

A high-angle, wide shot of a massive crowd of people gathered in a city square at night. The crowd is densely packed, and many individuals are holding open umbrellas in various colors, including yellow, blue, red, and black, creating a vibrant, textured sea of light. In the background, city buildings and streetlights are visible, with a large, brightly lit billboard or screen on the left side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant public gathering or protest.

People Power in Cities

Kurt Iveson

University of Sydney

kurt.iveson@sydney.edu.au

"We need a pedestrian crossing..."



Why 'people power strategies'?

People power strategy =

how urban social movements
understand, build and enact
people's collective capacity to
shape their city

Studying urban people power strategy

Research designed and conducted in partnership with movement leaders, participants and scholars



- We had questions coming from our own experiences
- We workshopped those questions, and emerging answers, with researchers and movement leaders at events in 2018 and 2019
- Student-assisted surveys of movement diversity
- Fieldwork in several phases 2017-2023

Common strategic dilemmas

We started by asking people about the big dilemmas that shaped their strategic choices...

1. Who participates?
2. What are the issues?
3. How to resource the work?
4. Where do we work?
5. How quickly do we work?
6. Who is the target of our action?
7. What counts as a 'win'?

Five urban people power strategies

1. Playing by the rules



Austin, Texas

- Participation in formal channels for participation, litigation
- Power of argument
- Internal and external legitimation strategy, often a prelude to other strategies
- Leaves the 'rules of the game' in place

Five urban people power strategies

2. Mobilising



Pro-democracy protest, Hong Kong

- 'Turning out' supporters to move from attitude to action
- Power in numbers
- Speedy (especially when reactive 'no' is required), disruptive
- Difficulties converting 'no' to 'yes', sustaining momentum, transcending single issues

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3. Organising



Sydney Alliance Assembly, Town Hall 2011

- Building relationships, leadership and institutions that precede and outlast specific action
- Power in diversity
- Extends urban politics beyond 'usual suspects', builds proactive agendas, seeks to transform politics as well as win issues
- Slow, difficult to resource, risk of 'lowest common denominator' in finding agreement across diversity, need for 'wins' to maintain energy

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4. Prefiguring



Reclaim the City, Cape Town

- Living the *world as it should be* via micro-political experiments and counter-spaces
- Power of example
- Delivers material change while demonstrating political possibilities, present- not just future-oriented
- High threshold for participation, challenge in 'scaling' from micro to macro, legitimation challenges

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5. Running for office



Municipal election posters, Barcelona

- Independent, platform and party candidacies in formal elections
- Power of state institutions
- Broadens movement agendas, builds popular support, resources movement work ... sometimes even 'wins'!
- State institutions aren't all-powerful, delegation and demobilization of broader movements, risks of electoral success becoming end-in-itself

Do they work together? Sometimes!

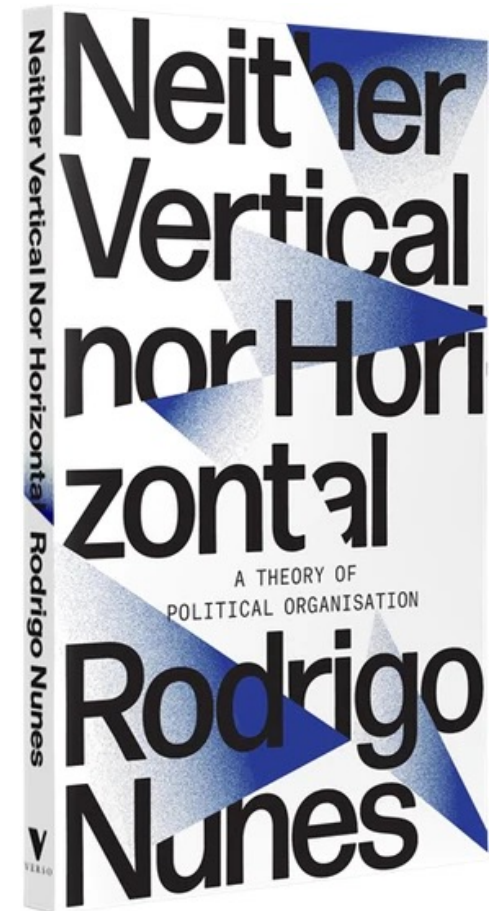
These different strategies...

- co-exist within and between organisations (often in tension);
- can change and evolve over time
- can make use of same tactics for different purposes

There are no silver bullets...

"The question of organisation thus ceases to be an arena for the endless reiteration of fixed positions and becomes instead a shared worksite in which everyone has to deal with the same set of problems, even if coming at them from different angles."

Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal*, p. 5



People power strategies for housing

Over to you...!