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Tactics in urban future-making

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The global climate crisis and its (trans)local effects exert considerable pressure on built environment professionals to envision and enable radically alternative futures. Addressing challenges such as environmental degradation, rising sea levels, and socio-spatial inequalities, urban imaginaries may feature resilient net-zero cities and territories, including concepts of the ‘green’, ‘smart’, or ‘just’ city. However, such aspirational and variably negotiated models of the future are not just grand narratives, progressive discourses, and ‘change utopias’. Rather, they are embedded in specific socio-spatial settings, influenced by overlapping and conflicting interests, objectives, and timescales that shape *and* are shaped by the agency of built environment professionals. Approaching agency in urban future-making through the lens of *tactics* provides a comprehensive approach that not only focuses on material and social outcomes and objectives (what actors want to achieve). Instead, it also allows for an analytical perspective that places dynamic processes and actions, including their underlying power relations, at the heart of its inquiry (how and why objectives are achieved). In their specific roles, built environment professionals employ various tactics that support their individual and collective actions, such as activating and enabling urban futures or obstructing and blocking them. Focusing on tactics thus provides crucial insights into how professionals are embedded within institutional, legal, and political frameworks while also highlighting their interconnections with broader arenas and actors involved in urban future-making.

Disentangling tactics and strategies

At their core, tactics encompass a set of actions devised by actors or groups to reach certain objectives; in other words, being tactical requires the art of ‘manoeuvring to accomplish a purpose’ (Lydon & Garcia, 2015: 3). The most obvious tactics in urban future-making likely pertain to action-led approaches in the domain of ‘tactical urbanism’ (ibid.; Webb, 2018), or experimental urbanism more broadly (Bulkeley, 2021). These range, for instance, from ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) and guerrilla initiatives or temporary urban interventions (Iveson, 2013; Sager, 2016) to initiatives that are employed, supported, and initiated by state institutions, such as urban living laboratories, urban pop-ups, or other place-making formats (Bulkeley et al., 2018). In fostering long-term urban transformation, or in prefiguring what urban futures may look like, all of these formats share a focus on the iterative and

emergent process of instigating change, alongside the hands-on, practical experimentation that drives this iteration (Vallance and Edwards, 2021).

In this sense, echoing the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), we may draw a distinction between tactics, as informal or bottom-up arrangements by actors aiming to stir processes of urban change, and strategies, as more formal and, sometimes, top-down frameworks for action. However, this distinction also becomes blurred as tactical urbanism or experimentation (can) become purposive strategies deployed by built environment professionals and other actors to implement urban change. Furthermore, intentional urban development strategies may aim to turn tactical initiatives or bottom-up experiments into more structural transformations that can virally spread in scale into different localities and affect wider territories (Herman and Rodgers, 2020). As a result, the relation, opposition, and hybridization between tactics and strategies in urban future-making deserve further investigation.

Tracing conceptual foundations of tactics

A key understanding of tactics in urban future-making refers to the nuanced and hidden politics of tactical actions as part of agenda-setting and decision-making processes within and across institutions, actor networks, and scales. At the level of individuals, tactics refer to how persons or groups (agents) exert influence on other persons or groups (targets) to induce a change in the target, including changes in, for example, behaviours, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, or values (Barbuto and Moss, 2006). Earlier research in institutional studies draws on interpersonal influence theory (Leary, 1995) to categorize such influencing tactics along certain hard and soft factors (e.g. Kipnis et al., 1980). These include, among others, assertiveness and self-promotion (using a forceful manner), ingratiation (appearing friendly or likeable to the target), rationality (making logical arguments), sanctions (threatening punishment), exchange (offering something in return), blocking (impeding the target's progress), and strategic coalition shaping (for a comprehensive overview, see Higgins et al., 2003).

Examining the plurality of tactical fields and actions

Tactics take place in various professional fields related to planning and urban development. Recent literature on climate policy research, for instance, takes up the central role of tactics in envisioning, designing, and governing urban futures. Here, examining tactics allows us to delve into the everyday urban politics of climate change (Amorim-Maia et al., 2024) to identify various typologies and modes of action through which specific climate justice targets can be intentionally pursued by coalitions of actors, or how they can be mainstreamed or institutionalized (Aylett, 2015). Conversely, it addresses the manifold mechanisms behind processes of delaying or blocking climate targets (North et al., 2017).

Thus, from the point of view of socioecological benefits and climate justice objectives, the deployment of certain tactics rather than others can give rise to differential effects; tactics can work towards genuinely advancing socioecological targets, or they may favour a 'hidden' pro-growth agenda concealed within climate mitigation discourses.

Another field is addressed by planning research, which casts light on the role of tactics in, for instance, exerting power in urban planning (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002) and negotiating planning conflicts (Gualini, 2015). This is especially evident when we shift from viewing planning as an institutional framework to better understanding the multifaceted agencies, networks, and power coalitions that shape (the politics of) dynamic planning procedures and outcomes across various times and scales. Moreover, at the level of social movements and collective action, tactics are crafted as specific repertoires of organizing and strategizing by grassroots actors and activists, but also by urban professionals, aimed at either driving or hindering change (Sovacool et al., 2022). Examples are modalities to enact protests, to advocate for changes in established institutions, or to effect alternative modes of service or policy provisioning.

Lines of inquiry

Building on the literature outlined above, this conference track views tactics in urban future-making as 'analytical windows' (Shore et al., 2011). Opening these windows offers insights into the dynamic, processual, and sometimes fragmented nature of the collaboration, negotiation, and decision-making of urban professionals among institutional and spatial-temporal settings. This track calls for theoretical, methodological, or empirical contributions that potentially address the following questions:

- How can tactics be framed and conceptualized as specific modalities of exercising agency in urban future-making? In addressing these questions, this theme may draw from aspects such as the intentionality, calculation, strategizing and manoeuvring involved in tactics; the politics of stirring urban change towards certain directions; or the building of actors' coalitions in order to influence outcomes as possible objects of theoretical reflections. Collectively, this will work towards a better understanding of the role and nature of tactics amidst other repertoires of agency.
- How, why, and by whom are tactics designed, mobilized, and deployed in different socio-spatial settings to achieve, manipulate, or prevent certain outcomes? Also, how do tactics link

with programmatic strategies enacted in order to orient urban change? This theme calls for informed empirical analyses of modalities to perform tactics in diverse contexts and urban future-making situations. Analyses of tactics in action can range, for instance, from understanding how the (hidden) politics of climate change unfold through tactics in specific urban contexts; to the adoption of formats such as tactical urbanism, experimental designs, and other interventions in different domains; to the specific role of urban professionals as acting from diverse spheres (e.g. private, state, grassroots) in those or other manifestations of tactics.

- What roles do tactics actually play in achieving and/or blocking transformative and socioecologically just cities and urban futures, and how can the socio-material effects of tactics be evaluated? This theme is specifically interested in the evaluative dimension of tactics, i.e. in accounting for the socio-material and socioecological justice implications of specific tactics. As they serve certain purposes, tactics can be perceived as more beneficial for some actors or purposes, and less so for others. As such, tactics can generate conflicts, tensions, or contestations in terms of justice claims advanced by specific actors.
- How can the different types, dimensions, and scales of tactics in urban future-making be studied within and across various grounds and disciplines? Tactics in urban future-making may also relate to the different positionalities of urban researchers and practitioners, and thus the different ways they perceive, study, and theorise the urban. In urban studies, for instance, Robinson (2023) recently introduced a *typology of tactics* to plead for a more comparative account of future research, particularly looking from places of the Global South and thus challenging widespread notions and theories of Western-centric urban scholarship. This theme therefore understands tactics in terms of specific research methodologies that can be deployed in urban future-making.

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