Making Urban Humanitarian Policy: The "Neighbourhood Approach" in Lebanon

Dr Romola Sanyal

Dept of Geography and Environment

LSE

Abstract

Displaced people are increasingly living in urban areas and humanitarian organisations are rethinking their policies and practices. The 'Neighbourhood Approach'-an area-based policy model has become globally popular amongst humanitarians. In this paper, I trace its development in Lebanon through a Temporary Technical Committee (TTC) on Neighbourhood Upgrading. Although it failed in being taken up as a distinct policy, aspects of it are being incorporated into plans and agendas of various actors. Through a critical document analysis I interrogate how humanitarians imagine ideas of 'neighbourhood' and 'community' in urban contexts. Using the critical literature on urban policymaking and mobilities, I show how the making of the neighbourhood approach draws together people, experiences, lessons, and territories both near and far, thus complicating its provenance as local or global. I offer a glimpse into the world of urban policymaking by humanitarian organisations whilst also challenging the mainstream discussions on urban policy mobilities.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

The Syrian conflict which began in 2011 has displaced millions of people into neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Some have travelled further on to Europe and other parts of the world in search of safety. In countries such as Jordan and Turkey, refugee camps have been set up for displaced Syrians. In others such as Lebanon, there has been a ban on refugee camps and Syrians have either found shelter in cities, or in informal tented settlements (Bergby 2019; Fawaz, Saghiyeh, and Nammour 2014; Sanyal 2017). Regardless of having camps, large numbers of displaced Syrians have moved to urban areas in host countries in the Middle East, often into poor areas, where they can access cheaper housing options. In many instances this has led to increased crowding in neighbourhoods as buildings and apartments are modified and divided to accommodate more people (Fawaz 2016; Boustani et al. 2016). Billions of dollars in aid, international organisations and their experts have also arrived to 'manage' the crisis. Local and global actors have brought varying experiences and pedagogical training and expertise to bear on the situation that is simultaneously global yet ineluctably local in how it

evolves. With the protraction of the crisis, new methods of humanitarian interventions are being tested, drawing on lessons from further afield, but also creating ideas from the local context.

In this paper, I analyse the brief development of one such policy- the Neighbourhood Approach- in Lebanon. Although, a glimpse, I show how this global policy came to be developed through experiments and negotiations that organisations and NGOs were undertaking locally. In particular, through a careful document analysis, I interrogate the ways in which ideas of neighbourhood and community were imagined by contributors to the text. Here, I draw on the critical geographical literature on policy formation and mobilities to analyse how a policy is arrived at and how it is an impossible entanglement of the local and the global. In doing so, the paper makes two contributions- firstly to show how humanitarians 'learn' urban work and how their interventions can challenge how urban territories are conceptualised and acted upon. In relation to that, the second point is to shift away from the focus on urban entrepreneurialism in policy mobilities literature by drawing attention to the ways cities in zones of 'crises' become models for policies as well, especially as humanitarians become key actors in shaping and mobilising urban policies and urban futures.

Geographies of Policy

The project I initiated in Lebanon in 2014 was to understand how humanitarian organizations were responding to an 'urbanized crisis' and what challenges their interventions raised in the contexts where they operated. As part of the project, I, together with my research assistant interviewed numerous NGOs both local and global in different parts of the country. In the process, we stumbled across the development of the 'Neighbourhood Approach' which was being carried out by a few international NGOs (INGOs) but also being comprehensively developed by UN Habitat together with several INGOs[1] through a Temporary Technical Committee (TTC). The intention was to brainstorm and develop a single policy toolkit to improve urban humanitarian responses in Lebanon. Though several meetings took place in 2016 and drafts of guidelines were developed through discussions and input by various organizations, particularly operating in the shelter sector, the 'Neighbourhood Approach' as a discreet policy failed to materialise as it was originally envisioned due to various factors including objections by the government. Elements of it have been continued by various multilateral organizations, several NGOs have also continued to pursue it within their own organizations, and urban responses, multisectoral area-based approaches have appeared in later crisis response plans and have broadly been supported by the Lebanese government.

The Neighbourhood Approach as devised within the Lebanese context drove me to study the broader and emerging landscape of urban humanitarian policy-making. Through it, I traced the

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[1] As noted by an anonymous committee member, The TTC was formed from the Shelter Working Group specifically to develop the guidelines for the Neighbourhood Approach.

ways in which area-based approaches (one of several terms referring to a geographically fixed approach) have been circulating across the world since 2010. The scholarship on urban policy-making is particularly salient here. As several academics argue, we have moved away from a problematic political science analysis of policy transfer to a geographical analysis of policy mobilities where attention is given to the active construction of networks of policy circulations. This literature is also attentive to how policies mutate as they move and materialise in different territories (McCann 2011; Prince 2017; Robinson 2015; Peck and Theodore 2010). The mobility of policies offers a lens through which we study the relational nature of cities and their politics, how they are assembled and linked to and by people, ideas and objects near and far (ibid).

However, this approach has been rightly critiqued for attending largely to the tracing the movement of policies and paying less attention to how policies are 'arrived at' in the local context (Robinson 2013; 2015). In doing so, inadvertently, the policy-mobilities literature contributes to a global/local dualism and exacerbating presumed differences between what comes from out there and what happens here (Prince 2017). In other words, it becomes difficult to know if a policy adoption is the result of local actors drawing on globally circulating policies or if it is the result of local specificities (Robinson 2015; Prince 2017) . To overcome this, scholars have urged a shift away from topographical understanding of policy development to a topological one (ibid). In other words, to understand how policy makers compose certain policies instead of others, it is useful to shift away from tracing the mobilities of policies to turn to the local context and consider how the making of policies involves the borrowing and invention of ideas simultaneously (Robinson 2015). Drawing on her work in Johannesburg, Robinson argues that what we may want to start by asking is *why those policies*? In posing this question, she shifts our focus away from tracing the arrival of the policies to thinking about the "incredibly messy, often untraceable processes of policy formulation" (Robinson, 2013, p.11) We consider how diverse groups of people draw on different ideas from distinct sites, temporal moments, documents, influences from near and far to come up with policies that are specific and unique to their own context. She notes that ideas may have always already been in place, or they have arrived in different ways, or not arrived at all, or forgotten, or put away. This returns us to the specifics of the local, how it is made of up multiple elsewhere, of different temporalities and materials that come together in unexpected and unpredictable ways, such that separating out what is 'global' and what is 'local' what is 'borrowed' and what is 'invented' becomes impossible, and even less relevant.

Robinson's provocation to shifting our starting point to asking how policies are 'arrived at', paying attention to how different elsewheres figure together with present exigencies is instructive for this paper. The Neighbourhood Approach may have been a 'global policy' and may have 'landed' in Beirut through the circulation of experts, but the specific formulation of this policy is equally made up of other territories, people and knowledge. It borrows from the northern city of Tripoli, from the suburbs of Beirut, and neighbourhoods Mount Lebanon. It is also shaped through other histories of the country-of having hosted refugees for generations, of having itself

been the subject of humanitarian development especially after the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The policy then is that of multiple elsewheres and times brought together through what is written and omitted. Drawing further on Robinson (2018)work, and expanding beyond the local context, what is also important to consider is how the urbanisation of crisis management and humanitarian action offers new imaginations of urban concepts-in this case 'the neighbourhood' and 'community' and new ways of governing them.

The data from this project is necessarily partial, drawing on interviews with several organisations that were experimenting with the Neighbourhood Approach, as well as following the developments of the TTC between March and June 2016. The TTC was formed from the Shelter working group specifically to develop the approach/guidelines. It was comprised of a handful of INGOs and led by UN-Habitat. I engage in a close document analysis of working drafts of guidelines developed by them that came via email exchanges. These were rich in commentary and edits by various members of the committee, which offered a unique insight into the process of policymaking. The document has a number of different discussions, but I focus on two specific issues around defining neighbourhoods and communities and how these evolved through input by various committee members over the course of these months. Further, my research assistant also attended four of the technical committee meetings which were semi-public. I use these observations to provide a contextual setting for the discussions. Where the data comes from her, this is specifically noted in the text. Meetings and negotiations between different organizations continued well past when this project ended, but I do not have this material. However, I note that I separately continued to follow the work of two of these organizations from 2017 until 2020 through key informant interviews and studying internal organisational documents. I supplement this with analyses of documents on neighbourhood approaches and area-based approaches created by organisations working in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world.

Urban Displacement, Planning and Humanitarian expertise

Despite long histories of displaced people living in cities in different parts of the world there has been a tendency in academic and policy literature to focus on camps rather than urban environments. Arguably an 'urban turn' in refugee studies has been brought about by a belated acknowledgement and acceptance by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2009 of urban displacement (Darling 2017). While scholars have expanded the scope of work on urbanised displaced populations, several disciplines such as urban planning, which would seem centrally interested in studying urban refugees have continued to be largely disengaged from these discussions. Part of the reason why displaced populations do not yet fall into mainstream planning literature may be due to the fact that they are still seen as a humanitarian concern and as temporary inhabitants in cities. It may also be because attending to the needs of refugees may not be of interest to local authorities and planners, or because helping displaced people may be controversial and counterproductive, particularly in places where local populations are antagonistic towards displaced people (Kihato and Landau 2016). Yet, displaced

populations can and should be included in urban analyses and policies because they too are city-makers and have rights to the city (Sanyal 2014).

The engagement with urban issues in humanitarian practice is also relatively new. While there has been an expanding academic discourse on blurring the boundaries between camp and city, in humanitarian practice, this divide has been significant and persistent. Humanitarian aid has been rooted in working in camps and rural areas and is largely driven by the prevailing cluster approach and sector-based delivery (Campbell 2018; Sanderson 2019; Bergby 2019)[2]. This approach has been found to be ill-suited for urban environments that have pre-existing institutional structures and systems and are complex, contradictory and dynamic. In order to 'urbanize' their approaches, many organisations are finding it necessary to retool their approaches away from traditional models but have found this to be extremely challenging. They now have to be agile and flexible, work with a variety of stakeholders including municipal governments, private sector actors and to coax donors to shift away from the traditional aid architecture. They also need to move towards inter-cluster, multi-sectoral responses (Sanderson 2019; 2020). This shift is difficult to undertake as crises proliferate and become increasingly protracted. One could perhaps argue that the city has become a different kind of camp in which experiments in service provision and governance are being undertaken. In the Lebanese context, this metaphor can be pushed further as organisations 'carve up' different neighbourhoods in which to work, as will be discussed further on. In a way then, neighbourhoods come to take the place of camps as sites of humanitarian work.

The 'urban turn' in humanitarianism has also brought about the creation of urban toolkits. The earthquake in Haiti appears as a key 'origin story' in the development of urban responses for humanitarian action. It is after this disaster that various aid organisations 'woke up' to the need to urbanise their responses (Sanderson 2019). But, this was not the only 'site' where the urbanisation of humanitarianism took place. Cities such as Kabul (Afghanistan), Bangui (Central African Republic), Tacloban and Bogo (Philippines) amongst others have all been sites of 'urban learning' for humanitarian actors[3]. The Syrian Crisis has also provided an important spatio-temporal opportunity for changing and advancing humanitarian practices. Here too, humanitarian organizations are shifting from a humanitarian and emergency focus to one that increasingly identifies resilience, sustainability and self-reliance (Gabiam 2016) and often in urban areas. The neighbourhood approach is a key tool in the development of urban responses in the Middle East, in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, but policies 'territorialising' the neighbourhood and community illuminate how these ideas come to be formed through local specificities. In the next section, I briefly discuss the role of neighbourhoods in planning and in Lebanon to contextualise the broader argument.

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[2] The cluster approach was created in 2005 by the inter-agency standing committee (IASC) of the UN. "Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations, both UN and non-UN, in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. water, health and logistics. They are designated by the IASC and have clear responsibilities of coordination". See https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/Clusters

[3] See https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/cities_in_crisis.pdf

The Neighbourhood as a Concept

The neighbourhood has long been as a key site of socio-spatial relations and social control in human societies and settlements (Kallus and Law-Yone 2000; Abraham 2018). In Western planning, as Kallus and Law-Yone (2000) note, the self-conscious development of the idea as a key part of urban design and governance is a more modern phenomenon and is also arguably more significant in this context than in the Global South. Yet, even here, what the neighbourhood is precisely is subject to considerable debate. Like its related term 'community', 'neighbourhood' is an invented and deeply contested concept. As many scholars have noted, neighbourhoods may mean different things to different people and each resident can bring their own understanding of neighbourhood boundaries (Blokland 2009; Stein 2014). Here, race and class amongst other identities play crucial roles in how neighbourhoods and their boundaries are imagined and mobilised. Therefore it is important to be attentive to who are seen to be 'residents' of a neighbourhood and authorised to speak on its behalf (Blokland 2009).

The neighbourhood has also been an important part of decentralisation processes in the Global North, and this has viewed with considerable cynicism. Academics have been critical of the problematic imposition of boundaries, the assumptions around 'community' and democratic legitimacy at this scale (Cowie and Davoudi 2015) and more fundamentally, critiqued the turn towards the local scale for masking the workings of neoliberalism under the guise of democracy (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Lord and Tewdwr-Jones 2014; Parker and Street 2015) . Related to these are concerns about the means and methods of participation in neighbourhood planning. Fundamentally, there is an implicit assumption that neighbourhoods are homogenous, that there are shared valued and interests and that these would then translate into consensus over plans. However, as scholars have pointed out, this is problematic as the question of consensus is contentious at best. Discussions and dialogue are imbued with power politics in which some voices are silenced by those who are more powerful. Furthermore, although participation in planning issues is encouraged, it is also resource intensive, and inadvertently a smaller group of community representatives are involved- often the usual suspects, skewing consultations and making them exclusionary. Therefore, valid questions can be raised about who would be participating and who would be left out, how to build social capital across diverse groups affected by plans and projects and ensure that those groups with already strong social capital do not act in insular and exclusionary ways (Holman and Rydin 2013). Thus, although viewed as democratic, identifying neighbourhoods, neighbourhood boundaries and engaging in planning practices that mobilize neighbourhoods and communities is a fraught process that rests on some shaky assumptions about social relations between people, political agendas and invented boundaries.

The neighbourhood in the Lebanese context plays an important role in the socio-spatial transformations. Whilst a comprehensive discussion is not possible here, a few key points about the salience of neighbourhoods are important to highlight for this discussion. As (Fawaz 2009) notes in her work, the production of neighbourhoods have been key for communities to place a

foothold in cities such as Beirut and to exercise their right to the city in the post-independence era. Social networks and the entanglement of the formal and informal have remained crucial to the production of neighbourhoods, including informal ones (Fawaz 2008). The most significant transformations to neighbourhoods in Lebanon have occurred over the period of the civil war when massive population displacements took place, dividing cities like Beirut into homogenised, sectarian neighbourhoods. Wartime geographies continue to haunt the city influencing where people live, travel and socialise (Deeb and Harb 2013). The territorialisation of sectarianism and the anticipation of future conflicts significantly affect the ways in which neighbourhoods come to be formed and the kinds of services and infrastructures they can access. (Seidman 2012; Bou Akar 2018; Nucho 2016) Along with sectarianism, neoliberal developments have also led to considerable changes as rising property prices have pushed out many residents from centrally located neighbourhoods in Beirut (Khechen 2018; Sawalha 2010). Finally, as will be noted further on in the paper, there is a dearth of data, particularly on poorer neighbourhoods and the kinds of resources and deprivations they face. All this makes for planning and interventions in neighbourhoods highly complex and politically fraught processes. Placing planning critiques together with a local history of neighbourhoods is important as we unpack the politics of 'neighbourhood', 'community' and 'participation' within humanitarian work in Lebanon.

Area-Based/ Settlements / Neighbourhood-Based Approaches in Humanitarian Work

The neighbourhood scale is popular amongst humanitarian organisations and seen as the appropriate scale for attempting to 'integrate' refugees and local residents (Seethaler-Wari 2018). Neighbourhood approaches, also referred to as settlements based approaches or area-based approaches (ABAs) are seen to enable more holistic responses to protracted and increasingly urbanised crises (Bergby 2019). They have gained currency since their major advent during the post-Haiti recovery and have been popularised by USAID and increasingly supported by other organisations. Despite their 'origin story' being embedded within the Haitian recovery, scholars argue that their pedagogical foundations can been drawn back to the 1960s and 1970s to work undertaken by urban and regional planners in vulnerable neighbourhoods (Schell, Hilmi, and Hirano 2020). Interestingly however, this work refers to a development planning work undertaken in many countries in the Global South seen to be in 'need of interventions'. Further it problematically collapses a number of different practices- urban re-generation, site-and-services, slum upgrading, integrated development programs- all of which have very different geographic and developmental trajectories into a single framework (Sanderson 2017).

Area-based approaches rely on defined areas with high needs, and focusing on communities living in them. The approach is intended to be multi-sectoral- addressing not just shelter and WASH needs, but also considering health, livelihoods, protection and so forth, and intended to be participatory and inclusive (Sanderson 2017; Schell, Hilmi, and Hirano 2020; Parker and Maynard 2015). Several questions can be raised here about how an area is defined, who is

involved in the definition, how areas are divided between different organisations, how coordination is set up and what the implications of these processes are on urban environments. More generally, the policy literature on area-based approaches focuses on the implications on humanitarian practice rather than considering with any nuance, the implications on urban development, politics or governance in the future. This forms part of a larger critique of humanitarian policy-making which is ephemeral, and subject to temporal priorities and donors and exigencies occurring elsewhere.

Indeed, significant critiques have been raised about area-based approaches in humanitarian governance. (Parker and Maynard 2015:4) for example note that an area-based approach is implemented in a number of different ways, using a range of terminologies and "as a result on-going humanitarian policy and operational discussions are not informed by a shared understanding of what 'area-based programming' means in practice, why, when or how to adopt the approach, nor the institutional implications, such as funding and administrative mechanisms." Expanding on that, they note that whilst there is some general commonality on focusing on the neighbourhood scale, targeting families ranging from 1400-6000 people, the scale of operations remains unclear. Thus projects can focus on a few households to encompassing entire urban areas (ibid). This critique highlights the vagaries embedded in urban humanitarian policy making and its mobility.

The Lebanese Context: From Emergency to Stabilization

The specificities of the Lebanese context are fundamental to the evolution of the neighbourhood approach both within the TTC, and other organisations. Lebanon is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, hence, Syrian refugees are not classified as 'refugees' but as 'displaced persons' or 'de facto refugees' which has no legal bearing and effectively renders Syrians in the country as migrants. This classification coupled with policies such as border restrictions, costly annual visa renewals, along with a host of other ad-hoc policies designed to deter Syrians have driven many into conditions of destitution and invisibility (NRC ICLA 2014; World Bank 2016; Sanyal 2018).

In 2014 the number Syrians displaced into Lebanon surpassed 1 million. The government, was at the time, running without a president or parliamentary elections, and in effect had a 'caretaker government'. In response to the crisis, it followed a policy of inaction (Harb, Kassem, and Najdi 2018) whilst also denying UNHCR the possibility of setting up refugee camps. The Syrian population thus scattered across the country in rural and urban areas and attempted to acquire whatever shelter they could access. The influx of large numbers of refugees into many municipalities have overwhelmed local communities and compounded the already existing woes of local administrators. It should be noted here that Lebanon is no stranger to urban refugees. Armenian, Palestinian, Iraqi and other refugees have found shelter in the country for a very long

time. Palestinian camps which were once on the outskirts of cities such as Beirut have become part of the urban fabric thus blurring the boundaries between cities and camps (Martin 2015; Sanyal 2014).

The influx of large numbers of refugees into Lebanon has had a significant impact on local governance particularly as municipalities have been on the frontline of hosting refugees, often against a backdrop of limited or no support from the central government (Boustani et al. 2016). Lebanon has a largely centralised governance system despite being committed to decentralisation. In a four-tiered governance structure, the municipality, is the smallest and the only autonomous and elected body (Harb and Atallah 2015). There are a very large number of municipalities, many of which are very small, with limited financial or administrative means (Atallah 2016). This impacts their ability to do more holistic planning, relying instead on more sporadic interventions and on international aid, particularly in responding to the Syrian crisis (Bergby 2019). Some of these have been grouped into Unions of Municipalities and coordination between them in certain parts of the country work well, making humanitarian efforts there also easier [4]. Furthermore, there is a lack of data on the urban environment, services, population and needs, which affects the possibilities of undertaking planning interventions in the country (ibid). Finally, and importantly, as noted earlier, Lebanon's government is structured on a confessionalist system and the sectarian logic permeates all levels of governance, planning institutions and socio-spatial transformations. Bou Akar (2018, 147) notes that in Lebanon "..urban planning has devolved into a series of practices that produce the spatiality of sectarian difference while facilitating continued, profitable real estate development." The Syrian war has not just impacted the population increase within Lebanon, but has affecting political and sectarian politics and divisions in the country causing conflicts and solidarities to become further entrenched. The combination of contested planning, limited means and sectarian urbanisation fundamentally affects the ways in which humanitarian policies come to be formed in the country

Humanitarian organizations that had either been working in the country previously or arrived due to the onset of the crises began undertaking a standardized, individualized responses- targeting only Syrian families with emergency supplies and services. This proved to be deeply problematic as Lebanese host families and neighbourhoods who had faced decades of poverty and deprivation, and yet were extending their hospitality were being bypassed[5]. They were thus doubly abandoned- first by their own government, and then by aid agencies. As the crisis became more protracted and the burden of hospitality became more difficult to shoulder for many host communities, inter-communal tensions began flaring. Aid agencies began rethinking many of their strategies and considered more comprehensive approaches to assistance that would serve both refugees and the local host communities. The Neighbourhood Approach, which was already a global policy, became increasingly relevant in this context. Aspects of it were included in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) of 2015/16 and later. The LCRPs urged a rethinking of

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[4] Comments from TTC drafts.
[5] Internal NGO report

humanitarian aid, to including both Syrians and Lebanese families and communities, especially the poor who were hosts. In doing so, the plan suggested a shift from emergency relief to stabilization and the involvement of the government, particularly through the Ministry of Social Affairs (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2014; 2017).

Moving to a Neighbourhood Approach

In Lebanon, spaces in urban and peri-urban areas expanded to accommodate the large numbers of Syrian refugees. However, the resultant increased levels of overcrowding and densification affected the quality of housing and living conditions in many neighbourhoods including informal ones (Fawaz 2016).

To urbanise their responses, many NGOs began experimenting with neighbourhood approaches[6] anticipating that a geographical approach supporting both Syrians and Lebanese, would reduce conflicts between them and also be cost efficient. It could also potentially improve relations between organisations, local communities and governments, in particular, where local governments were brought on board and consented to humanitarian operations. Some undertook assessments in different parts of the country such as Mount Lebanon to determine where gaps lay and where their interventions could be most effective. They then used that to carve out distinct spaces in which they alone would operate [7]. Others who had established their presence in certain cities, such as Tripoli, worked together with LNGOs to assess the most vulnerable neighbourhoods and their needs and base their funding on that. This cemented closer ties between INGOs and LNGOs that was beneficial for local capacity building but also for finer-grained assessments and understandings of local areas and communities[8] (Boustani et al. 2016). In 2016, most organisations we encountered were either in the assessment stage or at the very early stages of working out their neighbourhood level projects. Their experiences and expertise in terms of community engagement, local government engagement, doing assessments in different parts of the country informed the comments they made on drafts of guidelines for the Neighbourhood Approach.

In 2015, the TTC on Neighbourhood Upgrading began developing guidelines for the policy. The documents noted that the terminology used was based on global guidelines on Neighbourhood and Area-Based Approaches, however the ideas were clearly driven by urban lessons learned from Lebanon. The document contained distinct ideas around Neighbourhood Approach and Neighbourhood Upgrading. These two ideas overlapped to some extent, but were also distinct. According to the draft document, the Neighbourhood Approach was "enhanced humanitarian assistance mainly in urban areas, through basing interventions on neighbourhoods, providing coherent and multi-sectorial assistance amidst the multi-faceted conditions of urban areas. Thus,

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[6] Examples include CARE International's "One Neighborhood Approach", Solidarities International "El Hay" and ACTED's 'Neighborhood Approach'.
[7] Interviews undertaken with RA in 2015.
[8] Interviews undertaken with RA in 2015.

a 'Neighbourhood Approach' was an area-based means of responding to multi-sector needs that is informed by a community-based decision-making process reflective of the social, economic, and physical features of the delimited area." Neighbourhood Upgrading on the other hand involved a "formula taking into account space, population, shelter vulnerability, infrastructure and service delivery needs, utilization of existing resources, and a minimum package of interventions. These included: shelter, water and sanitation upgrades, rehabilitation of buildings common facilities, maintenance, upgrades and/or extension of existing basic urban services infrastructure, general and environmental improvements of common spaces/public areas and community management and maintenance". In other words, the " *'Neighbourhood Approach'* described the overarching approach [which included 'soft components' such as protection and enhancing social services] while the '*Neighbourhood Upgrading'* described the intended outcomes of this activity-often related to shelter and WASH, and tools to achieve these." That the document was titled Neighbourhood Upgrading, rather than Approach is telling as it signals the central role of the shelter sector in formulating and implementing these guidelines. In addition, the guidelines having an upgrading focus had a pragmatic angle- some agencies felt that they did not have the capacity to take on a full neighbourhood approach that would entail holistic assessments and strategies for interventions across all sectors. Rather, they wanted to focus on physical surroundings, ideally in partnership with others working on more 'social' issues. There were some discussions that such a split could possibly be problematic as a focus on physical improvements, while useful, may overlook far more pressing needs in an area and that need greater attention[9].

The TTC attempted to meet on a weekly basis initially to develop a series of guidelines for organizations involved in this work. However, over the course of three months some were postponed or cancelled due to various constraints. Attendance at meetings also fluctuated between having anywhere from nine to three participants from different organizations[10]. Drafts were circulated over email with comments from various committee members. Participants brought their own organizational, work experience, and cultural backgrounds to bear on how they input into the changing document.

Although the initiative to this response sat with the Shelter working group, several sectors contributed to the strategy, particularly the Water and Energy, Protection and Social Cohesion sectors. Later drafts dropped the language of having the shelter group leading this committee and the approach being settlement-focused to make it more inclusive and draw attention to the social dimensions of neighbourhoods in addition to the physical and spatial aspects of them. However, the approach continues to be dominated and driven by shelter priorities today[11].

Defining and Bounding a Neighbourhood

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[9] Comments by anonymous committee member
[10] Notes from RA and email correspondence
[11] KI interview, June 2020

The TTC equally spent a considerable amount of time, particularly in the initial period debating how to define and demarcate neighbourhoods. For these organizations, it was a fine balance between understanding social relations on the ground in order to improve their service delivery, and having a practicable scale to carry out their work. In other words, the size of the neighbourhood was influenced by the pragmatics of humanitarian project work including budgetary and capacity constraints, donor expectations and priorities of organizations, as well as local specificities of Lebanon. The working group relied on the definition of neighbourhood based on that used by USAID. This description of neighbourhood, which itself appears to rely on western logics of what a neighbourhood is and does was as follows: "*Neighbourhoods are geographic areas of cities typically defined by social, economic, and physical features, which often serve as the basis for administrative and political recognition within larger jurisdictions. Neighbourhoods provide their residents with an identity and foothold in the larger urban area.*"

In early versions of the document it was clear that defining and demarcating neighbourhoods was very much a product of the specificities of Lebanese urbanisations alongside the unique humanitarian situation unfolding in relation to that. There was an acknowledgement that neighbourhoods could be defined through boundaries and features involving administrative (existing administrative areas) and physical (natural barriers, roads, rivers or topography) criteria. It was also clear that municipal definitions of neighbourhoods were not satisfactory. Much like in planning, this is because such demarcations of neighbourhoods may not match the perceptions of neighbourhoods or sub-neighbourhoods imagined by the resident communities themselves. In larger urban areas, boundaries between different neighbourhoods may also be fuzzier and interventions in one sub-area may potentially lead to tensions in another. Considerable time was thus spent on defining a neighbourhood that would be socially meaningful but operationally viable producing a Neighbourhood Approach that was uniquely local. For the purposes of upgrading, neighbourhoods were defined through shared needs, based on similar experiences, backgrounds and so forth. Members suggested using administrative and physical boundaries together with social analysis and delineation to create suggestive and provisional boundaries in a draft circulated in March. These boundaries would not only be fuzzy, but be subject to amendment based on work experience and budgetary constraints in order to avoid tensions between different areas.

The need for having boundaries was important for coordination between partners and municipalities. Most NGOs preferred working in specific areas so it was important to ensure that operations did not overlap. There was also an agreement that sometimes a neighbourhood would be larger than the capacities of a single NGO and would thus be divided into operational sub-areas[12]. Organizations were also expected to update systems to indicate when and what works were completed. However, a key factor in determining neighbourhood boundaries was a scale that was workable for NGOs. There were some debates in a later draft circulated in April about whether size or population should be included in the definition of a neighbourhood- whether it

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[12] Notes from anonymous committee member

should be 0.005 sq km, or, as per the interventions of certain NGOs, at the scale of 5000 people. Some commented that where they came from, such a size/density would be considered a town. Others noted that socio-economic criteria should be considered when outlining a neighbourhood, rather than focusing on geographical boundaries.

Further, significant conversations took place around questions of informality and illegality. Again, different Lebanese territories folded into the analysis of these issues. Many organisations faced these issues especially in neighbourhoods where needs were high, that were either illegal, informal or both. Informality also operated at different geographical scales- as entire neighbourhoods, or as parts of buildings which were constructed without permission, creating a patchwork of legality and illegality[13].

From the March drafts there were concerns raised about how there were conflicts of interest for ministries and municipalities regarding informal neighbourhoods where many services were not provided (Ministry of Water and Energy acknowledged that infrastructure plans did not include informal neighbourhoods). The drafts noted that upgrading would not be considered there. Some organisations working in informal neighbourhoods in Beirut, noted that they had been forced to remove things they had implemented with the permission of the municipality[14]. Discussions therefore commenced about how to intervene in them formally, and what level of government to involve in conversations around them- the municipalities from whom endorsements for working in these neighbourhoods may be difficult, or the national government, or specific ministries involved in the maintenance of infrastructure, or security forces that need to provide approval for intervening in certain 'illegal' areas. The concerns revealed how the complex, overlapping and contradictory nature of governance in Lebanon often made coordination between humanitarian organisations and the state cumbersome and ineffective and lead to mistrust between them (Boustani et al. 2016) .

The last draft that I was able to access in June 2016 was a considerably evolved document, with hard and soft components that would form the core components of the Neighbourhood Approach (see Figure 1):

	Components		
	Hard	**Soft**	
Dimensions	Upgrading of Units	Stakeholder engagement	Municipality
			Neighbourhood committee
	Networks improvement, public/street space	Exit strategy	

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[13] KI interview, June 2020
[14] Notes from RA

Fig 1: Table from draft document of the Temporary Technical Committee. Courtesy of TTC on Neighbourhood Upgrading, June 2016.

 While neighbourhood definition was seen to be flexible, a suggestive geographical size was provided based on experiences of partners already undertaking this work. It was as follows:

"Based on the principles of identification of neighbourhoods and the examples of neighbourhood sizes, the definition of neighbourhoods for the purpose of neighbourhood upgrading could therefore rely on three main parameters: Size; an average of 0.05sq km / 5 hectares, Population / density, Budget (per capita?), and may be further categorized according to additional parameters, e.g.; socio-economic vulnerabilities, formal vs informal residential typologies and basic urban and social services. This would be defined through neighbourhood assessment/profiling....The formula gives priority to the critical requirement to communicating budget needs to donors and partners to meet needs by applying the neighbourhood upgrading."

It noted that neighbourhoods could be identified through administrative and physical boundaries combined with social analysis and delineation. Larger neighbourhoods may also be subdivided according to such community structures, though keeping in mind interventions in one sub-neighbourhood may be challenged by adjacent sub-neighbourhoods with equal needs (see Figure 2).
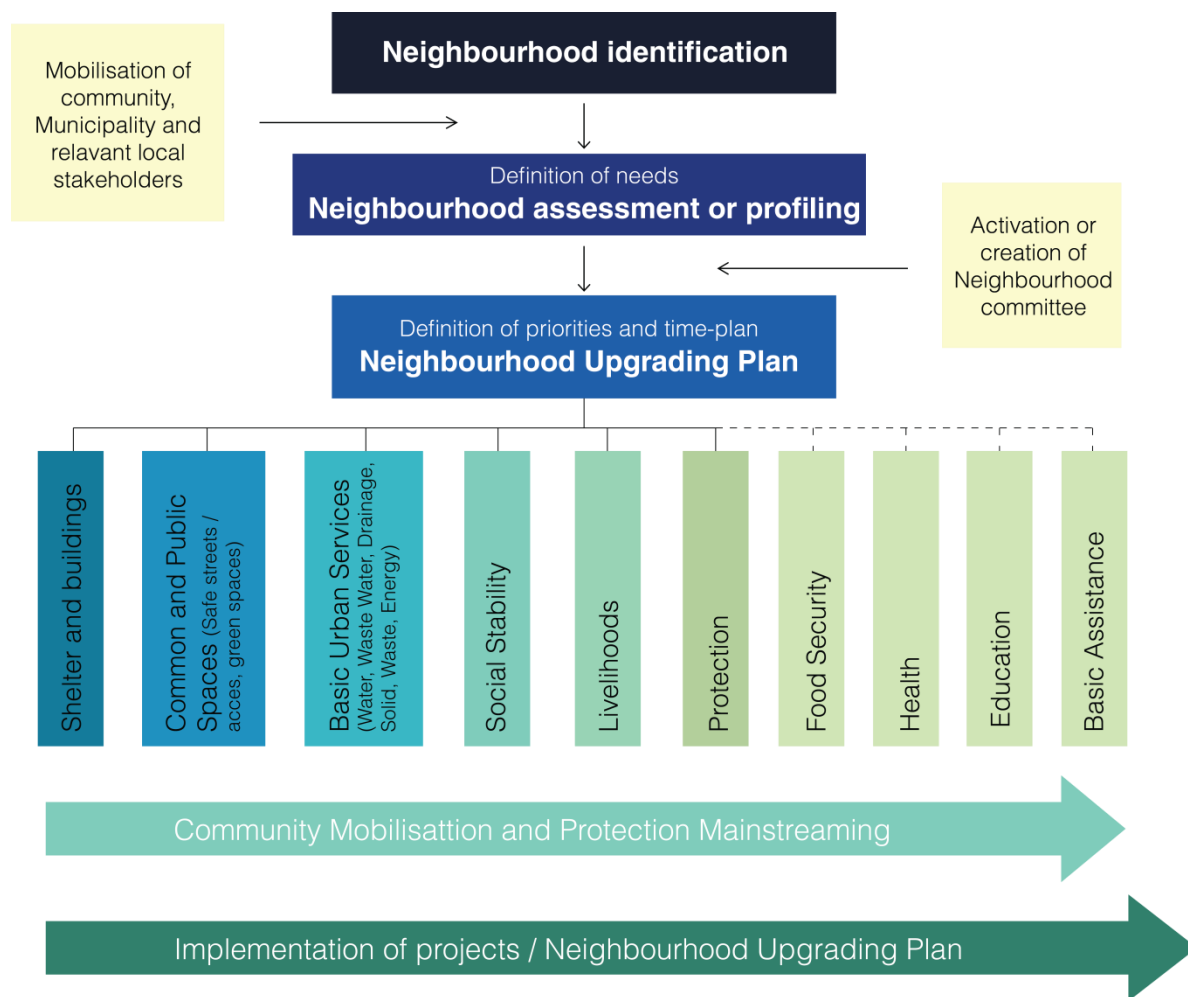
Figure 2: Diagram of Methodology. Courtesy of TTC on Neighbourhood Upgrading, June 2016.

Involving Communities

Communities and committees were seen to be key actors in the understanding of neighbourhood boundaries and the implementation of projects. In the charged, sectarian context of Lebanon, where attitudes towards refugees have been shifting, finding, constructing and mobilizing communities across Syrians and Lebanese was a complex task. In the NGO working in Tripoli, neighbourhood approaches were done through committees formed from the communities themselves. These committees made up of 6-7 people were mostly women despite attempts at trying to diversify by gender and age[15][16]. They were formed around issues on which everyone could agree and these were eventually combined into larger committees. However, the

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[15] The composition of committees could be very varied depending on how and by whom it was constructed.

[16] KI interviews in May and June 2020. They also noted that men couldn't be on committees because of work and also because they didn't want to.

organisation noted that there were several issues with creating and sustaining committees. Firstly, Syrians and Lebanese had different ideas of 'community'. Particularly for Syrians, who moved because of jobs or because they could not pay rent, their idea of neighbourhood and community would be qualitatively different from their Lebanese counterparts[17]. Further, the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Lebanon also led to tensions between different groups[18]. In fact 'communities' varied in different neighbourhoods- being fully formed in some places and non-existent in others. This lead to different outcomes in terms of committee empowerment and project success[19] especially as organisations found themselves not only attempting to create social cohesion through committee/community building, but training them in 'expert talk' and learning how to take grievances to the local authorities[20]. This latter issue of community creation and training was also affected by the short project cycles determined by the donors.

The TTC also concerned themselves with whom to include and exclude when thinking about neighbourhood makeup. The last draft notes that "The geographical scope of the neighbourhood will be **defined by** both spatial and social factors and agreed approximate size... The factors will include **shared** needs, experience, identity, background, services, equal vulnerabilities, common interest in upgrading with **space** as the structuring point of entry, not country of origin."[21] Building on this, the committee agreed to have community representatives, focal points, key individuals be an integral part of the consultation process. It was also advised to have representatives from all relevant groups present in consultations. As the document developed, discussions over exit strategies and handing over projects became more salient. The concerns around community participation, maintenance, involvement of the municipality itself became key issues. Communities needed to take over the ownership of projects especially after NGOs had finished the physical upgrading work. This meant that not only would the community need to participate actively in the process, but that they needed to have to necessary knowledge and enthusiasm to do so. To address the first part of the problem, there would have to be capacity-building undertaken by intervening organizations to ensure that adequate training and development had taken place. To encourage the second part of the problem to be resolved, it was also necessary that municipalities be involved from the outset.

There are a number of issues that arise here with regards to the understanding and empowerment of communities. Firstly, although there was an acknowledgement of the highly varied nature of residents and concerns over elite capture of consultations, the drafts did not include discussions on power dynamics between different groups of people, or the questionable nature of consensus. This is even more complex within an environment such as Lebanon where the Syrian crisis has led to hostility between the Lebanese and Syrians and as noted above, increasing illegalisation,

[17] KI interview, May 2020
[18] Interview with LNGO undertaken with RA, August 2015
[19] Internal NGO report
[20] KI interviews in May and June 2020
[21] Emphasis mine

destitution and invisibility of the Syrian population. In light of this, it can be asked to what extent, can Syrians, who are seen as guests in the country and are often in a vulnerable legal condition able to meaningfully participate in a consultation? How can they be considered part of the community if they are not there for significant periods of time? How do you draw together their priorities and those of the local communities which may be considerably different from each other?[22] Furthermore, drawing on the critical work on communicative planning, in situations where there are deepening differences between people, can the discussions be frictionless? Does placing faith in deliberative processes enable socially just outcomes or can it, as some scholars point out, bury possibilities of redistribution and enable injustice and continuing disparities between groups to take place (Fraser 2000; Watson 2006)?

In later interviews, it came to light that concerns around community involvement were apparently discussed in other meetings but not included in the guidelines because of the sensitivity the Lebanese government had towards the question of refugees. The government viewed attempts at advocating for refugees to be part of the community and participating equally as paths to have them naturalised. In a country where the presence of refugees has been thorny and seen to be destabilizing the delicate political confessional balance, it is perhaps unsurprising that including them in participatory activities would be viewed with suspicion. All this points to the politically charged and highly unequal nature of participation and the ways in which humanitarian projects, much like development projects are capable to overlooking and silencing voices in the process of getting communities to participate (Mosse 2004). Neighbourhood Approaches, though geographical and in theory comprehensive, may perhaps be seen as enabling a form of right to the city for refugees. However, it is important to reflect more critically on this perspective as it becomes evident that the involvement of displaced populations in always contingent and fleeting, driven by donor politics that are themselves fickle.

Equally surprising is the single mention of sectarianism in the evolving guidelines[23]. As noted earlier, the sectarian issue is significant in understanding both urbanisation and considering the Syrian crisis as neighbourhoods have either supported or rejected Syrians based on sectarian politics that spill over from Syria. In Tripoli for example, sectarian conflicts between adjoining neighbourhoods have complicated the work of NGOs doing neighbourhood level work[24]. It is only from May onwards that the TTC drafts contain language around conflict as well, and consideration for the conflict history of Lebanon. Suggestions on including this however extend to drawing on conflict maps that cover issues over the last two years, rather than thinking about conflict as a determining process in neighbourhood formation. Again, follow- up conversations with key informants revealed that although sectarianism was not mentioned in the drafts, it was part of the considerations. The lack of inclusion was also influenced by the involvement of a government representative as a co-lead of the TTC. However, not including these and other

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[22] KI interview, May 2020
[23] Notes from anonymous committee member
[24] KI interview, June 2020

discussions in the text also meant not committing to specific guidance and allowing flexibility to adapt responses in the different local contexts [25].

Finally, perhaps the most critical issues that complicate the development of urban responses for aid agencies are the geopolitical and geo-financial landscapes of humanitarianism. For example, the underlying concern was to ensure that upgrading and other projects would be appealing to donors, and manageable for organizations to implement within their limited mandates and budgetary constraints. This was being done against a backdrop of unpredictable funding, particularly in the shelter sector. UNHCR's budget fluctuated in different years and NGOs had to reach out to different donors for funding their assessments and projects. Donors ultimately determine the nature and length of funding and the limited funding cycles (sometimes only a year) affected the work of organisations working in vulnerable neighbourhoods and communities as they could not employ staff or sustain engagement in meaningful ways (Campbell 2020). One interviewee from an INGO was particularly frustrated and noted that really the projects were donor driven, not needs driven- that donors would change priorities every year, from shelter, to WASH to development or something else[26]. In subsequent discussions they also noted that at the end of the day, they were a business and the project cycle and donor priorities affected their long- term work and especially the engagement they hoped to have with the neighbourhoods and communities in which they were working[27]. Convincing donors then of shifting away from a refugee-focused, project cycle based aid system to one that is inclusive and longer term is difficult. Donors such as the European Union's European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (EU ECHO) were initially unwilling to support neighbourhood assessments as they saw it outside of the scope of humanitarian intervention[28] and many donors continue to refuse funding because projects are seen as being 'not humanitarian enough' and 'too development'[29]. The Lebanese government was also reticent about coming on board with the neighbourhood plans, especially as it involved the participation of refugees as well. Further, different municipalities had different approaches to hosting refugees with some being more restrictive in terms of their rights than others (Barjas 2016; El Helou 2014; Sanyal 2018).

Conclusions

The Neighbourhood Approach as a discrete policy failed to materialise due to a number of reasons, including sensitivities by the Lebanese government that this was perhaps a backdoor to permanently settling Syrians in the country[30]. This in itself is an interesting point to consider when unpacking how local policies are determined and how global policies fail to materialise. Donor politics are also key here- an insistence on focusing on project cycles and concrete

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[25] KI interview, 2018
[26] Interview undertaken with RA, April 2015
[27] Discussions with KI in 2017 and 2020
[28] Notes from anonymous committee member
[29] KI interview, June 2020
[30] Interview with anonymous committee member, 2017 and 2020

outcome flies in the face of these area-based approaches that are intended to be medium-term with far more 'soft' components.

What this brief glimpse into the policy-making process reveals is the deep entanglement of the local and the global in its formulation. Certainly, the Neighbourhood Approach is a key new global policy toolkit, but its emergence within the Lebanese context is not just about adapting global policy to a local context, but also about how the local context demanded this policy and how in arriving, the policy folded territories from elsewhere and within. Tripoli, Beirut, Mount Lebanon shaped the policy through the experiments being done in them. This returns us then to Robinson's point that the provenance of policies is perhaps less interesting than thinking through what compels the production of certain polices and ultimately thinking about the impossible separation, the topological and the topographical relationship between different places in the making of policies.

Despite the effort that went into it, it was ultimately the local geographies and politics combined with the global aid landscape that determined the future of this neighbourhood policy. In this case, although the policy itself failed to materialise in its intended form, it has continued to be relevant within the context of Lebanon. Individual NGOs continue to use neighbourhood approaches in their work and some projects of upgrading houses, installing street lighting, improving safety have been completed in a number of neighbourhoods across Lebanon[31]. The Neighbourhood Approach as undertaken by some of these organisations have also become their own unique models and 'travelled' to other sites, such as Turkey and discussed in policy settings as an important template[32].Aspects of it have also been continued by various UN agencies. For example, UN Habitat has created urban profiles for cities such as Tripoli and Tyre and "some early stages of inter-sector coordination at the city level was initiated, allowing for more focused coordination" (Bergby 2019, 110). Profiling continues to be developed in collaboration with UNICEF and UN Habitat and they are being considered as templates for action by local communities and organisations[33]. This raises the possibility of a new conceptual understanding of neighborhood, one that is driven by humanitarian logics and finance but continually remade on the ground. What future does this development of neighborhood profiles and policies hold for Lebanon and for elsewhere where such experiments may be occurring? How could these processes challenge earlier ideas of neighborhoods?

Finally, the paper offers a challenge to the some of the work on policy mobilities such as that by (Peck and Theodore 2010) that focuses primarily on urban entrepreneurialism and urban political economy and notes that Vancouver and Barcelona have purchase within the policy circuits because of their policy fixes. They note that "policy blogs are unlikely to be running hot, anytime soon, with talk of the Havana model, Kabulism, or even lessons from Detroit " (ibid, pg 171). I

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[31] See for example publicly available project reports from organisations such as CARE Lebanon.

[32] See for example CARE Lebanon's "One Neighborhood Approach"

[33] For a more detailed discussion regarding the methodological issues and adoption of elements of the Neighbourhood Approach, please see Bergby, 2019.

question this position. Cities become sites of learning for myriad reasons. Lebanese cities such as Tripoli and Beirut are rightly key sites for learning how to cope with and emerge from multiple and overlapping crises, of charting a path through global and local politics and priorities. They become models for the growing numbers of cities facing conflicts disasters and displacement. Perhaps a focus on the making and mobilization of policies in these sites can serve as a way to provincialise conversations around policy mobilities as well.

Acknowledgments

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