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The Research Incubator Program

Final Report

ORGANISINGCITIES
Organising the 21st century city

Organising the 21st Century City

Final Report

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Introduction and Thanks

This is the final report for this project, funded by the Henry Halloran Trust Incubator Scheme from 2017-2019. The report provides a recap of the aims and methods of the project, a brief outline of key findings, and a summary of key outputs and future directions.

We are incredibly grateful to the Henry Halloran Trust for its support of this research – not only the significant financial investment that has made the research possible, but also the intellectual and personal support that we have received especially from Peter Phibbs, Kim Beecroft, and Ann Forsyth (the academic advisor to the Trust).

We would also like to express our gratitude to other supporters of this project, who have included:
- The Sydney Policy Lab, who provided significant financial and staff support in the final year of the project, and financial support to extend Amanda's employment for a fourth year in 2020;
- The Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre, which funded the researchers' workshop in 2018;
- Settlement Services International and The Peace and Justice Office (Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney), both of whom have made significant financial contributions to the project.

Project Summary

In a growing number of cities, citizens are channelling frustration with existing citizen engagement processes into the creation of new citizenship infrastructures that bring together diverse civil society actors to articulate and pursue common interests. The intention of these infrastructures is to enable citizens to play a proactive role in the shaping of their cities, as an alternative to the reactive role they are often ascribed in existing governance and planning frameworks. That is, these are infrastructures designed to build and enact 'people power' in the city. Through desk-based mapping and qualitative case studies, the project examined people power movements in cities by exploring their global extent, their different forms and activities, their relationship to existing forms of citizen participation in existing structures of urban governance and planning, and their effectiveness as infrastructures for citizen engagement and empowerment. The research aims to contribute to scholarly understanding of citizen participation in urban governance, and make significant practical contributions to both urban agencies charged with citizen consultation and the efforts of citizens who engaged in urban alliances in their cities as a means to democratise urban governance.

Our Research

In the first phase of the research, we conducted a desk-based study designed to capture the breadth of urban alliances in cities across the world, in all their diversity. In this phase, we identified over 120 urban alliances, and developed profiles of these alliances through analysis of internet resources and follow-up phone interviews. Many of these alliances were identified through their participation in regional or global networks – such as the formally-constituted Industrial Areas Foundation, and the more loosely-constituted Fearless Cities network.

We then explored the different models of 'people power' that they used through a series of in-depth case studies. We have conducted in-depth field work of urban citizenship in action in Austin, Barcelona, Cape Town, Hong Kong, London, Moscow, and Sydney. Alliances in these cities have been focused on a wide range of issues, from housing dispossession and affordability, to other urban issues such as transport and sustainable energy, through to broader procedural issues of urban governance and democracy.

Key Findings

It is easy to be dazzled by this incredible variety of issues that are the focus of citizen action, and the myriad practices in which citizens engage in trying to address those issues. As Melucci identified, research into citizen action and social movements can suffer from the 'myopia of the visible' – focusing only on visible moments of explosive confrontation, but ignoring the way in which 'the visible action of contemporary movements depends upon their production of new cultural codes within submerged networks'.[1] As such, in our analysis of field data, we sought to develop an understanding of these deeper 'cultural codes' – we have asked, what are the political imaginaries and approaches to social change that inform the diverse actions of urban alliances working on diverse issues? These imaginaries and approaches shape both the organisational forms of urban alliances, and the choices they make about issues and action.

Through our research, we have identified five related, but distinct, strategic approaches used by movements and civic organisations in cities to coordinate citizen action and build citizen power. Borrowing from language first used in the anti-Marcos uprising in the Philippines, and now commonly used across global civil society[2] – we call these different types of *people power*. They are – playing the game, mobilising, organising, prefiguring and parties. Each of these forms of people power define 'power' in different ways, while using different practices and cultures to generate and enact that power.

Playing the game is a form of people power where people individually or collectively use the formal avenues of democratic participation to influence their city. Examples include people's use of formal planning process to lodge objections, and/or participation in a consultation processes within a strategic planning exercise. This form of power draws authority from the state in democratic contexts. As such, they can be relatively uncontroversial, safe to utilise and difficult to completely ignore. The weakness of this approach is that the rules of 'the game' – like timelines and the scope of intervention – are set by the decision maker.[3] And the game is played most easily by those with the resources to participate, like the educated middle class and well-resourced organisations.

Mobilising is the most visible form of people power. It seeks to build and enact power through turning people out to protest events like a large march or a stunt, often staged at symbolic

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[1] Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

[2] Ali, S. (2019). How do you measure people power? *MobLab: Moblisation Lab*, 17 September 2019. **https://mobilisationlab.org/stories/how-do-you-measure-people-power/**, Accessed 3 March 2020.

[3] Tully, J. (1999). The agonic freedom of citizens, *Economy and Society*, 28(2): 161-182.

sites to attract media attention. Mobilising tends to conceive of power quantitatively – signified by the number of participants and/or the amount of media coverage.[4] Mobilising often mixes digital and face-to-face communication to turn people out to events.[5] The strength of mobilising is that it is fast, able to bring people together quickly in the face of a threat. But these networks can be hard to sustain over time. Mobilising often reacts to a crisis, demonstrating outrage – turning people out via a shared determination to declare 'no' – but frequently struggles to identify a widely agreed, concrete solution to a problem.

Organising is a type of people power built by connected and skilled leaders, capable of collective action through their involvement in institutions and alliances.[6] Organising focuses on supporting and connecting leaders by rebuilding institutions as spaces that can anchor democratic practice. Broad-based community organising cultivates networks of diverse institutions across a city in order to build unusual coalitions that can stand for the whole of the city and develop positive solutions to problems. The strength of organising is its focus on supporting organic leadership amongst working class, poor and non-white communities. Organisers argue leaders are not just born, but made through the invisible networks of support identified by Melucci. But there are weaknesses. Organising is very slow and local, and it can be hard to scale intentional leadership networks to amass sufficient power to make systemic change on big issues. It can also be hard to identify powerful demands within diverse broad-based networks, where compromise between groups risks demands becoming lowest common denominator.

Prefiguring is a form of people power where people demonstrate, model, or 'prefigure', what they want to change in the city. Instead of demanding that the state act, prefiguring is a form of withdrawal and construction, where people act out in the present what they want to see in the world.[7] Prefiguring disrupts an understanding of what is possible. It is frequently used in occupations like those in Spain and New York following the Arab Spring in 2011 – where the occupations embodied forms of democratic decision-making – modelling their goal of 'real democracy'.[8] A key strength of a prefigurative people power is that the propaganda is the deed, the people's activity authentically tells the story of what they want and demonstrates it is possible. A weakness is that prefiguring requires people to take a high-barrier action. For instance, staging an occupation is often illegal, and maintaining it requires a lot of work to reproduce simple needs like eating and sleeping. Occupations can result in exhaustion and burnout.

Parties is the people power strategy of forming parties contest elections and run for office. Power comes from using the levers of the state directly to make change in the city. Political parties are a distinctive form of social organisation with a close relationship to the state, and this has seen them excluded from most social movement literature, examined separately in electoral studies.[9] This a somewhat arbitrary division, increasingly problematic since the financial crisis in 2008, after which there has been a rapid expansion of new political parties that are constituted at the urban scale, and focused squarely on issues like housing.[10] Not only

[4] Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the internet age.* Cambridge, Polity Press; Chenowerth, E. and M. Stephen (2011). *Why civil resistance works: the strategic logic of nonviolent Conflict.* New York Chichester, Columbia University Press.

[5] Bennett, L. and A. Segerberg (2013). *The Logic of Connected Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics.* New York, Cambridge University Press.

[6] Chambers, E. (2003). *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for power, action and justice.* New York, Continuum; McAlevey, J. (2016). *No Shortcuts: Organising for power in the new guilded age.* New York, Oxford University Press.

[7] Hodkinson, S. (2012). "The return of the housing question." *Ephemera* **12**(4): 423-444; Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London, Verso.

[8] Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the internet age.* Cambridge, Polity Press.

[9] McAdam, D. and S. Tarrow (2010). "Ballott and Barricades: on the reciprocal relationship between elections and social movements." Perspectives on Politics 8(2): 529-542.

10 Barcelona en Comb et al. (2019). Fearless cities: a guide to the global municipalist movement. Oxford, UK, New Internationalist.

are voting strategies important in their own right, but there is often a transfer of strategy between movements and parties (or in our vernacular, an exchange between people power strategies), while also noting that these boundaries can be sites of hostility. One of the strengths of a political party is that they hold together an agenda ('a coalition of interests'), rather than a single issue or single constituency.[11] But parties can depart from the interests of their core constituencies to pursue a majority constituency to win elections. Party power can be limited by the scale of political decision-making space. City governments are not all the same size, many are not coterminous with the metropolitan area, and there are often jurisdictional limits on city power.

A summary of these approaches and their distinctions is outlined in Table 1. In our work, we do not seek to advocate for one of these strategies over the others, nor to arrange them in a pre-defined hierarchy. Rather, our framework is designed to help discern the diverse strategies that citizens are using across different urban contexts and struggles, while providing a set of concepts that allows that diversity to be drawn into constructive dialogue and comparison across contexts.

Empirically, we have approached this in two related ways. First, we have conducted a **series of city-based case studies**, examining the ways in which individual urban alliances have tried to combine (or not) different people power strategies in their work across a range of issues. Second, we have conducted a series of **issue-based case studies**, comparing the people power strategies that have been deployed by a range of movements to address a shared issue, such as housing affordability (see Project Outputs below).

Table 1: Five forms of People Power Strategy

	Definition	Understand power	Features
Playing the game	Formal democratic participation	Participate and express ideas	Culture set by the decision maker
Mobilising	Explosive mass protest action	More (people) is more (power)	Fast, lots of activity, say no.
Organising	Rebuild civil society	Strong leaders in strong institutions connected, acting	Slow, intentional. How you win matters. Solutions
Prefiguring	Be the change you need	Model what is possible	Deep engagement – reproduce food/rest and politics
Parties	Use the state to make change directly	Get elected to make change, influence electoral space	Winning, pragmatism, compromise if necessary

Project Outputs

Given our explicit intention to engage with different audiences, including practitioners and planners as well as urban scholars and students, we have used a range of dissemination strategies.

Engagement with practitioners

In line with the collaborative design of the project and our engagement with a range of partners, we were determined not only to 'extract' information from our informants, but also to

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11 DEAN, J. (2016). CROWDS AND PARTY. LONDON, VERSO.

provide opportunities for practitioners to engage with us and with one another in the course of the research.

Along with informal exchanges throughout the project, this culminated in 2019's **Global Gathering**, at which over 20 practitioners from Austin, Barcelona, Brisbane, Cape Town, Hong Kong, London, Nottingham and Sydney spend a week together in an intensive workshop at the University of Sydney to discuss and debate the key learnings from the research. An early version of our 'people power' framework was tested with this group, and further refined through the workshop.

Amanda has also developed and delivered training on people power strategies drawing on the findings of the research. To date, she has provided workshops for a range of civil society organisations and networks, including a session on People Power Strategies for 100 Australian community leaders via zoom at the 'Organising in a Pandemic Training 2020 (which is also available as an edited video); a presentation to the Citizens UK Guild of Organisers in May 2020; a session featuring our case studies in Barcelona and Cape Town at the Australian Progress Conference 2020. In 2019, Amanda delivered MasterClasses in Electoral Power – applying findings from this research. Three all day workshops were delivered to over 150 people in Sydney and Brisbane.

Public Engagement

We have used a range of strategies to disseminate research findings to a broad public audience.

The most successful of these has been Amanda's *ChangeMakers* podcast. This has featured several case studies from the project, and highlighted the support of the Trust. This podcast has achieved high levels of engagement and reach through social media, since July 2017 it has had over 500,000 downloads, 60% of which have been in Australia (its largest international audiences are the US, then UK, Canada, then NZ). *ChangeMakers* also has a large social media following: on Facebook it has an average monthly reach of over 750,000 people, with a page following of over 10,000 people. Episodes are currently also used by several university-based academics and civil society organisations as part of their education and training materials. The ChangeMakers podcast from 2017-19 has also been registered as a non-traditional research output with IRMA.

We have also given several public-facing talks drawing on our research. This has included presentations at the 2018 and 2019 *Festivals of Urbanism*, and two major *Sydney Ideas* events that coincided with both the Researcher Workshop in 2018 and the Global Gathering in 2019.

Alongside *ChangeMakers* and these events, we have written several opinion pieces in *The Conversation* and elsewhere. Our pieces in the Conversation were widely disseminated, with our first of four Hong Kong articles in August 2019 downloaded over 120,000 times, being the third most viewed article from the University of Sydney that month. We have also spoken to several media outlets about our work. For instance, our invited practitioners were profiled in a feature article on urban activism published in *The Guardian* to coincide with the Global Gathering in 2019, we have appeared several times on ABC Breakfast and we were interviewed for a recent episode of *Philosopher's Zone* on ABC Radio National.

Academic Outputs

There have been some initial academic outputs, but the most significant outputs are still in production for completion in 2020.

Published chapters, articles, books:

- Iveson, K. and Tattersall, A. (2020) "The promise and practice of urban alliances", in Turner, B. et al (eds) *Urban Change and Citizenship in Times of Crisis: Volume 3 Figurations of Conflict and Resistance*, Routledge.
- Fincher, R., Iveson, K., Preston, V., Leitner., H. (2020) *Everyday Equalities: Making Multiculture in Settler Colonial Cities*, University of Minnesota Press (this included a chapter drawing on research into the Sydney Alliance).
- Tattersall, A. (2018) "How do we build power in coalition? Rethinking union-community coalition types 12 years on", *Labour and Industry*, 28(1): 68-81.

Publications in review/preparation include:

- Tattersall, A. and Iveson, K. "People power strategies in contemporary housing movements", submitted to ***International Journal of Housing Policy*** July 2020.
- We have a complete draft manuscript for an edited book called ***Democratising Cities***, under review with University of Georgia Press. This book will include a jointly-authored introduction, and separate chapters from both Amanda and Kurt. It pulls together contributions to the 2018 Researchers Workshop held in Sydney.
- We are working on a jointly-authored book provisionally entitled ***People Power in the City***. A prospectus for this book is in the final stages of preparation. This book will develop the arguments and cases already assembled in the 40,000 word report prepared for the Global Gathering held in Sydney late 2019. We anticipate finalising the first draft of the manuscript by the end of 2020.