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*Disassembling Connections: Circulating Ideas and Practices of Slum Upgrading in Durban and São Paulo*

The thesis entitled 'Disassembling Connections: Circulating Ideas and Practices of Slum Upgrading in Durban and São Paulo' is a comparative study of slum upgrading different trajectories in these two cities, from experimental practices to public policy. Drawing on postcolonial studies, and the call for more comparative and transnational studies the thesis outlines and puts into practice a relational historical comparative tactic based on connections. The thesis takes the case of a partnership established by São Paulo and Durban, with the support of the United Cities and Local Governments network, between 2011 and 2014 – The Mentoring on Upgrading Informal Settlements. The partnership is used as a starting point to build a multi-scalar comparative analysis in which both cities are treated as equivalent starting points in the process of establishing policy connections, engaging with circulating slum upgrading ideas and mobilising them.

The thesis demonstrates how different rationalities have been historically operating behind slum upgrading advocacy, not only internationally but also in local domains. It shows that while pioneer initiatives, examined both in São Paulo and Durban during the 1990's, had a revolutionary approach based on the enhancement of communities' autonomy, closer to Turner's writings in the 1960's and 1970's, they were supplanted by a technocratic model focused on infrastructure and land tenure. This transformation, while influenced by international agencies such as the World Bank and UN-Habitat, was also capitalised by local actors acting as policy entrepreneurs.