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From unilocal to comparative research: the Mistra Urban Futures journey

Henrietta Palmer and David Simon

Introduction

In terms of the logic laid out in [Chapter One](#), this chapter moves from the locally co-produced transdisciplinary research in individual city platforms to the even more experimental approach of comparing such local research approaches across varying urban contexts.

Understanding the potential uniqueness of cities and the specificity of the local are essential for knowledge production for sustainability. Local practices stemming from a specific climate and ecology, a specific geographic setting and urban morphology, a set of cultures and traditions, and local social networks, skills and habits interact with national and global agendas to produce different and contextualised solutions from which to learn also about universal problems. This implies that urban dissimilarity and difference are interesting features for research on urban sustainability that could potentially be captured through comparison. The organisational structure

of Mistra Urban Futures, as presented in Chapter One, carefully considers the differences among the partnering platforms in terms of local stakeholder participation and agreements. Nevertheless, the *raison d'être* for this organisational structure calls for comparison between the different cities and their respective stakeholder arrangements. Comparison is embodied in the notion of the Centre as it spans different kinds of borders at global, continental and national scales. Consequently, comparison is a constant ongoing process in which each issue is positioned and debated. To pursue comparative research across the different LIPs, to produce further knowledge on sustainable development, was therefore an underlying aspiration that found expression in the structured propositions embodied in the Centre's Strategic Plan 2016–19 (Mistra Urban Futures, 2015).

Collaborative comparative research is not novel and further diversifies urban comparison as it bridges different urban contexts and research agencies into the varying contexts (Gough, 2012). However, as with unilocally co-designed and produced research, comparative research does not avoid the importance of understanding and engaging with the implicit and explicit power relations. Who will decide what to compare in such a multi-collaborative setup? After all, what is of apparent value to one context and to its multi-stakeholder structure might lack relevance and/or interest from the other comparative contexts. For Mistra Urban Futures, the jointly developed research agenda of Realising Just Cities – introduced in the previous chapter – has been a useful framework for selecting possible comparative themes from a common rationale. Here we examine the substantive themes that were considered relevant for comparative investigation into the larger issue of 'prospects for the just city' (Clarke, 2010: 9).

Comparative urban research has been oscillating in popularity over several decades, even having a dedicated international academic journal in the 1970s and 1980s,¹ a key focus of which was the global South. Early theoretical challenges and formulations were also debated in urban and some disciplinary

journals, particularly in relation to problems of decolonisation and post-colonial urbanism (for example Walton, 1975; Abu-Lughod, 1975; Simon, 1984, 1989, 1992; King, 1990). More recent theoretical approaches have also been applied in this arena (such as Roy, 2011, 2016). At one point, some comparative research focusing on identifying networks of world cities was heavily criticised as performing hierarchical division of cities in terms of which cities are of value to compare with and which ones are not (Robinson, 2011). Pointing towards this embedded power mechanism of comparative urban research, Jennifer Robinson underlined the importance not only of a broad inclusion of cities but also of exploratory methodologies in comparison. To compare case studies of good solutions or non-functioning solutions might be less relevant for ‘cities in a world of cities’ connected through different kinds of processes and movements. She therefore calls for ‘new repertoires of comparativism’ to expand its potentials beyond the global North–South divide and beyond any normative definition and division of cities of the world and to be potentially “‘generative”, where variation across shared features provides a basis for generating conceptual insights supported by the multiple, sometimes interconnected, theoretical conversations which enable global urban studies’ (Robinson, 2016: 195).

In the work reported here, we contribute to this new repertoire. This research programme is both a substantive contribution to the discourse on urban justice through comparative and sometimes conceptual inquiry, and a methodological contribution showing how co-produced transdisciplinary research can cater for some of the main issues discussed within comparative urban research, such as negotiation and contestation of the research issues, differences of cultures theory, and translation of knowledge (McFarlane, 2010). Co-produced transdisciplinary comparative research sets out a new dimension of including participants from sectors beyond academia. Jane M. Jacobs identifies a reason for doing collaborative research comparatively, which resonates with the ethos of

Mistra Urban Futures' research approach, namely that the kind of 'comparisons that city builders, managers, transnational workers, and residents engage in – is essential for redrawing the map of urban studies. In this sense, urban practitioners may be ahead of urban theorists' (Jacobs, 2012: 920). Further, our comparative work is organised according to a defined typological framework, which will be explained later in this chapter and in depth in the chapters to follow. Both there and in the concluding chapter, we assess the extent to which the typology is valuable or generative.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. The next section provides an overview of methodological lessons derived from the first phase of Mistra Urban Futures' research, in which transdisciplinary co-produced studies were undertaken locally within the individual cities. The third section discusses the reasons for doing comparative co-produced research and the challenges involved in doing this research transition. The fourth section proposes a framework for comparative co-production. The final section provides a concluding discussion and a description of the chapter's contributions. Parts of this chapter draw heavily on earlier published work on this comparative research agenda (Simon et al, 2018).

Methodological lessons from unilocal transdisciplinary co-produced research

This section synthesises some of the key achievements, constraints and generalisable methodological principles based on the experience in the respective LIPs during the first phase of Mistra Urban Futures. It draws in part on the work of Henrietta Palmer and Helen Walasek (2016) and Beth Perry and colleagues (2018).

As emphasised in Chapter One, key features of the LIPs are their diverse histories, structures, number, and range of partner institutions and activities. The first important lesson reflects

that the prerequisite for success is being locally appropriate and embedded, so as to be, and be seen to be, responsive to local conditions and flexible in adapting to evolving agendas. Attempting to establish a common format for LIPs to undertake transdisciplinary research co-production in different contexts would simply not work and therefore the starting point for comparison is the acknowledgement of difference rather than similarity.

In spite of their differences, the LIPs operate in a similar manner as 'active intermediaries', a term introduced by Beth Perry and Tim May (2010) for governance structures acting between global agendas and local contexts and concerns, translating and transforming practices of knowledge production among the different partners involved. As a second lesson, this tells how this bidirectional role and relationship add considerable value both ways. On the one hand, the individual cities have been able to understand and learn from experiences elsewhere and from global initiatives on urban sustainability in tackling similar problems. Conversely, Mistra Urban Futures uses the transdisciplinary co-production experiences in the individual cities to inform wider global policy debates and agendas for practice.

A third learning is that the partners need to operate through thorough reflexivity, with openness to change and renewal (May and Perry, 2011, 2018; Voss and Bornemann, 2011). A perennial challenge in any large institution, but one that is magnified in transdisciplinary partnerships, is the difficulty of maintaining continuity, consistency and momentum in the face of ongoing changes in key personnel in one or more partners. A change in mayor, chief executive, or even line manager of a particular institutional representative can change priorities, power relations within and across partner institutions, political and/or financial support, or even enthusiasm to participate. New team members often raise new questions (or repeat old ones) and may challenge previous decisions or have different priorities, and the renegotiations involved can be draining,

even when there is agreement in principle to abide by previous decisions (see also discussions in subsequent chapters).

Another important lesson is that much depends on who the individual researchers are. It is essential to identify researchers who can have a pronounced interest in straddling disciplines and bridging the divide between academia and policy/practice, since these are extremely difficult and time-consuming challenges and not everybody has the right personality, skills, experience or such career ambitions. A related acquired knowledge is that different stakeholders often have diverse perspectives and conflicting agendas. People involved in transdisciplinary research also need good facilitation skills or need to be able to draw on professional facilitators, as they attempt to reconcile or make room for diverging perspectives in both process and outcomes (Pohl et al, 2010).

Experience from each LIP shows that it is possible to have a significant impact on policy and practice through the transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge. For example, co-production processes that brought together different stakeholders in Kisumu resulted in the planning of a range of physical upgrading projects for the city and the implementation of a number of significant initiatives, such as an eco-tourism project. Several processes have also brought together officials and researchers to co-produce new policies, such as a new policy framework to guide state investment in human settlements in the Western Cape (the location of Cape Town) and a new climate change strategy for Gothenburg. Exposing both the participating academics and practitioners to a range of new perspectives from different cultures of knowledges and contextual experience has triggered the creation of new communities of knowledge and practice with capacity to change the mindsets and actions of many participants (Palmer and Walasek, 2016).

A final key lesson is that there is no single, right method of approaching the transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge, and this kind of research usually needs many different

methods depending of the stage of the research process where the intentions and short-term objectives might vary, but also on who is participating; how contested that particular issue is; what the existing body of knowledge on that particular topic is in that particular place; and how experienced the participants are in doing co-produced transdisciplinary research. One commonality in the various transdisciplinary co-production processes taking place was that they all involved extensive engagement over a sustained period of time, including a range of stakeholders to attempt to better understand and address the real challenges facing the city.

A transition towards comparative transdisciplinary co-production: challenges foreseen

This section provides arguments for the objectives of comparing co-produced transdisciplinary research in an urban context. It presents the sub-projects of this comparative research, and discusses some assumed outcomes in relation to potential impact.

Reasons for comparing co-produced and transdisciplinary research

After the end of Phase 1 (2012–15) of Mistra's funding, the Centre sharpened its focus on how to transition towards sustainable cities by suggesting comparative transdisciplinary research as a possible approach to tackle 'wicked' problems² of urban injustice. With the diverse experiences from the four city platforms, where at that point the different stakeholders involved in the respective LIPs were already experienced in co-production, there was also good potential to move forward with comparative research on what constitutes a just city and how to realise such a city in contrasting urban contexts.

Sustainable development is a contested term, and conflicts can appear in determining what constitutes a socially, economically and ecologically desirable urban condition. The

question of ‘sustainable development for whom?’ emerges sooner or later. For all the research conducted within the different platforms, urban justice was already an embedded objective. Within the three broad themes of socio-spatial, socio-ecological and socio-cultural transformations, three core attributes were considered to characterise just and sustainable cities, according to the Mistra Urban Futures vision statement (2015: 9) – that they should be fair, green and accessible. Since comparative transdisciplinary co-produced research had the potential to catalyse new knowledge about certain themes as well as around what Jacobs calls the ‘third term’ (2012), in other words the meta-issue evolving through thinking across different cases, it was relevant to move a step further to explore the realisation of urban justice through a ‘comparative gaze’ to extend the Centre’s co-produced research.

Existing comparative urban concepts such as twinning have already created comparative exchanges between the city officials for mutual learning about, for example, planning mechanisms. City branding listings, where urban qualities such as liveability are measured to compete for the same group of investors, represent another form of comparison with which the public and private stakeholders were familiar. However, this kind of comparative urban studies were new to the participants from the public and private sectors. Also, from an academic perspective, the co-produced comparative approach was at large untried and came with certain difficulties to imagine. However, the new wave of theoretically inspired comparative urban studies, mentioned in the introduction, calls for a fresh view on comparison where cities are not comparatively graded but linked and connected both conceptually and by different kinds of global processes, and hence could be compared according to various differing logics. Robinson (2016) presents a taxonomy of possible types and features of urban comparisons: from light touch ‘comparative gestures’ to comparisons of tracing connections, and of launching analysis and generating concept from specific contexts with possible

wider applications. Mistra Urban Futures' approach of co-produced transdisciplinary comparisons could speak to many of these types, but also adds yet another layer of methodology to the development of the discourse. All these anchor points, together with the positioning of experimental comparative urbanism as part of the evolving field of post-colonial urbanism, added compelling features to the prospect, which mitigated anticipated complexities and difficulties.

Indeed, comparing transnationally how to realise just cities implies an agenda that cannot 'belong' to the interest of any particular stakeholder group or practice, nor to one single geographical context. All perspectives, conflicting as well as aligned, ultimately contribute to the production of a richer body of knowledge on what urban justice could look like, and how it might be imagined, operationalised and achieved. Since each one of the individual comparative projects came to formulate its own rationale for comparison, Mistra Urban Futures set up an overall comparative project, entitled Realising Just Cities. This comparative endeavour aimed to produce meta-knowledge, considering how all the different comparative sub-projects together create societal impact in terms of organisational changes and policy effects, along with changed social behaviours and societal imaginaries and visions, all contributing to the realisation of just cities.³

Learning from comparative co-produced research

As has been pointed out elsewhere within the work of Mistra Urban Futures, different organisational setups contribute to different kinds of knowledge production. Consequently, as part of a comparative learning process, the differing organisational project arrangements could also be compared, along with the different co-production methods applied at similar stages of the respective processes in the varying contexts. Both these objectives would feed into the cross-context learning on how to achieve just cities. Hierarchies that might exist

in one context, and that could effectively prohibit deliberative co-production, might be understood in light of shared experiences from other situations, where structures of power would take different forms. In this manner, the methods and organisational structures applied could develop and become more robust. This, in turn, would contribute further insights into transdisciplinary knowledge production and more sustainable processes of co-production.

Another objective underlying the comparative co-produced research is to mirror the way different problems are manifested in their respective local contexts, in order to deepen our understanding of the problem at hand and its global impact and relevance. Highlighting differences or similarities, or embracing a diversity of knowledge cultures, allows for an expanded understanding of the problem – something a single context could not produce. In other situations, a crucial problem might be suppressed and hence become ‘non-existent’ within an agenda promoting urban justice, as for example is embraced in the discourse on recognition (Fraser, 1996). Transnational comparative and co-produced research, with its multitude of stakeholders, could shed light on and highlight such an issue. A striking example is the way the #MeToo movement, addressing the matter of silenced sexual abuse, has been brought forward as a parallel discourse in diverse contexts around the world through experiential knowledge and an international co-acknowledgement.

In Mistra Urban Futures’ comparative proposal, 11 thematically different projects were identified, resulting from the previous three broad themes of socio-spatial, socio-ecological and socio-cultural transformations, covering an urban ground of great variety – from food production to migration (see Table 2.1). While using these different topic lenses to understand how urban justice might be achieved, a further outcome would be to detect the direction and intensity of ongoing change in each local context. How change is taking place, and how it could be directed towards more just urban conditions

through different vehicles of transformation, could be explored at a comparative meta-level traceable across the full set of projects. Here each context would provide valuable insights on mechanisms for transformation towards urban justice, and how they play out in relation to different citizen groups.

Unlike 'traditional' research, co-produced research has the advantage of already including some of the actors with planning roles or mandates (such as city officials and councillors). This means that the research, in addition to pointing to evidence and results, actually becomes a catalyst itself, affecting behavioural changes as part of the research process. The novelty of our methodological approach is not collaboration per se within a research team, but to have multiple research teams of different stakeholders, each one with local expertise, in a joint comparison. With different local stakeholders engaged in the comparative issue, conversations are generated from stakeholder to stakeholder across geographical contexts. In the process, the comparative issue becomes nested in a number of cross-national conversations that, however difficult to foresee, would undoubtedly affect each local environment. We return to a discussion around these matters in the concluding chapter of this book, detecting the impact of our work.

Early assumed outcomes

Clearly, outcomes and impacts are, and will be, difficult to specify in this ambitious programme, although it is coming towards its end in terms of financing. Many of the project setups are at this point concerned with academic outputs, network effects and different outcomes in terms of learning and sharing. However, this in itself is worth commenting on, since outputs such as constructed networks and outcomes such as shared knowledge point towards an expansion of a culture dealing with joint explorative and problem-solving research, which in itself is a transformative tool for societal change. The researchers and practitioners involved foresee an

extended research activity, beyond their immediate research engagements or their daily managements, that will enable a joint space for translation of concepts and cultures. The comparative issue is in many situations envisioned as an ‘arena’ into which different stakeholders are invited to test new thinking and where new knowledge could be produced. The LIPs have proved before to provide ‘safe spaces’ for untraditional research practices (Perry et al, 2018). Ultimately this exploration and production of knowledge will broaden the bases for decisions and for policies and new research to follow.

A typological framework for comparative transdisciplinary knowledge co-production

In this section, we present the framework developed as a methodological support for the comparative imagination within Mistra Urban Futures. We further present and discuss briefly how the substantive sub-themes relate to the typologies and the overall research objective of Realising Just Cities.

According to Colin McFarlane (2010), empirical urban comparative studies are mostly concerned with the practicalities of the research, the methodology or the categories. As we have described, co-produced transdisciplinary comparative research involves numerous practicalities in terms of logistics and finance as well as in terms of setting principles and agreements for research and about the research findings. This research approach can make use of a number of methodologies in relation to the participants, the particular stage of the research process and the need for either short or long research objectives. In a multidimensional project of this kind, conducted both as an overarching and Centre-initiated proposal, as well as thematically organised comparative transnational projects, additionally containing several local multi-stakeholder research groups, some overarching directions are crucial. Typologies as a framework for comparison have in our case been a helpful

instrument to set the stage and to create a common cognition from which to thread forward in varying directions.

As the Centre developed its research towards the Realising Just Cities research agenda, a typology of six possible categories of how comparative transdisciplinary knowledge co-production could take place was developed collectively by the LIP directors and Secretariat. This framework informed the Strategic Plan 2016–20, thus preceding initiation of the research. It functioned both descriptively to formulate for external stakeholders what the Centre was about to undertake, and productively to guide everyone involved across all the platforms in terms of the comparative ethos. The following categories were conceptualised:

- *local projects retrofitted*, where existing research projects on a particular theme in different cities were in need of some retrofitting, or perhaps just a specific comparative ‘add-on’, to facilitate drawing conclusions about that particular theme from multiple contexts;
- *local projects replicated*, where particular successful projects initiated in particular cities have been, or are intended to be, replicated in other cities, thus opening up possibilities for cross-city comparison of problems and solutions;
- *translocally clustered comparative research projects*, developing consistent clusters of projects identified by a common theme rather than immediate comparative features, across multiple cities to produce new references for urban research and practice;
- *internationally initiated projects with local co-production*, internationally conceived through co-design, with co-production undertaken by local teams in each city, but with centrally based co-ordination;
- *international projects with translocal co-production*, where completely translocal teams work across cities;
- *PhD studentships linked to co-production processes*, where either students from one city are doing research on another city

in collaboration with local students, or students are doing comparative research on a number of cities. This model is distinct from types 1–5 in that, as the projects are led by PhD students, it also includes an educational element.

This typology provided a spectrum of central versus diverse local design and implementation, and helped us set out a direction for the comparative projects in addition to the Realising Just Cities research agenda. It was resolved at the outset not to be prescriptive or proscriptive. So, examples of several models were expected to emerge according to the nature of the initial impetus in each case, the subject matter and degree of diversity or uniformity in relevant local projects, and the number of platforms participating in each theme.

The foci for the comparative research projects emerged from an iterative process of negotiation among the LIPs and Centre Secretariat based on relevance and interests for the LIPs in the suggested sub-themes. This negotiation sought to ensure overall coverage of the three broad themes into which the Realising Just Cities research agenda had been divided (socio-spatial, socio-ecological and socio-cultural transformations), along with cross-cutting core processes of urban change, urban knowledge and urban governance (see [Figure 1.1](#)). The large variation of possible sub-themes together with the six comparative categories in the typology would guarantee a broad spectrum of findings that jointly would produce relevant and possibly new knowledge on how to realise just cities, as well as bring new concepts and innovative methods to the discourse on comparative urbanism.

The initial expectation of a diversity of comparative models has been borne out, in that examples of all except the fifth category have been pursued. The exception, framed as a centrally initiated project with translocal co-production, turned out to be unfeasible given budgetary and capacity limitations, as everybody in such a project team would need to spend a

Table 2.1: Mistra Urban Futures' comparative projects

| Project | Platforms |
|--|---------------------------|
| Realising Just Cities | All |
| Cultural Heritage and Just Cities | CTLIP, GOLIP, KLIP, SMLIP |
| Food Value Chain | CTLIP, GOLIP, KLIP, SMLIP |
| Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs | All |
| Knowledge Exchange | CTLIP, SKLIP |
| Migration and Urban Development | GOLIP, KLIP, SKLIP |
| Neighbourhood Transformation and Housing Justice | GOLIP, SMLIP |
| Participatory Cities | All |
| Solid Waste Management | KLIP, SKLIP |
| Transport and Sustainable Urban Development | CTLIP, GOLIP, KLIP |
| Urban Public Finance | CTLIP, KLIP |

significant amount of time in each city involved. Not only would this be prohibitively costly, but most researchers and partners from outside academia would have difficulty in obtaining leave of absence for the periods required. In the light of climate change, moreover, the degree of travel required for this kind of research must also be questioned.

Two of the 11 comparative projects (Table 2.1) have been adopted by consensus as universal, in which all LIPs are participating, representing different comparative categories. The more advanced project initially was a centrally designed but locally adapted and implemented project on how the involved cities engage with and implement (or not) the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the urban SDG (SDG 11). This project also involved two specific project-based partnerships

in Shimla (India) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). The second universal project, entitled Realising Just Cities (deliberately echoing the name of the general research framework), was framed as a reflective research by each LIP team regarding how its diverse activities and projects are advancing Mistra Urban Futures' core objectives of urban sustainability and justice. As such, it represented a project of meta-learning rather than a specific comparative project type, and as it developed it left the comparative project portfolio and took on the role of a formative evaluation of the comprehensive research achievement responding to the Centre's mission 'to generate and use knowledge for transitions towards sustainable urban futures through reflective co-creation at local and global levels' (Mistra Urban Futures, 2015: 9).

The other nine comparative project themes were defined as Food Value Chain; Solid Waste Management; Cultural Heritage and Just Cities; Participatory Cities; Migration and Urban Development; Transport and Sustainable Urban Development; Neighbourhood Transformation and Housing Justice; Urban Public Finance; and Knowledge Exchange.

Each comparative project has different origins and rationales, and different numbers of participating LIPs. For instance, the comparative food research has grown out of several foregoing comparative food projects involving the African Centre for Cities/Cape Town LIP and Kisumu LIP, including Consuming Urban Poverty and the Hungry Cities Partnership, so considerable comparative quantitative and qualitative research work had already been undertaken in those projects. The focus was now broadened somewhat to accommodate other LIPs, particularly in Gothenburg and Sheffield–Manchester, where interests focus on allotment cultivation and augmentation of urban food supply; urban commoning; active engagement of refugees with agricultural skills and the need to earn livelihoods; and the reduction of food miles. This broad focus on food justice represents a

replicated comparative project, along with research on solid waste management and comparative work on how knowledge transfers from public sectors to academia and vice versa. Public finance is at the other end of the scale, the smallest comparative project, having grown out of a PhD project comparing the municipal financial systems in the cities of Cape Town and Kisumu.

The category based on transnational PhD collaboration has its very successful forerunner in a model set up with special funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency as a mutual learning process between PhD students at the Gothenburg and Kisumu platforms. The four Swedish and three Kenyan PhD students, together with their supervisors, co-developed an innovative but complex learning and research process. This had both cross-national co-production as a basis for some of the PhD projects, and cross-national comparison and learning among the PhDs themselves, in the form of common seminars, courses and exchanges. Besides the development of the seven theses, the participants and tutors have also been developing reflexive work on the process itself (Jernsand and Kraff, 2016). However, when the new comparative work was launched in 2016, the PhD category was ultimately omitted, due to the lack of funding for new PhD positions.

Taken together, these projects and their respective themes represent a good amalgam of the respective platforms' particular local priorities and broad coverage of the Realising Just Cities agenda. Reassuringly, they also correspond well to topical comparative research themes identified in the literature, where urban politics on sustainability, urban justice, the cultural turn in urban studies, and mobility and migration as well as methodological and theoretical advances in comparative urban research are highlighted (Clarke, 2010; Robinson, 2011, 2016; Roy, 2011, 2016; Glick Schiller, 2012; Gough, 2012; Jacobs, 2012; Simon, 2015).

Discussion

This final section comments on some main features of the proposed methodology and typologies in relation to the chapters to follow.

As a multidimensional research approach set out from the base of a Centre organised around multiple city platforms, the comparative agenda set out here is indeed challenging and risky. The explicit challenges from each sub-project will become apparent in the following chapters. The close interconnections between process and outcomes in this kind of research, and how the construction of a research process also affects the research objectives, will also be visualised. McFarlane (2010) tells us that efforts to learn between cultures of theory raise ethical and political considerations. In transdisciplinary co-production, these are already pressing but acknowledged matters, as the knowledge cultures involved are varied and have to find room for both conflicts and negotiations in processes of knowledge integration. Nevertheless, it brings us to constantly consider which knowledge counts and who sets the pre-conditions for the knowledge production. In our case, the project emerged from local concerns that had been the bases for co-produced local investigations and, when seen through a larger framework of Realising Just Cities, would start to build relations across platforms and across multi-stakeholder research groups. Relevance to local context is crucial, and as the complexity of the large proposal also makes it vulnerable, it will not find its driving motivation if it does not resonate with the local actors involved.

As explained at the end of [Chapter One](#), the following chapters are each presented as a larger ‘case’ (sometimes consisting of more than one thematic research project), debating the relevance of the typologies foreseen and how reflecting on these have contributed to the process of the research. Thus [Chapter Three](#) discusses retrofitting as a comparative strategy in a study of waste management. [Chapter Four](#) reflects on replicating as a comparative approach between three different

research teams concerned with an educational knowledge exchange programme set in place at two different LIPs: food security, and transportation and urban development. [Chapter Five](#) reflects how clustering has been a helpful typology through which to organise and analyse a number of discrete projects on migration and urban development. [Chapter Six](#) discusses strategies for building a centrally organised comparative project with multiple local teams in relation to the implementation of SDG 11 and the NUA. [Chapter Seven](#) showcases a local collaborative project that explores the relevance for comparative work of transdisciplinary learning within a team comprising academics, local authority officers and non-governmental organisation staff. The final chapter provides a concluding discussion and reflection of this agenda and its potential for adaptation, together with a discussion on potential contribution of the comparative work to the Centre's agenda of Realising Just Cities.

Notes

- 1 *Comparative Urban Research* was edited by William John Hanna and published by Transaction Periodicals Consortium at Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA, but ceased publication due to declining interest and support.
- 2 'Wicked' problems are those complex, hard-to-define problems that do not lend themselves to single, permanent or replicable solutions (Rittel and Webber, 1973).
- 3 Realising Just Cities is the title of both the framework explained in [Chapter One](#) and of a comparative project. The latter includes comparative inquiries at each LIP, examining the platform's role as active intermediaries and the importance of reflexivity in seeking to detect so-called second- and third-order effects. It includes further components than the ten comparative projects only, hence its full structural framework is not entirely relevant to describe in this context of comparative project methodology.

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