

Urban agendas around the world: a case of policy transfer?

An analysis proposal

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Abstract

The present article addresses the issue of policy transfer. Three public policy tools (the New Urban Agenda, the Urban Agenda for the European Union and the Spanish Urban Agenda) were analysed. The objective was to develop an analytical framework allowing to examine these public policy tools in order to know the degree, nature of the policy transfer, as well as the mechanisms behind it. Our preliminary analysis indicated a certain degree of policy transfer between agendas. Some divergences were found, however, that could be explained by several factors: the social, economic and political context in which the agenda was launched; previous experience; and the formal ability of the government level that promoted the agenda to influence certain issues. According to our findings, the issue needs to be addressed through extensive methodologies that would support empirical generalisations about the extent to which the characteristics indicated in this first work shape the degree, nature and mechanisms of policy transfer between urban agendas.

Keywords: Urban agendas, policy transfer, New Urban Agenda (NUA), Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) and Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA).

Introduction

In recent years, the major role played by cities in a country's economic and social progress has been confirmed (Cohen, 1991, Henderson, 1991, Spence et al, 2008, OCDE, 2006). It has been projected that by 2050, over two thirds of the world population will be living in urban areas, adding another 2.5 billion people to today's 4 billion urban residents (United Nations, 2014).

Urban issues were not explicitly addressed in 2000 when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were approved. Nevertheless, Parnell (2016) points to five major ways in which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) differ from the MDGs. One is that urban SDGs are “path breaking”, because “in an urban world, cities can be pathways to sustainable development”. In 2015, the inclusion of the urban goal (SDG11) in Agenda 2030 reflected the increasing funding and policy attention given to urban areas, in recognition of the role cities play in enabling sustainable development (Simon et al, 2016; Watson, 2016; Klopp and Petretta, 2017).

Subsequently, the Quito Declaration (2016) launched the materialisation of the SDGs through public policies with an impact on urban areas. This declaration constitutes a milestone. Indeed, it approved the New Urban Agenda (NUA), i.e., the first policy instrument to include the principles and measures devoted to global urban area interventions. Following the NUA approval, similar instruments proliferated in other territories, e.g., the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU), or the Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA). These agendas are generated by different government levels and thus result from independent processes. They do not, therefore, constitute the same, multilevel policy arena. They could represent, however, a vehicle for the transfer of principles and content of urban policies around the world.

Six years after the approval of the Quito Declaration, initiatives to territorialise the SDGs in urban areas have spread. In addition, more or less complex indicator systems have developed to understand the

¹ The goal is to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and includes a series of 11 targets, each with politically negotiated indicators.

results of SDG implementations. Nevertheless, less efforts have been made by academia to reveal the impact of the 2030 Agenda on public policies dedicated to cities. Some works stand out for their focus on the analysis of the territorialization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as in policies related to the smart-sustainable city (Yi and Di, 2023) or spatial planning and territorial cohesion (Medeiros, 2021). However, as commented by Valencia et al. (2019), it is urgent to understand how and to what extent authorities worldwide have begun to comprehend, engage with, and seek to implement these agendas. Adopting a policy transfer perspective can inform us on the extent to which the proposals of the Agenda 2030 for urban areas have materialised in specific public policy tools. A multilevel approach to the question can therefore reveal how different government levels implement them.

The present work attempted to analyse a policy transfer process between urban agendas, exploring how principles and policy content in one political setting were used in principles and policy content in another political setting (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). The aim was first, to verify how such agendas are shaped, and second, to uncover their essential elements regarding their procedural and substantive dimensions².

The transfer literature employs small n qualitative case studies focusing on a detailed analysis of a policy transfer, or a series of related policies between two or more countries. In this paper, the observation units were the United Nations New Urban Agenda (NUA), the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) and the Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA). When selecting the study cases we first sought to represent urban agendas located at different government levels. Since the NUA cannot perform direct implementations, it was necessary to observe its materialisation at lower government levels. The UAEU is more concrete in this regard, though less than national agendas – which is why Spain was included in the analysis. We selected the SUA as a case study because at the time of writing,

² Howlett and Rayner (2017) note that substantive elements are those that have an effect on the production and distribution of goods and services to society, whereas procedural elements are designed to have an effect on implementation (policy processes).

it was among the few agendas to have been accepted nationally – it was approved in 2019. Moreover, the SUA constitutes a major action document at the national level. First, because it can be considered as the first policy in Spain to address cities specifically. Second, because it reflects the country's adherence to European urban policy, as it forms part of Spain's commitment to the 2014-2018 programming period.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: the concepts included in the study analytical framework are defined in the first section. The second section addresses the operationalisation of the concepts used to analyse the agendas, followed by a description of the data and methods in the third. The fourth section analyses the degree, nature and mechanisms of transfer found between urban agendas. The last section sets out the main conclusions of the work as well as proposals for future analyses.

1. Policy transfer: an analysis proposal for urban agendas

As mentioned above, the aim of this paper was to compare different public policy policy tools (urban agendas) promoted at different government levels.

To this end, three basic dimensions were considered: first, the political principles underlying the agenda configurations; second, the agenda contents; and third, the extent to which these public policy tools can be regarded as policy transfer based on the analysis of the first two elements.

First, we must address the following questions: How do we define policy tools, and what types of tools exist? In the context of our research, it is essential to acknowledge the significant contributions of classic literature on policy tools. Howlett et al. (2009; 2005) delve into the intricacies of policy tools and their application, providing valuable insights into their effectiveness. Salamon's (2002) work offers a comprehensive examination of the tools employed by governments, shedding light on their roles and impacts. Hood's (1983; 2007) influential research provides a nuanced exploration of governance instruments, highlighting their significance in shaping policy outcomes. Meanwhile, Vedung et al. (1998) offer a foundational perspective on policy tools and their use in achieving policy objectives.

In this context, a policy tool can be understood as a set of techniques through which governmental authorities exert their influence to secure support and drive social change (Vedung, 1998). Each tool possesses a specific nature, and it is their alternating or simultaneous use that reveals the specific strategies of policies. Velasco (2004) identifies a specific type of tool, known as programmatic, which includes plans. A plan serves as a fundamental policy tool that guides public actions within a defined timeframe. Due to their programmatic nature, plans encapsulate essential references and dominant ideas concerning a specific issue, guiding any implemented activity. In essence, they design overarching strategies that orient policy, considering the problem holistically.

Within the framework of this study, agendas are classified as programmatic public policy tools, aligning with Velasco's definition of programmatic tools (Velasco, 2007). They are situated within a defined

period and encompass a set of fundamental ideas regarding a specific issue that directs political actions during the designated timeframe.

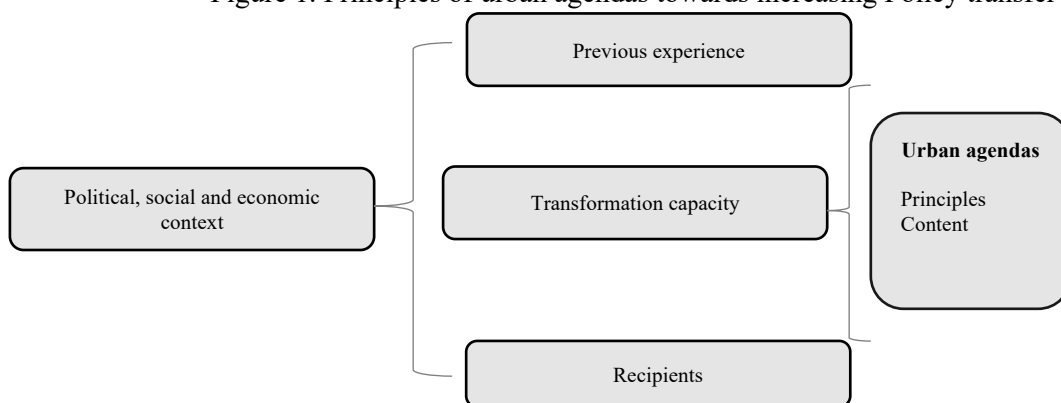
Policy transfer, often referred to as the process of borrowing and adapting policies from one context to another, has become a prominent feature of modern governance (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Its origins can be traced back to the need for governments to learn from the experiences of others and apply successful policies to their own unique circumstances (Evans & Davies, 1999). The primary objective of policy transfer is to save time and resources by avoiding the reinvention of the wheel (Stone, 1999). By studying and adopting policies that have yielded positive outcomes elsewhere, governments aim to address pressing issues, achieve their policy objectives more efficiently, and enhance the overall effectiveness of public administration (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Stone, 2001). However, the success of policy transfer hinges on clear articulation of the source and targets of these policy adaptations, as well as careful consideration of the contextual differences between the original and recipient settings to ensure that the transferred policies are appropriately tailored and effective (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Stone, 1999).

According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), policy transfer is the process through which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting. These authors also set out a series of questions linked to this transfer: who transfers policy, why engage in policy transfer, what is transferred, are there different degrees of transfer, where are lessons drawn from, what factors constrain policy transfer, and how the policy transfer process relates to policy “success” or “failure”.

The objective of this study was to understand whether the principles and content of the analysed agendas were similar or different. We also sought to determine the characteristics that influenced the shaping of each agenda. Therefore, the following questions were addressed: what is transferred, to what extent, which factors constrain policy transfer and which are the mechanisms behind it?

The general starting hypothesis is that all agendas share backgrounds that are alike, as reflected in their similar contents. The weight of each issue, however, may vary. The possible explanation is that agendas derive not only from the wishes of the actors who design them, but also from the opportunities at their disposal. In this sense, transfer literature highlights the key role of structures (Marsh and Sharman, 2009) which provide the context in which agents act, constrain or facilitate agent actions. More specifically, a range of aspects form an interaction system from which they derive. These factors are as follow: the political, social or economic context in which the agenda is generated; the true transformative capacity of the government level that promotes the agenda; previous experience; and the characteristics of the territories concerned. Consequently, transfers can vary in terms of degree and nature. According to Lenschow et al. (2005), policy transfer does not imply a comprehensive adaptation of foreign institutions and practices. Instead, transfer usually entails hybrid combinations of outside and local knowledge. As such, the transfer preconditions of the recipient state are of much greater interest, together with the understanding of how national differences may alter the speed, scope and extent to which external examples are incorporated into the domestic policy-making process. This interaction system has been adapted and is reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Principles of urban agendas towards increasing Policy transfer



Source: elaborated by the authors

Bearing in mind that each of the agendas is developed in its own context, they will in turn generate its own logics associated with the transfer between policies. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) identify mechanisms behind this transfer such as: learning, that implies a rational decision by governments to emulate foreign institutions and practice to the extent that these measures produce more efficient and effective outcomes than the alternatives (Rose, 1991); competition, or make the country attractive for the entry of resources (Drezner, 2001); coercion, that may come from powerful states or from international organizations; and mimicry, emulation or socialization. This mechanism is related to the fact that states adopt the practices and institutional forms of social leaders and thereby are perceived by others and themselves as being advanced, progressive and morally praiseworthy. Emulation in this way be a deliberative play by governments to acquire legitimacy.

Basic analytical framework: principles and content of urban agendas

In the context of urban agendas, it is essential to examine the fundamental dimensions that guide the development and execution of policies aimed at shaping the future of cities. These dimensions are encapsulated in two core aspects: *principles* and *content*. The principles underpinning urban agendas revolve around the fundamental tenets of *better regulation*, which emphasizes the need for streamlined policies and regulations, *better funding* seeking to create effective and accessible financial mechanisms for urban development, and *better knowledge*, focusing on generating and sharing standardized urban information.

On the other hand, the *content* dimension delves into the substantive aspects of urban agendas. A *holistic* approach to content considers a wide spectrum of public policy areas, ranging from economic development and social welfare to physical infrastructure and environmental sustainability. The *strategic* dimension involves aligning urban agendas with broader policy objectives. Additionally, the *territorialized* perspective emphasizes the importance of explicitly considering the spatial characteristics of urban policies, thereby ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. Lastly, the *participatory* dimension acknowledges the necessity of involving stakeholders actively in the design and implementation of urban agendas, fostering collaboration and coherence in policy initiatives.

In the subsequent sections, we will explore each of these dimensions in more detail, shedding light on their significance in shaping urban agendas and their impact on the future development of cities.

1.1.1. Principles based on better regulation, better funding and better knowledge

One study objective was to determine the extent to which principles of *better regulation*, *better funding* and *better knowledge* are reflected in urban agendas. These principles are the three main guidelines underlying the urban agenda model internationally and include: improving and making the legislative framework more agile; facilitating access to economic resources; and designing policies according to the knowledge of the reality being intervened upon.

1.1.1. Better regulation

The Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament (2015) sets out the *better regulation* principle. This principle consists of elaborating simpler policies and regulations that are managed by administrations with the capacity to do so, and that are supported by citizens and stakeholders.

In this regard, we sought to identify whether these principles existed in the public policy documents forming the agenda antecedents. The first step was to verify the presence of a parsimony³ principle – or a search for simpler models with regard to legislation and institutional design. The second was to uncover the extent to which this institutional model was accompanied by more effective, efficient and transparent policy management models. The third stage was to find out the degree to which the normative, institutional and management model was geared towards providing local stakeholders with a greater institutional and decision-making capacity.

1.3.1. Better funding

With regard to this principle, the aim was to create better-working and easier-to-use financial instruments for cities. As indicated by Cohen (2016), the New Urban Agenda recommendations require adapted financial resources that guarantee the fulfilment of the pledges made by national and local governments. In this regard, one long-term objective should be to undertake significant urban finance reforms, strengthen revenues, and increase access to national and international markets. Along similar lines, the EU has been planning to simplify the use of funds and to broaden their possibilities of combination (European Commission, 2017).

To corroborate the existence of such elements, we need to examine evidence from public policy documents, e.g., financing the implementation of policies aimed at cities and facilitating access to funding.

³ Parsimony refers to the balance between explanatory capacity and simplicity – maximising the first and striving for simplicity through a reduced number of propositions (Hernández, 2003: 90-91).

1.3.2. *Better knowledge*

This principle is associated with creating and promoting the exchange of comparable information between cities (European Commission, 2017). Caprotti et al. (2017) signal the political, ideological and development implications of focusing more on cities as ‘measurable entities’, that is, cities reducible to data and that are controllable using new technologies. Consequently, despite previous attempts to generate knowledge about cities, a new dimension is addressed here: standardising the definition of sustainable urban development using systematic technical means (Joss, 2015). According to Cohen (2016), producing such knowledge guarantees strong and independent supervision, and ensures that the commitments will be monitored. Similarly, Simon et al. (2016) underscore the need to generate knowledge to improve the design and implementation of public policy.

To summarise, corroborating the existence of principles related to knowledge about cities implies the following processes: gathering evidence on the generation of information and knowledge about cities; using the information to design, monitor and evaluate any implemented actions within them; and exchanging information about good and innovative urban practices. The analytical proposal related to political antecedents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Political principles: main analytical dimensions

Dimension	Sub-dimensions	Elements to include in agendas
Political principles	Better regulation	- Regulation and institutional design
		- Policy management
		- Institutional capacity and local power
	Better funding	- Source of finance associated with urban policies
		- Access to cities
	Better knowledge	- Knowledge generated
		- Dissemination and exchange

Source: elaborated by the authors

1.4. Content of urban agendas

Based on the literature, the intervention model underlying urban initiatives presents the following characteristics:

- *Holistic.* Until the 1970s, the dominant belief was that all urban problems could be solved through physical intervention (*hard issues*) within the territory (Cochrane, 2007). From then on however, social matters (*softer issues*) became an urban subject⁴.

Such an approach implies an integral view that is centred on the territory but with an inter-sectoral perspective⁵. As indicated by Da Silva et al. (2012), urban areas must be understood as a series of compound systems rather than a series of separate parts. These systems include among others governance, infrastructures, markets and social systems. Considering all of them requires a holistic perspective in which cities must be understood as “complex life systems”. Consequently, cities should integrate social, economic and environmental challenges (McGranahan, Schensul and Singh, 2016).

Here, it is necessary to search for evidence that agendas include objectives and issues related to a variety of public policy areas (the environment, the economy, social welfare, physical elements, etc.) at the same time.

Strategic. An urban initiative should consider its possible connection with actions developed in other domains (government levels). Regarding the NUA, Cohen (2016) points out that the proposals set forth in Habitat III will have a limited effect unless national governments recognise the important role of the urban agenda in macroeconomic development, environmental conservation, the promotion of social justice and democracy. Similarly, the NUA commitment should be linked to the true priorities of cities and their metropolitan areas within national policies. González (2013)

⁴ Le Galés (2005) indicates that this is due to two processes: on the one hand, the phenomenon of new immigration, which forces cities to develop new adaptation strategies; and on the other, the social effects of the global economic crisis. Regarding hard and soft(er) issues, see the work of Groth and Corjin (2005).

⁵ See the article by Jordan and Lenschow (2010) on the influence of sustainable development principles from the 1990s onwards as a political response as well as unconnected objectives related with economic development, social development, and environmental protection.

highlights the implicit interactions among urban policies at a multilateral level within the European Union. According to the author, EU policies have been established despite the EU lacking authority in this field, as urban matters are formally the responsibility of national, regional, and local authorities. European Union (EU) funding and cohesion policy have played a crucial role as a source for incorporating EU principles into urban policy, promoting sustainable urban development. These funds, integrated within the EU's cohesion policy, provide substantial resources for investment projects in urban areas with the aim of enhancing infrastructure, quality of life, and economic competitiveness (McCann, 2016; Huete, Pazos and Merinero, 2023). Furthermore, they support initiatives specifically designed to address urban challenges, such as the revitalization of degraded areas and the promotion of social inclusion in urban environments (European Commission, 2020). In this regard, due to the strategic importance of cities for the EU as a whole (European Commission, 2009 and 2011), it has become necessary to address and develop the issue from a pan-European perspective.

The objective in this study was to define the extent to which urban agenda contents reflect the importance of being aligned with the agendas of other government levels, whether through an upscale (bottom-up) or downscale (top-down) approach.

- *Territorialised*. This characteristic can be understood as the adoption of an explicit spatial focus in policies⁶ in order to gain a complete understanding of the effects of changes within them and to help to organise responses at the different government levels.

As indicated by Barnet and Parnell (2016), a consensus exists today on the importance – perhaps even the centrality – of urban processes to ensure sustainability in matters such as climate change, economic development, poverty eradication, public health and food safety. Taking territory

⁶ In this regard, Atkinson (2001) analyses how the European perspective on territorial development has gradually penetrated the European urban agenda, giving territorial meaning to city policies.

centrality into account, city-focused policies should be especially sensitive to the characteristics of the territory of implementation.

- *Participatory*. Considering the underlying principles of urban policies today, the participatory dimension is unavoidable. In relation to the new challenges facing administrations since the 1990s, Howlett and Rayner (2017) highlight the need to create institutional designs geared towards creating what they call “integrated strategies”. Together with the substantive dimension, related to the intended outcomes and objectives, governments seek to reconstruct political domains in which coherent objectives are combined with robust policy tools. This would involve, among other things, integrating existing political initiatives into a single strategy and coordinating the actions of different agencies and stakeholders.

In this sense, given the complex nature of agendas, partnerships presumably need to be established with other stakeholders to meet the set objectives. An analysis of urban agendas must thus uncover a quest to promote stakeholder participation, both in their design and in their implementation. The present paper focused on: the existence of governance models that are relatively plural (Dahl, 1961); the characteristics of the network created according to the nature of the stakeholders (public vs. private) (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Rhodes, 2007; Pierre, 1999; 2001); and the model of interaction established between them. More specifically, the objective was to define the spheres of collaboration in order to ascertain the extent to which the different stakeholders had more or less capacity to make decisions about the design, implementation and/or evaluation of the agenda (Parks and Oakerson, 1989).

In short, the proposal involves building knowledge about the system of governance used to materialise urban agendas in relation to: (1) network size (actors in the network); (2) the nature of the network (public vs. private); and (3) the interaction model (stage of the policy in which the actors are involved). Table 2 presents a summary of the agenda content analysis.

Table 2. Content of the agendas: main analytical dimensions

Dimension	Sub-dimensions	Elements to be included in agendas
Content of agendas	Holistic	Content of public policy areas (Eco. development; Social welfare; Physical elements of the city; Environment)
	Strategic	Coherent with other broader-reaching agendas
	Territorialised	Search to adapt the agenda content to the territorial characteristics
	Participatory	Network size
		Nature of the network
		Interaction model

Source: elaborated by the authors

2. Data and methods

To meet the above objectives, we analysed various public policy documents that constituted the pillars of each urban agenda examined here. In addition, we studied the documents which reflected the urban agenda of each government level. The documents are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Sources of information

Dimension of analysis	Level of analysis		
	New Urban Agenda NUA	Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU)	Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA)
Political principles	Vancouver Declaration (1976)	Rotterdam Urban Acquis (2004)	Sustainability whitepaper on Spanish urban planning (2010)
	Istanbul Declaration (1996)	Bristol Accord (2005)	Spanish urban and local sustainability strategy (EESUL) (2011)
	Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium (2001)	Leipzig Charter (2007)	Spanish Agreement of Association 2014-2020 (2014)
	Progress achieved to date in the application of the final document of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and determination of new and emerging problems of sustainable urban development (2014)	Marseilles Declaration (2008)	
	Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015)	Toledo Declaration (2010)	
		Riga Declaration (2015)	
Content of the agendas	New Urban Agenda (2016)	Pact of Amsterdam (2016)	Spanish Urban Agenda (2018)

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) was promoted by the United Nations. It was approved in October 2016 during the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, also known as "Habitat III," which took place in Quito, Ecuador. The primary objective of the New Urban Agenda is to provide a global framework for addressing urban challenges and advancing sustainable development in urban areas worldwide, recognizing the vital role that cities play in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) is an initiative promoted by the European Union (EU) to address specific challenges faced by cities and urban areas within EU member countries. It was officially launched in May 2016 as part of the EU framework, with the primary goal of improving the quality of life in urban areas by tackling issues like sustainable urban development, housing, transportation, and social inclusion. The agenda encourages collaboration among EU member states, cities, and stakeholders to develop innovative solutions and policies for urban environments, thereby contributing to the achievement of EU policy objectives and the enhancement of urban living conditions.

The Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA) is an initiative promoted by the Government of Spain to address specific challenges faced by cities and urban areas in the country. It was officially launched in 2018, with the primary goal of promoting sustainable, efficient, and equitable urban development in Spain. This agenda aims to tackle issues such as urban mobility, housing, the revitalization of degraded urban areas, and the improvement of the quality of life in urban environments. It encourages collaboration between the central government, autonomous communities, municipalities, and other key stakeholders to develop specific policies and solutions that address urban needs and challenges in Spain.

The methodology followed to examine the indicated documents was content analysis. As Berelson (1952) points out, the content analysis technique allows to describe the manifest content of

communication, based on objectivity (explicit rules) and systematisation (applicable to all units of analysis). A series of registration units were selected from the sampling units (the public policy documents shown in Table 3), i.e., the specific segments within the public policy documents that constituted the empirical material under study.

The content analysis performed in this work was thematic. It was therefore oriented towards analysing the presence of terms or concepts, regardless of the relationships arising between them. Subsequently, a coding tool was created to measure policy transfer. Following Bardin (1996), three counting rules were considered to generate the coding system: the presence or absence of the elements; frequency; and the orientation or sense of the issue adopted in the text.

The tool has a dual purpose: first, to measure the importance given to different issues (topics) in each agenda; and second, to evaluate the orientation similarities or differences among the various agendas. Hence, each topic described in Table 4 was evaluated based on the following criteria: *Very present* (3); *Fairly present* (2); and *Barely present* (1). This analysis revealed the weight of every issue in each agenda.

Table 4. Coding system based on presence and frequency

Degree of topic importance	Description	Value
Very present	The subject is explicitly referred to in the agenda and is central	3
Fairly present	An explicit reference is made, but in general terms	2
Barely present	Alluded to in the agenda or does not even appear	1

Source: elaborated by the authors

After analysing the presence of each issue within each agenda, we utilized the coding tool to evaluate orientation. In this study, orientation was defined as the specific proposals regarding a given issue presented in each agenda. The objective of this analysis was to determine the level of similarity among the issues. As illustrated in Table 5: a high level (3) of similarity was identified when the approaches to

a single issue were similar, both in terms of presence and orientation; an intermediate level (2) of similarity was considered when the degree of presence was similar, but each agenda advanced different strategies. Finally, a low level (1) of similarity was considered when the agendas diverged in terms of issue presence and the orientation of potential actions.

Table 5. Coding system based on an issue orientation

Degree of similarity	Description	Value
High	Similar between the agendas analysed (both in terms of presence and orientation)	3
Medium	Similar in terms of presence, though with possible discrepancies with regard to orientation	2
Low	Divergence in terms of presence and orientation	1

Source: elaborated by the authors

3. Main findings

In this section, we analyse the configuration of the three agendas in terms of principles and contents. The aim was to identify similarities and differences between them in order to ascertain the transferred contents and the level of transfer between agendas.

3.1 Agenda principles

Better regulation

The NUA antecedents do not clearly set out the need to simplify *regulation and institutional design*. The absence of conspicuous references to regulation and institutional aspects are understandable in the case of this government level since the United Nations lacks explicit powers over the normative and institutional design of cities. In contrast, the antecedents of the European and Spanish urban agendas make plain reference to the need to coordinate and simplify the regulatory framework. In the EU, the Riga declaration argues the need to use “existing legal frameworks and structures, avoiding the creation of unnecessary legislation and always adapting to the characteristics of the specific territory” (2015:2). The Spanish Agreement of Association (2014-2020) emphasises the parsimony principle by highlighting the need to reduce intermediate bodies, programmes and their corresponding administrations. The agreement advocates greater coordination and a smaller number of programmes implemented within a complex multi-level governance framework, marked by major decentralisation in urban matters (2014: 325).

Concerning *policy management*, a common political narrative is the need for more transparent, effective and efficient management of the documents consulted in all government areas. Policy management is established as a principle in the NUA antecedents⁷, in the case of Spain, a rationalisation and

⁷ The Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium (2001) stipulates the need to: “Resolve to intensify efforts for ensuring transparent, responsible, and accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of cities and other human settlements. (...) Cities need specific approaches and methodologies to improve governance, (...)”.

simplification principle is explicitly mentioned as a means to manage urban issues⁸ more efficiently and effectively. The SUA emphasis undoubtedly goes hand in hand with a context of crisis, marked by other milestones such as Law 27/2013 of 27 December on the rationalisation and sustainability of the local Administration. This law is a key element in the actions adopted by Spain during the economic crisis, aiming to ensure that local administrations use resources more effectively and efficiently.

In relation to the *institutional capacity of local actors*, the documents issued by the EU as well as those generated by the United Nations advocate the strengthening of the institutional capacity of local stakeholders, although in the case of the United Nations, the stakeholder definition is more open than in the EU. While the United Nations documents give greater weight to the group of stakeholders involved in city policies⁹, EU documents largely focus on strengthening the capacity of local authorities¹⁰. However, in contrast with the UN and EU agendas, the SUA antecedents do not explicitly refer to the need for local stakeholders to have a greater institutional capacity. Strikingly, the actors most capable of delegating competencies in cities are the most reluctant to do so. This can be explained by the fact that the Spanish agenda was developed during an economic crisis, therefore, in the midst of social and political difficulties. In such a scenario, modifying the local government model is not a priority, although the issue of political competences versus local actor financing has been a recurring subject of political debate over the last twenty years.

8 The Spanish Agreement of Association 2014-2020 (2014) proposes the development of improvements in it and management tools. Reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries. More efficient execution and generation of more streamlined reports.

9 The Istanbul Declaration (1996) indicates, “An enabling strategy, capacity-building and institutional development should aim at empowering all interested parties, particularly local authorities, the private sector, the cooperative sector, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, to enable them to play an effective role in shelter and human settlements planning and management”. Vancouver Declaration (1976) sets out the same principles, creating a specific instrument: the United Nations Centre for human settlements (Habitat). Later, the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium (2001) states that it: “Welcome[s] the efforts made so far by many developing countries in effecting decentralisation in the management of cities as a means of strengthening the operation of the local authorities in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda”. This Declaration also states the need to: “Further resolve to empower local authorities, non-governmental organisations and other Habitat Agenda partners, within the legal framework and according to the conditions of each country, to play a more effective role in shelter provision and in sustainable human settlements development. This can be achieved through effective decentralisation, where appropriate, of responsibilities, policy management, decision-making authority and sufficient resources, where possible including revenue-collection authority to local authorities, through participation and local democracy as well as through international cooperation and partnerships”.

10 This principle is present in most of the documents, but it is in the Bristol Agreement that it takes more importance, with the concept of ‘place-making’ skills –such as such as territorial leadership, community engagement, partnership working, project management, governance and cross-occupational learning.

Better funding

In relation to *finance*, the models proposed are based on the flexibility of existing financial instruments. The NUA establishes the access to financing sources by local authorities through integrated financing frameworks¹¹. Along with this, the NUA proposes the need to improve the fiscal autonomy of cities¹². The EU advocates, since 2008, the use of external financial sources by local authorities or the development of instruments, such as Jessica¹³. In Spain there is a drive to diversify sources of finance through different areas of public policy, moving away from finance that is dependent on urbanistic dynamics¹⁴. The scant attention paid to providing municipalities with their own fiscal instruments in the case of Spain is consistent with multi-level governance, where regional governments have been inclined to concentrate powers and resources to the detriment of local governments. Hence, Spanish regional governments have tended to centralise city-related resources and powers, despite the efforts and pressure of local governments (Wollmann, 2012, Pradel, 2016).

Better knowledge

The differences in the principles among the three agendas described above can also be found regarding *knowledge*. In the public policy documents studied, the principles linked to knowledge tend to converge, yet there is an emphasis on different aspects. In relation to the *generation of knowledge* in the UN documents, we found an insistence on the systematisation of the generated information¹⁵. This aspect

11 We recognize that sustainable urban development, guided by existing urban policies and strategies can benefit from integrated financing frameworks.

12 The support for effective, innovative and sustainable financing frameworks and instruments that strengthen municipal finances and local tax systems in order to create, maintain and share the value generated by sustainable urban development in an inclusive way.

13 Marseille Declaration 2008. Expands the range of instruments aimed at providing financial assistance to urban development investments, thus facilitating the development of individual financing strategies, which may include both grants and JESSICA instruments. This efficiency improvement could help to increase urban development investments using the public funds available.

14 The Whitepaper on sustainability in Spanish urban planning (2010) posits “A fiscal regime for Local Councils whereby finance, in such an important amount, does not depend on acts of urbanistic transcendence (through taxation or merely tied to reclassifications and gains linked to the increase in building volumes)”.

15 The Vancouver Declaration (1976) indicates: “The knowledge and experience accumulated on the subject of human settlements should be available to all countries. Research and academic institutions should contribute more to this effort by giving greater attention to human settlements problems”. To this end, a specific instrument is created: the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). The Istanbul Declaration (1996), proposes the need to “Strengthen existing human settlements related information systems by adopting efficient and sustainable methodologies and institutional arrangements, by systematically incorporating research results and by compiling, analysing and updating data for human settlements and shelter statistics and policy-sensitive indicators”.

seems to be developed the most in the European sphere¹⁶. Finally, knowledge generation was present in antecedent documents of the SUA, although it was largely oriented towards the physical aspects of the territory¹⁷.

In relation to *knowledge exchange*, the EU is pursuing its institutional dynamic of fostering information exchange, obtaining comparable information for the whole of the EU, and developing a common research agenda. Consequently, Europe is where knowledge is exchanged the most. This knowledge exchange orientation is reflected in the UN¹⁸ documents, but in a less detailed manner. The Spanish documents, however, refer to participation in international exchange networks, although no mechanisms are established within the country as a whole or among the stakeholders¹⁹ beyond the Urban Information System, the Network of Urban Initiatives, and the territorial observatories listed in the public policy documents preceding the SUA.

16 The Bristol Accord (2004) states that “Ministers stimulate greater coordination and integration of national sectoral policies that impact upon the knowledge base of cities”. The case studies should demonstrate flexible and transferable solutions to common challenges. (...)”. The specific instrument: EUKN. Leipzig Charter (2007) proposes a “(...) European platform to pool and develop best practice, statistics, benchmarking studies, evaluations, peer reviews and other urban research to support actors involved in urban development at all levels and in all sectors”. The Marseille Statement (2008) proposes the need” to (...) improve knowledge of the city and reinforce, through training, the know-how and skills of the individuals who collaborate with key professional institutes and bodies. A specific instrument: Urban Audit”. This same statement advocates “facilitating access to knowledge of good practices and existing methods to develop indicators created at a local level and which could also support measures to monitor the implementation of integrated, sustainable and cohesive urban development proposals, or the lack thereof”. Specific instrument: Thesaurus is the first reference to give precise quantitative and qualitative indicators. The Riga Declaration (2015) posits the need “To promote the knowledge base and the data on urban development issues, referring to different types of urban units” through the following specific instruments: Urban Audit, URBACT, ESPON and EUKN.

17 The White paper on sustainability in Spanish urban planning (2010) states that “(...) simple information about the urban development’s set out for the territory as a whole constitutes the first step to deactivate growth forecasts that are bordering on absurd”. To this end, tools are proposed such as the Urban Information System, the Network of Urban Initiatives, or territorial observatories. The Spanish local and urban sustainability strategy (EESUL) (2011) advocates “Recognising the complexity of territories and developing instruments capable of quantifying and evaluating the functions, specificities and complementarities of each of the functional units, as well as the flows and exchanges between them, always against a backdrop of sustainability”.

18 The Istanbul Declaration (1996) states the need to “Develop information systems for networking, for accessing resources in a timely manner and for the exchange, transfer and sharing of experience, expertise, know-how and technology in human settlements development”. To this end, it proposes the United Nation Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) instrument. The Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium (2001) states its intention to “Resolve to raise awareness about human settlements challenges and solutions through full and open dissemination of information and commit ourselves to renew and foster political will at all levels”. It also posits that: “(...) Governments at all levels should identify and disseminate best practices and apply shelter and human settlements development indicators”.

19 The Spanish Agreement of Association 2014-2020 (2014) states that “in all these Programmes (INTERREG EUROPE, INTERACT, URBACT, ORATE), Spain is playing an active role in their management structures through antenna or Networks of experts, and by developing the exchange of experiences and good practices”.

In short, knowledge seems to be prioritised in the EU not only as an instrument to evaluate policies but also as a good that must be shared between cities. Thus, while the NUA considers knowledge as key for decision-making, the EU and, in less extent, Spanish agendas regard its utility as a resource in terms of exchange. We must remember what the agendas are intended for. The EU has perhaps overcome the challenge of knowledge-based decision-making so its present goal is to standardise knowledge in order to share and facilitate comparison between Member States. Table 6 shows the main results of the public policy documents analysis.

Table 6. Principles of the agendas: main findings

Dimensions		Evidence in documents prior to agendas		
		NUA	UAEU	SUA
Better regulation	Regulation and institutional design	No explicit references	Existing legal frameworks adapted to the territory	Simplification, rationalisation and harmonisation of processes and legislation
			Existing government structures	Explicit references to reducing the number of programmes and the corresponding implementing administrations
	Policy management	Specific references to public management approaches and methodologies	Specific references to objectives, criteria, methods and instruments of evaluation	Special importance given to the rationalisation and simplification of processes
	Institutional capacity and local power	Strengthening institutional capacity of local authorities	Strengthening institutional capacity of local authorities	General references without specifying stakeholders

			and other local stakeholders	
Better funding	Sources of finance	Flexibility of financial mechanisms and instruments	Flexibility of financial instruments Integration of a broader raft of policies	Integration of a broader raft of policies Linked to different themed objectives and different programmes
	Access to cities	Fiscal autonomy	External sources	Diversification of sources
Better knowledge	Generation	Accent on systematisation	Accent on systematisation and the diversity of issues to be evaluated	Based on more physical aspects of the territory
	Dissemination and exchange	Relative development in specific tools/instruments	High development at an inter-governmental level, as well as in its instruments	Low development related to participation in external networks

Source: elaborated by the authors

3.2 Content of the urban agendas: holistic, strategic and territorialised

The three urban agendas analysed here seek a *holistic* design. In this sense, the NUA points to the potential of sustainable urban development, formulating its transformation commitments through a paradigm shift based on the integrated and indivisible dimensions of sustainable development: the social dimension, the economic dimension and the environmental dimension (2016:11). In the same way, the Amsterdam Pact identifies twelve priority issues that are coherent with the Europe 2020 Strategy, which

are limited to public policy areas linked to the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Finally, the SUA points out that the document, as a strategic framework, rests on a perspective that is necessarily transversal and holistic. In this sense, it states that plans, programmes, strategies or agendas aimed at the design, elaboration and implementation of a sustainable urban development model cannot be limited to a mere sum of diverse actions covering different areas (2018:83). Hence, when choosing the sectoral actions, it is essential to apply the integrated approach as well as to adopt the participatory and multidimensional orientations within it.

In line with the different documents, the agendas integrate various areas of public policy, including different fields such as social welfare, economic development and the environment. There are differences, however, in the definition of these areas as well as the way in which they should be integrated. While the NUA is clearly orientated towards equity and inclusion as a general element that structures the other policy areas (urban economy, planning, environment), the SUA has a more urbanistic focus. Based on the results, the UAEU offers the highest level of integrality or equilibrium between public policy issues.

These agenda approach divergences can be explained by elements such as context, previous experience, and recipients. The NUA instrument is designed for cities the world over, whose main challenge is usually urban poverty. As indicated in the agenda, over two thirds of the urban population live in developing countries, and in these countries, increasing urbanisation has come hand in hand with rising urban poverty levels. In this sense, the NUA would logically assign a specific weight to social inclusion matters²⁰. Conversely, the public policy issues at the heart of the UAEU and the SUA would be explained by other factors than the mere characteristics of the recipient cities. The integrated character of the UAEU is influenced by the working groups involved in the agenda's elaboration. As a result,

20 This is evidenced, for example, in the latest high-level meeting for the monitoring of implementation held in April 2022, where the key issues were as follows: (1) Ending poverty and fighting inequalities, with a focus on affordable housing and access to basic services; (2) Boosting equitable and sustainable urban economies and ensuring predictable financing for sustainable urban development through innovative approaches; (3) Decoupling urbanization from environmental pollution and connecting communities to data and financing to enhance climate adaptation and resilience; and (4) Promoting participatory urban planning approaches for effective and inclusive urban crisis response and prevention.

what can be highlighted is the equitable weight adopted by each public policy area in the agenda. In the case of the SUA, we cannot ignore the institutional location of the agenda, nor the institutional level of policies devoted to cities in Spain. Both the policies and the agenda were located at the level of the Ministry of Public Works and focused mainly on the physical aspects of the cities. This institutional position would influence the ultimate nature of the agenda.

Regarding the *strategic* dimension, the agenda contents are clearly oriented towards an alignment between the analysed instruments and other initiatives of varying scope. In this way, the NUA raises the need to align its content via a coordination with lower government levels²¹. For its part, the UAEU proposes an alignment strategy with the NUA, highlighting, as of the Amsterdam Pact, the need to contribute to the realisation of Habitat III. Finally, the SUA proposes the need to align with the NUA, as well as with the UAEU²².

Furthermore, all agendas also seek to modulate their contents in line with the *characteristics of the territory*. The NUA highlights the role of adapting all the implemented measures to the territory, supporting the initiatives rolled out by each municipality and facilitating the financing, cooperation and reciprocal support between the different cities within the member states. This territorial perspective is also reflected in the creation of evaluation and monitoring tools. A key role is given to local governments, which must consider the individual characteristics and needs of cities in order to evaluate the policies developed over each evaluation period (2016:28). The UAEU proposes strategic urban planning that rests on a place-based and people-based approach. Finally, the SUA broadly defines the

²¹ Understanding the NUA as a wide-ranging international agenda, the strategies that are drawn from it are not directed towards coordination with other agendas of greater significance, but rather towards cooperation between the actors signing the agenda, in order to encourage the horizontal coherence at all territorial levels of a common framework for all United Nations member states.

This intention is materialized through the declaration of effective application (art. 81-84), which is subsequently specified in the Building the urban governance structure block: establishing a support framework (art. 85-92) in order to create a common framework for all members.

²² The document states that it is necessary to become aware of the global from the local, and this places cities in the dominant position to be the main actors of their own sustainable development and, with it, that which corresponds to the whole of each one of countries and the planet itself. In the same way, it is also pointed out that the AUE allows directing the efforts made in urban development to the principles and objectives established in the United Nations Urban Agenda, for which it constitutes a necessary guide.

territorialisation element, allowing the various stakeholders at regional and local government levels to specify it, e.g., through the Local Action Plans developed by cities (2018:230).

In short, although territorialisation is present in all agendas, its weight differs in each case. Thus, the greatest emphasis on territorialisation appears to be assigned in the agenda that is defined at the highest level of abstraction (NUA). However, the lower the government level that promotes the agenda, the less significant this aspect becomes. Moreover, the NUA assigns this territorial adaptation to the evaluation phase, the UAEU to the design phase, and the Spanish agenda to the implementation phase.

Finally, we could say that urban agendas are based on broad public and private stakeholder participation at all stages of public policy. In this way, the NUA highlights the importance of considering all the actors interested in sharing knowledge and challenges. The UAEU emphasises the participatory approach, based on the Amsterdam Pact. It thus generates the agenda content through a system of "partnerships", aimed at encouraging the participation of various actors such as States, interest groups, cities, etc. Finally, the SUA indicates that citizen participation and the involvement of the various public and private actors allow decision-making to be shared from the outset and improve transparency (2018:83). This requires much more coordinated work, in what is already known as good multilevel governance.

Nevertheless, the governance networks generated within the agenda frameworks present differences. The NUA embraces an extreme plurality of actors and offers the greatest balance between public and private stakeholders. The EU agenda, on the other hand, includes sectorial and territorial stakeholders, including networks of cities and private stakeholders, in addition to public stakeholders (cities, member states, and the European Commission itself). The SUA presents the smallest range of stakeholders. Although private stakeholders are mentioned, they come mainly from the business domain with close links to the construction industry. This characteristic can be interpreted according to the institutional tradition of the case regarding the location of city policies and the agenda, the Ministry of Public Works, fundamentally linked to aspects related to the physical dimensions of cities.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe the extent to which local stakeholders are included, as well as their role in the policy process. The policy process analysis revealed that despite a highly open consultation process, as the policy cycle advanced, civil society participation declined, becoming mainly concentrated within the public domain. In turn, the role of local governments was restricted to the period of implementation.

Table 7. Content of the agendas: main findings

Type of content			Evidence in the agendas		
			NUA	UAEU	SUA
Holistic	Public policy areas involved		Several, but based on social welfare	Several, balance between them	Several, but based on physical aspects
Strategic	Coherent with broader-reaching agendas		Top-down (lower government levels)	Bottom-up (NUA)	Bottom-up (NUA and AUEU)
Territorialised	To adapt the content of the agenda to the territorial reality		Strong presence	Defined in general terms	Defined in general terms, to be specified by local stakeholders
			Phase of public policy: evaluation	Phase of public policy: design	Phase of public policy: implementation
Participatory	Size of the network	Stakeholders involved	Member States; inter-governmental organisations; UN-Habitat and other bodies, groups in the United Nations General Assembly and funds; experts from Political Units; subnational and local governments and main networks of local and regional	Cities; Member States; EU Commissions; stakeholders (thematic networks and city networks)	Construction firms, housing cooperatives, chambers of commerce, energy and banking firms, General State Administration, local entities and self-governing communities

			governments; organisations and networks		
Nature	Public vs. Private		Public and private. Greater presence of the public sphere		
Interaction model	Types of stakeholder involvement at different policy stages		Design: experts and stakeholders Implementation: local governments limited to specific domains Evaluation: mainly national governments	Design: stakeholders involved in different partnerships Implementation: delegated to some of them (states and cities) Evaluation: no explicit mention	Design: based on expertise. Consults different participation forums: Working groups Implementation: Local Councils through Action Plans, in collaboration with public stakeholders and civil society Evaluation: no explicit mention

Source: elaborated by the authors

4. Urban agendas: a case of policy transfer? Mechanisms behind policy transfer

As indicated, the study objective was to ascertain the degree of policy transfer between public policy tools (urban agendas). We can generally affirm that urban agendas constitute a case of policy transfer, and that similar approaches can be found regarding both their underlying principles and their content.

Concerning the principles, similarities were found relating to *better regulation and funding*. With regard to agenda contents, the three agendas showed similarities in the importance they gave, first, to the alignment with other government levels – top down (NUA) or bottom up (EU and Spain) – and second, to the governance model. All highlighted the need to perform actions based on coalitions or alliances with the actors. The greatest similarity was found in the nature of the network: it was mostly public and associated with the design stage of the policy process. For their part, actors located outside the administration were assigned functions relating to policy production.

A major difference was linked to the greater institutional capacity given to local actors. Agendas from government levels that are distant from city levels are more explicit with regard to the role and decision-making capacity of cities about these issues. Concretely, government levels with the capacity to decentralise decision-making processes in cities make less explicit pledges, although a recurring issue in all the agendas was the need to give local stakeholders greater leadership.

A third variation was the importance given to knowledge. This difference can be explained by the intended recipients of the agendas. In the EU context, the challenge of knowledge generation has perhaps been overcome: the present goal therefore is to achieve standardisation in order to compare territories. This is why knowledge exchange plays a special role in the EU and Spain while in the NUA, the emphasis is on knowledge generation.

Finally, there was another remarkable difference between the agendas in relation to the governance model. The network generated within the agenda framework becomes denser at higher government levels (NUA). This seems logical, since the agendas involve a greater number of actors depending on the territory they address.

These differences must be interpreted taking into account that each agenda is rolled out at different government levels. In addition, urban agendas do not represent a unique public policy arena. Elements such as context, capacity for intervention in these matters, or agenda recipients can therefore be essential to understand the agenda's final configuration. All these results are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8. Policy transfer analysis: a measurement proposal

Dimension	Sub-dimensions		Degree of importance of the topic in the agenda			Level of similarity
			NUA	UAEU	SUA	
Principles	Better regulation	Regulation and institutional design	1	3	3	Medium
		Policy management	3	3	3	High
		Institutional capacity and local power	2	3	1	Low
	Better funding	Provision of sources of finance	3	3	3	High
		Access by cities	3	3	2	Medium
	Better knowledge	Generation	2	3	2	Medium
		Exchange	2	3	1	Low
Content	Holistic		2	3	2	Medium
	Strategic		3	3	3	High
	Territorialised		3	2	2	Medium
	Participatory	Density	3	2	2	Medium
		Nature	2	2	2	High
		Interaction	3	2	2	Medium
Similarities		Transparent, effective and efficient				
		Provision of financial sources of finance				
		Strategic				
Differences		Nature of the network				
		Institutional capacity and local power				
		Knowledge exchange				
Elements of the interaction system that explain differences between agendas		Formal capacity	Previous experience	Context		

	Recipients		
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Source: elaborated by the authors

From the analysis the existence of transfer elements with a bidirectional orientation can be deduced: from upper to lower levels of government (top-down) and from lower to upper levels of government (bottom-up). This bidirectional transfer also can be associated with different mechanisms. Transfer from upper to lower levels of government responds to mechanisms of imitation, competition or coercion. Transfer from lower to upper levels of government correspond with a learning mechanism. Table 9 shows the transfer elements, the mechanisms and their orientation.

Table 9. Mechanisms associated to policy transfer

	From NUA			From UAEU			From SUA		
	Dimension of the policy transferred	Mechanism	Orientation	Dimension of the policy transferred	Mechanism	Orientation	Dimension of the policy transferred	Mechanism	Orientation
To NUA				Better funding: provision of sources of finance	Learning	Bottom-up	There is not transfer	-	-
				Better funding: access to cities					
				Holistic					
To UAEU	Better regulation: policy management	Mimicry	Top-down				There is not transfer	-	-
	Strategic								
	Participatory: nature								
To SUA	Better funding: provision of sources of finance	Mimicry	Top- down	Better regulation; regulation and institutional design	Coercion Competition	Top-down			
	Better knowledge: generation			Better regulation: policy management					
	Strategic			Better funding: provision of sources of finance					
	Participatory: nature			Strategic					
				Participatory: density					
				Participatory: nature					
				Participatory: interaction					

Source: elaborated by the authors

In the first place, UN, throughout Habitat I, II and III, has been placing the emphasis on improving the internal functioning of administrations, generating a framework or model of action to which the different Member States must orient themselves. Consequently, the assumption of these principles is associated with a mechanism of mimicry, or the search for greater legitimacy, through approaching to management models that are considered advanced from lower levels of government as the EU and its urban agenda.

This same mechanism is shown in relation to the strategic nature of the agendas. The NAU is established as a wide-ranging international agenda that requires cooperation in order to encourage the horizontal coherence at all territorial levels of a common framework for all United Nations Member States. This principle is assumed by the AUUE. The Amsterdam Pact reflects the need to contribute to the realization of Habitat III.

Finally, another transfer elements from the NAU is the participation of the actors. This element constitutes one of the aspects that NAU indicates as desirable in a public policy. It is participation, as an element that has to guide the content of public policy, which constitutes an element of transfer, associated again with the mimicry mechanism in the UAEU.

As previously stated, transfer occurs with a top down orientation but also with a bottom up direction. This is the case of the transfer from the AUUE to the NAU. The European Commission (1997) Communication “Towards an urban policy for the European Union” lays the foundations of what we know as the EU urban development model. Authors such as Medeiros and Van Der Zwet (2019) point out that the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Model calls for: participatory models based on multilevel governance; a wide territorial scope; the development of new organisational and governance models; and the combination of physical regeneration measures with those geared towards socio-economic development, environmental protection and urban planning.

Although, this idea has been reinforced in more recent times by the 2015 United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The EU institutions interact with these worldwide agendas but they have their own timescales and, as a consequence, generate transfer towards other government units. The mechanism associated with this transfer is learning and is the result of knowledge and experience accumulated in the EU over time.

Throughout the article several transfer elements have been identified. One of the principles is better funding, which could be identified as a transfer element from the UAEU to the NAU. UE has advocated this principle through several documents as Marseille Declaration (2008).

Along with this, other aspects related to the content of the policy constitute part of the elements that are transferred from the AUUE to the NUA. In this sense, the Leipzig Charter (2007) includes the concept of integrated urban development, incorporating the environmental, economic and political dimensions. This integrated approach has guided urban development policies at the EU level for more than twenty years. The experience and knowledge accumulated over the years constitutes an element of transfer from the EU to other levels of government, such as the UN through its presence in the design of the NUA.

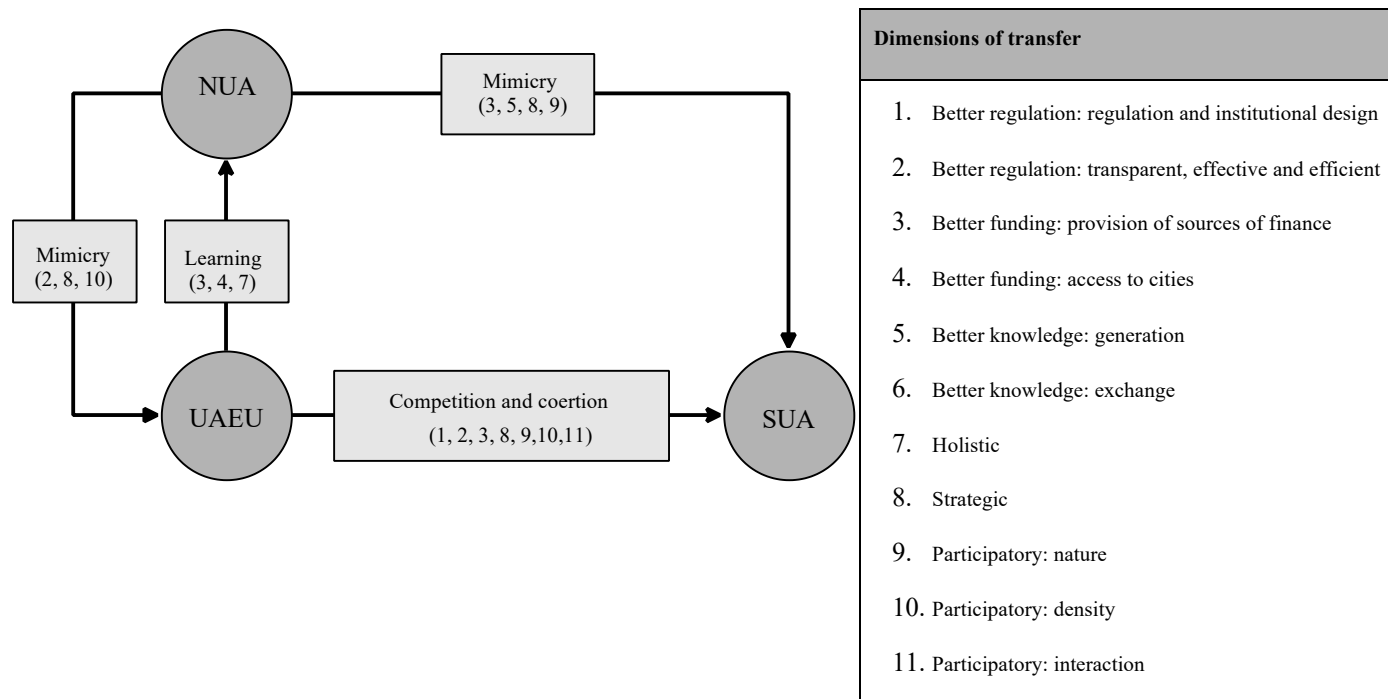
For its part, the SUA constitutes a case of receiving transfer. The underlying logic associated with transfer from NUA to SUA is mimicry. Specifically, elements of transfer from NUA to SUA have been those related to better regulation or the emphasis on improving the internal functioning of administrations. The strategic approach, related to the cooperation in order to encourage a common framework for all United Nations member states. SAU points out that UAEU allows directing the efforts made in urban development to the principles and objectives established in the United Nations Urban Agenda, for which it constitutes a necessary guide. Finally, another transfer element identified from the NAU to the SUA is the participation of the actors that constitutes one of the aspects that NAU indicates as desirable in a public policy.

In the case of the transfer from the UAEU to SUA, the elements of transfer are related to better regulation, better funding, the content of public policy (strategic focus) and the governance model. This transfer is associated with a coercion and competition mechanism. To be concrete, in order to receive funds, cities must design their strategies in coherence with the guidelines established by the EU. Along with this, Spain assumed the commitment to develop an Urban Agenda for the country within the framework of the 2021-2027 financing period. This agenda is supposed to be designed in coherence with the principles established in the framework of the Cohesion Funds and the UAEU, responding to a mechanism of coercion.

Along with this, there would also be the search to become more attractive compared to other territories for the capture of resources. Therefore, the assumption of principles and content of the SUA with respect to the UAEU would also be related to a competition with other cities mechanism.

Figure 2. Dimensions and mechanisms behind policy transfer

Source: elaborated by the authors



Final considerations

The aim of this paper was to examine policy transfer between the urban agendas developed at different government levels (global, European and national). To this end, an analytical tool was designed to evaluate the degree of policy transfer considering two dimensions: antecedents and content.

Based on the literature on policy transfer, specifically the operational definition used in this article, the main results showed that the analysed urban agendas constituted a case of policy transfer. The thematic content of the agendas revealed how characteristics were transferred from one policy to another, as well as the administrative arrangements, institutions and underlying ideas. We thus found that all the agendas reflected the principles of regulation, finance and knowledge in their political principles. The same applied to content. They all appeared to respond to a common intervention model in urban areas, as illustrated by their shared characteristics (holistic, strategic, territorialised and participatory).

The analysed urban agendas constitute a policy transfer case regarding the role of economic resources in urban policies. In addition, we identified the transfer of aspects relating to strategic approaches between instruments, specifically, the importance given to an alignment with agendas of other government levels. Finally, transfer regarding the importance given to participation was also observed. This was materialised in similar governance networks in terms of the nature of the actors involved – mainly from the public sphere.

These principles, however, were present to variable degrees (i.e., the importance assigned to the principle was unequal) and their nature differed in each agenda (specific orientation or materialisation). In this sense, this article points to the importance attributed by authors such as Marsh and Sharman (2009) to structures, which act as catalysts for the transferred principles, ideas and policy models. Within the framework of this study, agenda variations were understood to derive from a number of factors: the social, economic and political contexts in which each agenda was launched; previous experience; the formal ability of the government level that proposes it to influence certain local issues; or the final recipients of the document.

Along with this, the work has shown that each of the contexts generates its own logic associated with transfer. And also that transfer occurs from higher to lower levels of government, responding to mechanisms of mimicry, competition or coercion. But also from lower to higher levels of government (as is the case of the EU to the UN), associated with learning mechanisms.

In this sense, future studies would need to apply extensive methodologies, allowing for empirical generalisations regarding the extent to which the characteristics observed in this work determine the degree, nature and mechanisms of policy transfer between urban agendas around the world.

It is also important to analyse the different implementation plans of each agenda, in order to ascertain the real extent to which the principles reflected in these agendas are specified and materialised in cities over the coming years. In short, the challenge to come is to understand the extent to which agendas move from the 'normative' domain, which they are part of now, to the 'positive' domain. In the latter, we will witness not only the true scope of these agendas, but also a genuine policy implementation transfer.

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