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**Article:**

Richardson, L., Durose, C. and Perry, B. [orcid.org/0000-0002-4335-1869](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4335-1869) (2019) Three tyrannies of participatory governance. *Journal of Chinese Governance*. ISSN 2381-2346

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23812346.2019.1595912>

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Chinese Governance* on 18/04/2019, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/23812346.2019.1595912>

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*Uncorrected proof copy for library deposit*  
*Published in the*  
*Journal of Chinese Governance*  
*2019*

## **Three tyrannies of participatory governance**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the potential promise of more participatory urban governance, some debates do not sufficiently reflect difficult realities. This paper aims to make good on this by maintaining reflexivity about tensions. Drawing on traditions of pragmatism, the paper identifies tyrannies besetting understandings of participatory governance. Tyrannies are ways of thinking that developed in response to an identified issue, but which fail to live up to their initial promise. Despite this, those particular ways of thinking continue to hold sway. The paper sets three key tyrannies: the quest for authenticity in non-elected representation; assumptions about leadership models; and 'bottom up' versus 'top down' debates. First, despite widespread acknowledgement of the value of lived experience in participatory governance, in the quest for authenticity it is simultaneously reified yet denied. Second, we question assumed symbiotic alignments between participatory governance and ideas of distributed leadership. Third, we present a critique of the fetishization of 'bottom up' approaches in participatory governance. It concludes with the role of reflexivity in re-negotiating the politics of participatory governance.

**Keywords:** participation; governance; bottom up; leadership; authenticity; representation

## 1. Introduction

Many engaged in participatory governance are able to rehearse the theoretical groundings for more participatory forms of decision-making. Indeed, the normative and empirical case for greater participation has been cogently made, many times over. Citizen participation has been advocated across contexts and regime types, in more democratic as well as more authoritarian systems. We firmly agree with the proposition that a greater diversity of types of expertise ought to be brought to bear on complex policy problems. However, behind shiny renderings of the benefits of participatory processes, many also recount sorry sagas of misunderstandings, disagreements, misplaced idealism, and failed processes. Yet, the debate about participatory urban governance seemingly fails to reflect and explicitly articulate some of these realities. Despite the eulogies, critical questions and challenges are often ignored and cleansed from academic accounts. As normative participation scholars have cautioned, a utopian vision also needs to be realistic and take account of the realities (Wright, 2010). To further the cause, the cause has to be confident enough to acknowledge its own blind spots. In this paper therefore, we ask, what are some of the current challenges in participatory governance?

In thinking about tensions in participatory governance, we use the concept of tyrannies. By tyrannies we mean ways of thinking that developed in response to an identified issue, but which fail to live up to their initial promise. Despite this, those particular ways of thinking continue to hold sway. Each generation of scholars and activists works in the shadow cast by dominant tropes of the day, which are themselves responses to previous sets of understandings. Solutions designed as “healthy counter[s]” (Freeman, 1972/3, p. 151) to one problem become rigidified and over-extended, turning into a new problem to be solved. What makes them tyrannical is that the space has not yet been fully created to acknowledge the limits of the idea, at least not within particular groups or networks. We can spot the signals that a tyranny might be present; sage nods of agreement in a discussion inside the room, then sotto voce whispers of contradiction once outside.

Drawing on traditions of pragmatism, we mobilise experiences from research and practice to identify some of the tyrannies besetting understandings of participatory governance. The paper sets out propositions around three key tyrannies in debates on participatory governance: the quest for authenticity; assumptions about leadership; and ‘bottom up’ versus ‘top down’ debates. First, despite widespread acknowledgement of the value of lived experience in participatory governance, in the quest for authenticity it is simultaneously reified yet denied. Second, we discuss assumed symbiotic alignments between participatory governance and ideas of distributed leadership. Third, a discussion of the fetishization of ‘bottom up’ approaches in participatory governance. The substantive content of tyrannical modes of thinking changes from era to era, and between contexts.

Underlying the core argument is the claim that there is a need to be reflexive in thinking about participation, and explicitly articulate presumptions. In doing so, the politics of participatory governance can be acknowledged and re-negotiated.

## **2. What is a tyranny?**

We use the concept of a tyranny as a means of highlighting practices which have purported to have challenged existing norms, but which instead have replaced them with new intellectual cul-de-sacs. The new ways of thinking are tyrannical when they severely restrict deeper engagement with the issue at hand. It may be a truism to say that solving one problem merely creates a new problem to be solved. However, the notion of a tyranny also suggests how an idea might preclude the development of further thinking.

Joreen Freeman's 1970s essay, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, was written out of her frustrations about experiences in anarchist feminist collectives. She was responding to debates between members about how best to organise in ways which did not ape patriarchal structures. Her argument was that denying hierarchical structures did not make them disappear. Attempts to do away with structures deemed to be oppressive by declaring them obsolete, she argued, simply made the problem worse. They still existed, or were re-created, but were not discussed. These second wave feminist theorists were applying the concept to autonomous self-organising citizen groups, attempting to put into practice what we might think of now as polycentric forms of decision-making and collective action (Ostrom 1996). These settings, and numerous similar attempts before and since, are part of the lineage of participatory governance.

Freeman criticised those who clung tenaciously (p.162) to unrealisable, inappropriately generalised and ineffective ideals. She refers to these dominant ideas as tyrannies. They become the empress's new clothes, or "goddess[es] in [their] own right" (Freeman, 1972/3, p.151). That is, ways of thinking which have become so dominant they serve to inhibit a more critical engagement with those challenges. Theorising participatory governance demands critical and self-reflexive modes of thinking. However, when particular ways of thinking become orthodoxies, they serve to limit the space, scale and scope for more profound critical perspectives (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Identification of tyrannies can generate new analytical understandings, or as some have it, 'transformation' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

In developed democracies where the limits and partiality of representative democracy have become clearer, an increasingly participative narrative of democracy is being articulated. Participation is understood to revive a form of democratic citizenship where 'an ethos of public

responsibility, accountability and authority becomes diffused as a function of the general civic culture' (Boyte, 2005, p.519; see also Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984). Participation is often normatively positioned as a panacea, strengthening legitimacy of decision-making (Young 1990), solving problems and improving outcomes (Ostrom, 1996).

Yet, participatory governance is in itself a new orthodoxy (Richardson, Durose and Dean, 2018), for example, as seen in the lionising of celebrity policy interventions of the moment, such as participatory budgeting (de Sousa Santos, 1998; Baiocchi, 2001; Goldfrank, 2007; Smith et al., 2015; Beard, Mahendra, and Westphal, 2016), and other democratic innovations (Fung and Wright, 2001; 2003) like citizen assemblies. A previous generations' 'causes célèbres' (Smith et al., 2015, p. 244) are replaced by the latest darling of citizen participation, such as Liverpool's Turner Prize winning Community Land Trust, Granby Four Streets (Thompson, 2015).

The concept of tyrannies is not primarily an attack on magic bullet policy pronouncements, nor on a boosterist best practice literature. Equally, neither is it primarily a gap in theoretical approaches. Tyrannies can be seen across settings and sectors. In the academic field, where challenge, critique and contestation are the currency, there remain lingering traces of repeated tropes which act to silence debate at some level. Practitioners' awareness of the gaps between claims and reality, which are not then articulated, generate the tyranny. They exist despite extensive acknowledgement of various forms of hybridity in governance forms (Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2006; Skelcher and Smith, 2015) and of high levels of contingency or conditionality in social systems generally (Dryzek, 2004; Fischer, 2003; Bevir and Kedar, 2008), and in governance particularly (Innes and Booher, 1999; Teisman, Gerrits and van Buuren, 2009).

### **3. Practice- and research-informed thinking**

In thinking about tyrannies in participatory governance, we draw on traditions of pragmatism, which advises social scientists to conduct "cooperative search[s] for truth for the purpose of coping with real problems encountered in the course of action" (Joas, 1993, p.19). Through surfacing tacit knowledge, this intelligence can be brought to bear on contemporary urban problems (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 166). Normative groundings for participatory governance leave open the critique that they are naïve to the notion that such having such aspirations is not the same as achieving them. Moreover, that participatory governance offers an optimal prescription in a perfect world. This emphasis has had the impact of not only generating what has been termed an 'expectations gap' (Flinders et al. 2016, p. 269) but also foreclosing reflexivity about the political dynamics of participatory governance. Our argument here is to position participation as questioning the

persistent presumptions about governance and in doing so, keep open the opportunity to acknowledge and so continually re-negotiate the politics of participatory governance.

It has been argued that 'theory is catching up with practice' (Perry et al., 2018, p. 191) in the field of knowledge production on governance. Arguably, this is also applicable to the three tyrannies discussed here, which arise from an interaction with practice. In what context are we using the term 'practice'? For social scientists, their practice is research and intellectual inquiry – tyrannies here manifest themselves as assumptions in their work, research questions, findings and so on. Academics can also be practitioners, either as action researchers, academic-activists, or in dual professional roles, moving between different positions. Academics may also act in their non-professional lives, playing roles themselves as citizens participating in governance. For actors in participatory governance, their practice is their core roles directly related to the governance activities they undertake.

#### **4. Tyranny of authenticity in participatory governance: the quest for authenticity**

The first tyranny of participatory governance we consider is about the quest for authenticity in unelected representation. When deployed within the often 'invited' spaces (Cornwall, 2004, p.1) of participatory governance, authenticity can become a tyranny by simultaneously reifying and yet denying lived experience.

Participatory governance is often positioned as a useful complement to representative democracy, with 'the potential to compensate for electoral inflexibilities' and provide 'high levels of targeted, information-rich representation' (Disch, 2011). As Urbinati and Warren reflect, '... insofar as electoral representation works, it does so in conjunction with a rich fabric of representative claimants and advocacy within society' (2008, p. 402). By engaging with constituencies beyond the ballot box, participatory governance is understood to offer a means to more fully connect lived experience with decision-making and thus to address the inherently partial nature of electoral representative claims.

The argument here is that quality of representation rests not only on a democratic mandate or accountability by election, but on the claim to 'authenticity', that participants unlike their elected representatives are the 'real thing' (Saward, 2005; 2009). These non-elected forms of representation premised on authenticity are argued to offer a means of more inclusive representation, an opportunity to value the voices of those too often excluded or marginalised in decision-making and to make representative democracy more effective. The tyranny here lies in the over-correction. A quest for authenticity reifies independence from formal politics and embeddedness in social



networks (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014). Participants are specially targeted who are outside party politics, and who are said to be able to make representative claims on the basis of their membership of a specific interest network or group. Membership of a social network also implies particular identities, and associated direct experiences, which confer experiential expertise on those members. However, in practice, the disconnection from formal party politics, and also embeddedness in particular sets of interests are used to deny lived experience. Sought out for their authenticity and ability to complement political representation, the participants can then be dismissed as 'unrepresentative' because they are unelected and because they represent particularistic interests. The very bases for inviting people to participate are subsequently used to question their contributions.

In the context of academic literature on participatory governance, authenticity is understood as the basis for non-elected claims to representation (Saward, 2009). Here, authenticity is related to the extent to which representative claims are independent from and untainted by the formal politics of political parties, elections and legislatures (Saward, 2009, p. 19-20). These non-elected claims instead derive legitimacy based upon 'constant exchange, dialogue, education and adjustment between the representative and the represented' (Saward, 2005, p. 183). As implied, 'authenticity' is understood as being derived from embeddedness in social networks that ensure that non-elected representatives are informed by a wider constituency (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014, p. 276). The notion of 'authenticity' offers the distinction between the vertical connections of traditional accountability that are associated with electoral representation, what Dryzek terms the 'symbolic', and the horizontal connections that underpin the potential of non-electoral representation, the 'substantive' (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014, p. 276; Dryzek, 2002, p. 185-6). Examples of such non-elected representative claim-making are in evidence in participatory governance. For example in various multi-agency and multi-sector partnerships with nominated membership for those chosen to represent specific constituencies or selected special interest groups – the 'BME rep<sup>1</sup>.', 'voluntary sector rep.', 'youth rep.', 'business association rep.' and so on.

'Authenticity' may be understood as a tyranny in the following ways. First, 'authenticity' is a tyranny when it is aligned with the non-electoral representative claims of particular groups or interests. As noted, in both theory and practice, priority is given assigned to those individuals or groups who can make claims to represent a wider constituency, for example of a community of place, issue, interest or identity (Mansbridge, 2003, p. 524). Yet, giving to priority to claims made on behalf of a wider constituency opens up participatory democracy as a space for the antecedent power of these potentially competing constituencies to be played out, raising the spectre of capture

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<sup>1</sup> Rep is a colloquial shortening of term representative

by vested interests. The challenges of substantiating the quality of non-electoral representative claims, coupled with a hyper-pluralist critique that suggests a proliferation of claims and fragmentation of interests that render this approach, at best, outmoded. This situation can often lead within participatory governance to 'unacceptable levels of conflict, stalemate and suboptimal policies' (Sirianni, 2009, 16) rather than the 'more specific, explicit and flexible' forms of representation that are promised (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014, p. 274). In short, this interpretation of 'authenticity' risks simply defaulting to rather than resolving power inequities and capture by vested interests.

Second, 'authenticity' is a tyranny when it becomes a means to devalue rather than acknowledge the contribution that an individual may offer to participatory governance on the basis of their own experience. Due to the fears raised by neo-pluralist critiques, in practice we see an over-correction, resulting in the unsatisfactory situations of either over-relying on established interests or forcing participants to substantiate their claims to authenticity or be dismissed. For example, Saward (2010, pp. 103–4) proposes that 'authenticity questions' might seek to establish whether the claimant is who they say they are and whether the content of their claims and their own character 'ring true'. It is valuable to challenge those making representative claims - notably to differentiate between those who offer a channel for voice and those who may wish to position themselves as 'gatekeepers' to communities (Pearce, 2011). Many, however, participate on the assumption that diverse and wide-ranging engagement with different individuals will be welcomed in participatory governance. Some participants put themselves forward, imagining widespread engagement with different individuals. Instead, they are unwittingly placed in a position where they are expected to legitimate their authenticity and then accused of being un-representative (Richardson and Durose, 2013). In the 'invited spaces' of participatory governance, the demand to 'prove' authenticity, can often serve as a basis to dismiss lived experience that doesn't fit with pre-conceived expectations or pathologises those who raise challenging or awkward questions. For example, Aldred has illustrated participants may be pathologised as having 'entrenched negativity' when raising structurally rooted problems (2011, p. 63).

This interpretation of authenticity suggests an implied 'ordering', positioning some as more authentic than others. In practice, this binds authenticity to particular groups, individuals or experiences, and devalues or dismisses the experience of those who do not fit or comply with such expectations. Policy abounds with the relentless search for 'real' or 'ordinary' people, suggesting that some people are somehow unreal or less real. Whilst this can be articulated as an explicit attempt to tap into latent interest in participation that has previously not been realised or to provide a space for otherwise underrepresented groups and individuals to have voice (Hansard, 2013). In the

context of the 'invited spaces' of participatory governance, the quest for authenticity can serve to devalue those who do come forward, as illustrated in the widely-used but pejorative phrase, 'the usual suspects'. Furthermore, it perhaps inadvertently gives those who set the terms of the spaces of participatory governance the role of policing who is authentic and who is not. Not only can an emphasis on 'authenticity' lead to an insular, endless and arguably self-defeating quest, but again places the power to decide who is in and who is out in participatory governance with those in formal, often elected positions.

### **5. Tyranny of leadership in participatory governance: leadership should be distributed**

Second, we turn to look at the tyranny of leadership. In participatory governance debates, there is an assumed symbiotic alignment between participatory forms of governance, and ideas of distributed, shared or adaptive leadership. Participatory processes are premised on values such as diverse voices being heard, collective pooling of expertise and so on. In many participatory circles, facilitative styles of leadership are seen as supporting these processes by not foreclosing decisions, creating spaces for discussion, and mirroring the principles being espoused; 'walking the walk', and modelling ones' own principles in practice.

One issue is how far these ideas merely represent idealistic ideals rather than empirical realities. How do distributed models take account of the negotiation of antecedent forms of power, historical delineation of relationships, or disparities in resources in participatory governance? Seemingly obvious alignments between participatory governance processes and adaptive modes of leadership perhaps conceals more than they reveals. As with the original tyranny of structurelessness, positing an easy symbiosis between participation and a set of leadership practices that emphasise emergence, openness and distribution may hide the underlying dynamics. A second set of issues is the degree to which facilitative styles or adaptive models are preferable in participatory governance. Might there be contexts in which there is potential compatibility between robust leadership modes and facilitative participatory processes?

Grey literature on participation, that is, more practitioner-orientated materials, have long grappled with the most appropriate methods and principles for how to conduct participatory processes, particularly focused on the practice of facilitation of face-to-face events. After many 'turns' in the literature, including the empirical turn in studies of deliberation, as well as the participatory turn generally, there has also been a turn towards micro-practices within participation. The reasons for this can be seen if we understand the nature of the challenge that participation presents for leadership models. Participatory processes require sustained relationships between

different interests, involving a deliberate intersection of different forms of expertise, including lived experience and deliberate inclusion of under-represented voices. Difference and inclusion in those relationships is explicitly valued, or a transformation of relations is sought (Needham and Carr, 2009; Robinson and Tansey, 2006). The aims are not to invert or offer another form of hierarchy, but to suggest a non-dominating relationship between different forms of expertise (Durose and Richardson, 2016). In short, seeking to ensure different forms of expertise are, 'integrated, not annihilated, not absorbed' (Follett, 1924). Forging sustained relationships, across traditional boundaries between governance actors, either within or between different epistemic communities, is a challenge. To do so in a way that seeks to not only give voice to, but integrate different forms of expertise is even harder. Throw in a necessarily 'messy' (Ackoff, 1979; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005; Polk, 2015) governance context, confronting 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Head, 2008; Head and Alford, 2015) and 'super-wicked' issues, and the degree of complexity is magnified. Added to this, new modes of governance are not inscribed on a blank canvas but layered on a pre-existing world that mediates what is achievable (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). These inherited, inherent and inescapable structures can act as constraints on available or viable options; both crowding out but also actively working against efforts to introduce change. What then does it mean to lead in this simultaneously ambitious yet constrained environment?

The dynamic, uncertain and complex context that is understood as having informed the rise of participation is also seen to have influenced a 'fundamental reframing of leadership' (Gronn, 2002). Earlier theories of leadership which emphasised leadership traits and styles have given way to more situational forms of leadership (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2006; Bussu and Galanti, 2018) and a characterisation of leadership as emergent, open and distributed. Leadership as a situated practice (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2006; Bussu and Galanti, 2018) then plays a key role in participation to negotiate various complexities and tensions of governance, including: setting priorities and clarifying shared goals; supporting greater inclusion, particularly with regard to less represented voices, fostering communication and public accountability, and encouraging innovation through challenging traditional aversions to risk (Bussu and Galanti, 2018). Within this process, 'there is openness to the boundaries of leadership' and 'varieties of expertise are distributed across the many not the few' (Bennett et al. 2003, 7). Underpinning this shift is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of one person or a few select people at the top of a hierarchy, but as a collective social process emerging the interactions of multiple stakeholders (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Bolden, 2011). Adaptive leadership models stand in contrast to so-called 'heroic' models of leadership as the property of individuals, often associated with more didactic styles of hierarchical or shared leadership.

Post-heroic understandings of leadership across fields and sectors have re-framed leadership as about shared responsibilities, a flattening of hierarchies of expertise, as well as about emergence and openness rather than narrow or closed dictatorial direction. The parallel re-framing of governance and leadership suggest an easy symbiosis between participation and a situated leadership practice that emphasises emergence, openness and distribution. But, the tyranny of leadership can be seen in two core issues. First, regardless of whether one particular mode is desirable or not, any aspirations to facilitative styles are not necessarily borne out in practice. Both the governance and the leadership literatures are limited in their understanding of the depth of challenge in realising such ambitions. A conflation between adaptive styles of leadership and participatory governance arguably conceals inequalities that arise due to antecedent power of participants and other disparities in resources, as well as formal roles, and current and historical relationships. Participation does not start from blank sheet: “whilst leadership may be ‘distributed’, power often is not” (Bolden, 2011, p.260). Despite their critical grounding, existing literatures on both leadership and co-production tend to be normatively-driven, with an insufficient and often apolitical approach to the dynamics of power (Bolden, 2011; Flinders et al. 2016). Notwithstanding good intentions, shifting from ‘old’ to ‘new’ is a challenge. Even with increasing acknowledgement of the limits of ‘traditional’ modes of either participatory governance or leadership, it not only remains incredibly difficult to enact change and a difference in views on the appeal or extent of desirable change is likely to be encountered. Contemporary notions of leadership may be responding to a demand rather than offering an accurate account of how leadership occurs (Bolden, 2011, p. 254). Side-stepping these issues is part of the tyranny, and risks exacerbating or re-producing existing inequities and legitimising the domination of particular groups.

Second, the under-explored issue is whether facilitative styles or adaptive models are preferable in participatory governance. A conflation between adaptive leadership and participation does not just conceal inequalities, it may simply be the wrong conflation. For example, despite espoused incongruity, for some stakeholders, more ‘traditional’ or positional leaders may be seen to provide the comfort of clarity, as well as a source of inspiration and direction in participatory arrangements. ‘Traditional’ approaches may offer greater discretion and empowerment. Perversely, more adaptive or distributed approaches might stifle or paralyse action.

Even for those positively disposed towards a more pragmatic, adaptive, informal and relational approach to leadership, there are trade-offs to be made between emergence, openness and distribution. As Mansbridge (1994) has argued, enlightened versions of coercive power are sometimes necessary. While she was writing about much larger-scale processes, institutions and concepts, participatory governance is, in many places, part of this larger whole, and is attempting to

improve democratic systems. Yet, it is still largely an anathema to publically or openly suggest these modes of leadership in participatory processes. The use of coercion will always involve some unfairness (p.60), and: “can never meet an uncontested standard of procedural fairness, to be fully and unquestionably legitimate in the normative sense.” (Mansbridge, 1994, p.53). But, the flipside of this issue is equally problematic. In the tyranny of adaptive leadership, there can often be an over-emphasis on procedural considerations in participation – making sure the process is as transparent as possible, that every voice is heard, everyone is included, each participant is aware of and satisfied with the process. The standard of procedural fairness is as fully met as possible. However, the concomitant trade-offs are not as explicitly recognised, such as the slowing down or deferring of decisions. Our own experiences have occasionally been of an interminable process, seemingly as an end in its own right, with a frustrating lack of focus on action, leaving participants wishing for some judicial application of strategic coercion.

#### **6. Tyranny of ‘bottom up’ is best participatory governance: ‘bottom up’, good, ‘top down’ bad**

The third of the three tyrannies is the fetishization of ‘bottom up’ approaches in participatory governance (Perry and May, 2010). The tyranny of ‘bottom up is best’ is contrasted to the perceived failure of ‘top down’ approaches to governance. Our argument is not the presentation of the binary between ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ *per se* that is the issue, but the essentialising of features to specific groups of actors or spaces of governance.

In making this argument, we are not ignoring the high level of nuance in the literature. Many writers advocating bottom up approaches would themselves say that these approaches operate on a continuum or spectrum with varying degrees of orientation towards state actors. There is recognition in the literature that there are multiple mutual obligations, structural connections, and inter-dependencies between state and non-state actors and forms, as well as a proliferation of hybrid forms. Governance activities takes place across spheres, and involves mixed sets of institutions and actors, state and non-state, in blurred relationships with loose, shared responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues, using collective forms of action (Stoker, 1998). Another obvious but important qualifier is that the existing literature also understands movement between choices of modes or strategies under different contingent circumstances. Rather, the analytical problem is with the essentialisation of particular features as being seen as the property of specific sets of actors or governance forms and spaces. We will make the proposition that instead of a focus on which institutions offer superior forms of governance goods, instead the focus should be on the goods themselves. The ‘bottom up is best’ tyranny starts with a critique of

top down approaches to governance. There is a critique of existing forms of urban governance as not fit for purpose, not fully inclusive or just (Fainstein, 2010; Marcuse et al., 2011), nor delivered prosperity for the most disadvantaged. 20th century prescriptions of 'good governance' and 'trickle down' have not delivered (Perry and May, 2011) and are insufficient to deal with the contemporary 'urban polycrisis' (Swilling and Annecke, 2012). Pre-occupation with finding an 'organisational fix' for urban governance has led to a proliferation of different organisational forms. Few have delivered fully on promises of democratisation (Davies, 2011; Harvey, 1989; Logan & Molotoch, 2007; Purcell, 2008). Indeed, participatory governance in practice 'tend[s] to be the direct inverse of people-driven change' (Eversole, 2010, p. 30).

The 21st century city has been predicated on a particular form of technocratic and economic knowledge that constitutes expertise as residing in elite and professional epistemic communities. Political cultures are characterized by relatively stable 'civic epistemologies,' or 'public knowledge ways,' that comprise preferred modes of producing public knowledge and conducting policy deliberation (Jasanoff, 2012, p. 9) initiated, or controlled from the 'top'. Therefore, some see the problem partly being generated by 'top down' approaches to governances, by elite actors, often state actors, in formal or invited spaces. Indeed, there are often unhelpful conflation made between top down, formal and state-led or orientated governance activity.

Critiques of existing forms identify what might be wrong with urban governance, but there are as many areas of contestation about alternatives as there are suggestions for alternatives. An emergent informal tier of non-state governance actors working across and between different sectors and communities, has been identified, who are experimenting with alternative forms of urbanism (Brenner, Marcuse, and Maye, 2012). There is a gap in understanding of parsimonious solutions across different contexts to address wicked governance dilemmas (Jones and Ward, 2002; Offe, 1984), and how there can be a reconnection of local expertise, innovation and creativity in urban policy. Having said that, some common threads can be discerned in amongst the vast array of suggestions for how to rectify existing forms. A key response to perceived failures of top down governance has been the counter-claim that, conversely, 'bottom up' autonomous mobilisation by non-state actors in 'popular' spaces should be privileged as a driver for innovation and creativity in governance. This tyranny argues that, if the problem is that formal elite institutions and actors have not performed the required functions, then they need to be replaced by civic institutions and actors (Harvey, 1989; Fainstein, 2010). Prevailing governance forms can be seen to be part of the problem, and in their place are suggested exemplification of utopian alternatives through local practices, which subvert existing governance forms and offer 'new ways of "governing from below"' (Atkinson, Dörfler and Rothfuß, 2018, p. 171 ).

The tyranny of top down and bottom up binaries focuses on debates about who are the key initiators of innovation and creativity in participatory governance; a professional, trained elite with strategic capacity, or an innovative, creative, and experientially-driven bottom up? Bottom up is credited by some as having greater potential to innovate and transform, less fettered by some of the institutionalised and politicised path dependences inherent in state-led structures (John, 2014). Citizens have been said to have been 'restless' and 'uninvited' innovators (Hirst, 1994, p. 105). Successful coproductive arrangements are often generated out of informal spaces and relationships (Fung, 2001) from the bottom. Experiments in collaborative governance 'emerge in the civic sphere, and transfer to political society' (Wagenaar and Wood, 2018, p. 158). Privileging the bottom up sphere, they make the claim that 'innovative potential' is premised on the origins of initiatives in civil society (p. 153).

Bottom up approaches are said by advocates to be superior ways to enhance social justice or voices of marginalised groups, and potentially address conflict, or at least integrate agonistic practices into action. Top down spaces have a consensus-bias, for example the: 'elevation of collaboration...to a paradigmatic value means that collaborative governance has a complicated, often confused, relation to conflict' (Dean, 2018, p.181). In contrast, citizen resistance is seen as a way to offer critique, dissensus, and disruptions to dominant discourses. Bottom up governance is also portrayed as being better able than top down approaches to mobilise civic participation, with popular or organic spaces (Cornwall, 2004) seen as better able than invited spaces to attract mass participation. Bottom up can activate or mobilise latent participation, for example through its emphasis on new forms of political subjectivity, such as 'everyday makers' (Bang, 2005). Renewed focus on the 'everyday' has potential as a space for radical transformation (Bang, 2005; Cooper, 2014). Looking at the everyday is argued to overcome the gaps in representative claims of 'expert citizens' inhabiting invited spaces of top-down governance, who have become increasingly disconnected from their original constituencies, and risk being co-opted (Bang, 2005).

Claims made about the benefits of a bottom up approach are, of course, highly contestable, and contested. The fetishization of bottom up approaches is as problematic as the privileging of top down approaches (Perry and May, 2010). A critique of conventional governance forms leads to alternative theories of governance which risk reifying the everyday in place of a reification of the local state (Davies, 2011). One could equally argue that the multiple experiences of the capture of participatory processes by sectional interests lays waste to claims of bottom up governance protecting minority voices. As discussed above, there is a wealth of critique about the partial and patchy nature of the representative claims made by civic groups. Advantages of bottom up are bought at the cost of gaps in effective capacity, which require additional inputs to 'seed' and



develop infrastructure (González and Healey 2005, p. 2066). Some have claimed that the democratic mandate and civic leadership status of state organisations are a greater boon to social justice. Top down is seen by some as more strategic, with greater capacity to be effective, and more socially just by brokering (democratically) between claims.

The point is not to then adjudicate between these competing claims. The tyranny is precisely that a problematic mode of thinking is superseded by an equally problematic mode. The issue is not the debates between the benefits brought by different sets of actors into governance processes. Competing claims about benefits of different approaches illustrate the problem. The problem is the essentialisation of features of governance to specific sets of actors, and types of governance spaces, rather than seeing them as contingent, and generated by equifinal processes. The tyranny is the analytical problem of essentialism. Our argument is that the bottom up tyranny unhelpfully conflates sets of actors and particular governance spaces with particular institutional logics, such as the focus on, or neglect of, wider strategic priorities in decision-making. Bottom up is best claims sometimes also go further, seeing particular sets of actors and configurations of spaces as being associated with effective delivery of specific governance functions, such as the protection of minority voices in decision-making processes. How justice is best protected, how effective capacity is achieved in participatory governance, and so on - these are live debates which are useful, and need to be debated empirically. However, the underlying challenge is to undertake this analysis on the basis that we are interested in how governance functions are produced, and the specific forms taken in particular cases, rather than seeing different institutional logics or delivery of functions as the property of those actors or spaces. So, the issue is *not* that a reification of the everyday might replace a reification of the local state. Instead, the reification is a result of both positions starting from the wrong place, by emphasising the site of governance, rather than the goods produced, and therefore essentialising the goods produced to a specific site. Where thinking on governance functions becomes tyrannical it is where contingent claims become essentialised into analytical features.

## **7. Discussion and conclusions**

So, where does all this take the debate on participatory governance? We started our discussion of tyrannies with an aim of keeping open the opportunity to acknowledge, and so continually re-negotiate, the politics of participatory governance. The promise of participation, we would argue, is still good. But it is a promise on which much is still to be made good. In order to do this, we have argued for the maintenance of reflexivity about practices. Where the

dominant ideas about how to do participation get stuck, or become counter-productive, it is worth thinking about these issues. Our goal is to attempt to prevent participatory governance from becoming a tainted policy fad, disliked because it has been: 'stale, over- and misused, cynically applied and generative of public cynicism, ineffective, and superficial' (Durose et al., 2013). "Participation" can be used as a cloak of words to disguise business as usual: to hide power inequities, gloss differences, and enable elites to pursue their own agendas' (Eversole 2012, p. 30). Some have reflected on "the new participatory paradigm" in negative terms, for example: "experience shows that empowerment measures often disempower; in too many cases, democracy is a code word for conformity" (Shaw, 2011, p. ii129). It is these sorts of negative reflections that give rise to the need to regularly refresh paradigms in order to avoid sub-optimal outcomes.

That participation is a panacea is a tyranny in itself, the challenges should not be taken as a means to revert to only elected forms, but rather to remain reflexive. However, as we have said elsewhere (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019) it is often easier to outline a problem than to solve one. The emphasis in this paper has been on exposition, on the grounds that it is a positive step to acknowledge, and further elaborate and articulate key current tyrannies in the field. Where might this thinking go next, in considering new practices? We consider the specific tyrannies before going on to consider possible implications for participatory governance in other contexts.

On the first tyranny we identified from our own context, of the quest for authenticity, we set out some problems with ways that non-electoral claims to representation have been set up, or used. Proposals for ways to target recruitment or a default to random selection of non-electoral participants have many advantages in addressing complex issues of representation and accountability. However, in some ways, they replicate the problems we discuss. This is because the idea of selective recruitment, for example, relies on these disputed social networks, group memberships, and other contested claims from special interests. Random selection party addresses the representativeness issue, and in its more deliberative forms, helps to surface more fully formed preferences. However, it does not necessarily help to bring forward under-represented views in a targeted way. The implications of the tyranny of authenticity are to have a conversation about the value of lived experience in its own right. If we removed the competition over authenticity by recourse to representative claims to wider constituencies, then contributions might be judged on their own merits. This would require a different set of questions to be asked of those who come forward who do not wish to make specious claims to represent wider constituencies. In cases where

a participant would prefer to avoid assuming a gatekeeping position, what might be more relevant questions? Instead we might ask, for example, what does this experiential expertise tell us that we did not know before? How does it challenge or question established wisdom? What contribution does it make to answering the questions we have asked on this governance issue?

In our second tyranny, of the assumption of distributed leadership, what are some of the implications here? Most obvious would be an exhortation not to assume which model or models of leadership are most suited to the task in hand at any particular point. More challenging is the need to explicitly recognise the possibilities of trade-offs, and discuss what those trade-offs might be. Where there is an over-emphasis on procedural considerations at the expense of other important aspects of justice – epistemic, distributive - there may need to be re-balancing. The case for procedural justice to take precedence over others types of justice in participatory governance seems to have crept into a dominant position without any explicit negotiation or agreement. These claims need to be surfaced, articulated, discussed and re-negotiated where appropriate.

A tyranny of bottom up is best was the third debate discussed in this paper. Whether indeed bottom up is best or not, under what conditions, to what extent, in what ways are all empirical questions. Is it that top down approaches are superior in some contexts, or are there new hybrid forms which offer greater potential for some governance outcomes? We would hope that social scientists will want to continue trying to research answers to these questions. The underlying analytical implication from this paper is to investigate these questions by emphasising the outcomes (including process outcomes) produced. Then, understanding what institutional logics, sets of actors and spaces produced those outcomes in those instances. The implications are to avoid essentialising the goods produced to a specific site, or set of actors.

Our three tyrannies are the products of particular configurations of circumstances in governance: decades of experience of participatory practices, often of poor quality; repeated exhortations by formal decision-makers to 'do' participation and ostensible government backing for initiatives; a developed and crowded marketplace of advisers, organisations and 'toolkits' about how to do participation, and many high profile 'good practice' examples drawn from practices in the UK, western Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and NZ, as well as Latin America. These tyrannies are context-specific and contingent.

Therefore, are they relevant to other governance contexts, such as China? Chinese contexts for participatory governance are different, and also similar, in many ways. For example, although one more distinction is in the type of regime, however, the shape of governance

arrangements in China is much more complex than a simple regime classification. Governance structures across contexts operate at multiple layers and overlapping jurisdictions. As elsewhere, there are degrees of decentralisation in China, for example, with direct elections for village committees, and formal governance institutions at local level operating alongside and interacting with informal institutions (Xu and Yang, 2015). China has been described as “no exception” to the rest of the world in the presence of civic action, such as grassroots activism and NGOs, on environmental issues (Martens, 2006, p. 213). Other differences and similarities exist in cultural approaches to political participation (Pye, 1985).

Some official state support for citizen participation in major decisions is relatively recent, such as requirements for citizen participation in urban development specified by the China State Council in the National New-Type Urbanization Plan of 2014, as well as support for citizen participation announced in other central government documents from 2003 onwards. However, again, this position is more nuanced, with debates reaching back several decades about forms of citizen-initiated participation in governance (Jennings, 1997). And the idea of participation faces challenges of cynicism through mis-use, and discrediting by past policy initiatives since the 1940s, which although differ in specifics, have aspects in common with non-Chinese experiences. Some scholars have argued that the Chinese Communist Party has been gradually overhauling administrative institutions around public management ideas (Pieke, 2012), ideas which would be very familiar to a western audience. There are similar questions raised about participation, for example the conditions under which institutions are more responsive to citizen inputs acting as “true channels of responsiveness”, and circumstances under which quasi-democratic institutions are “mere window dressing” (Meng, Pan and Yang, 2017, p.400). Questions which also span contexts include the challenge of capacity building for participation, for both citizens and institutions (Plummer and Taylor, 2004).

It is possible to imagine that these contextual differences, and similarities, might generate both some resonances with the tyrannies presented here, as well as some differences. However, the real answer to that question is that each set of governance actors and academics will need to work out their own particular and peculiar bugbears or resonances for themselves. What makes people feel weary or cynical, what they feel needs discussion but which is hard to initiate, what they feel is a misunderstanding that has become hard to correct, these things will come out of a process of reflection for those people involved. The transferable point is about the principles of persistent experimentation and feedback loops in participatory practice.

Similarly, there are questions about the extent to which tyrannies of practice and thinking are particularly prone to take hold in the realm of participation practices. How relevant are these issues to other sorts of practices? Established and routinised practices in any profession, network, or organisation are powerful because they are core parts of what constitutes structures and institutions. Alongside formal rules and informal practices, institutions are also formed of a set of dominant narratives, used to both articulate and generate ways of thinking about 'how things are done round here' (Richardson, Durose and Dean, 2018). A quick glance at other fields is therefore extremely likely to reveal their own context-specific tyrannies.

Whether changes to practices would be any better than what exists is anyone's guess. Participation is not a cookbook (Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987, p. 207). Incompleteness is a positive feature in participation, that is, where options for how to deal with an issue are not fully worked out in advance. Incompleteness rules in uncertainty, flexibility and developmental change (Durose and Richardson, 2016). Key amongst conditions for effective participatory governance are self-awareness, reflexivity, and adaptation; long may these continue.

DRAFT

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