On Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through Coproduction of Knowledge

A Case Study of the Makers Valley Partnership

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Abstract

While the inner city of Johannesburg in South Africa exhibits a considerable decline and disarray, it is simultaneously a site attracting investment, infrastructural change, and growth. An enabling and democratic space for multistakeholder partnerships is therefore vital, particularly one that is inclusive, mutually benefitting, and reflecting local validity. Drawing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an analytical framework, the chapter explores the actions of a particular civil society organisation, the Makers Valley Partnership (MVP), that has established relations with several universities and entities to further sustainable development within Johannesburg's inner city. In these endeavours, a systematic, participatory approach to enhance the coproduction of knowledge is advocated. The latter could address uneven power dynamics as evident in previous ways of working and thus help to attain the SDGs. With respect to collaborations between civil society and public libraries, the key concern here is whether such alliances can be meaningfully built to achieve a common goal. It is argued that libraries can potentially play critical societal roles in the way they partner with civil society organisations, groupings, and movements. The chapter concludes with emerging lessons, recommendations, and policy implications.

Keywords: Coproduction of knowledge; libraries and civil society; Makers Valley Partnership (MVP); localising SDGs; Inner city Johannesburg

1 This chapter has been written largely by Inolofatseng Lekaba (80%) with helpful conceptual, theoretical, and literature inclusions from Trynos Gumbo (10%) and Kammila Naidoo (10%).

Introduction

The rate of urbanisation on the African continent is rising astronomically. As it stands, countries on the continent are attempting to address socio-economic and environmental imbalances caused by Africa's population dynamics (Ruhiiga 2013:48; Hunter-Adams, Makandwa, Matthews, Nyamnjoh, Oni, & Vearey 2018:12; Kundu, Sietchiping, & Kinyanjui 2020:5). Pressing problems include poverty, economic slump, housing shortages, food insecurity and environmental degradation (Castells-Quintana & Wenban-Smith 2019:1670). This represents the same socio-economic and ecological ills that inspired Agenda 2030 and is the basis on which the United Nations (UN) adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets and 232 indicators in 2015 (Rao 2016:2). Scholars have argued that the SDGs emerged from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) due to the UN's realisation that current developmental challenges have their origins in the increased rates of urbanisation (Sachs 2012:7). In 2016, UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda was formulated in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to reposition cities from sites of developmental challenges to those where solutions can be built (Caprotti, Cowley, Datta, Broto, Gao, Georgeson, Herrick, Odendaal, & Joss 2017:369). According to the UN (2017:3), there is a correlation between good urbanisation and development as expressed in the linkages between the principles of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs, spotlighting Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

It is because of this correlation that we are writing this chapter in which we focus on the developmental challenges experienced in the inner city of Johannesburg, and attempts by local partnerships to address it, using the 17 SDGs as a guiding framework. Here, we investigate the contextual nuances that underly these partnerships through a case study of the establishment and functioning of a grassroots civil society organisation, the Makers Valley Partnership.[2]

The chapter will first unpack the development scene of inner city Johannesburg. We will then give arguments for the localisation of SDGs while highlighting the MVP attempts in this endeavour. Third, we will zero-in on the nature of the partnerships between the MVP and universities. Finally, this chapter will propose a way forward for mutually beneficial partnerships between civil society organisations and university libraries that could ensure the realisation of Agenda 2030.

2 The research is based on a post-MA (REC 02-0035-2018) initiative. The key informant interviewees who are quoted, consented formally to their participation.

Framing the Local

In this section of the chapter, the overarching context of this study is explored. First, the focus is on the catalytic events that led to a ghettoised Johannesburg inner city, the resulting revitalisation programmes led by the local government, and private property development and its alignment to national (National Development Plan) and international development policies (SDGs). Second, this section will deconstruct arguments posed for the localisation of SDGs, given the context of Johannesburg's inner city and site for this study.

Johannesburg's Inner City

Historically, the Johannesburg inner city was a space through which wealth generated from the gold rush could materialise. The inner city, a buzzing hub of economic activity, began experiencing decline from the early 1950s. The initial catalytic event for this decline was the departure of the City Council to an outlying area, with the second catalyst being the change of parking regulations to restrict car usage (Guelke 2005:85). This saw businesses relocating and abandoning buildings. The third influencing factor was the ushering in of a democratic dispensation during which previously excluded racial groups began moving into abandoned buildings. This arguably triggered what is often themed as 'white flight' (Harrison, Gotz, Todes, & Wray 2014:15; Gotz & Simone 2003:130).

Mututa (2020:210) states that this series of catalytic events birthed a ghettoised Johannesburg inner city that is only a shadow of its golden era. However, so has the city's rapid urbanisation. Johannesburg has seen a population growth of 2.91% per annum from 2010 to 2020, which is double the rate of the rest of the country (Todes, Weakley, & Harrison 2018:284; Moyo 2020:160). Being the fastest growing city in South Africa, Johannesburg is grappling with various developmental challenges (Mbembe & Nuttall 2007:24; Practice Group 2018:1). While the city is a major contributor to the country's GDP, it has a poverty and inequality crisis with its economy ranked as one of the most unequal on a global scale (Madlalate 2017:474): 40% of those formally employed are described as unskilled or semi-skilled, underscoring that the city's skills base is discordant with its economic structure. There is also an unemployment rate of 32.7% while the youth unemployment is 40%+ (Stats SA 2011). In Johannesburg's inner city, as is in the rest of the metro, social exclusion and inadequate levels of human development translate socially as deprivation, substance abuse, gender-based violence, and crime, as well as spatially through housing shortages, low urban densities, large distances between places of employment, and residence and urban decay (City of Johannesburg 2020:40).

Despite these developmental hurdles, Johannesburg is at the centre of much reinvestment from the local government and private property developers (Reid 2005:158). The Johannesburg Development Agency, private developers through City Improvement Districts (CID), and other interested groups are implementing several inner city revitalisation plans and programmes at varying scales (Vejby 2015:89; Didier, Peyroux, & Morange 2012:920). While the site for this study is not a formal CID, the Victoria Yards urban revitalisation project is a joint venture to address developmental ills experienced on the eastern edge of inner-Johannesburg (Crewe-Brown 2018; Ho 2019).

Victoria Yards and other inner city revitalisation programmes are informed by the City of Johannesburg's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Zack 2015:63-65). The 2020/2021 IDP outlines goals and targets that mirror the SDGs, including employment creation, reducing socio-economic inequalities, and fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient city (Amirtahmasebi, Orloff, Wahba, & Altman 2016). Local developmental policies such as the IDP and Johannesburg 2040 Growth and Development Strategy derive their direction from provincial and national policies (Kalina & Rogan 2017:10). South Africa, as a member state of the UN, develops its national development policies according to the frameworks provided by the UNDP as demonstrated by Fourie (2018:767) as well as Mthembu and Nhamo (2021:13). As such, there is a 74% correlation between Agenda 2030-SDGs and South Africa's NDP, Vision 2030 (Cloete 2018:4). In addition, owing to Goals 11 and 17 of the SDGs plus the New Urban Agenda, Johannesburg is strategically positioning itself as an enabling space for multistakeholder partnerships in the urban age.

Localising the SDGs

It is often argued that for the city of Johannesburg and other developmental organisations to create an enabling space for multistakeholder partnerships, there needs to be an increased sense of ownership, especially in terms of the SDGs (Dube & Nhamo 2021:2197). While it can be argued that in the Johannesburg policy context, SDGs have been incorporated into key frameworks like the IDP (Fourie 2018:767), such policy integration does not always translate to the localisation of the SDGs. This is because this process requires more than a mere local application of global level agendas (Tan, Siri, Gong, Ong, Lim, MacGillivray, & Marsden 2019:3). Hence, this section of the chapter deals with the advocacy for localisation of the SDGs, and the different approaches available for this, which are regarded as the most suitable for the MVP.

Research conducted on the MDGs as well as Agenda 2030-SDGs has yielded insights on the costs and benefits of using global indicators to further local development (Chirisa 2012:4). Klopp and Petretta (2017:64) observe

that certainly global indicators are valuable for comparing developmental challenges and progress across varying contexts. They, however, serve to demotivate action as do not reflect local values and may contribute to a sacrifice of local validity (Burford, Tamás, & Harder 2016:28 of 38).

For countries in the Global South, where there are pre-existing resource and capacity shortages, global indicators are rendered unusable. Localisation advocates assert that for global indicators to assume relevancy and applicability at local scales, data should be obtained that match local needs and values to these indicators (Reddy 2016:3). However, it is difficult for countries in the Global South to do, as these countries typically do not have resources to invest in data collection, or the capacity for this. Similarly, these resource and capacity shortages negatively impact the locally informed adaptations of SDG indicators (Patel, Greyling, Simon, Arfvidsson, Moodley, Primo, & Wright 2017:789). In this sense, there is a fragmentation of tasks and expertise on both vertical and horizontal axes. This may result in local actors who are experiencing frequent seclusions which rob them of much needed support and empowerment, further hampering possibilities for participation and ownership (Ruzickova, Yaremchuk, & Besgul n.d.:19).

As already mentioned, the call for the localisation of SDGs goes beyond a simple local application. This process requires a systematic approach which includes local agenda setting, decision-making, and monitoring, using locally adapted indicators (Lucci 2015). In this way, local actors generate a sense of ownership over the global indicators that is arguably vital for efficacious SDG implementation at local scales. Thus, the localisation of SDGs is procedure-oriented, aiming to build procedures that are responsive and relevant to local needs and aspirations (Tan *et al.* 2019:2 of 10).

Tan *et al.* (2019:3 of 10) argue that the most suitable procedure for the localisation of SDGs, especially in resource-poor countries of the Global South such as Malaysia, is Systems Thinking and Place Based Methods. Thus, the Systems Thinking and Place Based Methods for the Healthier Malaysian Cities (SCHEMA) project was initiated in 2014, using multistakeholder case studies. These place-based case studies focussed on the facilitation of an overt understanding of relationships and interconnections by encouraging actors and stakeholders to make use of system tools for model and narrative building (Sustainable Places Research Institute 2014:1). In the face of the vertical and horizontal fragmentation of tasks and expertise, such methodologies are argued to provide a common language as well as shared narratives about important development issues. Furthermore, this approach is pointedly suitable for the localisation of SDGs because context-sensitive development issues are better addressed through locally available resources such as human capital (Zinkernagel, Evans, & Neij 2018).

This is exemplified by the comments of the steering committee at the MVP. Below is the CEO's answer to a question posed on how their steering committee was started:

> *It started before I joined in 2018 and it flopped. When I joined I said, 'Let's bring it back' and we did. Thuso put a flyer out on WhatsApp, printed posters and put them on the different places that we know people engage in our community and people applied via WhatsApp to say, 'I'd like to be in' and we said, 'These are the different pillars: There's small business development; there's recreation; there's clean, green and safe; there's different pillars and if you are passionate about a specific pillar, then we'd like you to be a volunteer on the steering committee.'*
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> *It has to be voluntary because we are the ones trying to create the committee but at the same time, we are not trying to influence the committee because the whole point is that they give us an objective point of view. We can assume and be on our high horses and have our meetings, but do we really have a real sense of what's happening? So, the steering committee was supposed to be people from our community but are not part of our organisation, who live and work in the community and have a passion and sense about their specific pillar…Their main role is to share what is needed for that specific pillar, like 'this is the status quo of recreation in our community; we think we need more activity at the park, we think we need more activity on the streets.' Whatever, so they would give us insights in terms of what is actually happening, where are the needs, where are we failing (CEO of MVP 2021).*

A defragmentation of expertise and tasks is evidenced in the steering committee working together with the MVP. In this context, experts that make up the Partnership are supported by community members in the form of the steering committee to examine a common goal and create new knowledge and theory (Tress, Tress, & Fry 2005:17). Surely, the fragmentation of expertise and tasks could be addressed using systems-thinking. However, in multistakeholder partnerships, another contextual difference needs to be considered, which is the context of power – hence, the discussion below.

Drawing in Theory

In this section, the theories that enhance this investigation into the MVP are engaged with. The most suitable framing theories are power and the

coproduction of knowledge – intended to orient the reader to intricacies of this case study.

The Nature of Partnerships in Multistakeholder Projects: The Context of Power

Literature that unpacks the nature of multistakeholder partnerships is presented here with a focus on the often-skewed power dynamics in participatory development. The essence of multistakeholder partnerships in development is to be a participatory platform for exercising voice and choice. Participation is preoccupied with developing a human, organisational, and management capacity to address challenges as they arise to sustain the improvements (Saxena 2011:6).

In multistakeholder participatory projects, expressions like 'empowerment' are habitually used, indicating an underlying context of power. Hence, we present arguments on the relations between power, rationality, and knowledge in such endeavours. This point of view is adopted because power and knowledge cannot be separated from each other. This observation was first expressed by Sir Francis Bacon (1597:20) in his pivotal quote, 'knowledge is power.' While this quote sufficiently expresses the fundamental nature of knowledge, it does little to fully extrapolate the nuances between power and knowledge.

Flyvbjerg (2003:18) argues that the relation between power and knowledge is one where the former can be exchanged for the latter and *vice versa*. Therefore, power *is* knowledge. Power exists where knowledge is abundant. Knowledge creates and maintains power. Therefore, an examination of the context of power in multistakeholder partnerships, especially those involving universities, that discounts or ignores knowledge, is one that is incomplete (Harkness 2005:1416). This is because the relation of power to knowledge is such that power determines what is judged as knowledge, presenting an interpretation of a phenomenon that is granted superiority over another. Additionally, power endeavours to acquire knowledge that can enhance its purpose and in the same breath, suppress knowledge that lies outside its mission (Short 2012:1819).

It is based on this argument that Flyvbjerg (2003:18) presents the case of the Aalborg Project to examine power, knowledge, and rationality, using ten propositions. In these propositions, it is increasingly clear that in democratic institutions, just as in social institutions, power dominates over rationality, even though democracy hinges on rationality to function well. Hence, in settings such as the Aalborg Project and others (Shabani 2003:93; Petzka 2007:17; Anderson 2019:197) where rationality has proved to be weak in the face of power, democracy built on this weak foundation risk's frailty. Seeing

that multistakeholder partnerships such as those examined in this study are anchored on democracy, this is concerning.

Monitoring Power in Multistakeholder Partnerships: Coproduction of Knowledge

It is with this layered understanding of the rationality of power that the concept of coproduction arose. Coproduction as a form of participatory theory and practice in knowledge production is regarded to effectively move towards creating longstanding shifts in democracy (Osborne, Radnor, & Nasi 2013:141; Weimer & De Ruijter 2017). It is a practical form of participation through which the liberty to define rationality (knowledge) and thus create reality is shared among the powerful administrative authorities and less powerful citizens (Pestoff, Bransen, & Verschuere 2013:4). Advocates for coproduction argue that this shared freedom to create reality can more effectively balance out the imbalanced power relations that exist in this system, as demonstrated by Polk and Kain (2015:18) as well as Durose and Richardson (2016:13).

While the concept of the coproduction of knowledge has gained significant popularity due to its compatibility with democratic principles, it has multiple and varied definitions. Varied as these definitions are, they link the coproduction of knowledge to an evolving band of participatory and cross-disciplinary research methodologies (Nature 2018). For sustainability research, coproduction of knowledge is lauded as potentially producing a greater impact on sustainable development outcomes (Balvanera, Daw, Gardner, Martín-López, Norström, Speranza, Spierenburg, Bennett, Farfan, Hamann, Kittinger, Luthe, Maass, Peterson, & Perez-Verdin 2017). Hence, for this research, on achieving the UN SDGs through the coproduction of knowledge in the inner city of Johannesburg, this concept is understood in terms of 'Iterative and collaborative processes involving diverse types of expertise, knowledge and actors to produce context-specific knowledge and pathways towards a sustainable future' (Norström, Cvitanovic, Löf, West, Wyborn, Balvanera, Bednarek, Bennett, Biggs, De Bremond, Campbell, Canadell, Carpenter, Folke, Fulton, Gaffney, Gelcich, Jouffray, Leach, Le Tissier, Martín-López, Louder, Loutre, Meadow, Nagendra, Payne, Peterson, Reyers, Scholes, Speranza, Spierenburg, Stafford-Smith, Tengö, Van der Hel, Van Putten, & Österblom 2020:183). With the emphasis on 'iterative context-based processes,' this definition encompasses the arguments made by Tan *et al.* (2019:4 of 10) that Systems Thinking and Place-Based Methods are the most suitable for the localisation of SDGs in resource-poor countries of the Global South. Therefore, this study understands the coproduction of knowledge as a procedure through which knowledge is produced alongside capacity development, the building of social networks and capital, and an implementation of activities that

contribute to sustainability while monitoring power (Jasanoff 2004:5; Miller & Wyborn 2018:90).

Goldman et al. (2018:6) argue that despite these noble ideals of the practice, coproduction of knowledge often works as a veil to power differentials, thus necessitating a further development of nuanced analytical tools for examining power dynamics in social institutions. One such tool is introduced by Montana (2019:1582) that examines power dynamics in decision making institutions by dissecting multiple organisational dimensions as it pertains to coproduction. Using the case of an international sustainability programme, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) applies this analytical tool to examine the power relations between participants, processes, and products.

In the examination of this case, Montana (2019:1584) presents his overarching argument through the lens of coproductive forums, socially constructed spaces in the organisation that are posed in time and space to facilitate structures and oftentimes continually negotiate interactions between the participants, processes, and products. More typical, these forums can be workshops or collective meetings. They can, however, also take the shape of less controlled exchanges like e-mail correspondence or lunch meetings. In this case study, participants are researchers, stakeholders, or policy makers. The process could take the form of a workshop where the products commonly lean towards being of a scientific nature such as reports or articles, or in other instances, social networks, collective schemas, and other such softer products (Miller & Wyborn 2018:92). These forums, regardless of their nature, operate within frameworks of participation, representation, and deliberation, with their outcomes conveyed through a series of activities, guided by a framework of circulation. Frameworks of participation determine the involvement of some individuals over others (Brandsen, Verschuere, & Steen 2018:5). In the frameworks of representation, individuals are selected from designated population groups or communities as representatives of whatever worldview (Lindquist 2013). Frameworks of deliberation are more prescriptive of how the interactions between these individuals will take place, detailing the decision-making process (Kallis, Videira, & Antunes 2007:24), while the frameworks of circulation are centred on building and providing for a practical logical lens for designing and assessing coproduction initiatives (Durose & Richardson 2016:14).

Coproduction as occurring through these frameworks and its concepts can be idealised as the axiom of democratic progress (Lidskog & Elander 2007:76) and as a noble endeavour for empowering citizens and other groups that do not traditionally share in the decision-making process of social institutions. Despite this seemingly supportive environment for coproduction,

these frameworks and concepts of participation, representation, deliberation, and circulation are occurring within organisational dynamics that might not always be aligned to its principles.

Indeed, Pestoff (2018) argues that the complexities of the organisation can either enhance the democratic process of coproduction or diminish its effectiveness in monitoring power. It is observed that organisational dynamics in the IPBES case proved to be quite rigid to the ideals of the coproductive initiatives (Montana 2019). Participants found that despite all others, the organisational framework based on individual value systems affected their liberty to exercise the power vested in them by this 'inclusive' form of participation. Montana (2019), Pestoff (2006:15; 2018), and Vamstad (2007:229) conclude that, to remedy this challenge, designers of coproduction initiatives are to be more aware of the impact of cultural variances in organisational frameworks.

In this case and those presented by Jasanoff (2004:10) as well as Rausch and Krige (2012:9), coproduction is not an inclusion-centred form of participation presented to ensure a joint production of knowledge and rationality, it is rather a process of learning and incorporating different ways of organising social (power) relations. The organisational dimensions (participation, representation, and deliberation) offer a varied analytical tool for interrogating power dynamics in a democracy, contrasting the power and rationality tool offered by Flyvbjerg (2003:320). With both tools, power relations in a democracy can be interrogated organisationally and systemically. Using the organisational dimensions tool, the micro power relations between participants, processes, and products in social and democratic institutions are illuminated, and with the systemic lens, there is an opportunity to examine the social structure of power and rationality in these institutions.

In an effort to ground these theoretical understandings, the coproduction of knowledge in achieving the SDGs at the MVP will be assessed, using four general principles as espoused by Norström *et al*. (2020:187). These principles are chosen because they emphasise the context-specificity and process-based nature of this approach (Balvanera *et al*. 2017; Patel *et al*. 2017:790). Hence, the four principles for the exceptional coproduction of knowledge for sustainability are 1) context-based; 2) pluralistic; 3) goal-oriented; and 4) interactive.

Methodological Approach: Gathering Data

In this section of the chapter, data on the establishment and functioning of the Makers Valley Partnership are presented. The data are drawn from a preliminary study that began in May 2021, conducted by one of the authors. To synthetise this section, four data collection tools are described. The first is a document review through which publicly available reports were assessed.

The main author also requested documents from the CEO and community manager that could elucidate the day-to-day functioning of the organisation (Nishigaki, Nitta, & Onoda 2018:47). The second data collection tool was unstructured interviews with the CEO and community manager of the MVP and the chairperson of its board (Roulston & Choi 2018:234). In an effort to add another layer to this data collection process, participatory and non-participatory observations of the MVP were conducted at their studio in Victoria Yards (Lavia, Witchel, Aletta, Steffens, Fiebig, Kang, Howes, & Healey 2017). This took place in the period between April and August 2021, during which the fourth data collection tool was employed, which is naturally occurring conversations (Kyprianou, Graebner, & Rindova 2015:274) between the first author and the CEO, chairman of the board of the MVP, community manager, studio manager, and project coordinator of the MVP, and founders of local civil society organisations. The data from the document review, unstructured interviews, observations, and conversations were then analysed using a bottom-up approach to thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3353). This was all done under the theoretical umbrella of a contextualist qualitative methodology (Bachmann 2020:81).

Case Study: The Makers Valley Partnership(s)

The MVP, a non-profit company that uses action research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2017:303) in its work with social and creative enterprises in Johannesburg's inner city, originates from two knowledge production exercises. The first was the PhD project of its cofounder, spanning from 2017 to 2020. The second was the Makers Way placemaking project between the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership and the local community. In this section of the chapter, we will unpack the emergence of the MVP through these two projects, specifically the Makers Way project, and present experiences from its decision-making partners, the CEO and community-manager, in its day-to-day operations. This analysis is done, using the overarching theory of coproduction of knowledge. To begin with, the context of power in the MVP is examined, followed by the organisation's use of tools to monitor this power context.

The Context of Power between the Makers Valley Partnership and University Libraries in Achieving the SDGs

With the establishment of the MVP, originating from the PhD research of its cofounder, it is not surprising that the civil society organisation values working with institutions of higher education. Certainly, the MVP has worked with several universities to further the sustainable development of eastern inner Johannesburg. However, these collaborations have not yielded mutually

beneficial exchanges. Lending evidence to the arguments made about power, rationality, and knowledge in such arrangements (Ozdemir 2021:354).

In conversations with the organisation's cofounder, who has his roots in academia, it was revealed that universities are benefiting from their engagement with the MVP. He reported that researchers and students who approach them can test their inventions in a 'real' life context or simply study the organisation, produce research reports, publish articles, and grow intellectually and professionally, while leaving the community unchanged (Hutchings 2021:54). In this power context, researchers who are backed by powerful institutions like universities, dictate the knowledge which is produced, use rationality to define reality, and further enhance their position (Short 2012:1877).

With this understanding of the skewed power dynamics between the MVP and universities, a question was posed to the interviewees to gauge if they envisioned a mutually beneficial partnership between their organisation – by extension the community – and university libraries. The cofounder clearly stated that he does not know how this would work, given the imbalances of past collaborations with universities. He reported that apart from enhancing the community's access to information, he does not envision any other type of partnership with an academic library. The CEO argued that it would be ideal for universities (not necessarily libraries) to make research funding available to the MVP so that they could conduct their own investigations on the community needs and the effectiveness of their projects and programmes. While research funding has not materialised for the MVP, they are writing and submitting funding proposals to international donors with the help of a social impact researcher from the United Kingdom. This endeavour, as well as its rationale are aligned with the arguments made for the localisation of SDGs in countries of the Global South with limited resources and capacity for research (Zinkernagel *et al.* 2018:7 of 17).

Design and System-Thinking as a Tool for Coproduction of Knowledge

The Makers Way project, an initiative of the MVP, followed an experimentational approach to placemaking for purposes of exploring, linking, and sharing ideas, skills, and knowledge. The method used for this was design thinking, which is argued by the cofounder and in the Makers Way project plan, to have proven most desirable for two reasons: First, it was revealed that through design thinking, community buy-in could be cultivated. Second and most relevant to this research, design thinking was identified by the Makers Way project implementation team as having the ability to ensure that the societal hierarchies and inequalities that are pervasive in the local context of power can be levelled out (MVP 2018:37). In this regard, design thinking was adopted as a

tool for monitoring power dynamics in the project, a tenet that is inexplicitly attuned to Goal 10 of the SDGs-reduced inequalities.

This method of design thinking as understood universally and applied in the Makers Way project is akin to a knowledge coproduction exercise. It also mirrors systems approach principles that are espoused for localising SDGs including the local agenda setting and decision-making. This method typically follows six stages to produce the desired outcomes, products, and learnings. The first is called 'empathise,' where members of the community share their lived experiences with development experts in order to ensure that those affected by the problem are centred (Elsbach & Stigliani 2018:2301). The second stage involves the analysis of data collected by experts from the community's lived experiences. In this stage, the core of the developmental problem is 'defined,' using both expert and conventional knowledge. In the third stage of the design thinking method, all stakeholders 'brainstorm' possible solutions to the clearly defined and understood problem, suggesting 'inventions' that will be made with transient materials in stage four of prototyping. In the fifth stage, the inventions and solutions are 'tested,' the results of which are 'shared' among all in the sixth and final stage (Mahmoud-Jouini, Midler, & Silberzahn 2016:148).

In attempts to safeguard the effectiveness of this process, community members, local organisations, and experts were allowed to group themselves according to an area of interest or one in which they were already active. The three interest areas for the Makers Way project were 'safe and clean,' relating to SDGs 6 and 13, 'productive,' that spoke to SDG 9, and 'inclusive,' which facilitated projects addressing SGDs 4, 5, 10, 16, and 17 (MVP 2018:3). Certainly, it was not difficult for the project managers and facilitators to garner participation on these three areas of interest because residents of the Valley are passionate about their neighbourhood, enough to want to be instrumental in its betterment. However, other unforeseen challenges were encountered and centred on the method of design thinking (MVP 2018:34). According to the Makers Way phase 1 report, community stakeholders did not grasp this method of project implementation until a workshop was held. In this workshop, facilitated by Play Africa (a non-profit organisation that uses play to teach children and adults), stakeholders practically engaged in the six stages of design thinking. While this assisted to conscientise them on process-driven projects, it was decided that for the subsequent phases of the Makers Way, they would focus on mostly working with organisations and individuals who already use the design thinking method in their own projects (MVP 2018:44).

The Makers Way project, even though it sought to address key areas of development through 16 placemaking activations, did not set out to establish

permanent solutions to the explored challenges. Rather, through design thinking, this project created a space for experimentation and mutual learning where experts, local organisations, and especially members of the community would develop their skills and build self-worth through testing out their ideas and seeing them materialise (MVP 2018:44). Thus, the founding project of the MVP paved the way for the civil society organisation to adopt a working culture aligned to the argument of Tan *et al*. (2019:8 of 10) for localising SDGs, which advocates for procedures that are responsive and relevant to local needs and aspirations. In the Makers Way of 2018, this procedure was the design thinking approach with multiple stakeholders.

In 2019, when the MVP was formally established as a non-profit company for the sustainable, inclusive development of the eastern edge of inner Johannesburg, the civil society organisation inherited the following feature from the Makers Way project: its aim was to continue creating a space for experimentation, learning, and skills' sharing among all its stakeholders (MVP 2018:44). While no longer explicitly applying design thinking for their projects, the community manager informed the main author that the MVP attracted knowledge producers in the form of researchers and inventors from other civil society organisations and universities. The community manager elaborates on this below:

> *For instance, a lecturer at Wits wants to test out a product with Engineers Without Borders at the community…We started learning to use the community as a space to brainstorm ideas and solutions to whatever challenges that are present. Community-engagement sessions are used to merge different knowledge systems by allowing experts to come in to share how they could benefit the community but also let community members share their experiences with experts to create a project that benefits and solves local issues. This is always the case: Researchers and experts approach Makers Valley Partnership with ideas that they want to pilot and Makers Valley Partnership acts as a bridge to reach the community (Community Manager of Makers Valley Partnership 2021).*

Through projects such as the Food Hub and Swap Shop which are both focused on reducing food insecurity in the community and thus speak to Goal 2 of Zero Hunger, the MVP had to adopt a heuristic implementation approach. These projects specifically arose from the crisis of Covid-19 in 2020 where community members lost their jobs and could no longer afford to feed themselves and their children. The MVP had to respond quickly to this challenge which saw several hiccups arise months later, such as the theft of food and kitchen supplies. However, the MVP and its partners in these projects were afforded multiple

opportunities to learn from this and create a food security programme that is responsive to local needs and conditions. Currently, this programme has birthed a new social enterprise in the area, contributing to zero hunger, decent work, and economic growth (SDGs 2 and 8).

In these examples, we observe how the legacy of the design thinking approach, used in the Makers Way project permeates the day-to-day functioning of the civil society organisation. Here, the six stages of the method are loosely followed and there is a culture of coproduction of knowledge that is embodied by the MVP.

This tenet is also witnessed through the organogram of this civil society organisation. As its name suggests, the organisation is not an individualised entity, but rather an amalgamation of creative and social enterprises that are working towards a similar goal of inclusive, sustainable development on the eastern edge of Johannesburg's inner city. According to the CEO, there are numerous partners that the MVP works with to ensure that various developmental challenges in the community are addressed. Partners include the Love Our City Klean, which is a local social enterprise that works on waste management; Safe Study and Timbuktu in the Valley are both non-profit entities that focus on early childhood development and basic education; 94 Colours works with reducing inequalities; Engineers Without Borders (EWB); the University of the Witwatersrand; and the University of Johannesburg's Process, Energy and Environmental Technology Station (UJ PEETS). Some of these partners are located within the affected community. However, the CEO alluded to the fact that there is a significant number of their partners that are not based inside the community such as EWB, the University of the Witwatersrand, UJ PEETS, and the American Embassy, who nonetheless provide important capacity and resource development for the MVP.

In one of their research funding proposals to the Ford Foundation, the MVP articulated how this research project will follow a coproduction of knowledge methodology (MVP 2021). This would be done through inviting community members to form a part of the research team where they will be trained as community scientists. The insights from the research would then be used for a public exhibition and a framework of their operation will be developed and exported to other civil society groupings around the country. This plan is in tandem with the principles for the coproduction of knowledge in sustainability research as espoused by Norström *et al.* (2020:183). While their operational model is not characterised along these theoretical lines, our examination thereof revealed that they are already engaged with these principles.

First, their processes are context-based, only focusing on the five neighbourhoods of Bertrams, Troyville, New Doornfontein, Judith's Paarl,

and Lorentzville, as well as the developmental challenges thereof. Second, they explicitly recognise multiple ways of knowing and doing as are obvious in the numerous workshops held with people from diverse backgrounds (Nature 2018). For instance, their workshop for establishing a 'Theory of Change' involved individuals from higher education institutions, community members, and themselves as an organisation. Third, MVP is goal oriented in their knowledge production (Van der Hel 2016:169). In conversations with their CEO and community manager, it was noted that even though they insist on flexibility in their targets, they do this within the confines of their broad goal of creating an enabling environment for social and creative enterprises in the Valley. Lastly, this environment is one that is highly interactive (Pohl & Hardon 2017:232). The MVP engages in multiple projects that involve continuous experimentation and learning, such as the Food Hub. They periodically hold community conversations, have a community-driven steering committee, a community WhatsApp group, the CEO sits on multiple City of Johannesburg development forums, and through their studio at Victoria Yards, they directly interact with different members of the community they serve.

Coproduction of Knowledge between the Makers Valley Partnership and University Libraries: Possible Pathways

Could this approach be used for collaboration between the MVP and university libraries and possibly level out the uneven power dynamics witnessed in the past, and in this way achieve the SDGs? While the answer to this question is yet to emerge from this study, this segment of the chapter aims to examine instances where civil society and public libraries have formed alliances to achieve a common goal. It is from these examples that a collaboration between the MVP and university libraries could be envisioned.

It goes without question that libraries are crucial for supporting literate, informed, and participatory communities (Weinberg & Flinders 2018). In their support for active citizenship, libraries are bolstered by energetic and dynamic individuals (Findlay-King, Nichols, Forbes, & Macfadyen 2018:165). Hence, the relation between society and dynamic libraries is ideally symbiotic. On this basis, libraries can play an imperative role in the overall society by partnering with civil society organisations, groupings, and movements. While these partnerships could yield much public good, their nature is typically ambiguous. This ambiguity is a result of the open-ended nature of the functions of libraries in different contexts (Library Policy and Advocacy 2017).

Nonetheless, there are instances where such partnerships have been formed to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders. In the first example, the Hungarian School Librarians Association joined a coalition of non-governmental organisations which was opposing a legislation that sought to fundamentally centralise the public education system. Even though

the movement was made up of groupings representing students, parents, teachers, and other interest groups, it still found a single voice where it was understood that a strong school library strengthens democratic schools and *vice versa* (Domsody, Pataki, & Veronika 2017:6). The second example takes us to Columbia in Latin America, where the Fundación Connector invigorated the national library sector through organising, expanding new tools, aiding libraries present at events and respond to consultations. This was all done to realise one goal: To heighten the government's engagement in copyright reforms of 2011 (Ramirez-Ordonez & Ramirez-Ordonez 2017:3). Therefore, since this movement, libraries are now recognised as key stakeholders in debates that centre access to information (Fundación Conector 2015). In the last case, the City Library of Newcastle invited an NGO (Open Rights Group) working on digital privacy to host a crypto party at their premises. Through this, the City Library formed an alliance with civil society for purposes of ensuring intellectual freedom while also enticing unique expertise (IFLA 2017).

Policy Implications

While this chapter is written from a preliminary and ongoing research endeavour, there are emerging lessons, recommendations, and policy implications. Hence, this brief treatment. Indeed, for settings such as the Johannesburg inner city where resources and capacity are limited, multistakeholder partnerships are ideal for the efficient realisation of SDGs, more so in localisation efforts. However, a key lesson that arose from this case study is that such partnerships are oftentimes ladened with skewed power relations. These imbalances are produced and reproduced, using knowledge and rationality, demonstrated in the relations between the MVP and universities as well as affiliated individuals. As a recommendation for equitable multistakeholder partnerships in this context, a dualistic application of coproduction of knowledge should be adopted. Here, the principles for knowledge coproduction as presented by Norström *et al.* (2020:183) would be used for learning and incorporating different ways of organising social power at both organisational and systematic levels. At an organisational scale, the micro power relations between participants, processes, and products in social institutions (civil society and university libraries) are illuminated through knowledge coproduction, while systematically, the method offers an opportunity to examine the social structure of power and rationality. Although this is not the approach used in the Hungarian and Columbian examples, it can still be argued that for a sustainable Johannesburg inner city, the approach to coproduction of knowledge between the MVP, universities, and academic libraries, is the best policy directive.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of a Johannesburg inner city that has been experiencing a decline since the 1950s, but also reinvestment and revitalisations with the dawn of democracy, this chapter sought to investigate the partnership possibilities between civil society organisations and universities for achieving the SDGs. This was done with a case study of the MVP. First, the chapter outlined that despite an alignment between the development policies of South Africa (by extension, Johannesburg) and the UN's Agenda 2030, the localisation of SDGs requires a procedural shift that would ensure a sense of ownership for local actors. With the emphasis on multistakeholder partnerships as a vehicle through which this could be achieved, the context of power that is often under-investigated, was described. Through this, the imbalanced power dynamics in multistakeholder partnerships were highlighted through unpacking the relation between power, knowledge, and rationality. The coproduction of knowledge was positioned as an antidote to the rationality of power detected in these partnerships. This theoretical basis was then applied to the establishment and operational models of the MVP, revealing that this grassroots civil society organisation in Johannesburg's inner city understood the value of knowledge-based development action and has centred knowledge coproduction in its projects.

However, while the organisation has partnered with universities in a select number of their projects, these partnerships have evidenced that the rationality of power indeed triumphs over the power of rationality in this context. Therefore, while the MVP still welcomes university engagement in its various SDG focused projects, it was revealed that it does not necessarily envision a mutually beneficial relation with these institutions, and this currently includes academic libraries. Hence, we sought out international examples that elucidate partnerships between civil society and academic or public libraries for the attainment of a common goal. It is with this understanding and optimism that policy recommendations have been made. Through these models, the MVP can begin to imagine future collaboration with academic libraries and institutions that would yield significant progress towards achieving the SDGs in their locale.

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