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Negotiating polyvocal strategies: re-reading de Certeau through the lens of urban planning in South Africa

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Abstract

Michel de Certeau's (1984) *The practice of everyday life* has become a canonical text in urban studies, with his idea of tactics having been widely deployed to understand and theorise the everyday. Tactics of resistance were contrasted to the strategies of the powerful, but the ways in which these strategies are operationalised was left ambiguous by de Certeau and has remained undertheorised since. We address this lacuna through an examination of the planning profession in South Africa as a *lieu propre* – a strategic territory with considerable power to shape urban environments. Based on a large interview dataset examining practitioner attitudes toward the state of the profession in South Africa, this paper argues that the strategies of the powerful are themselves subject to negotiation. We trace connections with de Certeau's earlier work to critique the idea that strategies are univocal. We do this by examining how the interests of different powerful actors can come into conflict, using the planning profession as an exemplar of how opposing strategies must be mediated in order to secure changes in society.

Introduction

Michel de Certeau's (1984) *The practice of everyday life* has become a key text in discussions of resistance across a range of global contexts and disciplines, especially urban studies. At its simplest, de Certeau makes a distinction between the strategies of the powerful and the tactics that are used to resist those strategies. The idea of tactics is central to de Certeau's attempt to understand and theorise the everyday. Strategies, conversely, remain undertheorised despite setting the place in which both everyday life and tactics of resistance are brought into being. This is a significant lacuna that we address here through an examination of the planning profession in South Africa.

Spatial planning has a particular affinity with de Certeau's work but previous research in the field of urban planning has been narrowly focussed, mainly focusing on tactics shaping everyday 'urban making' (see, for example, Nielsen and Simonsen, 2003; Elsheshtawy, 2013; Baptista, 2013) rather than the strategic practices of planning practitioners themselves. Walking in the city is used as a totemic example of a tactic because the designers of urban spaces cannot entirely determine the ways that people move around them (Bean et al., 2008; Middleton, 2018). Urban planning was thus presented by de Certeau (1984: 91-93) as *the* iconic strategy, seeking to control and dominate space by creating the concrete forms that host people's everyday activities. Strategies, for de Certeau, are about the control of space, but while he acknowledges different forms of strategies – political, military, capitalist – he says very little about how these different forms of power are played off against each other. This is understandable, given that the focus of his work was the quotidian and therefore the tactical, but it leaves open the question of how strategies emerge, how they evolve and, crucially, how they interact with other strategies that have contradictory objectives.

In this paper we take an analysis of the South African planning profession as a particularly acute example of how tensions between different strategies are *negotiated*. The paper is based on 89 in-depth qualitative interviews reviewing practitioner attitudes toward the state of the profession. We note the multiple and overlapping strategies that inform planning, examining how planners negotiate their practice between these. Planning practitioners are in the front line of often

contradictory strategies that are determining the shape (both metaphorical and literal) of post-Apartheid South Africa, balancing the need to mitigate the effects of ongoing racial injustice against a range of other powerful interests. The profession is changing alongside the nation, which makes it timely to reflect on how planning, as a strategic territory, is itself being reshaped.

The intellectual origins of strategies and tactics

Social scientists who use de Certeau's ideas tend to focus on two interrelated elements of his work. First, there are his discussions of space and place (e.g. Upton, 2002; Duff, 2010) and second, his theorising of tactics and strategies (e.g. Round et al., 2008; Andres, 2013). The engagement with his ideas is often somewhat superficial, simply using 'tactics' as a synonym for 'resistance'. We could have done something similar here, combing our interviews for evidence of planners acting 'tactically' by attempting to work in an advocacy mode (Davidoff, 1965) helping communities resist a neoliberal property development sector that puts profit above social justice (Watson, 2013). This would, however, be to ignore the very real strategic power held by planning practitioners by virtue of their professional status.

We will develop this link to planning practice below, but we begin by examining how de Certeau's ideas on power and authority developed during his career. His ideas evolved and should not be taken as a single canon, but at times he is frustratingly vague. Indeed, as Buchanan (2000) argues, even de Certeau's definitions of tactics and strategies are tentative and elusive, despite these being his most celebrated and cited concepts. Nonetheless, common themes recurred within his writing and we draw across a number of his publications to develop insights into some of these underdeveloped ideas. The ambiguity in his work creates the possibility of misinterpretation but also gives scope for extending the agenda that he sketched out, as we do here.

De Certeau's conceptualisation of resistance to institutional power can be read through his own scholarly marginalization from the Parisian intellectual mainstream of the 1970s (Terdiman, 2001). As Foster (2002) notes, de Certeau was also writing in a climate shaped by the aftermath of May 1968 and the Algerian independence movement; this no doubt influenced his desire to conceptualise resistance, while also sharpening his understanding of just how pervasive the power of the state could be. In his writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s, de Certeau analysed how processes such as centrally dictated socioeconomic planning sought to represent the world from a singular viewpoint. Yet his understanding of power and resistance was also shaped by directly working with the Ministry of Culture, perceiving its weakness within the French government's internal power struggles during the production of the Sixth National Plan. Far from being a single-minded government producing a singular plan, de Certeau witnessed how rival departments and individuals guided policymaking to serve their own interests (Ahearne, 2010: 188). These experiences had an influence on his subsequent writing including *Culture in the plural* (de Certeau, 1997 [1974]) which gathered together his published essays and lectures from 1967-73.

Culture in the plural highlighted the ways in which powerful actors sought to reduce public discourses down to *univocal*, singular positions. Trades unions, for example, had become less representative of the varied views of their membership by the later 1960s, becoming institutions of power that operated within the established order of society. De Certeau argued that wildcat strikes – a familiar phenomenon in France at that time – were a consequence of unions no longer speaking for their members (de Certeau, 1997 [1974]: 112). In the example of the wildcat strike, one can see ideas that would later inform de Certeau's notion of tactics – acts of resistance taking the form of a directionless rebellion against an established power structure. But what is also clear in this early work is that while the established order can capture popular institutions such as trades unions, there was also a sense that this established order was itself neither singular nor static.

The first specific mention of strategies and tactics within de Certeau's work comes in a short article, 'Cultural actions and political strategy: getting out of the circle' (de Certeau, 1974).[1] This article suffers the same ambiguities of definition that so frustrate Buchanan in his examination of *The practice of everyday life*. We do, however, get some clearer insights into how he understood strategies to operate. Within this article, society is characterised by a clear schism (de Certeau, 1974: 351-352). On the one hand, it is driven by *global languages*, which state how the world *should* be. Those languages, he argued, have been locked into existing systems and form the basis for his ideas around *strategies*. Conversely, he suggests that dispersed and localised *practices* have emerged, developed by different groups outside these global languages – here we see the origins of *tactics*.

This early article develops two further ideas that give additional insights into how strategies operate: the troglodyte system and concerted strategies. The troglodyte system allows powerful groups (e.g. doctors, teachers etc.) to capture the state's administration of public life in areas such as health, planning and education in order to address their own personal interests. These dominant professional actors conceal themselves within the institutions of government[2] shaping its agenda. Thus, the idea that central planning is purely technocratic and rational is shown to be illusory because powerful actors manipulate it to suit their purposes.

De Certeau describes the activities of troglodytes as being *concerted strategies* which deliberately challenge and disturb the existing system (ibid., 355-6). Instead of creating a system that responds to new needs within society, troglodytes in fact work to reinforce social division by using concerted strategies to reinforce the control of powerful groups over those systems. Thus, actors with strategic power can use their influence to shape global languages and reposition organisational power to address their own group interests without resort to tactical rebellion in the streets. Here, in effect, we see a *negotiation* between different strategies as powerful actors seek to create a favourable outcome for themselves within the wider strategies of state policymaking. We argue that these earlier ideas, predating *The practice of everyday life*, offer useful insights into how different kinds of strategies emerge and function.

Buchanan argues that instead of thinking of tactics and strategies as different forms of *power*, they should be seen as ways of producing *authority*. It is helpful here to reflect upon de Certeau's own analysis of Foucault's work to explore how panoptic discipline and strategies differ. De Certeau argued that prior to the Enlightenment, authority was generated through systems of affiliation and allegiance – to feudal lords, the church, the King. Discipline enacted via the panopticon created a new mechanism for exercising control which in turn created new ways to impose authority (Buchanan, 2000). Over time, de Certeau argues, we should expect other mechanisms to be developed which will supplant discipline, but through which the powerful will continue to exert their authority (de Certeau, 1984: 48-49). Thus de Certeau's strategies are distinct from Foucauldian discipline because they are not tied to a particular mechanism (i.e. panopticism) through which the *authority* of the powerful is reproduced.

At some points in *The practice of everyday life* the boundaries between strategies and tactics seem immutable, in others there is more ambiguity. In a discussion of Clausewitz's *On War*, de Certeau suggests that:

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[1] To our knowledge there has been no published English translation of this article. The translations used here are by the authors. The 'circle' of the title references a skit by comedian Raymond Devos about a circular traffic system from which drivers can never escape.

[2] He refers to these actors as 'making caves' within these institutions, continuing the troglodyte metaphor.

> Power is bound by its very visibility. In contrast, trickery is possible for the weak, and often it is his only possibility, as a "last resort": "The weaker the forces at the disposition of the strategist, the more the strategist will be able to use deception." I translate: the more the strategy is transformed into tactics. (de Certeau, 1984: 37)

This ambiguity is useful in that it opens the potential for tactics and strategies to be seen as a continuum rather than opposites. It is, however, another example of the frustrating quality to his work noted by Buchanan in that de Certeau hints at the possibility of a continuum between strategies and tactics, but never really returns to this. More significantly, for this paper, de Certeau hints here that strategies *themselves* can come into conflict, with powerful actors vying with each other to enact their authority in different ways across different times and spaces. Our interest here is in how conflict between opposing strategies is managed.

Setting up an opposition between polyvocal tactics and the crushing authority of univocal strategies, not only risks romanticising the resistant (McFarlane, 2011), but also obscures how strategies themselves are polyvocal, subject to change and conflict. Conflict between the strategies of the powerful requires negotiation between the interests of different actors. This need for negotiation *between* strategies, we argue, is distinct from de Certeau's discussion of resisting strategies through tactics, not least because the actors involved have their own legitimate position of authority from which they are negotiating.

Space, place and planning

For de Certeau, space and place are crucial concepts for the production of strategies. There are, however, some issues of translation here. In anglophone geography 'space' is a fluid concept, working alongside time to frame and co-construct social phenomena; 'place', meanwhile, is a space that has been given meaning (Relph, 1976). De Certeau, conversely, distinguishes between *lieu* (place) and *espace* (space). In French *lieu propre* (literally a 'proper place') is used to indicate that something is in an appropriate place for a given function. Hence a *lieu propre* might refer to a location where medicines are appropriately stored, crops grown, machinery installed and so on. De Certeau uses the idea of a *lieu propre* in a somewhat metaphorical manner to indicate that a strategy comes from an appropriate (and therefore authoritative) place. The *lieu propre* for de Certeau is a place of order, a fixed territory which serves as the origin point for power. *Espace*, conversely, is where different mobile elements come together to animate the *lieu propre*. *Espace* is where tactics play out, which means that tactics always operate in a place defined by the strategies of the powerful. He summarises the difference by arguing that '*space is a practiced place*' (de Certeau, 1984: 117, original emphasis), which in some ways flips the traditional understanding of these concepts in anglophone geography. To avoid confusion, we will stick to de Certeau's definitions here.

The spatial metaphor embedded in de Certeau's ideas lends itself very well to exploring questions of urban planning. There is, however, an important historical context to be understood here. De Certeau was writing at a time considered to be the high-water mark of state intervention in spatial planning within the global north. Post-war Europe saw a much greater role for the state than is fashionable in these neoliberal times. Control over spatial planning was seen as a key tool for delivering socioeconomic reforms, modernising the country and addressing key needs such as housing. For much of the immediate post-war period this was very much a technocratic power, deploying a discourse of experts using scientific judgement to determine how improvements to society would be undertaken. Within the profession of spatial planning, this technocratic discourse began to be challenged in the 1960s, with the rise of alternative approaches such as advocacy planning in the United States (Davidoff, 1965) and the Skeffington Report in the United Kingdom

(Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1969) which sought a greater role for communities in planning decisions. Although a more plural mode of planning is mainstream in western planning policy today, the diffusion of this idea was slow and uneven; France in the 1970s remained firmly committed to producing national plans for socioeconomic development (including new towns and high speed rail), using spatial planning as a crucial tool to strengthen the Republic. Thus, de Certeau's discussion of urban planning was very much shaped by the French national context at the time.

De Certeau (1984: 94) suggested that within discourses of urbanism, the essential building block of cities was a form of 'univocal', scientific systematisation that seeks to 'repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it'. In these discourses the city itself was organised as a *lieu propre*, serving to reproduce the authority of institutional power. Attempts to resist this authority, taking the form of tactics, therefore play out on this terrain. But of course, the idea that spatial planning of the high modernist period was objective, scientific, rational or univocal was always a myth. Planning is a profession built on negotiation, compromise and pragmatism, which simply does not fit with a conceptualisation of strategies as a *univocal* expression of institutional power. Indeed, as we discussed above, de Certeau himself recognised this in his conceptualisation of troglodyte actors lurking within and capturing institutions, subverting the intended direction of policy. What we argue for here, therefore, is a *polyvocal* conception of planning where tactical resistance is not the only means to challenge how cities are planned. Instead we highlight the range of powerful actors, operating from their own *lieu propre*, who strategically influence the reconfiguration of the built environment in line with their own agendas.

Planning and South Africa

We now turn to the South African example to illustrate these conceptual arguments. It is impossible to understand town planning in the country today without reference to the legacy of the colonial and apartheid era. The idea that space should be racially divided originated in the colonial period (Mabin and Smit, 1997). These ideas continued to develop throughout the twentieth century, particularly following the election of the Apartheid government in 1948. Within urban areas there was an attempt to limit immigration and the permanent occupation of urban areas by non-whites, creating distinct racialized areas, often by forced displacement (Maylam, 1990). In parallel, at the national scale, the Apartheid government built on the colonial policy of creating Reserves to form 'independent' self-governing, homelands. In total, it was estimated that around 3.5 million people were forced to move as result of apartheid policies between 1960-1983 (Surplus People's Project, 1985).

Planning was intertwined with this segregationist agenda. Planners were involved in demarcating the spatial boundaries of where each racial group was allowed to live, shaping the conditions of the neighbourhoods that black and white households lived in. For white areas, the suburban model became the norm, with housing on large plots provided with high-quality services and amenities. For black areas, residents were treated as temporary residents of the city; housing was basic, often provided in the form of hostels with only rudimentary services and amenities (Turok, 1994). This bifurcated approach to planning firmly entrenched apartheid and colonial ideas into the urban fabric.

Although the profession was crucial to the delivery of apartheid, spatial planning since 1994 has found itself at the forefront of attempts to overcome its physical legacy while addressing structural inequality and endemic poverty. 4.774 million subsidised dwellings were completed between 1994/95 and 2018/2019 (Africa Check, 2019). At the same time, however, many planners have been tasked with developing globalised and neoliberal infrastructure that in turn reinforces middle-class

privilege (Miraftab, 2009). South Africa is still characterised by a highly fragmented and segregated built environment but despite the scale of the challenges, urban planning remains a scarce skill, with just 3815 registered planners for a population of nearly 58 million in mid-2018.

As we discuss below, planners thus find themselves negotiating between powerful strategies that are often contradictory. This issue is not exclusive to the South African context, nor to planners, but we develop our analysis of this sector as an exemplar of how tensions between the different strategies of powerful actors can be understood. It is important to emphasise, however, that planners are not mere tacticians, working between these strategies, but powerful actors in their own right, with considerable institutional capital supporting their actions. We argue that the planning profession is itself a *lieu propre*, granting its members the authority to enact strategies that alter the built environment and hence the everyday life of individuals and communities.

Methods

The data for this paper comes from an extensive set of semi-structured interviews undertaken with 89 planners in South Africa working in the public (n=36), private (n=21) and education (n=13) sectors or with a mixed portfolio of activities (n=19). Of these, 50 were white and 28 black with the remainder of mixed or other ethnicity. There was a fairly even gender split of 45 male and 44 female interviewees. The majority were interviewed alone aside from a small number of group interviews with up to three participants. Based on the number of planners who obtained their registration after 1994, this sample roughly reflects the gender balance of registered planners in South Africa (44% female versus 56% male) although is somewhat over-representative of white planners (~37% white registrations since 1994).

This material was gathered February-May 2018. The interview data were coded in NVivo using a combination of deductive (theoretically-led) and inductive (data-led) approaches. The coding was undertaken by one person in order to ensure consistency, following a framework put in place and sense-checked by the project lead. A total of 38 theoretically-led codes were used, with a further 44 codes emerging during the data analysis. The apartheid legacy, informality and the role of planners emerged as particularly significant themes, leading us to questions around how planners balanced the different power relations to which their work was subject. This in turn led us to de Certeau's work as a frame for the analysis in this paper.

The planning profession as *lieu propre*

Despite having its reputation damaged by being closely associated with the apartheid regime to the point that planners briefly became 'non-grata' in South Africa (IC 25, public sector, white, male, 22 March 2018), planners are now mostly proud of how the profession has evolved. As interviewee IC 27 argued "it's been an achievement for the profession to actually … change tack and try and turn things around" (IC 27, private sector, white, male, 4 April 2018). Reflecting on the purpose of planning, some participants insisted that it is a merely technical activity that serves the will of the current government, while others reflected on the power that the planning profession *itself* holds.

It is clear that planners gain authority from their institutional status – a *lieu propre* which de Certeau would argue is the necessary base from which to develop strategies. This institutional authority has been clarified and to an extent strengthened through the passage of the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) in 2013. This is a complex piece of legislation and we do not intend to explore its subtleties here (see Laubscher et al., 2016). Its overarching goal, however, is to help achieve social and economic inclusion in planning and land use management practices, as well as redressing past imbalances. It updated legislation across a number of areas, including replacing

apartheid-era legal frameworks and gave full planning authority over to municipalities (previously provincial government held the right of final appeal in development control matters). These new frameworks can be seen in part as the culmination of an effort to reposition planning as a profession emphasising its *lieu propre* as a legitimate voice of authority. The Act has thus given the strategies of planners more weight in negotiations with other actors involved in the spatial transformation of the nation.

SPLUMA did not emerge spontaneously in 2013; it was the culmination of nearly two decades of effort to establish planning frameworks that aligned with the new political direction of the country after 1994. It built on the Development Facilitation Act 67 of 1995, which first introduced the notion of principle-based planning into legislation. One of our participants discussed her involvement working with the Development and Planning Commission that produced a Green Paper on Development and Planning (National Development and Planning Commission, 1999). The Commission highlighted the need to clarify the tangled web of overlapping governance structures between national, provincial and municipal level and the difficulties of producing planning legislation in compliance with the country's new constitution (IC 51, private sector, white, female, 19 April 2018). Provisions were thus written into the legislation to tackle problems that members of the profession felt had impeded practitioners for many years. One can argue therefore that the production of SPLUMA contains elements of a *concerted* strategy, where representatives of the profession lobbied hard to ensure that the Act served their interests.

This lobbying should not be taken to be a malign activity or against the public good – there was a clear sense amongst our interviewees that the profession wanted SPLUMA to help planners deliver on an agenda of social and spatial justice. Nonetheless, there are elements of reinforcing professional status built into the Act. A new emphasis on planners obtaining professional accreditation with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN) and getting yearly CPD points to maintain training has been one means by which planning has sought to secure its *lieu propre*. Before SPLUMA, the Planning Professionals Act 36 of 2002 laid the legislative framework for work reservation, at the time of writing this paper, however, this legislative power had limited if any usage. As one interviewee reflected:

> There was a huge fight to regulate professional planners which will lead to…
> not work restriction, but at least certain work can only be done by town
> planners and you know the land surveying fraternity is fighting against that
> because they are doing a lot of work and there's even lawyers and estate
> agents and everything that is doing planning work. (IC 12, public sector, white,
> male, 22 March 2018)

Some municipal and provincial planning departments have taken their own steps to reserve work for planners. For example, the Western Cape Land Use Planning Act No 3 of 2014 states that only a registered planner may submit an assessment of various land use management applications to the relevant municipality, and for the adoption of a Spatial Development Framework or zoning scheme.

Thus planning law reform and a more interventionist position from SACPLAN undoes some of the fragmentation of the profession that occurred as the country came to grips with what planning is *for* in the post-apartheid era (IC80, private sector, white, male, 20 April 2018). This, in turn, makes clearer the authority of the profession in determining aspects of the development process. Of course, SPLUMA and the Planning Professions Act do much more than simply protect the interests of the planning profession. What we see here, therefore, is a negotiation between different interests. We see a concerted strategy by a profession seeking to gain control over work that is perceived by many planners as their sole domain. Countering this are strategies employed by land surveyors, amongst other professions, who see this effort to reserve work for planners as infringing on activities that are 'communally' practised. We also see a streamlining of structures to help planners

deliver coherent projects. At the same time, as we shall discuss below, the Act also secures the strategic power of politicians who generally retain the final say on which projects go ahead.

Negotiating with politicians and developers

Postgraduate training, accreditation through SACPLAN and legislation such as SPLUMA help establish planning as a *lieu propre* from which authority can flow. But that authority is not without limits. Thus any planning *strategies* for imposing changes to society can only come through negotiation with a range of other actors. There are two levels of decision-making power for substantial planning applications in South Africa. Typically, the process is that a planner will write a report to a planning tribunal, on which no politician can sit. The tribunal must consist of both officials and outside professionals (not necessarily planners) who have knowledge of planning matters. If a municipal planning decision is appealed, it goes to the appeal authority. The appeal authority can, but does not have to, include councillors (the legal logic of this is currently somewhat confused). For minor matters without objections, the municipal planner makes the decision. This configuration is important as if an application is not appealed against, then the power lies with officials. If it is appealed, then it is up to politicians to decide. At every stage in this process there are negotiations between different actors as to the weight which is put on different interests. Planners have considerable influence over these processes by virtue of the authority derived from the *lieu propre* of planning as a profession, which has been enhanced through the passage of SPLUMA.

In *Culture in the plural* de Certeau insisted on the need to resist a tendency toward the univocal, reducing public discourse down to a singular position. No single strategy, no global language or *lieu propre* has all the answers. Many planners intrinsically understand this; planning is a profession fundamentally based upon negotiation between different powerful interests. By definition, planning is deeply embedded in political processes since it concerns the allocation of scarce resources. Planners working in the public sector report to politicians while those in the private sector are reliant on public authorities controlled by politicians to grant permission to move ahead with development schemes.   Politicians have their own *lieu propre* where their strategic authority comes from democratic structures and the constituents that they represent. Nonetheless, planners will often disagree with, attempt to influence or circumvent decisions made by politicians.   Planners we interviewed had a variety of responses to the actions of politicians they disagreed with. For some, it was simple acquiescence:

> So now, if you go against what the politician is saying, you're just shooting yourself in the foot, you'll never finish doing that job. (IC 23, private sector, black, male, 18 April 2018)

Others, however, discussed walking away from jobs where they felt the political pressure was too great, particularly where corruption was involved (IC 42, public sector, white, male, 22 March 2018). Some took a more militant line, one recalling a deep satisfaction when a project championed by the local mayor against his recommendation was eventually rejected by a higher tier of government (IC 79, private sector, white, male, 22 March 2018). This kind of behaviour can be underpinned by a great deal of idealism and a belief in the power of professional integrity:

> It's because planners succumb to pressures… that bad decisions gets made.
> (…) I pay suspension about three times in my career, so far, because politicians wanted a certain decision … but they insisted that I make the recommendation … to take an application in a certain direction which we refuse to… (IC 09, public sector, coloured, male, 22 March 2018)

We cannot, however, simply categorise IC 09's opposition to political decisions here as being mere 'tactics'. This is not a case of unconscious or undirected acts of rebellion playing out on a *lieu propre* solely controlled by politicians. Instead, these are strategies emerging from the planner's own *lieu*

propre formed by his professional authority refusing to sign-off on what he believed to be a bad scheme.

Planning is not simply a technocratic, tickbox exercise, not least because there are many possible variations on the form a development can take. As such planners have an opportunity to directly feed into the process of putting a project together:

> Let's say if you have an instance where we had a developer that wanted to do this really upscale new precinct in what is formally a very white and privileged part of town… but there's an element of housing integration that needs to be addressed. So, how can you allow for space for the city to assist you, or if you can build the units and then we will bring the infrastructure. So, it always works best when you negotiate on that part of the developer, to say hey, if you do this, we will give you these benefits… (IC 06, public sector, black, female, 5 September 2018)

In this example we see a negotiation between the developer's strategy of profit maximisation and the planner's strategy seeking to maximise public good, each using their professional *lieu propre* as a place from which to create a compromise. There are circumstances, however, where these negotiations are not about creating positive outcomes for wider society. One participant talked about a well-publicised corruption case in a municipality, arguing that "Planners contributed towards that corruption… Because of the power that they had to manipulate rezonings" (IC 02, public sector, white, female, 28 March 2018). This happened through a collaboration between politicians, developers and planners, each using the authority of their respective *lieu propre* to negotiate strategies for enacting corruption within the municipality.

The politicisation of developments in poorer neighbourhoods was a keenly felt issue for our participants, with one suggesting, for example, that "where we were working with more ANC dominated [areas] people will say… but that's not what the politicians told us." (IC 3 private sector, black, male, 28 March 2013). There is, of course, a danger here of positioning planners as heroic figures who resist the corruption, greed and simple incompetence of politicians. One of our participants was a little more nuanced here, noting that:

> [I would be] deeply resentful of a project of mine being defunded or dropped as political pressures change. But at the same time, I as a technical professional will never have the capacity to be as responsive to the needs of the community as a political body who is dependent on that community for votes… So, I think the disruptive element that politics play is while frustrating, and while problematic is incredibly important specifically for the planning profession, cause it's easy to become quite instrumentalist as a planner. … (IC 44, public sector, white, female, 26 March 2018)

Politicians' *lieu propre* is drawn from how they represent their constituents; IC 44 suggests that planners need to remember this fact when they are frustrated by some of the proposals that politicians ask to be implemented. Planners are not, however, powerless in these circumstances, finding ways to use their professional authority, supported by the law, to support their own strategic aims. Negotiations can sometimes break down, and if local politicians insist on a particular course of action, then planners may have to go along with what they perceive to be a bad proposal. But even in these circumstances, the matter is not necessarily closed as an appeals panel may overturn a decision where an argument is made, from the *lieu propre* of the planning profession, that the proposed scheme is inappropriate.

Negotiating informality

In 2017, 13.6% of South African dwellings were informal, with a further 5.5% comprising traditional rural dwellings (Statistics South Africa, 2018: 29). Informality would appear to be the ultimate example of a tactical response by individuals to the failure of planning strategies. We would argue, however, that there is something more nuanced at play here when considering the place of informality within planning. The new South African constitution, negotiated in the run up to free elections in 1994, is predicated on principles of equality. It also enshrines a right to housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living following the UN's Universal Declaration on Human Rights. This gives communities themselves a degree of strategic power to pressure local decision makers to mitigate the problems caused by inadequate housing and service provision. As noted above, a great many new houses have been built in South Africa since 1994, but there remains a desperate shortage, which poses a tremendous challenge to planners simply to get affordable homes built.

The practice of building backyard shacks to create an income stream for residents is an everyday reality for many in South Africa, providing informal accommodation to migrants and hosting small businesses. It is estimated that 5.43% of all households (circa 919,000 people) live in a backyard shack. Informality is an issue that is not dealt with particularly well in conventional planning as it developed in the global north (Roy, 2005). The *lieu propre* of the planning profession comes in part from a higher education curriculum that remains heavily influenced by this traditional way of thinking. This is, however, slowly changing as South African planning schools are paying more attention to informality and, through their teaching, begin to reshape the norms of the profession (IC 88, higher education, white, female, 6 May 2018) (Watson and Odendaal, 2013). Thus, the strategies that are emerging from planners today take much greater account of the need to negotiate between the ideals of planning practice and the realities of a country where informality will not disappear for a very long time.

Some cities have drawn up local frameworks to recognize this reality within their zoning schemes (IC 08, public sector, white, female, 22 March 2018), effectively renegotiating the strategic ideals of planning theory to accommodate the presence of a large informal sector. This can be seen in a slow shift around the recognition of informal trading by some planners, with one participant arguing that:

> …if you don't earmark any area for that informal trading, you will find they will
> operate on a residential area, they will operate on a sports ground. Wherever
> they see an open space or wherever they think this is best for them, they will
> do whatever they want to do. So, I think as planners we have to look at this.
> (IC 64, public sector, black, female, 25 May 2018)

Some of our participants discussed the need to research ways of dealing with informality within the structures of planning so as to mitigate the worst of the conditions it generates while accepting the inevitability that many people in the country will be living in informal dwellings for generations to come (IC 77 public sector, black, female, 08 February 2018). Others reflected on the tension with communities unused to dealing with formal planning structures and trying to educate them about why planning was of benefit to them, rather than just appearing to be a money-making scheme by local government officials (IC 76, public sector, black, female, 05 February 2018). The emphasis then, is not attempting to crush informal tactics as they play out within the territory of planning, but instead reshaping the *lieu propre* of planning to better manage the realities of life among poorer communities. This reconfiguration of planning is given weight by a legislative frame that, post-1994, gives at least some degree of strategic power to those living in poverty.

Fundamentally, however, there are questions of capacity here:

> South Africa has a very transformative agenda at the policy level, but when it comes to implementing this transformative agenda we really are restricted as government … maybe we do have the tools but then we don't have the capacity to implement those tools to effect the change that we need to effect.
> (IC 54, public sector, white, male, 14 February 2018)

While South Africa is a relatively wealthy nation, delivering even basic formal housing to its entire population would be an enormous task. Even if the money was available, there simply are not enough planners and professionals working in the built environment to deliver this. There is also a question of focus. In addition to addressing the needs of those living in informal housing, planners also work for a wealthier population that has different priorities, not least protecting property values in expensive white suburbs (IC 24, private sector, white, female, 16 April 2018). Relating some of her frustration about dealing with rich lobby groups protecting habitats threatened by proposed development, one of our participants noted that:

> …in the last couple of years I've felt that the environmental voice is just so loud that sometimes it, you tend to lose track of the reality of the context in which you operate. And there's a time and a place to protect natural resources but sometimes the social urgency for me is so real that I get very frustrated you know, that we're kind of even having a conversation about an endangered mole when you have families struggling to put food on the table. (IC 55 public sector, white, female, 13 February 2018)

For all that new legislative frameworks and a professional interest in promoting social equality may be reshaping the strategies of planners toward helping deprived communities, there are other powerful voices with which they have to negotiate. Environmental concerns, property values, tourist infrastructure and international initiatives (e.g. the new UN Urban Agenda) all have a strategic pull on the capacity and priorities of planners in the wider mission to transform the nation.

Discussion

De Certeau argued that strategies emerged from a *lieu propre*, a place of authority, and while he conceded that different types of strategies could exist, he gave no insights into what happens when strategies come into conflict. Planning, as a profession, wields considerable authority in its own right going far beyond simply being a technical tool delivering the will of politicians. Of course, planners are a diverse group, with different interests and agendas both personal and professional. In many cases planners report to elected officials who have varying degrees of control over their activities. Nonetheless, supported by the *lieu propre* of professional status, planners have considerable power to reshape the built environment. It remains, however, a profession built on negotiation and compromise.

In the discussion above we have seen different examples of *lieux propres*: planners with their professional authority; politicians given authority through their democratic mandate; developers employing the authority of capital. All must work together to deliver new developments but despite their authority these actors are rarely able to completely dictate terms. The process of hosting World Cup games in Cape Town, for example, saw extensive negotiations between competing powerful actors: politicians at different levels wanting to showcase the nation; wealthy populations seeking to protect property values; construction companies attempting to maximise profits; and planners seeking to ensure that the people of Cape Town actually saw some material benefits from the scheme, all while brokering the demands from FIFA about how the tournament should be organised (IC 53, public sector, white, female, 6 February 2018). No single group can be said to have dominated the agenda and all had to accept trade-offs from what they might have ideally wanted.

The myth of the all-powerful, technocratic modernist planner that de Certeau evokes in *The practice of everyday life* was already evaporating by the 1970s. His earlier notion of the troglodyte has value, however, in helping us to understand how professionals promote their agendas and attempt to insert these into government policy. We can see some of this in the way that the profession worked with policymakers to help frame the reforms to planning embedded within South Africa's Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, 2013 (SPLUMA).

The actions of de Certeau's troglodytes are fundamentally different to the tactics of oppressed groups reacting against the strategies of the powerful. Troglodytes use the authority of their *lieu propre* to reshape state strategies to serve their own interests. Indeed, one of the outcomes of the 2002 Planning Professionals Act 32 and SPLUMA has been to strengthen the power of the South African planning profession to designate certain types of work as being the sole purview of planners. Where we would diverge from de Certeau, however, is in suggesting that the troglodytes are able to completely capture those strategies and bend them to their own agenda – SPLUMA does much more than simply serve the interests of the planning profession and it does not solve the severe resource and skills shortages planners encounter in the field. Planning is, however, recognised as a key profession for the future of South Africa and planners have helped to shape the legislative changes and recognition of what planning is and should be. Instead of global languages merely being captured by special interests, here we see those languages evolving through a co-construction between actors negotiating the form and function of a new legislative framework.

De Certeau identifies univocal global languages enacted through singular strategies which he suggests can be challenged through the tactics of the weak. But this univocal view of strategies is itself contradictory; various powerful actors have different degrees of influence at different times over social processes. Thus, we have a *polyvocality* where different strategies come into conflict. The result is a constant *negotiation* between powerful actors over the global languages that frame our understanding of how the world is supposed to operate – even if in practice that operation is sometimes subverted by the tactics of weaker actors. Planning today increasingly seeks to bring less powerful voices into the decision-making process, using the *lieu propre* of the profession to give those voices legitimacy. This, in turn, has reshaped the strategies enacted by the profession as it seeks to make alterations to the built environment. The fact that the planning profession is able to give these groups a voice in the process demonstrates the authority that planning derives from its *lieu propre*. But it also reminds us that competing strategies exist that would otherwise not act in the interest of those less powerful voices. Polyvocalism, then is not simply a matter of giving a space for tactics, but also of acknowledging the competing strategies of different powerful groups, whether this be a politician's need to secure votes, a developer's desire to generate profit, or an environmentalist's wish to protect a habitat, all of which may come into conflict at different times.

Conclusion

This paper has challenged and developed de Certeau's ideas around strategies and power. In theorising the tactical, de Certeau made a vital contribution to our understanding of the everyday and convinced a generation of scholars that there was value to studying the mundane, banal and quotidian. Tactics, he argued, are enacted upon the *lieu propre* of the powerful. Unfortunately, de Certeau gave few clues as to how *lieux propres* are themselves shaped and operationalised – a lacuna we have addressed here. Through the example of South African spatial planning we have shown that the strategies of the powerful are both *polyvocal* and subject to *negotiation*. We have demonstrated how the interests of different influential groups sometimes conflict and must be brokered. As a result, we argue, *contra* de Certeau, that far from being a singular force of opposition, strategies operate from multiple and often conflicting *lieux propres*. Tactics of resistance remains de Certeau's most celebrated and widely employed concept. Based on our findings here,

we argue that future work focused on tactics needs to take much greater account of the tensions and contradictions between the different strategies and *lieux propres* that those tactics are being played out against.

Spatial planning in 1970s France was depicted by de Certeau as the archetype of a univocal strategy, imposing planners' ideas on the communities living in cities. Even at the time, however, the idea of the all-powerful planner was more imagined than real. Spatial planning in contemporary South Africa, meanwhile, is a model of attempting to broker a range of powerful interests and discourses – globalised growth, amelioration of poverty, environmental sustainability and so on – with varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, some things have not changed very much from the 1970s. The interests of the powerful will generally trump the interests of the weak. What we illustrate here is that competing strategies representing different interests can reshape each other. South Africa remains a country of extreme contrasts – both great wealth and diabolical poverty. Spatial planning, meanwhile, has evolved into a profession with a profound commitment to delivering positive change even in the face of strategies that would seek to entrench inequality. This gives some grounds for optimism as well as insights into how *lieu propre* develop and the strategies of the powerful are negotiated.

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