hand with a clearer Hub structure re-aligned to CoPs (action 6) with individual members electing sub-membership of specific Hubs (akin to the same sub-structuring of academic and professional organisations)

9. Strengthen **UNI's international voice**.

(3.) (6.) (8.)

Pending some degree of either internal investment in a 'secretariat'/program management team, or indeed outsourcing and resourcing by a group of core management universities, UNI should rethink its **presence on key platforms for urban discussions and thought leadership**. This could take the shape of sharing, mirroring and co-hosting at both UNI events and via the UNI website platform a running series of interventions by next generation scholars and well established leaders in the field, ensuring access to UNI is also based on live interventions in major debates, of instance recognising the success of engaging into live insight sharing platform (like CitiScope at the time of the Habitat III process and conference, Next City, Global Urbanist, or the long-standing visibility of the likes of Planetizen (Bloomberg) City Lab and more) and representation/promotion of UNI at major professional and academic conferences

o Resource need MODERATE to HIGH
This would require support from the External Engagement and communications teams of UN-Habitat to match interventions on core UN-Habitat programs with also key thought leaders in urban research; it would also require facilitation by an established UNI team (internal or external to UN-Habitat) to identify and facilitate interventions by early career researchers and navigate with CDTU agreements for open access sharing with one or more public debate platforms as per above.

o Practical actions: WUF forums involving emerging voices and greater WUF visibility (e.g. in main academic-led events or flagship events involving a 'UNI' academic/institutional partner); UNI presence at major academic association events and professional summits sponsoring/organising panels and side events.

o Linked actions: this is closely connected to next generation (action 3) and individual membership (action 8) strategies but also shift to greater presence in CoPs (action 6)

10. **Engage with curriculum**.

(11)

To step beyond networking academics into impact on university sector, UNI's strategy needs to engage more explicitly with universities as sites of normative UN-Habitat work, not just as partners. This would involve **facilitated ('accredited') training**, recognizing **training service by UN-Habitat staff to academia** and opening up a facilitation program, through the UNI secretariat, for academic programs (e.g. graduate courses, studios, PhD courses) to engage directly in UN-Habitat projects.

o Resource need MODERATE to HIGH
Whilst much of this engagement already happens to quite some degree in an ad hoc and generally not-funded manner, a distinctive and well manged program of this type would require a clear investment by an education oriented main national donor or a philanthropic institution with strong commitment to education; this might require partnership with another multilateral institution (UNECO, HESI, UNU, UNITAR) but would enhance a clear educational function and bridging capacity in capacity building for UNI.

o Practical actions: recognition by staff supervisors and managers of value of normative work through educational programs in universities as guest lecturers, doctoral supervisors and examiners, curriculum development consultants etc.; expanding the scope of Global Urban Lectures by working with a select group/coalition of academic institutions to develop a series of accreditable MOOCs, offering an interactive educational experience.

o Linked actions: partnering with sister programs (action 11) might be the most effective approach here

(11) <u>**Partner with sister multilateral programs**</u>.

● → (10)   ◯🟡🟠►

A more strategic engagement with other multilateral programs of relevance to UNI-involved universities is also recommended to enhance UNI's effectiveness and network reach. --- hand in hand with a more strategic institutional partnership strategy aimed at key 'anchor' institutions (with an eye at North-South balance) that are also more representative of current key voices in urban research/training

- o Resource need MODERATE to HIGH
  Whilst there might be low-moderate financial needs here, we would argue effective management of an <u>inter-agency collaboration</u> prompted by UNI to bridge into other major multilateral initiatives in this space might require accessing a medium-term establishment and development fund centred on educational activities

- o Practical actions: engage with existing academic partnership programs like UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN and WHO Collaborating Centres to align Hub/CoP reform and networking capacity to both other well-established and successful initiatives as well as to convening and resource identification typically outside the core 'cities' domain of UN-Habitat (e.g. in the arts and cultural sector or the health sector)

- o Linked actions: focusing on education and curriculum building (action 10) might be the most effective approach here
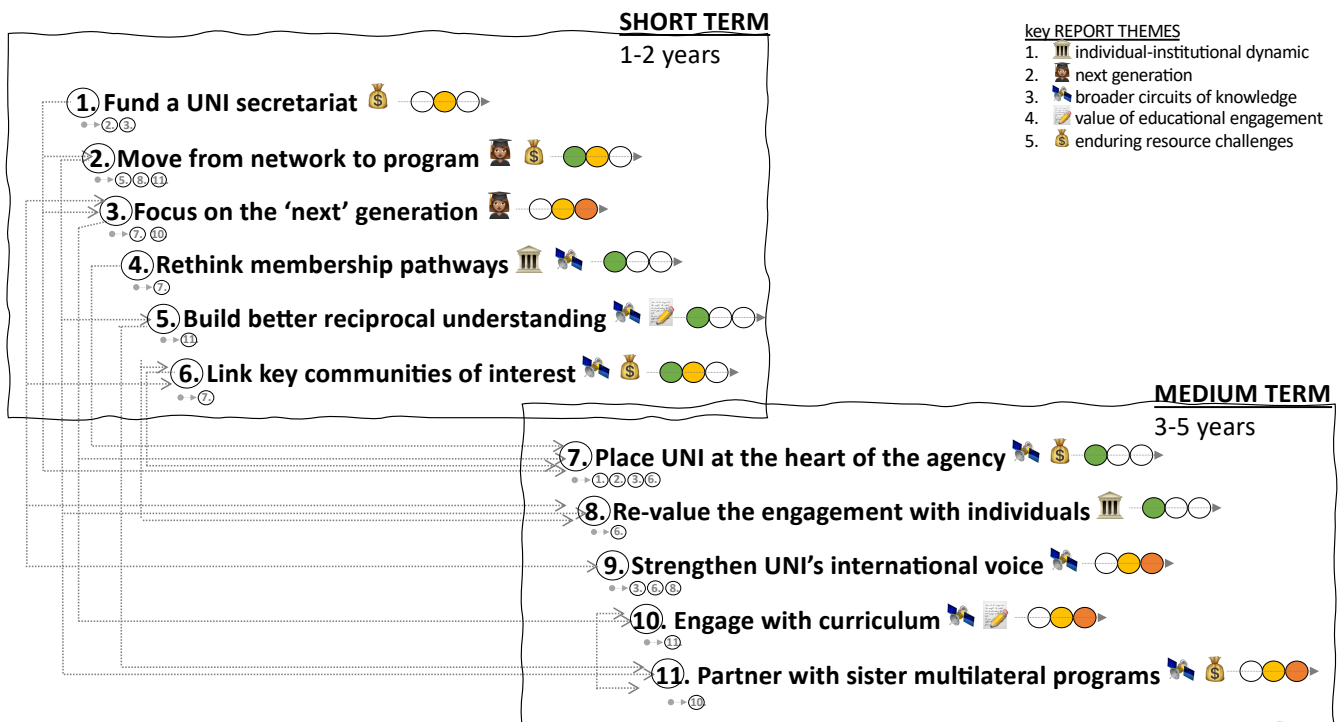
SHORT TERM
1-2 years

(1) **Fund a UNI secretariat** 💰 ◯🟡◯►
  ● → ②③

(2) **Move from network to program** 🎓💰 🟢🟡◯►
  ● → ⑤⑧⑪

(3) **Focus on the 'next' generation** 🎓 ◯🟡🟠►
  ● → ⑦⑩

(4) **Rethink membership pathways** 🏛️ 🔷 🟢◯◯►
  ● → ⑦

(5) **Build better reciprocal understanding** 🔷📝 🟢◯◯►
  ● → ⑬

(6) **Link key communities of interest** 🔷💰 🟢🟡◯►
  ● → ⑦

MEDIUM TERM
3-5 years

(7) **Place UNI at the heart of the agency** 🔷💰 🟢◯◯►
  ● → ①②③⑥

(8) **Re-value the engagement with individuals** 🏛️ 🟢◯◯►
  ● → ⑥

(9) **Strengthen UNI's international voice** 🔷 ◯🟡🟠►
  ● → ③⑥⑧

(10) **Engage with curriculum** 🔷📝 ◯🟡🟠►
  ● → ⑪

(11) **Partner with sister multilateral programs** 🔷💰 ◯🟡🟠►
  ● → ⑩

key REPORT THEMES
1. 🏛️ individual-institutional dynamic
2. 🎓 next generation
3. 🔷 broader circuits of knowledge
4. 📝 value of educational engagement
5. 💰 enduring resource challenges

Figure 21: connectivity between report recommendations

LIST OF FIGURES

Melbourne Centre
for Cities

The **Melbourne Centre for Cities** is a centre for research and training of the University of Melbourne designed to foster responsible and cosmopolitan city leadership, and the information it needs, in an interconnected and increasingly urbanised planet.

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