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Community self-surveys: appropriating a technology of rule

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Conflicting rationalities; global south; informal settlements; self-enumeration

Abstract

The rapid growth of urban populations in cities of the global South, gives rise to major conflicts between those attempting to gain a foothold in urban areas and those attempting to govern these places. This can be conceptualising as a 'conflict of rationalities' between techno-managerial and marketized systems of government administration, service provision and planning, and increasingly marginalized urban populations surviving largely under conditions of informality. The 'interface' between these conflicting rationalities is frequently a site of struggle the outcomes of which can take various forms and can warp technologies of rule and strategies of 'improvement' in various ways. The community self-survey 'movement' provides one such example of struggle over a technology of rule which can potentially yield important learning outcomes. The paper explores examples of self-enumeration in shack-dwelling populations in Cape Town (South Africa) where this has been used to engage with the local state.

1. Introduction

Over the last ten or so years, but with examples dating back as far as the 1980s (Patel et al 2009), poor urban communities in informal settlements in cities of the global south have increasingly adopted the tactic of self-enumeration and mapping in order to reinforce and specify their demands for land and services and to increase their 'visibility' to the state. In some cases these strategies have been followed by 're-blocking' in which shelters have been re-organized by their occupants to make more orderly spaces for the insertion of claimed basic services. With the scaling up of NGO organizations such as Slum Dwellers International (SDI), these tactics have been introduced to and adopted by informal settlements in other parts of Asia, in Africa and in Latin America. In what could be described as a growing, global self-survey 'movement' amongst poor urban communities, these traditional tools of planning and governance – the survey, the map and the plan – have been appropriated and used (often with the assistance of NGOs) as a mechanism to further the claims of marginalized groups to urban space.

This movement is of interest and significance for planning. Recent mainstream planning theory (communicative and collaborative planning theory or CPT) has tended to produce both analytical and normative works based on an assumption that state-society relations both are, and can be, predominantly consensus-seeking. In contrast, in the context of rapid urbanization, poverty and limited state resources in southern cities, the starting point for understanding state-society relations and engaging in planning activity should more appropriately lie in assumptions of conflict rather than consensus. However, struggles shaped by these conflicts can yield important insights for planning.

This paper draws on evidence from informal settlements in Cape Town (South Africa) which have been 'drawn in' to the global self-survey movement. With advice from NGOs linked to SDI, they are attempting to undertake surveying, mapping and shack reorganization to secure both recognition and improved services from the Cape Town municipality. These cases are used to explore and refine the notion of conflicting rationalities (Watson, 2003; 2009) as well as the method of investigation needed to interrogate such boundary action, requiring ethnographic study of both the state and community in their interaction with each other, as well as of mediating organizations such as NGOs.

Section 2 of this paper explains the nature of conflicting rationalities across southern cities and how planning can potentially locate itself in relation to these schisms. Section 3 describes the emergence of the community self-survey movement and the ways in which this has been understood and theorized. Section 4 draws on preliminary work in three informal settlements in Cape Town which have adopted the self-survey strategy as a way of engaging the state. Section 5, the conclusion, suggests how the self-survey

movement can be seen as an example of 'boundary action' across and between conflicting rationalities which can in turn give rise to insights and opportunities for planners and planning.

2. Conflict and normality in cities of the global south

The defining features of urban life across cities in the global south are struggle, alliance, betrayal, deal-making, opportunism, corruption, patronage, despair, suspicion, strife, traditionalism, ignorance, ingenuity, connection, escape. At the base of many of these schisms is the increasingly sought-after resource of urban land, rendered more and more scarce by rapid urbanization and slow land delivery processes. This brings those who have access to the wealth and connections needed for rampant property development hard up against those trying to gain a few square meters of urban space to construct a flimsy shelter or sell some basic foods or goods. For new urbanites, gaining access to a place (be it a bed in a shack or a square meter of pavement) sets in motion social, economic and political possibilities that spell the difference between survival in the city or failure. Thus southern cities increasingly feature glittering modernist towers (in Nairobi, reportedly built with Somali pirate money) adjacent to poverty-stricken shack settlements, with the latter forever under threat from land-gabbing politicians or property entrepreneurs. The line between legality and illegality is hard to discern here, and is constantly shifting and being re-defined, depending on who has power at any point in time. Criminality, too, is a matter of opinion, but law-abiding citizens are unlikely to survive easily in these environments: a young boy with no hope of ever finding a formal job may have no option but to join a gang; and paying the local warlord or taxi mafia for a piece of space to sell from or live on may seem as normal as paying municipal rates in other parts of the world.

The 'visibility' of the state in these contexts is highly variable, as is the line between the state and 'everything else'. Conventional notions of public and private as separate 'spheres' are hard to apply in these contexts. Heller and Evans (2010), comparing just the three southern democracies of India, South Africa and Brazil, describe how in India local urban administration is shaped by top-down national and provincial regulation, but local political power is characterized by clientelism and the inequalities of caste and class, rendering the state highly inaccessible to the poor (or accessible only as a client or member of a group, not as a rights bearing citizen); in South Africa, early shifts to democratization have since been countered by technocratic, managerial and corporatist forms of local urban government that have excluded previously active grassroots organizations; in Brazil, by contrast, there has been extensive democratization of local government, and urbanites are able to engage directly with a highly visible local state.

It could be assumed that under these circumstances planning is likely to be weak and ineffective, particularly in those contexts where state-society relations are structured by complex social divides. Significantly, plans and land-use control systems persist as important elements in many southern municipalities, but often for purposes that are somewhat different to their original intention. Yiftachel and Yacobi (2003: 217-18) argue that in ethnocratic states, such as Israel, the withholding of planning services is a deliberate tactic of political exclusion, where a common planning response is to condone informality as a way of leaving people out of the planning process and withholding urban services from them. Planning legislation and 'master' planning has also been used (opportunistically) time and time again across the globe as a justification for evictions and land grabs. Major land evictions have occurred in countries such as China (especially leading up to the Olympic Games) and in Zimbabwe, where the justification has been one of 'cleaning up' the city or removing illegal structures, but often the real motive behind these lies in objectives of political, ethnic, racial or class domination and control, or the pursuit of profit. Writing on planning in Indian cities, Roy (2009) argues that informality should not just be associated with the poor, but that India's planning regime itself has been informalized through the ambiguous and ever-changing nature of what is legal and what is illegal. The state, argues Roy (2009: 81), actively uses informality as an instrument of authority and accumulation. Planning therefore cannot 'solve' the crisis of urbanization as it is deeply implicated in the production of this crisis.

The nature of urban life, the state and planning in many southern cities suggests both analytical and normative work which takes as a starting point the deep and enduring conflicts and fractures which characterize socio-spatial as well as state-society relations. No assumptions can be made about the existence or strength of civil society organizations, about the willingness or ability of the state to engage with urban residents or to bring about improvement in urban conditions, or about the way in which planning as a tool of governance is used in relation to urban development. While many southern countries are now regarded as democracies, some even with highly progressive constitutions, the principles of liberal democracy find many forms of interpretation, often articulating with older and alternative institutional and cultural forms.

Elsewhere (Watson 2009a) I have suggested that a central concern for planning is understanding its role relative to these conflicting rationalities – between, on the one hand, organizations, institutions and individuals shaped by the rationality of governing (and, in market economies, modernization, marketization and liberalization), within a global context shaped by historical inequalities and power relations (such as colonialism and imperialism), and on the other hand, organizations, institutions and individuals shaped by (the rationality of) the need and desire to survive (and thrive) under conditions of poverty and marginalization.

Importantly, the interface between these rationalities can be understood as a zone of encounter and contestation, and is shaped by the exercise of power. For the poors and the informals it is a zone of resistance, of evasion or of appropriation. It is the point at which state efforts at urban development and modernization (provision of formal services, housing, tenure systems), urban administration or political control (tax and service fee collection, land use management, regulation of population health and education etc), and market regulation and penetration, are met, or confronted, by their 'target populations' in various and complex ways, and these responses in turn shape the nature of interventions. The nature of interactions at the interface can vary greatly: some products or policy interventions can be of direct benefit and improve the lives of poor households without imposing unnecessary burdens; some interventions (informal settlement upgrade or 'urban renewal') may benefit some households but may result in the forced removal of others and often the imposition of costs that many cannot afford, and this may be met with resistance; some interventions may be appropriated and hybridized so that they are useful in ways which had never been anticipated or intended. It is where the last of these occurs that opportunities for learning arise.

From the field of anthropology, Tania Murray Li (2007) – writing in the context of rural Indondesia – similarly argues that the complexities of social relations are antithetical to the position of the expert. The practice of 'rendering technical', which is an essential part of any plan or programme of improvement, '…confirms expertise and constitutes the boundary between those who are positioned as trustees, with the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others, and those who are subject to expert direction. It is a boundary that has to be maintained but that can be challenged' (Li, 2007: 7). Li recognizes that this boundary (interface) is shaped by power ('…the claim to expertise in optimizing the lives of others is a claim to power…'P 5) in the Foucauldian sense. Methodologically, making sense of these boundaries requires an understanding of the rationale of government schemes (governmentality) *and* the study of social history (Foucault's reference to the need for ethnographic study of the 'witches brew' of practices): two very different kinds of inquiry, but which should be seen as equally important and which need to be brought into dialogue with each other to see how programmes of improvement are constituted and contested (Li, 2007: 27).

I have argued (Watson 2009b) that planning action in these burgeoning cities of the south cannot be guided by the simplistic appropriation of models and 'best practice' solutions from other parts of the world – frequently the global north. Rather, action has to be based on a careful appreciation of the specificities of place and in particular, the form of conflicting rationalities which shape engagement (usually conflictive) between those with a will to improve or develop and those with a will to survive – the urban 'everyday'. I have also suggested that while these engagements can take multiple forms,

important learning opportunities arise where there is appropriation (and often 'warping') of urban technologies, rules, practices or spatial ideas across the interface between these completing rationalities.

The next section explores one form of appropriation that is now globally widespread: self-enumeration and mapping by informal communities. It first reviews the emergence and spread of this tactic from its source of origin, largely in India, to many other southern cities and the insights of those who have analysed this movement. It then examines how this idea is currently emerging in a number of informal settlements in Cape Town, spurred by the re-emergence of grassroots organizations after a long period of lowered activity in the post-apartheid period.

3. Appropriating the survey and the map: planning work at the interface

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is a confederation of country-level organizations from 34 countries in the global south[1]. Its mission is to 'advance the common agenda of creating "pro-poor" cities that integrate rather than marginalise the interests of slum dwellers and counter the dominant urban development approaches that are in turn backed and financed by global agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF and the UN' (website). It has a number of 'key rituals' (objectives and agreed practices) including 'grassroots driven gathering of information through surveys, enumerations and settlement profiles', and 'solution-finding through negotiations and dialogue'. Usually a local NGO working with SDI is the initiator of these processes. The enumeration involves a 'rough mapping' of the informal settlement carried out by the shack residents, identifying the location of individual shacks as well as toilets, taps, informal businesses and public spaces. Each shack is measured and numbered. This is followed up by a household survey, with the development of a questionnaire and the door-to-door gathering of information carried out by local volunteers. The survey information is analysed and synthesized in the form of tables, bar-charts etc. Parallel with this, women in the settlement are organized into savings clubs and build up capital to use as a bargaining tool with the state in terms of securing improved services and the redesign of spaces. Using the map and the survey, they also start to plan a 're-blocking' exercise which indicates re-organization of the shacks so as to open up spaces for facilities and access for emergency vehicles (fire trucks and ambulances).

The tactic of self-enumeration and mapping was originally developed by the SDI-affiliated Indian NGO termed SPARC (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres) which used this approach amongst

[1] www.sdinet.org

pavement dwellers in India in the 1980s. The SDI website now lists 34 countries where self-enumeration processes have been undertaken, and the academic literature contains a growing body of case studies documenting these activities (for example Hassan 2006; Huchzermeyer 2009; Patel et al 2009; Karanja 2010).

One example is Pakistan NGO, Oranji Pilot Project – Research and Training Institute (Hassan, 2006). Here, as is common in many southern cities, there was a large gap between the number of new housing units needed each year (350,000 in all urban areas) and the number which the formal sector could supply (120,000). Informal settlements were growing rapidly. Moreover, a growing number of existing units were being demolished to make way for mega-projects and the 'land hunger' needs of politicians and developers. State policy (funded by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank) aimed at dealing with informal settlements had been a failure as government had been unable to engage with communities, and had not been able to develop innovative engineering or tenure solutions which fitted with people's needs or ability to pay. City maps were very outdated and did not show informal settlements. Past governments had often given funding to ward councilors to develop infrastructure in their constituencies, but this was carried out in a localized and ad hoc manner, and again was not incorporated into city maps.

In one informal settlement, Manzoor Colony of 100,000 people (Hassan 2006: 462), a local NGO trained local activists and technicians to develop maps and plans for a sanitation system. The area was surveyed and mapped, and sewage disposal points were identified. They then approached first the councilors and then the mayor to finance and maintain the sanitation system. Both refused, and the Colony residents took the local state to court to force it to maintain the system. This was clearly a conflictual situation which could only be addressed by recourse to the courts.

Chatterji and Mehta (2007), in theorizing the self-enumeration movement, have argued that the articulation of power and knowledge in practices of government lead to the development of technologies of mapping and enumeration by which the state makes society visible to itself, but these can end up creating new types of social collectivities. Populations generated by these governmental practices, which mark and categorize them in particular ways, for example as 'slum dwellers' or 'pavement dwellers', can end up seeing themselves as communities capable of resisting these technologies (P 131). As a result, slum dwellers have been able to use the survey like government does, to transform themselves into a quantifiable population, and to create documentary proof that they exist as a collective that can speak back to government in its own language (P 143). In India, NGOs have used the surveys specifically for mobilization and to make slum dwellers aware of a new identity based on abstract citizenship rather than

on caste or religion (P 159). NGOs therefore see the survey as an ongoing activity and not a once-off event.

Chatterji and Mehta (2007: 144) have specifically rejected interpretations of self-surveys which see it as a '…tool for the practice of democracy internally' (Appadurai, 2002: 36). They argue that Appadurai ignores the fact that such forms of counter-governmentality are embroiled in local politics of inclusion and exclusion, and can become tainted in the same way that governmental practices can. Self-surveys are always directed by specific political interests and are not neutral instruments: thus they inflect social relations in the process of describing them (P 144). Surveys should thus be seen as part of the process by which the line between legality and illegality is continually renegotiated, both at the level of government and at the level of the 'community'.

Chatterji and Mehta (2007: 148) also distance themselves from interpretations of this movement which view 'community' as an oppositional category, defined in terms of its resistance to the state, or as a 'public sphere' which can be seen as distinct from the state and economy. Rather government technologies of mapping and enumeration not only carve out populations but also create new ways in which they are embedded within the state. The new forms of 'politics' which this can give rise to (politics viewed as an extra-legal domain of hustling and negotiation rather than democracy and dialogue – P 171) can also create fractures along which violence can erupt or new spaces in which cooperation (for a while) becomes possible.

4. Following the SDI 'rituals' in Cape Town

Over the last couple of years, informal settlements in Cape Town and other South African cities have been introduced to the SDI rituals of self-enumeration, mapping and reblocking. This has occurred as a result of the 'globalization' of SDI and its establishment of linkages with federations of informal settlement organizations in various cities in the global south. In South Africa the Informal Settlement Network (ISN) is supported by SDI and the NGO called CORC (Community Organization Resource Centre) which follows SDI's rituals. CORC has been working with informal settlement organizations in a number of larger South African towns to assist these organizations with surveys, maps, savings schemes and reblocking.

The housing situation for low income residents in Cape Town is not an uncommon one. It is estimated that some 16% of housing stock is informal (140,605 units in 2007) but the delivery of state-provided houses for low income people has averaged only 4,740 units per annum (OECD Territorial Reviews

2008). As a result, informal settlements have grown steadily and there is little prospect that they will be upgraded or that residents will be offered formal houses. The diversion of a significant proportion of the municipal budget into building the 2010 World Cup soccer stadium has meant that there is even less available to provide these informal settlements with services. While in some parts of the City the response has taken the form of service-delivery protests and violence, other settlements appear to have decided to follow the SDI rituals. The research project which forms the subject of this paper is focusing on three of these informal settlements, all the result of invasions of public land: Jo Slovo, an informal settlement on a well-located 'buffer strip' which has been targeted for removal to make way for public, lower-middle income apartments; Barcelona, occupying an old landfill site; and Sheffield Rd, located on a road reserve. Both of the latter two are on sites classified by the municipality as uninhabitable, although it has installed some small communal toilet blocks and taps.

The purpose of the investigation is to examine these sites where, it could be argued, there is a conflict of rationalities between, on the one hand, shack dwellers, who have managed to secure a piece of urban land, some shelter and access to basic services, and are engaged in political action to defend these gains and extend them to formal recognition by the City and delivery of improved services; and on the other hand, the Municipality of Cape Town which is seeking to enforce regulations which have classified this land for other uses (new housing, rubbish and a road), and to promote orderly and regulated residential development either in the form of state provided formal units or private-sector and developer driven delivery. However, if interaction at this 'interface' between opposing logics can take different forms (eg rejection, passive acceptance, or engagement and adaption[2]) then the adoption of the SDI rituals in these settlements might represent an appropriation and manipulation of a particular assemblage of technologies of rule (the survey, map and plan) which are worthy of being studied. The suggestion here is that for planners (and those intervening in the built environment in various ways with the aim of improvement of some kind) these processes offer the opportunity for research and possibly direct engagement as a source of learning.

Following from writings such as those by Li (2007) and Chatterji and Mehta (2007) the investigations of the Cape Town sites focus on the operation of power at the interface between these competing logics. As Li has suggested, engagement here is directly political, but often of the 'hustling' and deal-making kind described by Chatterji and Mehta, where engagement by communities with the state and NGOs gives rise to new inclusions and exclusions. The investigation thus needs to engage in ethnographic work on either side of the interface as well as at the interface. Within 'communities', how is leadership and representation advantaging some and disadvantaging others to take advantage of whatever resources may

[2] Possibly 'bricolage' – defined as spontaneous creativity, making do with what is around.

flow through these processes, how are groups re-categorizing themselves and presenting themselves in new ways within the settlement and beyond. And within both the state and NGOs, how are particular professionals, departments and discourses being restructured or changed to engage with these new processes, how are these self-surveyed communities repositioned in the 'eyes' of the state (and elements of the state) to engage with the state in new ways? And how does this in turn reconfigure and realign rationalities in ways that might produce outcomes which could be identified as positive.

In the three Cape Town sites, the process of surveying and mapping has begun only recently and requires tracking over a longer period of time in order to answer the questions posed above.

Jo Slovo

Jo Slovo informal settlement found itself, in 2005, on a site earmarked by national government to try out their flagship pilot project (the N2 Gateway Project) to demonstrate a new approach to low-income housing provision. This approach claimed to deliver 'sustainable' compact, mixed use housing for low income people, but this translated into three storey, landscaped, apartment blocks (with no other facilities) at rentals that were completely unaffordable for those living on the site in shacks. In the process of clearing the site for first phase construction, a large group of Jo Slovo households were relocated to 'temporary' tin shacks on the edge of the metropolitan area – where they remain to this day.

The Jo Slovo settlement[3], named after the first post-apartheid minister of housing and member of the SA communist party, had been on this site for 17 years and in 2009 contained a little over 3000 households. Most are unemployed and survive on government grants but the survey estimates that they contribute SAR 32m (US 5m) to the city economy annually (thus strategically describing themselves as an important economic entity) . As it became clear that shack dwellers would not be gaining access to the new N2 Gateway housing, and to challenge a threat of further removals, those remaining on the site took the issue to the Constitutional Court, and in the meantime linked to the NGO CORC to use the SDI rituals as a means of fighting relocation. In early 2009 a fire devastated large parts of Jo Slovo, and iKhayelami (a building materials arm of CORC) proposed a re-blocking exercise (regularized plots of 4X5m divided by lanes of 1,5m) to locate emergency shelters. The Constitutional Court found in favour of the state[4] with the only concession being that a proportion of the new units should be made available to Jo Slovo residents. In effect the Court condoned a forced removal of shack dwellers to a remote and inaccessible

[3] Information drawn from the community self-survey of 2009 on the SDI website http://www.sdinet.org/ritual/enumerations/

[4] http://allafrica.com/stories/200906260735.html

location in the city (on the grounds that it was temporary) in favour of a top-down and insensitive 'slum eradication' process which had no possibility of accommodating the needs of those already on the site.

An analysis of this conflict will be faced with a complex institutional ethnography. The shack dwellers faced a project which was cast as a flagship pilot by the national Department of Housing – the main funding agency; which was implemented by a provincial level of government under the ruling political party but which is now under the opposition; and which is within the jurisdiction of a local authority which initially distanced itself from the project (being itself run by the political opposition) but now has to deal with the problem left within its boundaries. The remaining Jo Slovo residents, on their part, gained important national and international exposure and profile during the court case and were linked to international SDI networks through the enumeration and blocking process. After the reblocking the NGO moved to introduce the next SDI ritual – the communal fund – to establish a communal toilet and shower block on the site as a sign of ongoing settlement. This was approved by the city which agreed to connect it to their infrastructure, and subsequently also by the province.

It remains to be seen how residents will engage an uncertain local and provincial government who have everything to gain from discrediting the project as a ruling (ANC) party bungle, but nonetheless will now be primarily responsible for the future of the site and can make political capital from shifting to an engagement with the residents.

Barcelona

This informal settlement of 2411 shacks is located on an old landfill site, where it has been for some 20 years. The municipality has classified it as 'uninhabitable' yet, recognizing the permanence of the settlement, has installed some communal bucket toilet blocks and some taps. CORC, with the assistance of community organizers schooled in the Jo Slovo campaign, have engaged with the residents' association in the area and have recently taken them through a survey and mapping exercise. In early May 2010, the residents' association and CORC engaged officials from several municipal departments as well as civil engineering staff from the University of Cape Town to open a discussion on the issue of toilets. The results of the survey were presented and the map was displayed (see below).

Barcelona: meeting on toilets May 2010

The fact that a meeting between city officials and Barcelona residents was taking place at all, and in the informal settlement, was unusual. A city spokesperson began by saying that there was a shift in the city's approach to dealing with informal settlements[5]. In the past the city had viewed the problem as simply one of providing services and it had been dealt with by engineers. These investments had not been sustainable and were constantly wrecked by vandalism and blockages. Now the informal settlements department in the city was shifting from an 'eradication' approach to an 'incremental upgrade' approach, it had engaged with CORC and the Informal Sector Network, and it was looking to form partnerships with grassroots organizations in the informal settlements.

The history of an engineering/technical approach to service provision in informal settlements, whereby blocks of bucket toilets and some taps had been installed in problematic locations and with no consultation with residents, had elicited violent and destructive responses from shack dwellers: the conflict of rationalities here had been stark. The 'shift in approach' which the city spokesman referred to had come about partly due to the mounting cost of replacing vandalized services (at a time when city budgets were stretched to the limit) and partly due to the engagement by the city of a new consultant on

[5] From own notes at the meeting.

informal policy who was dedicated to a participatory and bottom-up approach to upgrade. From the side of the shack dwellers, the influence of the NGO CORC and the ISN had paved the way for an attempt to appropriate the technologies of survey, map and plan and to use these instruments with which the city was familiar, to enter into negotiation over the upgrade of services.

At the May meeting with the city, the community organization was able to present itself as informed and in possession of reliable data. This is where the terrain of engagement with the city shifted to the question of which approach to data gathering was more 'scientific'. The city argued that their figures on shack and facility numbers were different and that it would require an 'expert' to verify the community survey and map. The response from the community representatives was essentially that their 'view from the ground' was likely to be more accurate than the city's 'view from the sky'. While the city relied on aerial photographs to count shacks and toilets, Barcelona residents argued that adjacent shacks often appear as one from above, that shack numbers can change from day to day, and that it is only possible to check if toilets are functioning from a close inspection. The question of data verification is clearly a further issue which will be driven by different logics and is a potential point of contestation.

Further meetings are now planned to consider an alternate form of sewerage system to the bucket option (proposed by the university) as well as the placement of these in conjunction with more taps and lighting. A potentially new schism has emerged here, as the new system provides for the possibility that each shack could have its own toilet, but the NGO, following SDI principles, favours communal toilet blocks as they encourage 'community building'.

Sheffield Road

This is a smaller settlement of some 170 shacks located on a 17 m wide road reserve, and for this reason is also classified by the city as uninhabitable. As elsewhere, however, the city has provided the settlement with 3 taps and 15 toilets in communal blocks, of which half have been vandalized[6]. The survey report (see footnote 7) makes the interesting point that shack dwellers agreed to engage with the NGO and adopt the SDI rituals after realizing that the possibility that the state would provide them with formal houses was unlikely. State-civil society relations in South Africa are perhaps shifting from one characterized by an expectation that the state will provide, to a situation closer to that of India where poor communities

[6] Information drawn from the community self-survey of 2009 on the SDI website http://www.sdinet.org/ritual/enumerations/

have little hope of state support. It is perhaps for this reason that the SDI method, with its origins in India, seems to have growing acceptance in South Africa’s informal settlements.

The survey and mapping was concluded in late 2009, followed by engagement with the city to introduce more toilets and taps. In the meantime the NGO has proceeded with discussions on a re-blocking exercise in which it is assumed that many of the shacks will be replaced with materials provided by the NGO and in the process they will be relocated into an orderly pattern to make spaces for public facilities. However, this is where difficulties have arisen. Some residents have substantial and well-built shacks and are not willing to downsize them to the standard 15 or 12 square meter shack (with no roofing material) being sold by the NGO. One large shack functions as a bar with music, and the owner has also appropriated a number of the communal toilets nearby for his guests. These divisions have expressed themselves in poor attendance at overall community meetings called by the NGO, and reports of numerous sub-meetings being held within the settlement when outsiders are not present. Currently a university architect is assisting the NGO to find a layout which accepts the current spaces and well-built shacks as fixes, and only re-negotiates spaces where people are keen to replace their existing shacks. NGO rationality can therefore also differ from that of the poors and informals, and notably Li (2007) brackets the state and NGOs together, both driven by a ‘will to improve’.

In Sheffield Rd there is evidence of how engagement across the interface, and acceptance of the SDI strategy, might give rise to new inclusions and exclusions within the settlement. Within any settlement there is huge diversity – in terms of income, gender, status and use of the shack, with those operating businesses from their shacks likely to be able to exercise greater power. While the analysis still has to be undertaken, it is likely that the re-blocking process here and elsewhere will bring about internal divides and conflicts, as some gain and others lose by the relocating of shacks to conform to patterns of settlement which accommodate a rational location of services and facilities.

Sheffield Rd informal settlement map, May 2010

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to present some early and exploratory empirical work which tests the conceptual idea of conflicting rationalities in urban planning and development processes. Broadly, the argument is that planning work needs to do much more in terms of thinking how it can be situated in relation to societal and institutional conflict, as a counter-balance to strands in mainstream planning theory which have tended to focus on and assume consensus-type outcomes. The paper argues that given the growing dominance of populations in the global south, where limited resources, poverty, weak institutions and conflict tend to be the norm, the need to consider how planning can function under such conditions, is urgent.

In particular, the intention of this paper has been to test the notion that where 'engagement' occurs across the interface between conflicting rationalities, which takes the form of appropriation or hybridization of rules, technologies, processes or ideas, then these offer important experiences within which planners can engage and from which planning can learn. Such engagement is unlikely to take the form of collaboration or consensus (although this is not impossible) and is more likely to take the form of struggle, conflict and even open violence. But these too, can offer learning experiences and opportunities for planning action. Essentially this is arguing for an inductive approach to the development of planning theory which seeks to yield theoretical insights which are of some use to planning practice[7].

Drawing on early theorizing of the self-survey movement as a strategy of shack-dwellers in various parts of the world to secure a foothold in urban areas, the paper turns this conceptual lens on three cases of self-survey in Cape Town. The paper thus highlights the method and conceptual approach which will be needed to explore these cases, but at this stage draws no more than preliminary findings.

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