

Learning by doing – unpacking the people power ecologies in our places



Learning by doing



Amanda Tattersall

Amanda Tattersall is the co-founder of GetUp and the founder of the Sydney Alliance, the country's largest and most diverse community coalition. She is an Associate Professor in urban geography at the University of Sydney, and a leader in place-based research and community-led research methods. She is the author of *Power in Coalition* (2010), *People Power in Cities* (2026) and *Conscious Tribes* (August, 2026). She is the host of the ChangeMakers Podcast, which is now in its tenth season and has had over 2 million downloads.

Learning by Doing: unpacking people power ecologies in our places

Associate Professor Amanda Tattersall (Geography)
Founder Sydney Alliance, author People Power in Cities (with Kurt Iveson)



www.amandatattersall.com,

Conversation in pairs

5 mins

What makes your organisation
and your place distinct?

What do you have in common
with others, both in your place
and across other places?



Thinking
differently
about
difference



Sameness

Difference



Sameness & Difference

Quick check in
(2 mins):

How is sameness and difference sitting?

In what ways is it useful for thinking about our work together? What is challenging or not sitting well?

**Relating
across
difference
starts with
curiosity**

**Individuals = curious
about stories**

“Why you do what you do?”

**Organisations = curious
about strategies**

*“Explore HOW each of us work - WHY
you choose to work like that?”*

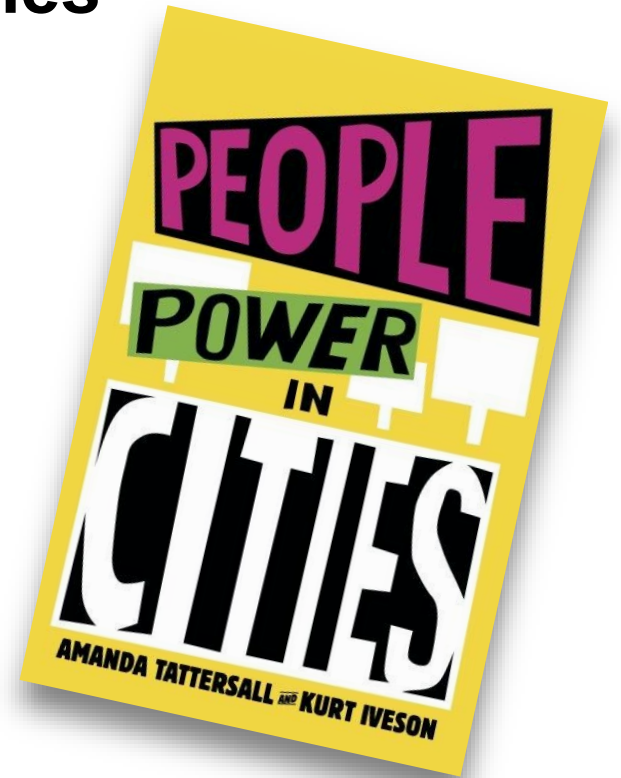
Research on place-based collaboration in cities



Me and co-author Kurt Iveson

- **Seven** years of research
- Mapped over **1500 cities**
- **Five** long case studies - Cape Town, Barcelona, Austin, Hong Kong, Sydney
- **New thinking about people power strategies and ecologies**

What, if anything,
might be translated
to support other
kinds of place-
based work?



Strategic dilemmas

Similar questions faced in different places - answers lead to different strategies

1. **WHO** is involved, do you need?
2. **HOW** do you make decisions?
3. **WHAT** problems/issues?
4. How do you **FUND** the work?
5. **WHERE** will you work?
6. What **TEMPO** will you work at?
7. Preferred **TACTICS**?
8. How do you define **SUCCESS**?

Strategic dilemmas

Organisations consider:

- Place, pressure and strategic choice
- Strategy = role of PEOPLE IN your ORGANISATION:
how are you deciding to work with people in order to make an impact

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Working Groups

5 mins - Journal on your own:

Answer these dilemmas for your organisation.

20 mins - Groups of 3-4 people

1. Each share your answers (<10 m)

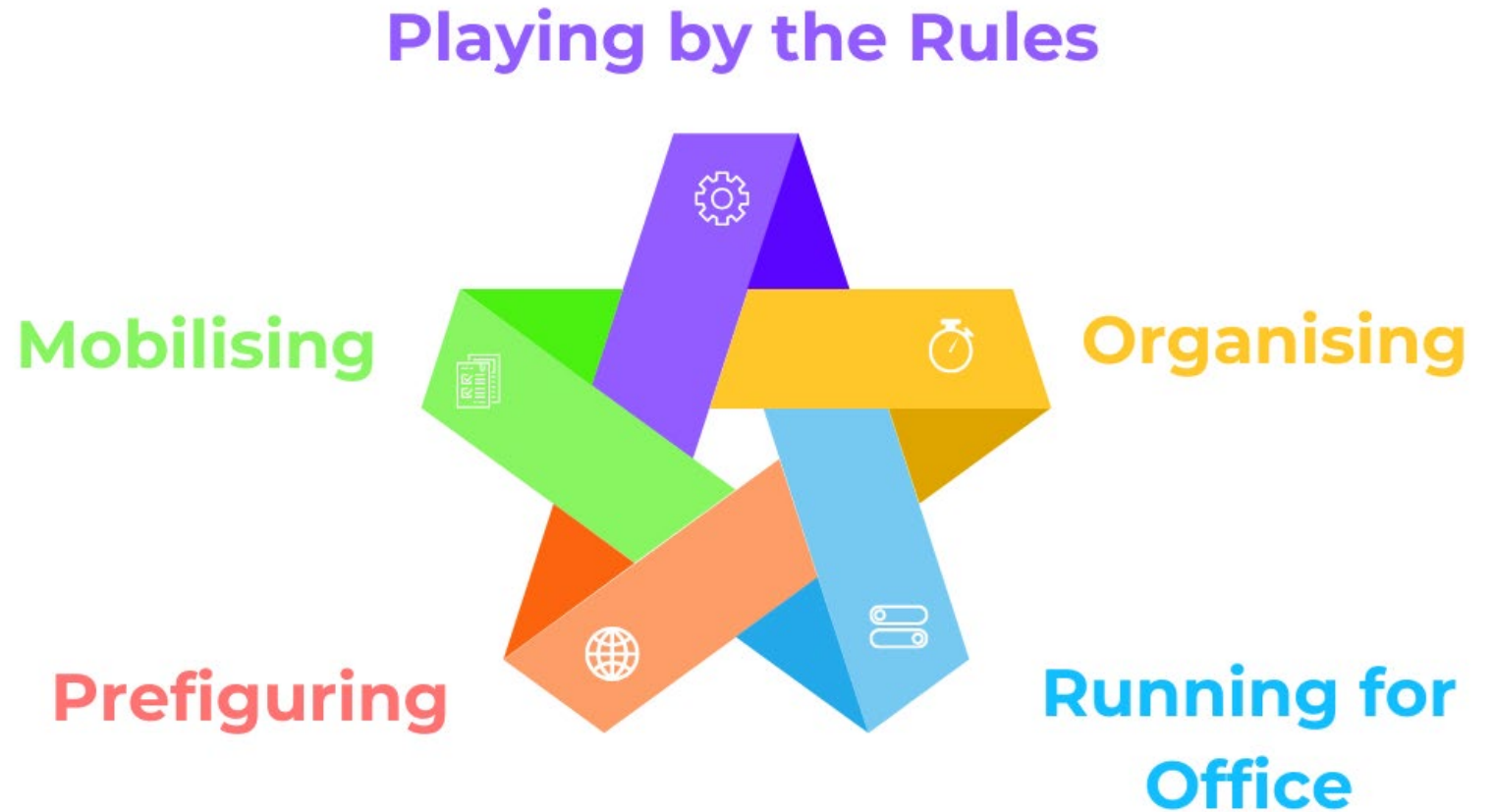
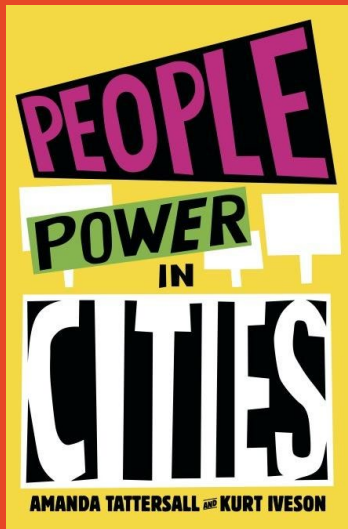
- Focus on the 2-3 that revealed the most to you
- How do they help explain why you choose to work with people to make an impact in the way that you do?

2. Reflect together (>10 m)

- What did you learn from other's answers about their choices and approach?
- What if we could spend more time understanding each others choices - how might it help you make an impact, and change how we collaborate?

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People Power Strategies



Thinking ecologically?

Each of us have an **interconnectivity** to the people and place around me. I'm not independent - but deeply connected to everything. I might get my **nutrients and my sustenance** from one thing, but also **feed other things** too.

Thinking ecologically

- 1. Diverse ecologies = adaptive capacity
- 1. Differences = collective strength
- 1. Humility = no one strategy will always have the answers

Thinking ecologically

4. Finding sameness in productive cohabitation

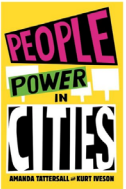
- a. Hold others in mind
- b. Relating across difference
- c. Cooperation (parallel play)
- d. Collaborative experiments - learning, exchange, joint activity

5. Rethinking failure (death) and what it means to thrive

6. Habitat (place) space of continuity and change for strategies

More resources

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Thinking on people power strategies and strategic dilemmas:

People Power in Cities (2026, with Kurt Iveson)

Thinking about sameness and difference:

Conscious Tribes: thinking differently about making a difference (August 2026)

Other writing: amandatattersall.com

ChangeMakersPodcast.org - sharing stories about people changing the world

