

**Towards an urban agenda from a feminist political ecology and care perspective**  
*(Chapter 14, pp. 262-286, “Feminist Political Ecology and the Economics of Care. In search of economic alternatives”, edited by Christine Bauhardt and Wendy Harcourt, Routledge, 2019)*

Ana Agostino

## **Introduction**

This chapter is informed by my experience as the Ombudswoman of Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, a position I have held for the last three years. Heading an institution with the mandate to promote respect for human rights, the best performance of departmental and/or municipal services and the achievement of greater transparency and efficiency of governmental administration has given me the chance to deepen the knowledge of the daily experiences of citizens in a variety of spheres and to make inputs for the improvement of their life conditions. The processes of understanding and contributing to the transformation of these experiences have been guided by three broad analytical frameworks which have guided my work on the ground and my research: a multicultural approach to human rights, experiences and analysis from transnational feminist movements and the critical views of post-development. It is within these three frameworks that I will share experiences, analyses and suggestions aiming to contribute to a sustainable, caring and equitable urban agenda.

My engagement with Latin American social movements, working with rural women in South Africa in the mid-90s, coordinating the Feminist Task Force of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) for five years, writing my PhD thesis on Post-Development, publishing together with transnational feminist academics papers on women and climate justice, contributed to a

synergy of these frameworks which has informed my professional and personal experience. Key concepts emerged in that journey that have informed the work that I am currently doing: hospitality, care, a deep questioning of the centrality of economics, gender mainstreaming, diversity and politics of place. These concepts will emerge throughout this chapter helping in the understanding of the challenges we face at the urban level but also as facilitators of other ways to look at and construct a new agenda.

### **Defensoria de Vecinas y Vecinos de Montevideo<sup>1</sup>**

The Ombudsinstitution of Montevideo (Defensoria de Vecinas y Vecinos, DVVM) was created by the Departmental Legislative body in line with the Paris Principles<sup>2</sup>, a set of international standards related to the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/134 on 20 December 1993. They are created by the states but are independent and autonomous, and have the mandate to promote and defend Human Rights, as well as to control the administration. Although the Principles talk about the national institutions, with time their jurisdictions expanded to include institutions with provincial, departmental, municipal and local mandates. Carlos Constenla, president of the Latin American Institute of the Ombudsman (ILO), argues that in fact, this is an institution that emerged at the municipal level and it is there where it justifies more than at any other scale its nature, its efficacy and its reason for existence, in close proximity with the citizens (Constenla 2016: 82).

In the case of the DVVM, it implements its mandate by responding to and acting upon the complaints and demands from the residents of Montevideo associated to the acts of the municipal and departmental government; doing research in order to suggest and recommend solutions to the specific problems presented to the institution as well as to issues of general concern for the

population of the Department (this includes specific recommendations to the government, public positioning and publications); training and implementing community mediation as a response to conflicts and/or as a means to promote dialogue among citizens and between citizens and the departmental authorities. All of this is guided by a Human Rights perspective and a gender mainstreaming policy. It is important to say that both are contested concepts, particularly in the last few years when we are witnessing a growing attack on human rights<sup>3</sup>. In the next lines, I will expand on the particular views of these concepts that guide our work.

### *Human Rights: a multicultural concept*

As a Human Rights institution the Defensoria needs to take a stance on the meaning and implementation of this concept, as it not only informs its work but the DVVM has a mandate to promote and educate in this perspective. Quoting Andrea Galaverna, Ombudswoman for the city of Bariloche in Argentina from 2013 to 2017, for Human Rights Institutions this perspective means to monitor the state conduct, prevent human rights violations by the state, provide protection when there have been violations, pressure the state to investigate, sanction and repair the violations, and promote people's participation and state's accountability. She also argues that there are fundamental premises linked to this perspective including that human rights are enforceable, they aim at changing the relations of power and the resulting inequalities, require the active participation of the persons holders of the rights, imply a differential approach in terms of gender and ethnic-cultural perspectives so as to promote equal opportunities and prevent discrimination (Galaverna 2016: 153–154). As Luis Perez Aguirre argued, all human groups have deep sentiments, beliefs, essential characters that define their culture, they have an ethos that inform their assumptions, their behaviours, their *Weltanschauungen*. This ethos is part of the foundation for choosing a Human Rights perspective, which is not merely rational, but on the contrary, is the response to 'a cry heard and felt in one's own flesh... the cry of one who has become a victim,

who has been stripped of their dignity or of their rights'. He further argues that the Universal Human Rights Declaration is the product of a long and complex process in response to innumerable cries throughout the world and throughout history (Perez Aguire 1998: 51–52). This ethos can be linked to what James Taylor called 'a pre-existing horizon of significance', that gives meaning to our existence 'against the background of things that matter...the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order (that) *matters* crucially...' (Taylor 1991: 38–41, emphasis in original).

The reality of this ethos, of this pre-existing horizon of significance, by its mere enunciation, shows that there cannot be only one, universally valid, view of Human Rights. This though, has been the mainstream vision as argued by Boaventura de Sousa Santos:

The concept of human rights rests on a well-known set of presuppositions, all of which are distinctly Western: a universal human nature that can be known by rational means that is essentially different from and higher than the rest of reality; and a concept of the individual as possessing an absolute and irreducible dignity that must be protected from society, the state or other forms of hierarchy (2002: 44–45).

Three elements can be identified in this concept: (i) rights are associated to the individual; (ii) they are the same for all individuals; (iii) it is through a rational approach that we understand, define and promote human rights. It can be argued though that this approach can only explain the legal category of human rights (including the Universal Declaration and its binding treaties), but does not pay attention to the fact that a natural right reflecting the intrinsic dignity of human beings and of peoples, existed before the positive right of the law. It can also be argued that it is not primarily through reason that we understand the meaning of these intrinsic rights, but by something much deeper and fundamental which is the capacity to feel with others, be transformed by their feelings

and experiences and transform them in turn. These feelings and experiences are culturally determined. And, contrary to a universal view, as Santos further argues, ‘to elevate to the maximum possible the level of consciousness of cultural incompleteness is one of the most crucial tasks in the construction of a multicultural emancipatory concept of Human Rights’ (Santos 2002: 44–45).

Furthermore, as I would argue later in the section on Care, ontologically, being human is caring (for ourselves, for others, for nature), which puts at the centre the need to see rights not only as individual but transcending the person. In this respect, it is important to remember that already the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a document from the 1940s and therefore not yet gendered or including an environmental perspective - emphasised the mutual responsibility towards one another and the general well-being in its Article 29: (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society (UN General Assembly 1948).

As argued before, the various peoples and cultures of the Earth have their own visions of human dignity, with different emphases on reciprocity, articulation with others, respect to other cultures and to nature, among others. It is on this basis that Santos argues for the need to reconceptualise human rights as multicultural (Santos 2002: 44). And beyond that, there would not be a construction known as Human Rights without the capacity to feel, to listen, to have pain with those whose dignity in one way or another has been affected.

## *Hospitality*

As a result of a process of critical engagement with these concepts and in the framework of exchanging ideas and analysis with other human rights institutions, I presented the notion of the Defensorias as ‘places of hospitality’, a view around which I have built the work of the DVVM.

The term hospitality refers to ‘friendly and liberal reception of guests and strangers’<sup>4</sup>. This definition states clearly of one who opens his/her house to someone not known, someone who is different. In his analysis of the concept, Jacques Derrida even says that maybe we cannot talk of hospitality if the person we receive already talks our language, shares with us all that is associated to a common tongue. He therefore says that

absolute hospitality requires that I open up my house and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Dufourmantelle and Derrida 1997: 25, emphasis in the original).

In this light, hospitality is a type of encounter that necessarily will transform the guest and the host, without understanding each other, with no need for that understanding in order to make place, that is, to recognise the person and its particular way of being in the world (Agostino 2007: 207–208). This mutual transformation is possible when moving away from a traditional view of hospitality rooted in mistrust of strangers to which our house is open while at the same time it is transformed into a fortress. In this configuration each part keeps its role: the guest must adjust and the host

keeps the power granted by the possession of the offered resources. In relation to this view, and engaging with the work of Derrida on hospitality, Maurice Hamington sees a role for feminist hospitality that can ‘subvert hospitality-infused hierarchies and minimize the inferred power relations grounded in property to facilitate connections among people. In this manner, sharing is less instilled with hidden agendas and more directed toward the well-being of the guest’. He further argues that ‘feminist hospitality explores the antimony between disruption and connection: The guest and host disrupt each other’s lives sufficiently to allow for meaningful exchanges that foster interpersonal connections of understanding’. This connection breaks the view that the ‘host gives and the guest receives’. The concept of feminist hospitality as he describes it ‘resists this directionality, instead valuing the exchanges between host and guest as reciprocal...; the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together’ (Hamington 2010: 24–28).

It is in this light that I argue that the Defensoria is a place of hospitality. The choice of the word *place* is not random: while being a place of hospitality, it gives place to a diversity of voices. In feminist analysis, place is an important category based on the political, material and symbolic appropriation, that activates rights and duties and allows for the manifestation of diverse identities, capacities, interactions and initiatives. As argued by Wendy Harcourt and Arturo Escobar in ‘Women and the Politics of Place’, ‘even in a globalized world, place is still the way people know and experience life’ (Harcourt and Escobar 2002: 8). It is where resistances and realities unfold, where events take place, where we are able to see (and to not see depending as well on place) and understand and propose and transform. In their analysis they talk of a *global sense of place* that includes the body, the home, the environment and the social public space.

Politics based around these four areas question the presumption that knowledge is only ‘important’ if it is detached, objective and rational, and instead points to the importance of material, subjective and personal vantage points. Women’s place-based

politics is embedded in, rather than removed from, the material lives they are trying to change (Harcourt and Escobar 2002: 11).

This is particularly true for a place like the Defensoria, as its essence is to receive the views, complaints, concerns and expectations of the citizens of Montevideo, and to act upon them. It is a place to feel with others, transform and be transformed. It is a place to care.

### *Gender mainstreaming*

The Defensoria was created in 2006. Very early in its operation it joined the Network of Women Defenders<sup>5</sup> of the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen, with the aim of incorporating a gender perspective in its institutional management. In 2009, the institution installed a Human Rights and Gender Programme as a specialized area, which aimed at strengthening the incorporation of a gender perspective in its strategic lines and institutional policy, to contribute with the Equality Plan from the departmental government and to promote actions in defence of the rights of women in articulation with other public and private organisations. All these steps are in line with the global efforts for gender mainstreaming incorporated in the Beijing Platform for Action agreed upon at the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations World Conference on Women and resulted from decades of struggle to achieve gender equality by women around the world. Gender mainstreaming has evolved throughout these decades, keeping the essential threads as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997:

...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men



benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality' (OSAGI 2002: 1)

The programme installed at the Defensoria led to an inclusive language in the tools of internal systemisation (annual and/or thematic reports) and in the data system to permeate the communication policy and the general vision of institutional management. Since 2014, when I took office, and in coordination with the Network of Women Defenders, we took on the challenge of implementing an Institutional Gender Policy. The incorporation of the gender perspective as a cross-cutting view implies the possibility and opportunity to move from an apparent neutrality in relation to the reproduction of gender inequalities, towards the analysis and implementation of internal policies and methodological strategies which effectively and explicitly act upon the stereotypes that reproduce these inequalities. The principle of equality of results is a guideline for the fulfilment of the right to equality and non-discrimination. The policy has the following objectives:

1. To promote the incorporation of values, principles and attitudes with a gender perspective in the organisational culture, in order to reduce and/or eradicate discriminatory attitudes both in the interpersonal relations of the staff and in the quality of care provided.
2. To deepen the integration of the gender perspective in the internal strategies of the institutional management, improving the tools of planning, management and evaluation.
3. To coordinate with relevant national institutions for the implementation of the policy, promoting good practices and the best use of resources available for their implementation.

These three years have been very far-reaching in the implementation of this policy with clear results and broad recognition at the local, national and international level<sup>6</sup>. All the work done at

the Defensoria is informed by our gender policy, including the core work of responding to citizen's demands.

### *Demands from citizens and the urban challenges*

Since its establishment in December 2006, the DVVM has received almost 15,000 complaints and consultations relating to all areas under the responsibility of the departmental and municipal governments. The main topics presented to the institution in this period have been noise pollution, sanitation, cleaning of the city and waste management, public trees, taxes, housing, transit and public transport, open space markets, street lighting, road-pavement, building control, permits for commercial and industrial establishments, health, animal ownership, accumulation syndrome, public spaces, environmental protection, guarantees for equality and non-discrimination, among others. There has also been a very high presence in the consultations in relation to the coexistence ('convivencia') between neighbours. All these topics are presented from the material, quotidian experience of those who individually or collectively take the time to first present a formal claim to the relevant authorities, and then to follow it up with the DVVM when no satisfactory solution has been implemented. As a trend, almost two thirds of cases have been presented by women.

All these issues that affect the lives of human beings relate to local policies, which implies that their well-being greatly depends on municipal governments managing soundly their duties. When this does not happen, the Defensorias become the institutions that protect and promote the fulfilment of rights at the closest level to the citizens. And the presentation of their cases to these institutions becomes, in turn, a mechanism for citizen participation. There is a high possibility that their complaint, demand or proposal, once taken, analysed and presented by the institution as recommendation to the authorities, will become new public policy (Constenla 2016: 87).

Although the list of areas in which citizens present their complaints seems to reflect a variety of unconnected topics, when working with them and making policy proposals, it becomes clear that they fit into the challenges relating to a sustainable view of urban management, including social, ecological and economic aspects of people's and communities' lives. In my role as head of the institution I have responded to these challenges incorporating a gender analysis that links these dimensions and allows for culture and knowledge influences into the building of alternatives that relate to feminist political ecology as it will be described in later sections.

Going back to the *global sense of space*, it is possible to say that the experience that leads to present the complaint encompasses the four dimensions: the body, the home, the environment and the social public space. On a daily basis, the Defensoria sees examples of individuals, mostly women and on many occasions women's groups, who 'in their daily lives are qualifying global processes' (Harcourt and Escobar 2002: 8). From their body experience of what is missing, or what is not functioning properly and impacts on their home, they develop a sense of what should be taking place in that localised sphere which, by definition, will affect others in their surroundings and eventually in the neighbourhood or city at large. They will then engage in active mobilisation, first demanding the local authority to fulfil its duty and then presenting their case to the human rights institution with the mandate to control and propose, actions that will lead to generate knowledge and proposals to transform reality. It is not necessarily a conscious path from the home to the social public space, rather, a collective process in which the Defensoria plays the role of enabling exchanges and critical engagements which eventually, and as a result of the participation of several role-players, lead to a new reality. Many of the complaints start from the demand of 'my right' to a clean sidewalk, to a quiet street, to sanitation and so on. Placing these demands within the framework of an urban agenda that is based on a sustainable, just and equitable perspective, is one of the challenges of our institution.

### **Sustainability and sustainable development: a post-development and gender perspective**

Sustainability has been key to the formulation of the current development framework, including the Agenda for Sustainable Development approved by the UN General Assembly in 2015 that contains the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the New Urban Agenda resulting from the United Nations Conference on Housing and Urban Sustainable Development, Habitat III, which took place in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador<sup>7</sup>. The mainstream concept of sustainability that informs these documents and their implementation programmes does not allow for a fundamental shift in the dominant economic model which is at the heart of the current ecological crisis. Placing myself in a post-development and gender perspective, I would argue that, unless economic growth is fundamentally questioned as the key for development, -even if calling for resilient, environmentally friendly, inclusive and sustainable growth- (UN-Habitat 2016: point 43) and women's views on sustainable livelihoods are not taken into account, there is no possibility of moving into a true sustainable future.

#### *Post-development*

Since the first UN Development Decade was launched in 1961 various concepts and programmes were advanced to improve the conditions of living for millions of human beings around the world. Development was the key word that summarised those efforts. Throughout the decades, the lack of improvements and the persistence of inequalities led to the formulation of new approaches and emphasis. All of these initiatives remained tied to development. The challenge was to strengthen, to improve, to transform and to enhance the methods under the development discourse in order to achieve better results. The prospect that the expected results might not be possible under

development was never part of the scenario. This changed with the emergence of what became known as post-development. Two major books can be identified as the collective expression of this particular way of thinking and that made it known in academic and other circles: *The Development Dictionary*, edited by Wolfgang Sachs and published in 1992, and *The Post-Development Reader*, compiled by Majid Rahnema with Victoria Bawtree and published in 1997. The key argument of this school of thought can be summarised as the conviction that reformulating development is not possible or desirable and that what is needed instead is to formulate and implement alternatives *to* it. To arrive to this conclusion, post-development writers deconstructed the concept of development, affirming that it is a historically produced discourse consisting of a field of control of knowledge, a sphere of intervention of power and forms of subjectivity which mould individuals and societies (Escobar 1987: 13–14); an effort to westernise the world arrogating itself the right – and the duty – to determine how the lives of other peoples and cultures ought to look like; the setting of universal standards and methods of reaching pre-determined goals which might have varied over time but have without exception remained attached to economic growth. Some of the key elements of the development discourse formulated by post-development writers refer to how (i) it defines and leads more than half of humanity to perceive themselves as underdeveloped; (ii) legitimises intervention; (iii) aims at the elimination of diversity; (iv) postulates economic growth as a synonym of development. In the formulation of these criticisms post-development offers clues for identifying other practices that constitute, by their own formulation and implementation, alternatives to the mainstream. Post-development has helped to generate debate and

contribute to the construction of an ethos beyond development. As part of this debate, central ideas have been put forward that do not aim to replace development but to generate ecologies [...] that oppose the monocultures resulting from the hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency that dominate development. These ecologies (as

part of a narrative that promotes the recovery of people's own language of desire and culture) contribute to the unveiling of other ways of doing things and restore their ability to constitute themselves in valid alternatives (Agostino 2007: 210).

It is within this framework that I will analyse sustainability in the coming paragraphs.

### *Sustainability*

The concept of sustainability refers to mankind's ability to live within the boundaries of the physical environment, now and indefinitely into the future (Martine and Villarreal 1997). Debates about sustainability and its association with development discourse came up as a result of concerns that in the 1970s were beginning to become increasingly evident about the impacts that the predominant model of development, closely linked to that of economic growth, was having on the environment.

The first United Nations conference on the 'human environment' was held in Sweden in 1972 and led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). In the same decade, a number of papers were published which revealed concerns about the viability of the prevailing production and consumption model. One of them was 'The Limits to Growth' of the Club of Rome (Meadows *et al.* 1974: 185), which analysed the planetary limits against the constant growth of population, land occupation, production, consumption, waste, etc. In this work, the close relationship between development and the environment was clearly raised, and a series of economic and ecological standards involving a state of 'non-growth' was called for. In 1973 E. F. Schumacher published *Small is beautiful. Economy as if people mattered* in which he raised the challenge of moving to a new way of life, with new methods of production and consumption, a way of life designed for permanence. In line with these works and also with the need to address environmental issues with a global approach, the International Union for Conservation of Nature

(IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), with the support of UNEP, developed in the early 1980s a World Conservation Strategy where a conceptualization of sustainable development appears. In 1983, UNEP convened the creation of a Global Commission on Environment and Development with the objective of reviewing and making proposals on critical environmental issues, proposing new forms of international cooperation that could guide the necessary changes and increase the levels of understanding and individual commitment of social organisations, companies, institutions and governments in this area (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 356–357). The outcome of this commission's work was the famous report 'Our Common Future' that includes the best known definition of sustainable development: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This definition includes, on the one hand, the concept of needs that must be fulfilled - in particular those of the great majorities that have been postponed - in the attainment of a better quality of life, and at the same time the recognition of the existence of natural limits that must be taken into account in order not to affect the future possibilities of continuing to satisfy them. This double dimension was taken up again at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, in Agenda 21, one of the final documents of the conference, which called for the implementation of production and consumption modalities that address both challenges. 'The Future We Want,' the final document of the Rio+20 Summit that took place in June 2012 emphasized that 'it is necessary to further incorporate sustainable development at all levels, integrating its economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing the links between them, in order to achieve it in all its dimensions' (UN General Assembly 2012: 2, par. 3).

One of the consequences of the recognition of existing limits and the continuous call to articulate the three dimensions should have been the implementation of transformations in the dominant production and consumption models associated with the continuous exploitation of nature and the permanent growth of production and consumption. It is possible to affirm, however, that sustainable development in many cases was replaced by sustainable growth legitimising in the process the continuity of the same practices. As Richard Douthwaite argued, ‘sustainable development is economic growth that has somehow been made more equitable and environmentally careful. However, since growth itself is not sustainable, the concept is a dangerous contradiction in terms’ (Douthwaite 1992: 286). Part of the problem has been that debates on sustainability within the United Nations have always taken place linked to the development discourse. That is to say, the need for development and its positive character were never put into question.

It has been perhaps that lack of clarity of the concept of sustainability, which admits diverse and even opposing readings, that has made it immensely popular, so much that to speak of development today is to speak of sustainable development without necessarily having any reflection on what the sustainable adjective implies. Since 1987, when ‘Our Common Future’ was presented for the first time the analysis of its meaning has not ceased, without this impacting either on the continuity of dominant models or the implementation of large projects with negative environmental and social impacts, all in the name of sustainable development.

According to the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability (2012: 11–12), two key reasons explain the fact that, despite the enormous popularity of the concept, its practical implementation is still very limited. The first is the lack of political will, given that the times of sustainable development are not the times of the political processes aimed



at short-term benefits. And the second is the continuity of economic dominance in the visions of development, so that economic decisions related to policies continue to be taken without considering environmental sustainability as one of its factors. That is, the necessary transdisciplinarity and the equal consideration of social, environmental and economic dimensions, is still absent in the discourse – and in the implementation – of sustainable development.

The concept of sustainability in turn varies according to the prevailing perception about nature and about the role of science and technology. Based on these perceptions, we distinguish between weak, strong and super strong sustainability. The first raises the possibility of substituting all forms of capital. Nature, therefore, seen as natural capital, can also be replaced by the application of scientific methods. Strong sustainability, however, while recognising the importance of technological efficiency, understands that certain elements of natural capital cannot be substitute it. The super-strong, in turn, does not see nature as capital but assigns intrinsic values to it independently of its usefulness to humans. Each of these visions implies a different relationship with nature (Pearce and Atkinson 1998: 5, UNDP 2012: 12–13). This is one of the elements of analysis of political ecology that engages with how power relations impact on the use, access and control of nature. The pre-eminence of science and of market forces are not neutral and are underpinned by a world vision in line with mainstream development views which focus on efficiency and rationality to extract and add value to nature. As we will see later, feminist scholars have also engaged in this debate adding a gender dimension to the analysis. The next section will highlight some of these analysis, including women's contributions towards the formulation and implementation of sustainable practices (Agostino 2015: 823–826).

What is clear is that sustainability is a concept in dispute, which explains the diversity of approaches that coexist and reflect very different notions about the relation of human beings to

nature but also of human beings to each other and to their material and immaterial environment. As we saw previously, the articulation between social, economic and environmental dimensions is the determining factor of sustainability. This means that decisions made regarding ways to satisfy needs or to seek welfare should be informed by the impact that the different options will have in each of those dimensions. Observing what happens in practice, it is possible to affirm that the prevailing view of sustainability privileges economic growth by presenting it as a necessary condition in order to respond to the needs of the population and incorporates some social and environmental considerations to legitimise the use of the term sustainable. This form of continuity with the dominant models of production and consumption legitimised by a language oriented to give an image of sustainability without implementing substantive transformations could be called ‘green hypocrisy’ (Robinson 2004: 374). In this sense, it is necessary to enable processes that help a collective and gender sensitive elaboration of sustainability and the identification of strategies to achieve it. Without opening it for debate, the dominant view imposes itself with the consequence that numerically significant sectors of the population feel excluded, but also their knowledge and experiences are wasted when choosing the course or courses of action that may be more favourable. This is substantial since, as John Robinson puts it, ‘sustainability is fundamentally a matter of human behaviour, and of negotiation about preferred futures under conditions of deep contingency and uncertainty’ (2004: 379–380).

#### *Looking at sustainability from a gender and post-development perspective*

Women’s organisations and women in the academia have contributed at length to shaping the understanding of sustainability throughout various decades. This long involvement in relation to sustainability and sustainable development has been analysed by Irene Dankelman in ‘Women Advocating for Sustainable Livelihoods and Gender Equality on the Global Stage’ (Dankelman 2012: 21–41) as well as by other feminist scholars (Dankelman and Davidson 1988, Shiva 1988,

Wichterich 2012). It can be argued that after the intense mobilisation of women during the preparatory process for UN Conferences held in Rio and Beijing, women's voices have not ceased to be present and with articulated and clear visions on sustainable development in all the UN gatherings that followed. They have been active at the global level but also, and most importantly, in their countries and regions mobilising locally, linking daily and concrete struggles with the language of conventions and treaties, providing local data, presenting alternative reports, putting forward testimonies and narratives to feed into the global negotiations. Women's organisations have succeeded in securing their presence and the spaces for critical and propositional engagement. Academic women, and in particular feminist scholars, have produced fundamental works.

In spite of these achievements, it has been difficult to materialise one of women's fundamental demands calling for a change in the dominant economic mode of production and consumption and the centrality of it. The recent Habitat III conference offers yet another example of the resistance towards this necessary shift that might be summarised in the idea of moving from '*sustainable development* to *sustainable livelihoods*'. As Sumi Krishna wrote, sustainable livelihoods refers to 'a framework of analysis and a strategy that focuses on human lives and the structures that shape people's well-being' (2012: 12). The focus on economic growth in development has even been recognised by the UN itself: 'The objective of Development is that people can enjoy long, healthy and productive lives – a simple truth but one often forgotten in the rush to accumulate more possessions and greater wealth' (UNDP 1992: 12). This rush has continued to permeate the development discourse and it has motivated women's organisations around the world to challenge it. Some of the UN documents from the period – as part of the long walk redefining sustainability – have, with different emphasis, included the concept of livelihoods. One example is Agenda 21, stating that 'The long-term objective of enabling all people to achieve sustainable livelihoods should provide an integrating factor that allows policies to address issues of development,

sustainable resource management and poverty eradication simultaneously' (Krishna 2012: 13). The formulation is very clear: sustainable livelihoods is the horizon for which policies in various areas have to be defined and implemented. The content and shape of sustainable livelihoods have been defined by women through various process at local, national and international levels, in grassroots, in policy and in academic spaces (Harcourt 2012).

The Women's Tribunals on Gender and Climate Justice (Agostino and Lizarde 2012) are an example of the full participation of women on the definition of policies in response to climate change including a series of recommendations on women's rights to land, training, inputs and credit; recognition of traditional knowledge and traditional agricultural practices; ceasing to be owners and to become carers of the planet; moving towards production and consumption modes in harmony with the planet's capacities. Molly Scott Cato (2012) argues that in order to create sustainable livelihoods we must begin by reversing the process of separation from the land, and to start perceiving ourselves connected by social relationships and with our environment rather than by the markets. She further argues that a sustainable economy must be a cooperative economy and analyses why women tend to be more responsive to it. These are other examples that show how women have contributed at length towards a concept of sustainability that challenges the mainstream views analysed above and that continues to inform UN main spaces and development frameworks.

As argued at the beginning of this section, the New Urban Agenda resulting from the Habitat III Conference and the 2030 Development Agenda that includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are key documents in the mainstream response to the challenges posed by climate change. Although a new language that puts sustainability at the centre has been incorporated, the necessary move from development to livelihoods has not been achieved. Economic growth continues to be

at the very centre of the Development Goals. Goal 8 calls to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, and throughout the document there are various reference to growth as a condition for achieving the whole framework. The New Urban Agenda - a comprehensive document that mentions livelihoods, incorporates gender and cultural diversity as elements to be taken into account for the formulation of policy and calls for local governments to have an important role in the implementation - continues, nonetheless, to put economic growth at the centre. As stated in the section related to the Implementation Plan, and in particular around ‘Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all’, the document says in point 43:

We recognize that sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with full and productive employment and decent work for all, is a key element of sustainable urban and territorial development, and that cities and human settlements should be places of equal opportunities allowing people to live healthy, productive, prosperous and fulfilling lives’ (UN-Habitat 2016).

It is clear that the move from development (informed by accumulation and wealth) to livelihoods (informed by well-being and the harmonic relationship with nature) is still pending.

### **Human Rights Institutions and the new urban agenda**

Several members of FIO (Iberoamerican Federation of Ombudsman), including the Defensoria de Vecinas y Vecinos de Montevideo, under the coordination of the Ombudsman from Ecuador, participated actively during the preparatory process and at the Habitat Conference with the understanding that our institutions can contribute towards the definition and implementation of an urban agenda. The objectives of this participation were to visualise the role of the Human Rights Institutions in the promotion, protection and defence of human rights within the framework of the New Urban Agenda and to highlight the importance of having mechanisms of enforceability and

observance for the full exercise of all rights in the urban context. A document was collectively prepared to this effect (FIO 2016).

The challenges the Habitat Conference had to respond to were not new; they were those that have informed the existing international human rights frameworks and other spaces related to sustainable development. These frameworks have developed in response to persistent and growing inequalities, in particular in urban environments. The participating institutions identified as key challenges the increasing number of population in the urban space and the limits of the physical environment with respect to the growing demands imposed on it, not only associated to the number of the population but mainly to the prevailing modes of production and consumption and its associated consequences.

As human rights institutions the participation was informed by the need to work towards solutions beyond business as usual; to contribute to the recognition that the strategies carried out for decades failed, and will continue to fail even if they are formulated in a language in accordance with the dominant international discourses; to advocate for the inclusion of a multicultural human rights perspective that could allow for other existential ontologies, other cosmovisions, other knowledges (which as a result of the epistemic violence that has characterized the Western world, have been denied their capacity of contributing to the solution of the challenges we face as individuals, as collectives and as humanity) and to make inputs into the agenda. There was also a motivation to take on the epistemological challenge to imagine the cities in which we want to live and future generations can live full and satisfying lives. This relates to what Jordi Borja points out, saying that cities are the ideas about the cities, since the city is, above all, a construction that

is born of the thought, of the capacity to imagine a habitat, it is not only a construction under which to find shelter, not only a temple or a fortress as a manifestation of power

[...] To make the city is to order a space of relationship, is to build significant places of life in common (Borja 2013: 26).

### *Right to the city*

A key point for the FIO Human Rights Institutions was the idea that the New Urban Agenda must be based on a human rights approach, taking the Right to the City as the encompassing right. As part of the process, I was in charge of contributing with a gender perspective to the position document of FIO, and my contribution was informed by a feminist political ecology view.

According to the World Charter of the Right to the City<sup>8</sup> this right is interdependent with all internationally recognised human rights, including all civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights already regulated in international human rights treaties. The Charter also states that it is a collective right of all people living in cities, without discrimination on the basis of gender, age, health conditions, income, nationality, ethnicity, migratory status, political, religious or sexual orientation. It further says that the right to the city protects in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, giving them legitimacy of action and organisation, respect to their uses and customs, with the aim of achieving the full exercise of the right to self-determination and an adequate standard of living. The formulation of the Charter was the result of the active and articulated participation of various civil society movements and organisations over several years.

From an inclusion and gender perspective I highlighted two elements to bring into the debate: (i) the collective and democratic process of drawing up the Right to the City and (ii) the recognition of the particularities and differentiated needs of the population living in the cities. For an equitable use of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice as called

upon by the Charter, differentiated policies and affirmative programmes are needed that are constructed democratically and that guarantee the access of women -and other groups historically absent from decision-making processes over resources and policies- to all the rights that make up the right to the city<sup>9</sup> (Huairou Commission 2016). These key elements were part of the conceptualization and definition of human rights standards and a gender perspective in the urban context for which the following categories were suggested and included in the FIO document:

- Habitable city (including the rights to adequate housing, water and sanitation, energy, information and communication, mobility, public spaces and services, infrastructure, human security, convivial city, cultural diversity).
- Inclusive city (rights to equality and non-discrimination, to work, to public spaces and services, and infrastructure for all)
- Sustainable city (right to a healthy environment, sustainable and responsible management of public goods and services, care and protection of natural, cultural and historical heritage)
- Democratic city (right to participation, democratic management of the city, transparency, democratic and equitable enjoyment of the city)
- Educating city (right to collective construction of city and citizenship)

Beyond proposing these categories each associated to a series of rights, the document argued that the problems of urban development are issues related to the lack of standards that ensure the full exercise of human rights. It called, therefore, for the observance and enforceability of human rights in the areas of work established for Habitat III, in a context of equality and non-discrimination. Specifically, it talked about the need for Human Rights Institutions to propose, follow-up and monitor policies that ensure the inclusion of a diversity of perspectives; to work towards the



fulfilment of the right to the city and all its components according to cultural, historical, ethnic, gender, age, and social particularities. In this sense, it argued that one of the roles of the Defensorias is to cooperate with making visible other ways of doing, of interpreting and of being in the world. Relating this role to the construction of the New Urban Agenda, it called for the inclusion of these other ways as valid and relevant alternatives to be considered in order to move towards fair, equitable and sustainable ways of life.

### **Feminist Political Ecology and Care: challenging the agenda**

From a feminist political ecology standpoint, building a New Urban Agenda that is based on human rights and a gender perspective means much more than to mainstream these concepts into the agenda. It requires to critically engage with it and question it on the basis of these perspectives as well as to challenge the continuity of the dominant views, associated with production and growth. This includes, as mentioned in the previous sections, to incorporate the concrete contributions from women present in the United Nations conferences cycle in the 1990s, in particular at the Earth Summit from 1992, based on concepts linked to feminist political ecology and women and sustainability. As argued by Christa Wichterich

Ecology and sustainability are not gender neutral; the analysis of gender relations is vital for understanding the relationships between nature and society and for overcoming the environmental crisis; without gender justice there will be no environmental justice, no sustainability nor a good life for all (2012, p. 9).

It is from this perspective that a feminist political ecology view is key for a true transformation of the agenda.

*A feminist political ecology* view places gender as “a crucial variable -in relation to class, race and other relevant dimensions of political life- in constituting access to, control over, and knowledge

of natural resources” (Sundberg 2017: 1)<sup>10</sup>. It incorporates a gender analysis into the relationship, management and use of nature; the decision-making processes and socio-political forces that influence development and environmental policies; the links between ecology, economy and society; the culture- and knowledge- specific influences into sustainable practices; knowledge production related to nature (and processes by which some of these are made irrelevant by the dominant perspective in what constitutes epistemic violence); the relations between humans and non-humans; the symmetries of different forms of oppression and the domination of nature; among other dimensions. Feminist political ecology highlights the engagement of women as political actors with the capacity to produce relevant knowledge, implement creative and sustainable ways to relate to nature, question power relations that reproduce gender inequalities in decisions about environmental policies. Furthermore, it calls for a holistic approach in the relationship between human beings and nature, incorporating objectives of subsistence and sufficiency.

A key element in this approach is *care*. The word care only appears in the New Urban Agenda in relation to health-care but not as a category in itself. Care is an intrinsic function of ‘the social’ that has been historically associated to the feminine and that on occasions may become a burden linked to gender mandates, be devalued and made invisible in its contribution and relevance. It is important to incorporate a new view linked to the ethics of care, which opens the possibility to have hope for a better world, a world in which the community dimensions become central, where care is the basis for connections, not only among humans but also at the community level and with nature, contributing to more sustainable livelihoods, in as far as fulfilling needs is not exclusively linked to the markets (and to economic growth) but –and mainly - to reciprocity, to what we can do for each other, to solidarity. Carol Gilligan, as a cultural feminist, analysed the importance of the ethics of care as central to being human –moving away from the stereotypical presentation of it as a female trait –calling for society to ‘recognize for both sexes the central importance in adult

life of the connection between self and other, the universality of the need for compassion and care' (Gilligan 1985: 28). Deepening into the understanding of care, the philosopher Martin Heidegger has argued that care is an ontological phenomenon that is at the base of any interpretation of what it means to be human (Agostino 2015: 821–822).

These two concepts provide the ground to look at relations of differentiation and domination based on gender and at the essential aspects of caring and their impact on the environmental policies. As mentioned earlier, including a gender perspective in a new urban agenda also implies the need to question those dimensions of the agenda that give continuity to historically dominant views associated with productivity and growth, and to anchor the analysis on the political struggles of women in terms of rights, responsibilities and knowledge. Feminist thinking and practice have allowed us to challenge conventional wisdom regarding a variety of categories such as gender, sexuality, identity, the centrality of the monetary economy vis-à-vis the centrality of care; they have also promoted the incorporation of these dimensions into an intersectional approach from which new perspectives on possible worlds are articulated, including a non-Eurocentric human rights perspective anchored in interculturality.

From this point of view, also the categories presented by the FIO Human Rights institutions (habitable, inclusive, sustainable, democratic and educative city) can be redefined and enhanced under the perspective of feminist political ecology. The challenge is to think these categories holistically, in terms of individual physical characteristics, gender, age, place and location, communities and livelihoods, policies and environment. The following are examples of possibilities that open up as a result of incorporating this perspective: we move from talking about transport to talk about mobility and plan the city not on the basis of the rhythm of cars and the centrality of trade but on the ability of human beings (and their particular needs and aspirations)

to access and enjoy public spaces; water and sanitation become a category based on a guaranteed right at risk to be fulfilled due to the dominant economic model. From this point of view the access to water and sanitation for quotidian life is intertwined with the need to question extractivist modes of production that externalise costs (contamination of water and soil, impacts on health and environment), with clear differentiated impacts on women and men; women's particular concerns in relation to the access of sanitation associated to their responsibilities towards the household are recognised and drawn into the planning of the service provision. While governments tend to deliver only technical solutions, it is possible to promote ecological and other sanitation alternatives as part of citizen-state cooperation for which women tend to be more involved with; the right to a healthy diet within an urban environment implies various considerations related not only to what we eat but to where and how is this food produced and transported, how is the generated waste treated and recycled, whether industrial or ecological food production is prioritised; the role of women in all this chain is central and considering their participation and views contributes to questioning the centrality of the economy and the utilitarian view of nature.

From these few examples, the conclusion can be drawn that there is a major challenge to incorporate all dimensions of sustainability in the analysis of public policies, municipal programmes and services. This implies considering the externalities of economic activities or infrastructure projects that impact on nature, on the living conditions of women -who are often the most affected- and on future generations. The approach involves moving to new forms of sustainable management with greater citizen participation. In Uruguay for example it is possible to generate energy at the private level and connect to the grid. Similarly, people or groups could generate their own services, which requires a new (or existing but invisible) citizen culture of cooperation, use of public spaces to facilitate the response to certain demands from various practices –more space for organic production, popular kitchens, shops for free exchange of goods

and services, eco-shops, bicycle stations, shared cars, trips in common, etc. It also involves regulatory changes that make space for these practices. This requires as a condition to recognise that climate change and other problems associated with sustainability in cities do not find their resolution exclusively in science and technology and in the deployment of economic resources, but, fundamentally, in daily life accompanied by public policies that enable and favour other ways of doing, of interpreting and of being in the world. The practices of women who have engaged themselves with a critical gender analysis of the relationship between dominant economic models and nature<sup>11</sup> are a fundamental contribution in this regard.

### **Implementing other views at the local level**

In this section I will share some examples of concrete actions, proposals for public policies and other measures taken by the Defensoria as a result of trying to translate into concrete actions the ideas, views and commitments shared above. The proposals have been organised following the categories proposed by the FIO Institutions at Habitat III<sup>12</sup>.

#### *Habitable city*

- For the last eight years, the Defensoria has been coordinating an interinstitutional group on '**abandoned houses**'. The aim is to promote the possession of these houses by the authorities to secure social housing for those in need of it, with a perspective of inclusion and sustainability guaranteeing the right to the centrality of the city, as opposed to the tendency to expand into areas without services.
- Following a demand from a group of neighbours in an area of the city without sewer systems, in 2015 the Defensoria presented a recommendation to the departmental government for the implementation of **ecological sanitation systems**. The grounding for

this Recommendation was the right to water and sanitation combined with the recognition of other knowledges and the importance of people's participation in the carrying out of alternatives. Although it was not implemented, it generated extensive debate, articulation with other policy makers at departmental and national level as well as academic researchers, and a commitment by various stake holders to continue working on the basis of the Recommendation.

- The Defensoria is a member of the Consultative Council on **Public Transport**, representing the interest of users. Our participation has the aim to promoting public transport vis-à-vis the growing usage of private cars, and to include a gender perspective in transport policies.

#### *Inclusive city*

- **Acoustic contamination** is one of the major complaints presented at the Defensoria. We have made several recommendations, in particular associated to places of night entertainment and their impact on the environment, which were taken and included into proposals of new legislation. Also as a result of recommendations from our Institution, this legislation includes clauses on **non-discrimination and prohibition of sexist content or images** in relation to the right of access and permanence in various types of establishments.
- **Sustainable city.** We worked together with the departmental government on endemic waste dumps in public spaces recovering them by neighbours (mainly women and youth) and social organisations through art. We are also working in the long term in the issue of waste management, promoting classification at source, composting and moving towards the concept of **Zero Waste**.

- In articulation with the departmental and municipal governments and agroecology networks, we have created a **Healthy Montevideo Space** (conceived as a place where healthy and communal ways of life are presented and opportunities for exchanging and interacting are created, including organic production, natural nutrients and products, sensitisation on gender and diversity, etc.).
- We propose, through annual and other reports, articulations and presentations, to incorporate the dimension of **sustainability in the analysis of all departmental policies, municipal permits, and services**. This implies considering the externalities of economic activities or infrastructure projects that impact on nature, on the living conditions of citizens and on future generations.

#### *Democratic city*

The Defensoria promotes debate and has become a reference in the city with respect to the protection of the **public space as a privileged scenario for democracy**.

#### *Educating city*

- Since 2013, more than 500 people have been trained by the Defensoria in **community mediation**, promoting a culture of peaceful resolution of conflicts incorporating a gender perspective. Those trained included inspectors from the departmental government, community policemen and policewomen, departmental and municipal officials, community leaders, educators, neighbourhood councillors, among others.

In all the examples shared, women have been at the centre of the processes. First of all, as it was already stated, they represent over 60% of all the cases we receive at the Defensoria. Secondly,

when we analyse how the various issues that we deal with impact on the population, the role of women in the care economy makes them the ones mostly affected by the implementation of urban policies. And thirdly, women tend to be the ones mostly involved in community groups and local initiatives. Looking at those examples it can be seen that all of them refer, in one way or another, to relations of power in the use, access and control of nature. The analysis of those relations, combined with the concern for a balance between environmental, social and economic dimensions, and the permanent awareness of the differentiated impact on women and men, informs all the decisions we take in terms of the areas we prioritise, the course of actions we decide upon, the alliances and articulations we build and work on. We aim at implementing the proposals and recommendations together with the women and men that come to our institution, recognising in them political actors, with the capacity to produce relevant knowledge, and implement creative and sustainable alternatives.

### **Final reflections**

In this paper I have tried to analyse how to contribute towards the construction of a new urban agenda from a feminist political ecology and care perspective. I have done this on the basis of my concrete experience as the head of the Ombudsinstitution from Montevideo, the Defensoria de Vecinas y Vecinos, an institution that I presented and described as *a place of hospitality*. Throughout the article I brought in what I believe are the essential characteristics of such a place, aiming to contribute to the fulfilment of citizen's human rights. I emphasised the need to a multicultural approach of human rights which values diversity and overcomes the imposition of mainstream views on policies and programmes influenced by the centrality of economics and technical solutions. I highlighted as well how care is an intrinsic function of the social and the basis for interactions and connections among human beings at the community level and with



nature, impacting on the long term responses that we can provide to social, economic and ecological challenges. I also brought up the particular readings of the urban demands put forward by citizens and the responses that incorporating a gender policy and a sustainability approach into our work allowed for. Efforts were made throughout the article to highlight that the gender and sustainability concepts that guide our work result from embracing the views put forward by post-development and feminist political ecology. It is as a result of this engagement that the tasks entrusted to an institution like the Defensoria (and other human rights institutions with which we have worked towards Habitat III) have been redefined allowing for the implementation –or recommendation for the implementation- of policies and programmes that aim at the well-being of citizens on the basis of their diversity. This is an ongoing task for which feminist political ecology provides an ideal framework to read – and promote – quotidian practices aiming at building sustainable, caring and equitable cities.

## References

-Agostino, A., 2007. Post-development: Unveiling clues for a possible future. *In: A. Ziai, ed. Exploring Post-Development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 197–211

-Agostino, A. and Lizarde, R., 2012. Gender and climate justice. *In: W. Harcourt, ed. Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods: Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 257–265.

-Agostino, A., 2015. Climate justice and women’s agency: Voicing other ways of doing things. *In: R. Bakash and W. Harcourt, eds. The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*. New York: Oxford University Press, 815–836.

-Borja, J., 2003. *La Ciudad Conquistada*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

- Constenla, C.R., 2016. La naturaleza municipal del Defensor del Pueblo. *In: Defensorias Locales: Su Aporte a la Gestion Municipal y Departamental*. DVVM, DPBA, ILO, 82–99.
- Cato, M.S., 2012. Your sharing co-op. *In: W. Harcourt, ed. Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods. Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 109–124.
- Dankelman, I. and Davidson, J., 1988. *Women and Environment in the Third World: Alliance for the Future*. London: Earthscan.
- Dankelman, I., 2012. Women advocating for sustainable livelihoods and gender equality on the global stage. *In: W. Harcourt, ed. Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods: Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 29–41.
- Douthwaite, R., 1992. *The Growth Illusion: How Economic Growth Has Enriched the Few, Impoverished the Many, and Endangered the Planet*. Dublin: Green Books
- Dufourmantele, A. and Derrida, J., 1997. *Of Hospitality*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Escobar, A., 1987. *Power and Visibility: The Invention and Management of Development in the Third World*. Berkeley: University of California.
- FIO, 2016. *Las Instituciones de Derechos Humanos y la Nueva Agenda Urbana* Quito, Ecuador: FIO.
- Galaverna, A., 2016. Defensoria del Pueblo de Bariloche, Argentina. *In: Defensorias Locales: Su aporte a la Gestion Municipal y Departamental*. DVVM, DPBA, ILO., 153–161.
- Gilligan, C., 1985. In a different voice: Women's Conceptions of self and morality. *In: H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine, eds. The Future of Difference* [online]. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Available from: <http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/sfxxx/documents/gilligan.pdf> [Accessed 5 February 2013]
- Hamington, M., 2010. Towards a theory of feminist hospitality. *Feminist Formations* [online], 22 (1), 21–38.

- Harcourt, W. and Escobar, A., 2002. Women and the politics of place. *Development*, 45 (1), 7–14.
- Harcourt, W., ed., 2012. *Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods. Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harcourt, W. and Nelson, I.L., eds., 2015. *Practising Feminist Political Ecologies: Moving Beyond the 'Green Economy'*. London: Zed Books.
- Krishna, S., 2012. Redefining sustainable livelihoods. In: W. Harcourt, ed. *Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods. Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 125–141.
- Martine, G. and Villarreal, M., 1997. *Gender and Sustainability: Re-assessing Linkages and Issues* Rome: FAO.
- Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J. and William, W.W., 1972. *The Limits to Growth. A Report for The Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New York: Universe Books.
- OSAGI, 2002. *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. New York: UN. Available from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/e65237.pdf> [Accessed 18.11.2017]
- OURs Working Group, AWID, 2017. *Rights at Risk: The Observatory of the University of Rights Trends Report 2017* Toronto: AWID.
- Pearce, D. and Atkinson, G., 1998. *Development: An Evaluation of its Usefulness Ten Years After Brundtland*. CSERGE Working Paper PA 98-02, Norwich, UK: CSERGE.
- Perez Aguirre, L., 1998. *Si Digo Educar para Los Derechos Humanos. Dehuidela* 15, 50–56. Available from: <https://es.slideshare.net/mariaeugeniaraodaoroman/perez-aquirre> [Accessed 18.11.2017]
- Rahnema, M. and Bawtree, V., 1997. *The Post-Development Reader*. London: Zed Books.
- Robinson, J., 2004. Squaring the circle? Some thoughts on the idea of sustainable development. *Ecological Economics*, 48, 369–384. Available from:

<http://ipidumn.pbworks.com/f/SquaringtheCircleSustainableDevelopment.pdf> [Accessed 05.06.2017]

-Rocheleau, D., Thomas-Slayter, B. and Wangari, E., 2013. Gender and Environment. A feminist political ecology perspective. *In: D. Rocheleau, B. Thomas-Slayter and E. Wangari, eds. Feminist political ecology: Global issues and local experience.* London: Routledge, 3–23.

-Sachs, W., 1992. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power.* London: Zed Books.

-Santos, B.S., 2002. Toward a multicultural conception of human rights [online]. *In: B. Hernández-Truyol, ed. Material imperialism: A critical anthology.* New York: New York University Press, 39–60. Available from: [http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/toward\\_multicultural\\_conception\\_human\\_rights.pdf](http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/toward_multicultural_conception_human_rights.pdf) [Accessed 05.06.2017 ]

-Schumacher, E.F., 1973. *Small is Beautiful. Economics as if People Mattered.* New York: Harper and Row.

-Shiva, V., 1988. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development.* London: Zed Books.

-Sundberg, J., 2017. Feminist political ecology [online]. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0804> [Accessed 18.11.2017]

-Taylor, C., 1997. *The Ethics of Authenticity.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

-UN General Assembly, 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* New York: UN General Assembly. Available from: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

-UNDP, 1992. *Human Development Report 1992.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-UNDP, 2012. *Uruguay: Sustentabilidad y Equidad: Material Complementario del Informe Sobre Desarrollo Humano 2011.* Uruguay: UNDP.

- UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development, Habitat III, 2016. *Draft outcome document*. Available from:

[http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-New-Urban-Agenda-10-September-2016\\_95815.pdf](http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-New-Urban-Agenda-10-September-2016_95815.pdf) [Accessed 22.02.2017]

-UN General Assembly, 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: UN General Assembly. Available from: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

-UN General Assembly, 2012. *The Future We Want*. Resolution 66/288. New York: UN General Assembly.

--UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012. *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*. New York: UN. Available from:

[http://www.acp.int/sites/acpsec.waw.be/files/GSP\\_Report\\_web\\_final.pdf](http://www.acp.int/sites/acpsec.waw.be/files/GSP_Report_web_final.pdf)

=Wichterich, C., 2012. *The Future We Want: A Feminist Perspective*. *Publication Series on Ecology*, 21. Berlin: Heinrich Boell Stiftung.

=World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. *Our Common Future* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the days that I was writing this article, the name of the institution was changed in a session of the Legislative Body of Montevideo. The proposal was presented by our institution on the grounds of inclusive language. The Spanish language uses the masculine as such and also as generic, leading to the feminine to be invisible on many occasions. The institution was called Defensoria del Vecino, which refers in singular to the masculine of neighbour. The new name, voted by 19 in 30 of the departmental legislators, is 'Defensoria de Vecinas y Vecinos de Montevideo', making the feminine explicit.

<sup>2</sup> See more at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/StatusOfNationalInstitutions.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> As a reaction to the enjoyment by growing sectors of society, particularly of rights related to gender and diversity, conservative movements are increasingly engaged locally and internationally with the aim 'to undercut the objectives and operation of human rights systems, transform the human rights framework, and transmit new rights norms infused with their values and messaging' (OURs Working Group, AWID 2017, p. 12).

<sup>4</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary.

<sup>5</sup> Red de Defensorias de Mujeres de la Federacion Iberoamericana de Ombudsman.

---

<sup>6</sup> As part of this recognition, during the last assembly of the Iberoamerican Federation of Ombudsmen in November 2016, the Defensoria was elected global coordinator of the Women Defenders.

<sup>7</sup> Other international instruments adopted in this period are in line, in their formulations, with the centrality of a sustainable development approach, such as the process of Financing for Development (FfD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

<sup>8</sup> Carta Mundial por el Derecho a la Ciudad, <http://www.hic-al.org/documentos/cartaderechociudad.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Red Hábitat (2010), Taller de Proyectos e Investigación del Hábitat Urbano-Rural. *Género, Vivienda y Hábitat: Estado de Situación en Bolivia y Propuesta de índice de cumplimiento del Derecho a un Hábitat y a una Vivienda Adecuados con Perspectiva de Género*. Bolivia: La Paz. From page 58, Conclusiones, discusiones sobre la construcción del índice.

<sup>10</sup> See also Rocheleau *et al.* 2013, Harcourt and Nelson 2015

<sup>11</sup> Examples of these could be found in the experiences shared by the Women's Tribunals on Gender and Climate Justice, as well as from the analysis of women's contribution on sustainability cited throughout this text. It is important to say, though, that further research on concrete practices by women in different contexts within a variety of social, economic, ethnic and other dimensions can contribute to a deeper understanding of feminist political ecology contribution to the building of a new urban agenda. In this respect, research in relation to the work done by the Defensoria with respect to the provision of municipal services and women's engagement is planned for 2019.

<sup>12</sup> See page 24.