TENSIONS IN TACTICAL URBANISM: THE ROLE OF URBAN PLANNERS AND CITIZENS

MRP One Page Summary

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In recent years, tactical urbanism (TU) has become a popular mode for both urban planners and citizens to revitalize and create vibrancy within their community. However, the grassroots and activist nature of TU has led to tensions between formal and informal actors, or planners and citizens. As bottom-up TU activities increasingly shift towards becoming a tool utilized by urban planners, their role is not well defined. Though previous studies have largely focused on benefits, challenges, and constraints of TU, the various experiences of participants within TU processes have not been fully examined. Through semi-structured interviews with key actors in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta, this study examines how both planners and citizens experience TU activities. As a result, the role planners and citizens play in TU is more clearly defined, assisting in allowing successful TU practices to emerge. Findings from this study suggests tension within TU exists between planners and citizens, the formal and informal, and regulation versus activism. To achieve a balance between competing actors and interest, planners and citizens must take on complimentary roles to one another. Generally, planners should act as facilitators, supporting communities in TU processes through ensuring citizen safety, managing liability, and allowing for citizen power and creation. Citizens should act as co-creators and leaders, utilizing their local knowledge and lived experiences to contribute to TU projects. Recommendations for sustaining TU in the long-term include recognizing the need for community leaders and citizen action, re-examining municipal planning and policies, and considering the concept of co-creation in planning. By allowing citizens to take action within their communities, ultimately a sense of ownership or buy-in can be gained, leading to longer-term sustainability of TU and its positive benefits.

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