RESEARCH

Illicit Economies Through the Lens of Urban Peace: Towards a New Policy Agenda

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This article draws together and discusses the key practical lessons of this Special Issue as a means to revisit 'urban peace' as a policy framework. It positions responses to illicit economies within a broader socio-economic agenda for which the notion of 'urban peace' acts as an umbrella for expanding the toolbox for dealing with illicit economies and as a signpost for the direction of policies to achieve greater levels of negative and positive peace. The agenda prioritizes the expansion of economic opportunities in informal economies as a critical strategic objective to manage the pressures within rapidly growing cities and to ensure peaceful urban politics in turbulent times. The article starts by charting the current mainstream responses to illicit economies before discussing the lessons of alternatives to law and order approaches of different case studies. It highlights multidimensional approaches and strong coordination mechanisms, as well as the potential of platform models as governance mechanisms for programmes to transform illicit economies. The article also underlines how illicit economies create their own non-state forms of order in which violence has a functional purpose. Building on a political economy perspective, the article proposes pragmatic peacebuilding and urban political settlements as a means to regulate and transform illicit economies. In the face of major systemic shifts happening over the next decade, the article underlines the need for a more fundamental rethink about how cities should address the multitude of challenges they are facing.

Introduction

This Special Issue reflected on the notion of 'urban peace' as a potential policy framework for approaches against illicit economies.[1] It draws the attention to a set of policy instruments that work on the bases of connectedness, proximity and trust between individuals, different segments of society, and divided urban spaces, as opposed to other approaches that emphasise separation, distance, and enmity associated with securitised, zero-tolerance, or counter-terror policies. In late 2019, the editors of the Special Issue launched a call for contributions to explore the bounds of a new field of research and practice. The result of this effort is now collected in this Special Issue and it is the basis for this article to revisit 'urban peace' as a policy framework.

What emerges from the Special Issue is an understanding of 'urban peace' as a framing for responses against illicit economies within a broader socio-economic agenda. This agenda positions illicit economies within larger informal economies and within the many grey zones that connect formal and informal economic spaces. The agenda prioritises the expansion of economic opportunities in informal economies as a critical strategic objective to manage the pressures within rapidly growing cities and thereby, also the urban transitions in turbulent times. After all, informal economies are the economic spaces where most people work – especially in emerging and developing economies (ILO 2018) – and in consequence these have to be

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[1] For the framing of the term 'illicit economies' please refer to the Introduction of the Special Issue.

addressed in novel ways to attain the broader objective of expanding economic opportunities and inclusive development.

The article reveals two dimensions of an 'urban peace' agenda with respect to responses to illicit economies. On the one hand, it is an umbrella for expanding the toolbox for dealing with illicit economies, especially through multi-dimensional approaches that combine instruments from different sectors and institutions. On the other hand, 'urban peace' can become an end goal for policymaking. Such a goal could be described to include achieving a negative and positive peace in the city, understood as 'the absence of turmoil, tension, conflict, and war' and the presence of 'a condition of good management, orderly resolution of conflict, [and] harmony associated with mature relationships …' (Boulding 1978: 3).

The following sections draw together and discuss the key practical lessons of this Special Issue as a means to revisit 'urban peace' as a policy framework. The article starts by charting the current mainstream responses to illicit economies before discussing the lessons of alternatives to law and order approaches of different case studies. It highlights mutli-dimensional approaches and strong coordination mechanisms, as well as the potential of platform models or multi-sided market approaches as governance mechanisms for programmes to transform illicit economies. The article also underlines how illicit economies create their own non-state forms of order in which violence has a functional purpose. Building on a political economy perspective, the article focuses on pragmatic peacebuilding and urban political settlements as a means to regulate and transform illicit economies. The conclusion charts the case for a new policy agenda on urban peace. In the face of major systemic shifts happening over the next decade, the article underlines the need for a more fundamental rethink about how cities should address the multitude of challenges placed upon them. This is why politicians, urban managers, and citizens must act faster to develop and deploy new approaches.

1. Reviewing Responses to Illicit Economies in Cities

Responses to illicit economies are frequently approached with a certain automatism: they are part of the realm of 'crime' and this is why politicians tend to transfer responsibility to deal with them to the law enforcement or military communities (Reitano 2020: 136; Cockayne 2013: 10). In many cases, such responses tended to contribute to spirals of lethal violence rather than reducing levels of crime and violence. The article on heavy-handed anti-drug campaigns in Manila, the Philippines, by Pangilinan, Fernandez, Quijano, and Dizon in this Special Issue is illustrative of the many cities that suffer from the impact of militarised approaches. The article recalls the human face of heavy-handed approaches that traumatises families and pushes them further into poverty and exclusion. Its findings connect the research on the global burden of armed violence and its findings that about two thirds of 560,000 victims of lethal violence in 2016 are outside the bounds of interstate and civil wars (Mc Evoy & Hideg 2017: 11). Beyond the number of dead bodies, violent criminality and heavy-handed responses have significant psychological consequences, too. Many violence-affected populations in US cities, for instance, suffer rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that are comparable to those of war veterans (Beckett 2014).

Despite the destructive impact of coercive law enforcement in many cities, they have lost nothing of their appeal for politicians that wish to demonstrate a proactive agenda against 'crime' or 'terror'. Such attitudes have been further reinforced by strongmen leaders at national or city levels that occur within the broader trend of rising autocratic governance (V-Dem Institute 2020). In some Latin American states, for instance, politicians used international support for counter-terror or stabilisation approaches to strengthen militarised approaches to fight crime (Gagne 2015; Kenny & Serrano 2012).

Many constituencies are well aware of the risks of the exclusive reliance on coercive law enforcement in responding to crime; and this recognition frequently occurs within the law enforcement community itself. Locke, in this Special Issue, highlights that simplistic and exclusion-oriented approaches can undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement agencies and reduce the morale of the many officers that joined the service in order to provide just and fair policing. Some security actors also see that conflict and violence in their own city has become more complex and that solutions to them lie beyond their own capabilities.

The proliferation of heavy-handed security policies stands in contrast to two decades of multi-dimensional approaches that aimed to reshape public and semi-public spaces in a way that complements traditional policing or violence reduction and prevention strategies at the community level (Eavis 2011; Waller 2014; Salahub et al. 2019). This might not always be grand or neatly planned programmes, but initiatives that bring together different actors to solve a problem that builds social and political capital during the process doing the work that in turn will help solve other problems (Andrews 2013). Heavy-handed approaches also stand in stark contrast to the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda or UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda, as noted in the Introduction of this Special Issue.

2. Multi-Dimensional Approaches to Urban Illicit Economies

In the context of this bigger picture, this article draws together the practical lessons presented in this Special Issue. It first looks at those articles that offer lessons from alternatives to heavy-handed approaches to urban illicit economies, and then reflects on what it would take to strengthen the governance of such approaches in cities located in emerging and developing countries. It then builds on the findings on the political economy of urban conflict shared in another batch of articles of this Special Issue and explores how pragmatic peacebuilding and political settlement practice could contribute to regulating and transforming illicit economies.

The first lesson is that alternatives to heavy-handed responses to illicit economies draw on multi-dimensional programme designs. The case study by Diskul, Collins, and Brombacher analyses experience from the Doi Tung Development project in Thailand. It suggests that the programme evolved around the connection of three policy measures, including diversifying off-farm income through value-added processing, entrepreneurship, trading, services, or tourism; addressing demand-side issues involving schemes assisting drug users to overcome dependence and remove stigmatisation; and continued law enforcement as a deterrent for engagement in illicit activity. The research on *Cracolândia* in São Paolo by Mendez de Paiva and Garcia shows that programming focused on three axes, including housing and relocation, work promotion and income generation, and health and social follow up with a target group. The case study on *El Bronx* in Bogotá by Mantilla started from a premise to focus on rescuing vulnerable populations and regain territorial control, rather than aiming to end drug supply. In order to implement this strategy policymakers framed a therapeutic policing approach that drew on instruments of citizen security, as well as social and urban renewal. The lesson of multi-dimensional approaches connects to the existing programming experiences in cities around armed violence reduction and prevention (OECD 2011). Overall, this experience recognises that ever more complex social or political problems require crosscutting policy responses that fuse the capabilities of different policy domains into a multi-dimensional response tailored for a specific context.

The second lesson is that multi-dimensional approaches require strong coordination mechanisms because they combine professional capabilities from different sectors that have little experience in collaboration across institutions. A lesson from the Doi Tung Development project in Thailand was that cross-sectorial approaches required coordination between development, health, and law enforcement professionals. This coordination was specifically important to assure the different capabilities support each other. In the case of *El Bronx*, a multi-dimensional approach rested on the capacities of the police, urban planners, and social workers. In contrast, the research on *Cracolândia* shows the consequences of lacking coordination. Every police operation undermined diagnostic and treatment plans of public health professionals and most of all affected the level of trust in the programme. These findings contribute to the existing voices that underline the importance of coordination, such as the United Nations System-Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements (UN-Habitat 2020).

The first two lessons also point to a need for pragmatism when deploying multi-dimensional approaches to rapidly growing cities in emerging and developing countries. The first consideration is that multi-dimensional approaches require existing functional capabilities within the city across different professional communities; a second consideration is that they also require a degree of policymaking sophistication that can both coordinate and implement complex programmes. For cities with chronic lack of capacities and that are under increasing stress, such multi-dimensional approaches might be hard to manage and are likely to be dependent on a significant degree of outside assistance. Finding ways to position multi-dimensional approaches to illicit urban economies must therefore build on a careful assessment of locally available capacities and existing experiences of working across institutions and sectors.

The third lesson is that multi-dimensional approaches require granular understanding of the territoriality of illicit economies and of the organisations and individuals operating them. The case study on two neighbourhoods of San Salvador by Van der Borgh showed how faith-based organisations (FBOs) operate in gang-controlled urban zones. In this case, the two FBOs accepted the gang's control of the territory to gain access to key populations and developed a way of working that is relatively free from gang influences. The FBOs needed to be equidistant from the gangs and law-enforcement agencies and to accept an unwritten code not to disclose any information about the gang. From the perspectives of the gangs, these attitudes translated into a perception of a basic human respect for gang members. In this way, FBOs could earn their respect from the neighbourhoods and structure a long-term presence and relationship with community members. In addition, the case studies on *El Bronx* and *Cracôlandia* emphasise the need for ongoing monitoring of rapidly changing local contexts due to interventions. This is necessary to understand how groups and markets adapt because of policy interventions and how, in turn, responses have to adapt, too. These

findings connect to the need to understand the hybrid and volatile nature of local political orders that is further developed below.

The fourth lesson is that implementing multi-dimensional approaches is political. An exclusive reliance on technical perspectives – an approach favoured by many international actors – will not be sufficient for responses against illicit economies to achieve their desired results. Political dexterity and coalition building are an important part of the deployment of multi-dimensional approaches. Policy responses in the *Cracolândia* case pitted advocates of multi-dimensional approaches to drug policy at the city level against advocates of coercion at the state level. Those favouring a multi-dimensional approach brought together an alliance involving academics, health and social workers, public defenders, prosecutors, the Bar Association, and other groups. The Mayor of São Paolo invested much political capital into this programme because "the future of drug policy in the city was at stake" as the authors of the study underline. Smart public communication was therefore key to protect the programme from its adversaries. Ultimately, the programme could not withstand Brazil's broader political changes that favoured coercive strategies.

These cases reflect the experience of many multi-dimensional programmes that become a play ball for politicians as they define their electoral strategies. Electoral cycles make the sustainability of many excellent projects difficult and underline the importance to position responses to illicit economies or urban violence above the dynamics of party politics in cities. With respect to the case of *El Bronx*, it is worth noting also that multi-dimensional approaches can remain controversial. In drug policy circles, some observers view this case as an example of misguided alternative to heavy-handed policing because it primarily aimed to establish territorial control. This approach resulted in dispersing drug users across the city that in turn inhibited continued diagnostic and treatment approaches.[2]

3. Governing Co-Production

Given the complexity of spatial dynamics and local politics, it is fair to assert that no single actor can achieve peaceful and inclusive societies in cities on its own. Thus, a shift in the narrative from 'implementation' to 'co-production' more aptly describes the task ahead, with different actors taking on different roles (Wennmann 2019b). However, co-production, with respect to policy against illicit economies, may require new ways of working. In many cities, a recurring mind-set is to identify responses to illicit economies in relation to the formal competences of a department, agency, or ministry that is then responsible to respond to 'crime' or 'drugs' with the instruments at their reach. This then leads to the automatism of the deployment of coercive tools against illicit economies, as noted in Section 1. The findings above, however, point to the need to take responses to illicit economies out of the niche and connect them to broader political discussions about the necessary mechanisms that will manage the transformation of rapidly growing cities in a peaceful way. This approach is much less about formal top-down processes or areas of competence of a specific agency; it is more about leveraging capacities that match the demand for localised efforts to reduce crime, violence, and exclusion.

The lessons from multi-dimensional approaches to urban illicit economies, therefore, invite reflection about a more fundamental rethink of public policymaking in cities at the intersection of urban economic development, security, and social policy. Especially in cities of emerging and developing countries, there is a need to recognise the practical limitations of government-centred approaches that flow from the formal authority and competences of institutions. It also questions key assumption behind the support of state-building that focuses on state capacities scaled through institutions but that does not place such capacities within the complexity of challenges such institutions are supposed to address (see Paris & Sisk 2009; Berdal & Zaum 2013; Andrews 2013). In a world where states and cities are, and will be, facing ever more complex challenges, unidimensional, authority-focused state-building approaches are likely becoming too limiting for achieving stability and security and broadening inclusive economic opportunity. In the context of responses to illicit economies, the lessons noted in Section 2 suggest that multi-dimensional approaches require strong connections and interoperability between capabilities of state and societal actors. To start with, they require an awareness of existing capabilities within a city that could be leveraged to transform illicit economies in ways that reduce violence and expand economic opportunity. It also requires consideration about the necessary political mechanisms that coordinate capacities from different sectors and adapts operations over time. Responses to exactly how such governance arrangements could work will depend

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[2] This comments draws on a conversation by the author with a drug policy expert that preferred to stay anonymous.

on each context, however, they should balance the idea of capability-focused, crosscutting, and process-oriented programming with the real feasibility of proceeding in such a way.

A prospective practice to strengthen the coordination of multi-dimensional approaches to illicit economies can build on the experience of 'platforms' that facilitate interaction between different communities with different interests, needs, and capacities. As a business model, platforms evolved from the performance of several well-known firms that have excelled by connecting different communities and facilitating transactions between them. eBay, Alibaba, Airbnb, Uber, or Upwork are just several examples of companies that have applied a platform model to their business strategy. What these companies have in common is that they create value by acting as catalysts between different communities that need each other in some way but cannot capture the value of their interaction on their own. They facilitate matchmaking and the exchange of goods, services, or social currency, thereby enabling value creation for all participants. Economists have described business platforms as responses to opportunities from 'multi-sided markets'. Platforms position themselves in-between different markets or different communities of buyers and sellers. They provide a common physical or virtual place to facilitate interaction between market participants or community members and minimise the transaction costs between them (Parker et al 2016; Reillier & Reillier 2019). However, platform approaches also have to be assessed in the face of their tendency to foster power and market centralisation that in turn leads to important questions about transparency, the flow of information, and decision-making (Firmino et al. 2019)

In a similar way that business platforms are currently transforming industrial economies, platforms could play a role as governance mechanism for the coordination of capacities that aim at transforming illicit economies. Such efforts have the broader goal to enable inclusive development and therefore serve the purpose to help cities navigate their turbulent future. Platforms work as infrastructures that frame other kinds of tools (such as apps) and data driven approaches to the transformation of cities in emerging and developing countries (Lobato 2020). In this sense, they might also be a gateway for closer collaboration between the tech community and policy circles associate to crime and violence reduction, peacebuilding, or public health.

4. Locating Illicit Economies within the Political Economy of Urban Conflict

A recurring observation of the articles in this Special Issue was that illicit economies create their own non-state forms of order and governance in which violence has specific functions. It connects to different literatures that shows how certain state functions are performed by gangs, private networks, local militias, guerrilla armies, or customary authorities leaving cities splintered into different zones of autonomy (Rapley 2006). Reference to 'hybrid political orders', 'closed accesses economies', 'limited statehood', 'rebel governance', or the 'political market place' testify to the burgeoning literature that conceptualises this phenomenon in different contexts (Boege et al. 2009; North et al. 2009; Risse 2011; Arjona et al. 2015; de Waal 2015). This literature points out that the actors maintaining different forms of order create their own insecurities and inefficiencies but can become the most legitimate political authority because they maintain a certain degree of public order and welfare.

This functional perspective also connects to research on the mechanisms connecting organised crime to violence. According to this view, violence can be a result of inter-group competition over criminal markets or a means of arbitration. As the 'underworld' is outside a legal mechanism of dispute resolution, violence becomes a means of dispute settlement between groups (Serrano 2002: 16–20, 23). Violence also occurs if competitors want to break into a market, and those challenged react to this competition violently (Naylor 2002: 31). In principle, criminal networks do not like to use armed violence because it attracts the attention of law enforcers and can interrupt established business channels (Dubinsky 2007: 385). Armed violence is also often a sign of new market entrants wanting to gain a larger part of an established market. It can also be perceived as a sign of weakness if used to enforce contracts, settle accounts, or intimidate customers (Naylor 2002: 31–32).

A focus on illicit economies extends these observations on the functions of violence to the functions of the provisions of welfare or economic opportunities in areas controlled by non-state authorities. Many crime groups and non-state authorities have understood the importance of controlling and regulating the economy as a means to build legitimacy in the eyes of the people they control, as noted in this Special Issue by Huddleston and Wood in relation to Yemen.

The importance of the link between cities, control over territory and populations, and access to resources is further emphasised in research on the Middle Eastern conflict zones. This research emphasises the role of

cities in 'conflict sub-economies' alongside oil-rich areas, transit areas, and borderlands (Eaton et al. 2019: v). Sampaio, in this Special Issue, builds on this work to highlight the role of illicit urban economies as a resource base for militias and insurgents. He highlights in particular the role of 'urban resources' that are 'a source of income for armed groups linked to the agglomeration of people and the scarcity of essential goods and services … resulting from inefficient urban governance' by the officially recognised municipal authorities. These resources involve, for instance, revenue from extortion of local businesses, charges for security service, or rents from housing or land use. Armed groups therefore focus on controlling urban zones with limited state presence but inhabited by many people because these zones represent prospective sources of income. The focus on 'urban resources' contribute to an emerging field of study on the political economy of urban conflict (Sampaio 2020; Gusic 2019; Young 2020). With its origins in the study of interstate and civil wars, this research reflects how analysts are adapting to the changing nature of violent conflict (see Wennmann 2019a).

Placing response to illicit economies within a framing of urban resources offers two potential policy opportunities. First, they act as a radar for locating future conflict zones. Through the lens on urban resources, these might be the many rapidly urbanising cities with a growing population and limited administrative capacities as well as a large, taxable population, high demand for basic public services, and availability of increasingly valuable land. Second, a focus on urban resources might help assess when non-state armed actors or crime groups are willing to transform into political actors. Given the prospective rents from urban resources, some armed actors might become more entrenched in the markets under their control, fostered by continuous rent accumulation and the capability to regulate markets through violence as noted by Sampaio in the case of Al-Shabaab in Mogadishu, or by Huddleston and Wood with respect to Ansar Allah in Yemen. The deepening of entrenchment in local economies, however, might also lead to increasing popular demand for better governance in the areas controlled by armed actors. This in turn can become an entry point for transforming the political nature of such groups, because once in control of sizeable populations their relationship with them will become more important to uphold revenues from urban resources. Understanding the relationship between armed actors, the populations under their control, and urban resources will be an important guide with respect to the possibilities of political engagements with armed actors and their interest in pursuing a broader political agenda (see Wennmann 2014).

However, such efforts require responses to illicit economies to look beyond specific labels or binary categories. Ganson and Hoelscher, in this Special Issue, highlight that the binary representation of economies in terms of legal/illegal, formal/informal, regulated/unregulated, or licit/illicit 'ignores the intractability and embeddedness of violence as a constituent feature of both public life and business operations'. They also frequently represent language that is state biased where all that is legal, formal, regulated, and licit is state-controlled, and what is not is illegal, informal, unregulated, or illicit, disregarding of the enabling or abusive nature of the state. These observations build on a stigmatisation dilemma of informal, parallel, or illicit economies, as noted in the Introduction of this Special Issues

5. Pragmatic Peacebuilding to Regulate Illicit Economies

In response to the diversification of de-facto authority in many emerging and developing economies, peacebuilding practice has moved towards approaches framed as 'pragmatic peacebuilding'. These approaches represent 'constructive and iterative engagement with "what is" in terms of actors that challenge or complement the sovereignty and monopolies of the state' (Stepputat 2018: 406). It focuses on 'what is possible in the shorter term and takes a step back from the high ambitions of the liberal peace' that aimed to establish order, prosperity, and participation all at once through national level programming (ibid., 405). Pragmatic peacebuilding emphasises that 'the predominant, state-centric norms are insufficient as guides for international actors …' (ibid., 399) and in turn underlines the importance to rethink the mechanism and modalities for the co-production of crime and violence reduction and more peaceful cities (Wenmann 2019b: 190–191).

With respect to the political and economic order of cities, a focus on 'pragmatic peacebuilding' offers the possibility to apply political settlement approaches to the management and transformation of urban illicit economies. Political settlements are defined by 'the formal and informal institutional arrangements through which resources (e.g., positions of power within government and informal institutions, control over natural resources, trade, and licenses) are negotiated and distributed' (Cheng et al. 2018: 10). From this perspective, it is more accurate to speak about different sectors in the urban economy and how their control or distribution is regulated in the political settlement of a city. From a political settlement perspective on illicit economies, violence can have different economic functions. It can include *competitive violence* to contest or defend a specific asset, *embedded violence* that is part of how the economy functions, or *permissive violence*

that occurs because key actors do not have the power, willingness, or competences to restrain all actors (see ibid., 2). As political settlements are dynamic processes, they can involve periods of stability that reflect a degree of power balance between contending elites, but also period of turbulence in which challengers aim to change the 'rules of the game' in favour of their partisan interests. In this interplay between incumbent elites and challengers, new rules and mechanisms emerge by which elites agree on the distribution of power and resources and on how to regulate the economy and the use of violence to operate it.

Proposing political settlement perspectives as a means to regulate illicit economies places existing law enforcement, drug policy, and peacebuilding practice into a broader political context. A singular focus on stability or drugs sometimes appears to be blind to the needs for political processes to shape the balance of power of different groups or elites within a particular urban space. In the rapidly changing social and economic environment of growing cities, the political dimension of transforming urban economies might only increase and underline the urgency to develop political mechanisms to broker political settlements between different de facto authorities that draw their power from controlling urban resources and populations. Such political mechanisms should nurture a reasonable alignment between the interests of powerful groups and the key state institutions – meaning the alignment of formal and informal rules and processes for upholding those interests. The result would be relatively low levels of violence, and political competition or cooperation dynamics can be managed by these alignments. However, if there is no such alignment, tensions develop, institutions may not work, and the risks of violence increases (Khan 2010).

There are also practical dilemmas that emerge from the application of political settlement approaches to illicit economies. The first dilemma builds on the known risks of political settlement negotiations in the context of stabilisation interventions. The prioritisation of stabilisation in international policy circles has tended to promote more narrowly defined elite bargaining processes that entrench more exclusive power systems. Such limited elite deals formalise control of key sectors and trade off short-term stabilisation against longer-term development prospects (Cheng et al. 2018: 1). The result is a certain degree of stability and more tightly elite-controlled economic orders that bolsters their own power. In the case of Syria, the government injected its claim to sovereignty to access resources from humanitarian aid that 'fed into its efforts of authoritarian regime maintenance at times of acute threats to its survival' (Leenders and Mansour 2018: 257). The second dilemma is a narrowly defined law and order approach that traps cities into the dynamics of a 'never-ending war' propelled by the mixture of the inability of local actors to resolve their own conflicts and the continual infusion of weapons and other support that prolongs them indefinitely (Hironaka 2005). In this situation, 'winning is not the aim of fighting' and 'it is important to distinguish the intention to eliminate an enemy and the usefulness to actually succeeding' (Keen 2012: 236). All too often, a 'mutually profitable stalemate' perpetuates dynamics of insecurity and violence as an economic function (Wennmann 2011: 24).

Both dilemmas evolve from specific political settlements that illustrate different strategies of rent accumulation and the functions of violence to sustain them. From a political settlement perspective, they open entry points for policy responses. With respect to the first scenario, Kania, in this Special Issue, argues for situating an elite bargaining process into the trajectory of urban peace formation. In the peacebuilding literature, peace formation stems from 'the local-scale agency, networks, from forms of mobilisation for legitimate and progressive peace agreements. It draws on everyday, localized understandings of positionality vis-à-vis politics, justice and reconciliation' (Richmond 2016: 5). In an urban context, this means carving out spaces for micro-political settlements to occur, for instance, around urban resources; it also means designing support mechanisms that accompany the evolution of these settlements for a long time. These spaces have also been described as 'spaces of exception' that enable co-existence, interaction, and relationship building even in the most inhospitable circumstances (Rodgers 2019). They also require strong insiders that can facilitate interactions in changing political constellations of post-conflict or rapidly growing cities, as highlighted by Kania in the case of in Damascus, Syria.

The second scenario underlines the case for 'economic de-escalation'. Where the economy is critical for shaping conflict dynamics, it does require a dedicated process of de-escalation that targets specific economic agendas. Such de-escalation might involve a stakeholder mapping of the key winners and losers of the war and peace, as well as an integrated and spatially disaggregated assessment of how much wealth there is to control or distribute, both in current and future terms (Wennmann and Davies 2020). Finding the relevant data and insight for such efforts can be difficult, but it is not unusual in the peacebuilding field. Some negotiation processes start to be accompanied by so called 'brain trusts', that is a group of about a dozen '"middle-tier" or "go-between" leaders who help bridge national and community level peace processes' (Clark & Freeman 2020). A brain trust offers deep thinking about relevant issues that are not filtered through specific institutional or partisan interests or approaches, it cuts across sectors and institutions and brings

together a collective capacity that goes beyond the limitations of individual members, and enables access to hard-to-obtain information and hard-to-access networks. There is much opportunity to explore the usefulness of brain trusts as strategic instruments for multi-dimensional approaches against illicit economies.

Conclusion: Urban Peace as a Policy Framework

Rapidly growing cities in Asia and Africa, as well as increasing vulnerability of many cities to sea level rises, drought, and natural disasters will be a major vector shaping the dynamics of regional and global security and development over the next decades. In some regions these transformations will lead to abandoned cities as life within them becomes unsustainable; other regions will see increasingly crowded cities resulting from population growth or migration. Framed by this bigger picture, new responses to illicit economies are part of the critical need to accelerate the expansion of economic opportunities and mitigate the adverse effects of ever more stressed urban systems.

Given these stakes, cities should prioritise efforts that aim at expanding inclusive economic opportunities. All UN Member States have signed up to this goal through the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. However, the pathway towards it might require unconventional approaches and a lot of pragmatism to prioritise what works. This should require focusing on cities – not states – and on enabling the economic spaces not formally controlled by public authorities. If the rapid expansion of economic opportunities is to work as a cushion for the destabilising effects of rapidly growing cities, then policymakers should focus on informal markets, because this is where most people work and where social impact of investments will be highest. Policymakers must resist following the assumption that formalisation by the state is the answer because many people in the informal space do not trust public authorities based on their own experience of abuse, corruption, or neglect by them (Wennmann et al. 2017: 42–43). With the primary concerns to assure subsistence, many people go to some length to protect their niche in the informal market including through violence, as Ganson and Hoelscher, in this Special Issue, illustrate. However, policymakers should recognise that they might have an ally if policies can deliver an end of violent abuse or extortion by public authorities or criminal gangs and results in expanded availability of essential goods and services and employment opportunities. Enabling informal economies, therefore, requires capacities that act in both formal and non-state spaces and can navigate within and transform a city's hybrid political order.

This focus on transforming illicit economies within their broader socio-economic context needs a name and this article suggest it should be called 'urban peace' – a policy framework to enable crosscutting and multi-dimensional approaches and to provide a sense of direction for an urban transformation process that should eventually achieve a negative and positive peace. The underlying ambition of an 'urban peace' agenda is to shift responses to illicit economies from the law and order or security to the socio-economic dimension. Advancing the agenda will therefore require challenging the law and order or security-focused approaches in local and national politics. Given the commercial and political power behind these approaches, addressing entrenchment is a formidable challenge, but it is necessary to confront a major challenge: the rapid growth of ever more vulnerable cities and the associated risks for regional instability unless this transition is managed constructively. Arming-up or further securitising cities will simply have too little practical value to help to prepare cities for the scale of pressures they will face because of climate change, new technologies, and geopolitical shifts. This is why cities need to adapt policies and the way they go about expanding economic opportunities at a relevant scale to ensure security and peace in the future.

The need to go beyond law and order and securitised approaches is further illustrated by considering cities as sick patients that have received too many antibiotics. Seeing the cities' deteriorating health, some doctors insist on the application of even more powerful antibiotics while others advocate for the use of natural remedies or lifestyle changes to promote healing. 'The latter is prescribed to strengthen the immune system from within, and this takes time and commitment. Antibiotics, on the other hand, are used when the system is too weak and severe symptoms need to be addressed before healing can take place. Both are sometimes needed, but the continuous use of antibiotics creates dependency and can harm the body' (Siebert 2012: 37). This analogy underlines that the case for multi-dimensional approaches is not about replacing law enforcement or security-focused approaches, but about their deployment in the right dosage at the right time so that they can reinforce the effect of other measures intended to help cities heal.

Following this analogy, the 'urban peace' agenda against illicit economies emphasises multi-dimensional approaches to respond to the unique complexities of a city or neighbourhood. This approach should help strengthen a city's immune system so that it can address issues such as exclusion, fear, and violence out of the energies contained within its own system of capabilities. The research presented in this Special Issue highlights the limitation of approaches that exclusively rely on law and order or security instruments that,

much like the exclusive application of antibiotics, will not heal the patient on its own. It emphasises the desirability to plan and deploy multidimensional programmes that integrate capacities from different sectors, including from health and social workers, architects and urban planners, civic protection officers, community peacebuilders, and police and security professionals. The research also underlines that such programmes require strong coordination mechanisms as different sectors have usually little experience of, or capacities for, collaboration across institutions. They also need to be guided by pragmatism given the real resource and capacity constrains in many cities to make multi-dimensional programmes workable. Overall, there should be greater emphasis on capability-focused, crosscutting, and process-oriented programming and mechanisms to broker the partnerships necessary to assemble relevant capabilities from within and outside a city in order to expand economic opportunity in informal markets.

This article underlines that addressing illicit economies means finding a new modus operandi to work in the hybrid political orders of cities. Illicit economies create their own non-state forms of order and governance that de-facto power holders use to entrench and project their power. Some of those non-state actors build legitimacy around expanding and regulating economic opportunities for the population living under their control; others are using violence and fear as an instrument for social control and income generation. This article proposes pragmatic peacebuilding and political settlement approaches as a means to regulate and transform illicit economies. By defining the rules of the game between different power holders, 'urban' political settlements could open a discreet space for negotiating the regulation and transformation of illicit economies in the short-, medium-, and long-term. Such spaces would also help prevent contests over urban resources, highlighted in this article as an important source of future urban conflict. Advancing responses to illicit economies in this way requires going outside the bounds of single-issue, technical responses and embracing political instruments commonly found in diplomacy and conflict resolution. It also requires a granular understanding of local contexts and the ability to work within and on local political dynamics for a long time, therefore emphasising the need to go beyond short-term programming to long-term partnership building that enable the co-production of urban peace.

Currently, problems for cities appear to grow faster than solutions to them. Looking at illicit economies through the lens of urban peace might help turn problems into opportunities, and help activate new instruments in order to size them. Given the number of cities experiencing rapid change and greater challenges, there are many places to potentially advance an urban peace agenda; and if our current knowledge about future trends is a guide, there is also no time to lose to start.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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