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COMPARATIVE URBAN RESEARCH FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Co-Production For Sustainability

EDITED BY
DAVID SIMON HENRIETTA PALMER
AND JAN RIISE

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CBO	community-based organisation
CTLIP	Cape Town Local Interaction Platform
GOLIP	Gothenburg Local Interaction Platform
KLIP	Kisumu Local Interaction Platform
LIP	Local Interaction Platform
MUF	Mistra Urban Futures
NUA	New Urban Agenda
QME	quality monitoring and evaluation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SKLIP	Skåne Local Interaction Platform
SMLIP	Sheffield–Manchester Local Interaction Platform
SWM	solid waste management
TOD	transport-oriented development

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SEVEN

Participatory cities from the ‘outside in’: the value of comparative learning

Beth Perry and Bert Russell

Introduction

Recent academic work on comparison has decentred strict comparative studies, where the aim is to produce generalisable knowledge on the basis of seeking standardised units of analysis and careful control of variables. While such work continues to be important and has its place in generating better evidence about ‘what works’ beyond single case studies, attention has turned to other forms of comparison, as explored in [Chapter Two](#). Increasingly, the emphasis has been on the purpose of comparison beyond generalisation, with a specific focus on the value of learning. One conceptualisation describes the ‘import mirror’ view (May and Perry, 2010: 249) which suggests that ‘the project of comparative analysis is worthwhile because in producing findings on the practices of other countries, we are better able to see the basis of our own practices’. Through this lens, we can reflect on our social systems and cultural ways of behaving, which take different social contexts and cultural practices into account. These ideas also underpin

Colin McFarlane's work, which emphasises the importance of comparison and learning for political strategies and progressive urbanism (McFarlane, 2011).

Reframing what we mean by comparison, and how it is undertaken, is particularly important given the increasing focus on engaging stakeholders meaningfully in the design, conduct and analysis of research in the context of the 'co-productive turn'. Recent work emphasises how co-produced methodologies need to be sufficiently open in their design (Perry et al, 2019) to be 'palpably affected' (Fung and Wright, 2001) by participants. As elaborated in relation to diverse research designs in earlier chapters, even where there may be an initial standardisation of approach, co-production introduces potential differentiation in design and method according to the needs of local stakeholders.

Questions must also be raised about who is supported to undertake comparison in co-production projects. International travel has traditionally been accepted as part of the legitimate work of academia, while local government officials and civil society members do not have access to the same resources or permissions to travel and have been under greater pressure to defend such decisions. Who owns and benefits from comparison and how this enables action on the ground are key challenges for those involved in co-produced research.

This chapter documents an alternative approach to co-producing comparison to draw out the value of collaborative comparative learning. The chapter contributes an otherwise overlooked perspective to the themes in the book by setting out how to support urban policy makers in comparative learning that can help them better understand and reflect on their own policy and practice. It draws on a knowledge exchange activity organised as part of the Mistra Urban Futures work stream on Participatory Cities to provide a lens on the wider issues. The activity involved two local government officials, two academics and two citizens of Greater Manchester (GM), UK, forming a delegation to the November 2018 International

Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) conference held in Barcelona. The delegation attended sessions, organised a joint workshop and identified key learning points from the conference to share in Greater Manchester. Data are drawn from a transcript of a reflective discussion among the six delegation members to highlight stakeholder views on the types and value of comparative learning. Four themes are identified: learning about participatory democracy; reflecting on policy and practice; grounding progress in international perspective; and opening the horizons of possibility.

The chapter concludes that the purpose of comparison in co-production is not only about the production of generalisable knowledge. In keeping with the ethos of 'doing with' and 'not to', involving urban officials and stakeholders in the generation of comparative insights, can enable learning from the outside in. By 'outside in', we mean using insights from other urban settings to better understand conditions, constraints, limits and possibilities in one's own context. Enabling local stakeholders to participate directly in comparative learning activities accelerates the transfer of relevant lessons that may support the realisation of more just cities.

While co-production often aspires to engage stakeholders throughout the whole knowledge process, the chapter argues that comparative learning should be prioritised over more specialised aspects of the research process, such as data analysis or academic writing, especially when there are limits on stakeholders' ability to commit time and resources to research. The chapter evidences the value of comparative learning from the 'outside in' and the need to find novel mechanisms to open up policy imaginations. Transdisciplinary co-production has a role to play in ensuring that comparison can benefit urban officials in their decision making in the context of increasingly limited resources and constraints. In line with the ethos of this book, the chapter has been written to appeal to a wide audience, drawing on academic ideas to stimulate wider reflection on the process and value of comparative policy learning.

Towards ‘meaningful participation’

In an epoch where inequality is becoming increasingly severe on a global scale (Piketty, 2013), and in which far-right nationalisms and populism are becoming dominant, the search for solutions that are just – in both process and outcomes – is as urgent as ever. The search for the just city (Fainstein, 2013) means taking seriously urban structural and institutional conditions and governance arrangements. Attention must be paid to the organisation of cities, foregrounding questions around the design and ownership of municipal institutions. Different forms of citizen participation, ranging from citizen involvement in urban planning processes through to municipal energy strategies, neighbourhood budgets or citizen juries, have been supported by local governments. However, in the context of multiple challenges to the idea of the ‘nation state’ and variable decentralisation and devolution efforts, greater citizen engagement has adopted an almost panacea-like character, capable ‘not only ... of addressing issues of poverty and social justice; it is also a means of tackling the growing democratic deficit that is now widely discussed in both “mature” and “emerging” democracies’ (Gaventa, 2004: 26).

The New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

As detailed in [Chapter Six](#), acknowledgement of the importance of participation and the role of local governments has been embedded in both the United Nations’ New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Running through the NUA is a clear commitment that its vision requires the ‘empowering [of] all individuals and communities while enabling their full and meaningful participation’ (UN-Habitat, 2016, para 26). This is made most explicit in one of the ‘transformative commitments for sustainable urban development’, which asserts the primacy of:

... promoting institutional, political, legal and financial mechanisms in cities and human settlements to broaden inclusive platforms, in line with national policies, that allow *meaningful* participation in decision-making, planning and follow-up processes for all, as well as enhanced civil engagement and co-provision and co-production. (UN-Habitat, 2016: 14, emphasis added)

Similarly, SDG 16 focuses on 'ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'. However, while the NUA and SDGs should be considered as 'an achievement in terms of bringing global attention to the critical importance of cities for humanity and its future', there appears to be a 'deliberate vagueness in the indicator framework' that suggests the urban SDG – and perhaps the wider SDG framework – is best approached 'as a "proxy" and policy tool, a way to simplify critical issues for the purposes of clarity and activism' (Klopp and Petretta, 2017: 96). Notwithstanding such concerns, a central message from international frameworks is to take the conditions for participation and inclusion of citizens in decision making seriously, as enabling wider sustainable urban transformations.

From co-production to comparison and back again

For these reasons, one of the comparative projects supported by Mistra Urban Futures focused on Participatory Cities. Workshops were held in 2017 in Kisumu, Kenya, that aimed to identify and support common cross-cutting themes around which international comparative work could be developed, with the aspiration of adding value to local projects already under way. The Participatory Cities workshop was attended by over 30 academic and city representatives from Cape Town, Kisumu, Malmö/Skåne, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Sheffield. The workshop was structured around presentations, discussions and workshop exercises to tease out the cultural

and epistemic differences in how participation was understood, researched and developed in practice across all six urban contexts.

As noted in other chapters, the initiation of comparative work was influenced by a number of constraining factors, largely relating to the fact that the majority of resources had already been allocated to local co-production projects by each local partnership. Limited additional networking funds were available centrally. Participatory Cities was developed as a series of related work streams, to pull together existing activity on participation in urban governance, decision making and planning from across the different Mistra Urban Futures Local Interaction Platforms (LIPs) – see [Chapter One](#).

The development of comparative work in Phase Two of Mistra Urban Futures was layered on top of existing local co-production work. A critical consideration was therefore what value international perspectives could add to each local interaction platform. Rather than initiate new projects, this meant overlaying local work, co-designed with urban stakeholders, with an international dimension (see Simon et al, 2018). Three different approaches were used: twinning, comparative interviewing and international policy exchanges.

Given that local projects were already underway, the opportunity for comparative work around Participatory Cities also meant thinking through how local partners could be involved and how the opportunity for comparative learning could be aligned with ongoing trajectories. This is now illustrated using the example of Greater Manchester.

Co-producing comparative learning in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester is a city region with a population of 2.8 million people in northern England, comprised of ten separate local authorities or ‘districts’. These districts had collaborated on a voluntary basis since 1986, through a body called the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

Following the negotiation of a City Deal in 2012, Greater Manchester became the first English city region outside London to secure greater devolved powers in areas such as transport, planning and housing, on condition that the local authorities agreed to a directly elected metropolitan mayor. The first mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, was elected in May 2017 on a manifesto that promised a different relationship between local public authorities and citizens in Greater Manchester. His 'cabinet' comprised himself and the ten local authority leaders, under a new organisation called the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

Such developments have been the subject of many academic studies and are well documented elsewhere (Haughton et al, 2016; Kenealy, 2016; Hodson et al, 2019). Of relevance to this chapter is the coincidence of the initiation of Participatory Cities with this period of huge governance flux, changing national–local relations and questions over how the new mayor would exercise his mandate and engage directly with citizens. In this context, there was an increasing appetite from some city officials to find 'new' ideas and approaches and to open up thinking to alternative approaches to participation.

This context forms the background to the co-production of a knowledge exchange programme between the GMCA and academic researchers involved in the Sheffield–Manchester LIP (SMLIP). In January 2018, discussions began to formulate a coherent 'gateway' for decision makers at the GMCA to collaborate with a wide range of local projects supported by the SMLIP. A process called Developing Co-Productive Capacities was co-designed and co-funded to enable knowledge exchange and to facilitate the engagement of officials in the LIP as a whole. Basket funding for the process was secured from impact funds allocated by participating universities (Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham) and by aligning existing local spend for knowledge exchange within a range of projects. Match funding in-kind was agreed in the form of officer time and the provision of venues. The negotiation

of this year-long process took over three months, with high-level sign-offs required to enable city officials to participate in activities and the identification of key personnel to take part. While delaying the initiation of some parts of the process, this led to strong buy-in and credible commitment, as well as high interest in the results of analysis. Importantly, the negotiation of a *process* for co-producing comparative learning constituted a single mechanism, with institutional endorsement, through which local overlaying of international perspectives could take place.

A central part of Developing Co-productive Capacities was the identification of three learning opportunities for city officials and stakeholders to undertake comparative learning. While comparison is usually undertaken by academic researchers, who then distil and represent relevant lessons back to urban officials, Participatory Cities sought to disrupt this division of labour by enabling stakeholders to engage in direct, unmediated comparative learning. The first learning visit was to the Mistra Urban Futures' annual conference in Cape Town in November 2018, during which Greater Manchester and Gothenburg officials were invited to present their urban contexts and governance arrangements.¹ The second visit shortly thereafter involved a mixed delegation from Greater Manchester to the IOPD meeting in Barcelona. The third was a three-day learning visit to Gothenburg with a wider delegation including citizens, third sector representatives, activists and local officials from Greater Manchester, as well as from the West Midlands Combined Authority.² A condition of participation was that participants would write blogs on their reflections and commit to internal workshops to ensure that learning was embedded in wider institutional contexts.³ To comprehend the value attributed to these exchanges by local stakeholders, the next section focuses specifically on the November 2018 trip to the IOPD to provide a microcosm of the wider issues.⁴

The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy

The IOPD is a network of over 800 cities in 91 countries collaborating to improve local participatory democracy and describes itself as 'a space open to all cities in the world and all associations, organisations and research centres interested in learning about, exchanging impressions and applying experiences of participatory democracy on a local scale with the aim of deepening the roots of democracy in municipal government'.⁵ The network was officially founded in 2001 and in 2006 co-ordinated closely with the United Cities and Local Governments global municipal membership organisation, also headquartered in Barcelona, to provide strategic intelligence on participatory democracy.

Annual conferences have been one strand of the IOPD's work to create a space for exchanging practices among members. IOPD conferences require much preparation and many sessions are dedicated to joint decision making and planning between member cities to progress the core work of the organisation. Although there are hundreds of global members, there are very few from the UK— the only local authority listed as a member is Bristol City Council, along with three academic-affiliated organisations and three consultancies/social enterprises.⁶ Through the Participatory Cities initiative, the University of Sheffield's Urban Institute had become an associate member, but had not previously attended or been involved in any aspect of the IOPD. Notably, the conference was neither academic in nature nor was held in a space owned by any of the Greater Manchester delegation participating. One delegate reflected that this meant the experience was far more co-operative, flat and equal than it otherwise would have been.

In mid-2018, as part of the Developing Co-productive Capacities process agreed with the GMCA, it was decided to send a delegation to the planned IOPD conference comprising two academics, two GMCA officials and two citizen/civil society co-researchers. The focus was the co-design and

delivery of a workshop – ‘How to co-produce the city’ – which eventually comprised a joint scene-setting presentation and an adapted world café-style exercise. The workshop was recorded on video and a short summary is available online (<https://youtu.be/RebvaBaMXMQ>). This approach and workshop were unusual in the context of the conference as a whole, where predominately academic *or* practice sessions were delivered, but rarely combined.

The IOPD conference was organised according to three key themes: direct democracy, citizen initiative and ecosystems of inclusive democracy. In total, there were 50 sessions on offer around these key themes. The delegation discussed and agreed collectively which sessions each member would attend, to achieve a good coverage and fit with individuals’ areas of interest. Each person agreed to take notes and reflect on relevant lessons and insights for Greater Manchester. On the last evening of the conference, all the participants discussed their reflections and insights in a two-hour group discussion that was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The data from the reflection discussion are presented in the following section. Quotes from delegates are denoted D1, D2, D3 and D4. Given the small number of participants, and based on feedback, job roles are not attributed, in order to preserve anonymity.

Reflections from the conference

The array of case studies, tools and techniques presented at the conference stimulated wide curiosity and interest in what other cities were doing. The volume of activity by local authorities and urban actors in cities around the world served to legitimise an agenda around participatory democracy that has less current coverage in the UK context. Our delegation reflected on the specific challenges facing different urban areas – for instance in cross-border spaces between France and Germany where multiple regional identities are present – and on the different

extents to which citizens' initiatives, such as referenda, are binding in different urban contexts.

Beyond specific examples of tools and techniques that could be applied in Greater Manchester, the conference opened up conceptual questioning about participatory democracy and different ways of thinking about participation: "I found that very useful" (D2). While desk-based reviews of the literature had previously been carried out, for instance, outlining the differences between participatory and deliberative democracy, the impact of hearing cities speak directly enabled such ideas to land more powerfully.

Delegates' reflections on the conference echoed wider intellectual concerns regarding the purpose and outcomes of participation:

'I would love to see the outcomes of some of these things. Because that's where it never went. So they named a square after something. Or they agreed to have a community garden. Is that where we are here? Or is there something better coming out?' (D1)

Critical questioning followed, supporting a bridging of perspectives between different members of the delegation. For instance, through the experiences of other cities in developing ecosystems of participation, delegates "noticed that feminism and gender identity had been placed at the core of a lot of these conversations about democracy (D3)", something that also reflected one of the political priorities of Barcelona City Council. However, they reflected that questions of race were not similarly central. While struck, on the one hand, by the "radicalness" of what was being presented, this was accompanied by concern at a parallel "lack of radicalness" given the "bigger, more urgent challenges at stake" (D2).

One delegate reflected that the composition of attendees was significant in this respect, noting that there was little consideration of "citizens" within the conference itself. Conference

participants presented themselves in their professional roles and city officials “talk about citizens as if citizens are ‘over there’”. This delegate also noted the importance of leading by example and the need for skills and capacities to make participation real rather than symbolic: “there’s something ironic about attending something called the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy and participating in nothing, other than being a passive recipient of information” (D4).

This led to a questioning of whether the agenda around local participatory democracy was “ducking the big questions” (D2). Listening to a presentation on local community participation in Mozambique – a context that was not initially presumed to offer comparative insight to Greater Manchester – this delegate reflected that there was a general lack of prioritisation at the conference. Municipal authorities were foregrounding initiatives that gave citizens control over parks or community squares, through mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, but issues of homelessness or drug addiction were absent from the agenda.

Reflections on what was heard in different sessions led the discussion naturally to the relevance for Greater Manchester. These implications were motivated by initial concerns to replicate or avoid the practices of other cities. For instance, one delegate reflected on the role of intermediary organisations in supporting smaller and under-resourced municipalities, concluding that “one of the things I’ll take back is to what extent we can support our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector to organise and to be able to engage with us, not [on an] equal level, but with some legitimacy” (D1). Delegates found specific interventions relevant and useful – such as the role of digital decision-making tools, participatory indicators or participant-led evaluation as a process for building power.

Understanding the priorities of other municipalities enabled delegates to think back on policy and practice in Greater Manchester. An awareness of the knowledge gaps was

shared – while there is “no shortage of ways of doing it”, one delegate asked, “Does Greater Manchester understand what the different approaches are? Does GMCA understand it? And are we evaluating what works for our citizens?” (D2). Delegates specifically noted the need to centre the “participation of people who are really struggling and on the breadline” (D2) as well as engage with ideas around participatory budgeting, youth engagement and the SDG agenda. Specific city experiences, such as those of Barcelona,⁷ provoked a different policy imagination, but one grounded in an understanding of contextual difference. For one city official, the prospects of radical change are far from Greater Manchester: “Our democratic system is what it is, that’s not going to change any time soon. Ours is about broadening what we already have” (D1). This assessment was based on reflecting on the different roles, responsibilities and resources of municipal governments and specifically the limits of the current devolution agreement:

‘One of the challenges you have with local government is you are seen as everything to all people at all times, when actually, we have quite defined powers and responsibilities. And even when we want to go beyond and strengthen some of those and work in different ways, there’s a limitation of what you can do ... we have a role, which is not everything.’ (D1)

How to take control and organise “without seeking permission” was the take-away message for another delegate (D3):

‘Ada Colau [mayor of Barcelona] was talking about people organising themselves without seeking permission ... that being something we should all value and appreciate rather than being scared of it and threatened by it.’

While many urban officials want to identify best practice, the dialogue around replicability was nuanced through the

self-identification of constraining and enabling conditions and contexts. Our delegation was struck by the extent of institutional support for participation in other municipalities, where there were full departments for participation or participation officers: “that was something that was seriously committed to, there was resource, there was capacity” (D1). This provoked reflection on whether such an initiative should be owned by city-regional or local authorities and whether, if desirable, it was possible in the context of austerity: “I used to be paid to do it, way back when, when we had a lot more money”.

Attendance at the IOPD drew back the veil on the scale and scope of municipalities’ active engagement with the theory and practice of participatory democracy in other parts of the world. A central take-home message was that Greater Manchester needs to pay attention to this and consider whether and how to participate in such networks:

‘We need to connect more and we need to be an importer of ideas. Places are ahead of Greater Manchester on this. We need to take stock of some of what we have heard and also reach into that network.’ (D1)

The vibrancy of the network in supporting cross-local learning stood in stark contrast to the current situation in the UK where the urban policy context encourages more competition than collaboration or sharing of practice (May and Perry, 2018).

The experience grounded the need for a less ‘boosterist’ discourse⁸ that seeks to reflect honestly on Greater Manchester’s strengths and weaknesses and learn from others. It also enabled delegates to frame what a coherent Greater Manchester contribution could look like. Notably, in the context of multiple discussions about participatory democracy generally, there was very little discussion about co-production in democratic ecosystems of participation: “It’s also about putting GM out there. We have dipped our toes in the water talking about co-production today” (D2).

The combination of concrete learning about participatory democracy with reflections on GM's policy and practice in international perspective served both to confirm and challenge existing trajectories. One consequence was to open up discussion about the horizons of possibility beyond the now, to where GM might want to be in the future. "It ranged from things we have done in the past ... things we might do in the future ... and then things which are beyond our current contexts" (D1). The challenges of ceding power and engaging with citizens led to reflection on the need for greater social movement building on GM:

'Whether that was Peru, or it was in America, or in unions ... the question for GM is to what extent do we facilitate or put up barriers to that type of social action? Is that in our destiny and where does legislation fit within that as a city region? Generally, we are governed by what's agreed at a national level. So are we a blocker to that sort of movement?' (D2)

One delegate acknowledged that organised social movements can help cities move forward progressively and "that's not always a bad thing". Inspired by examples in Barcelona and Berlin of cities and citizens taking control of their energy or water infrastructure, delegates returned to the issues of risk aversion and embracing social movements. This stimulated wider discussion about the preconditions for wider urban transformations.

'That's the question for us: how do we really engage our citizens around the big issues? And are we prepared that people will galvanise and come with alternatives, try and push the system and push ourselves?' (D2)

Honest reflection on institutional cultures within existing organisations followed, noting the need for cultural change

and support for city officials and professionals to undertake participation:

‘The problem is, we always get the answers we are expecting to get when we ask people ... and actually maybe we need to start asking different questions. If we want new ideas, how on earth do we go about asking different questions or allowing different spaces or whatever it might be ... for those curveballs to start coming through to “wow, there’s actually an idea that no one had seen”. Where do we get these ideas coming through?’ (D1)

Centring the knowledge and skills of citizens in this respect was seen to be key:

‘We don’t go outside of our boundaries in that way, when we think about the skillset of our communities. When it comes to thinking creatively about solutions to tackle some real big issues, what do people bring from communities?’ (D1)

Discussion: the value of comparative learning

Through this discussion, we can identify four key themes relating to the value of comparative learning. First, the approach enabled learning about participatory democracy through direct engagement with specific tools, techniques, approaches and methods. Second, delegates reflected on policy and practice in their own context, through honest consideration on the strengths and limits of existing approaches. Rather than looking for ‘quick fixes’ or models that could be transferred from context to context, comparative learning enabled context-specific lessons to be drawn building on pre-existing understandings of institutional constraints and possibilities. Third, looking from the ‘outside in’ meant that progress could be then grounded

in international experiences and perspectives. This enabled better understanding of where there were learning opportunities and where Greater Manchester had a distinctive offer to make. Fourth, and importantly, the experience started to open up discussion on different horizons of possibility for action and the necessary institutional and cultural changes required to bring them about.

Space was created for urban officials and stakeholders to think outside their usual constraints. One delegate referred to such learning as a 'luxury' not afforded in their everyday professional settings. Attending the conference and being exposed to ideas was valuable, but the post-conference discussion was the key mechanism through which exposure translated to learning. In the reflective dialogue, delegates prompted, questioned and challenged each other, for instance in relation to ideas of what was or wasn't deemed 'possible' in Greater Manchester. Members of the same local governance organisation had the opportunity to engage with each other's ideas and perspectives in ways that were not seen to be feasible at work. Stimulating critical thinking and space for reflection was as valuable as concrete tools and actions.

Collective experience and discussion had other impacts, in strengthening relationships between delegates. Rather than a critical agenda owned solely by academics, a greater shared problem space and critical lens started to develop among delegates. Learning together built trust that affected the quality of the co-productive relationships locally. This was designed from the outset within the wider Developing Co-productive Capacities process. While this chapter builds on a single moment within this process, the themes and values of comparative learning are echoed in the process as a whole. This exchange was only possible as part of a wider negotiated learning partnership that was signed off within GMCA, and due to pre-existing academic-civil society collaborations. Since the IOPD conference, the delegates have continued to work together locally – building a coalition for change to

#CoProduceGM, developing policy commitments towards communities of practice in co-production and co-designing an international policy exchange on co-producing urban policy.

On co-producing comparison

When resources for comparative learning are scarce, where does this leave participatory urban decision making? Urban officials are time-poor and institutional constraints limit the opportunities for learning about what is happening elsewhere, or reflecting on institutional conditions. Similarly, civil society engagement in decision-making processes relies on individuals giving their time voluntarily. Comparison is usually left in the hands of academics who are charged with transferring knowledge to potential users in the form of case studies or examples of best practice. Academics are used to populating international spaces and have had the relative luxury of time and space to think comparatively.

This chapter opens up a debate about what comparison means in co-production and who undertakes it. In this example, comparative learning was co-produced between different individuals from academia, government and civil society organisations through a shared collective experience and reflection. Comparison served to generate thinking from the 'outside in' on the need for, approaches to and possibilities for creating more participatory cities. By undertaking comparison in this way, learning is better embedded in local organisations aiding the exchange of knowledge between academic researchers and urban stakeholders. It simultaneously strengthens trust and relationships as a precondition for better co-productive partnerships locally over time.

On the basis of this experience, we reflect that current knowledge on co-production is not sufficiently sensitive to issues associated with comparison. Structured comparison aimed at generalisation is important to generate better knowledge about 'what works', but is resource-intensive and requires specialised

skills (Richardson et al, 2019). Participatory methods do exist to undertake such comparative studies in a more inclusive way in the research process. However, being trained to undertake such tasks is not always desirable or possible for those within an organisation to engage with transdisciplinary knowledge co-production. Comparative learning is not a replacement for systematic analysis, but can support better understanding of different possibilities and prospects for cities beyond the best practice case.

This opens a new avenue of consideration for those concerned with implementing and evaluating the United Nations' urban SDG and New Urban Agenda, and the particular commitment to 'meaningful' participation. Our experience suggests that while traditional technologies of participation such as participatory budgeting (see Chapter Two) or people's assemblies are specific instances of meaningful participation, we must also strive to create boundary spaces that facilitate reflective 'out-of-context experiences'. While the former are often promoted by institutions such as the World Bank (see Goldfrank, 2012), such replicable off-the-shelf techniques provide little substantial challenge to the governing status quo on their own. Comparative learning, when allied with a critical orientation, may provide more important opportunities for subtle moments of rupture to dominant governing logics to be aired, discussed and promoted. If meaningful participation is to be more than a shoring up of business as usual, this suggests that processes of co-produced comparative learning should be taken seriously, if we are to move 'beyond critique' (Perry and Atherton, 2017) and realise the potential of participatory cities.

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Notes

- ¹ www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/event/RJC2018
- ² <https://realisingjustcities-rjc.org/blog/co-production-working-local-democracy> and <https://realisingjustcities-rjc.org/blog/changing-world-learning-and-reflections-göthenburg-visit>
- ³ See, for example, <https://realisingjustcities-rjc.org/blog/greater-manchester-barcelona-and-back-again-lessons-co-production-and-digital-democracy> and <https://realisingjustcities-rjc.org/blog/how-co-produce-city-no-easy-steps>
- ⁴ At the time of securing the book contract, the Gothenburg learning visit had not taken place.
- ⁵ www.iodp.net/en
- ⁶ Information correct as listed on website www.iodp.net/en September 2019.
- ⁷ The election of Barcelona en Comú in the 2015 municipal elections has led to Barcelona being seen as ‘a flagship of [a] new municipalist movement’ (Russell, 2019: 992), one in which the relationship between citizens and the state has been a central focus for transformation.
- ⁸ Associated with the emergence of the ‘entrepreneurial city’ from the mid-1980s onwards (Hall and Hubbard, 1996), city boosterism encapsulates the range of ‘place-making’ behaviours, such as the rush to host major sporting events (Cochrane et al, 1996), orientated towards the attraction of capital investment.

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