

# **Austerity Urbanism: Connecting Strategies And Tactics For Participatory Placemaking**

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Received 13 Nov 2019, Accepted 21 Apr 2020, Published online: 13 May 2020

Cite this article as: Rachel Sara, Matthew Jones & Louis Rice (2020): Austerity urbanism: connecting strategies and tactics for participatory placemaking, CoDesign, doi: 10.1080/15710882.2020.1761985

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## **ABSTRACT**

Austerity has led to a growing interest in small-scale urban practices that engage community groups in participatory placemaking as an alternative to developing government or commercially funded parks and urban spaces. These approaches draw on bottom-up tactics to empower local community groups to take ownership of small communal spaces but are also often supported strategically by small financial grants provided by local and national governments. In this article, we draw on de Certeau's theory of strategies and tactics to explore the relationship between top-down strategies and bottom-up tactics in urban placemaking in response to the politics of austerity. We explore this process through critical analysis of our own participatory action research project to engage in the ideation and implementation of a community run, 'Pocket-Park'. We argue that the complex interplay between participatory bottom-up tactics and more formal top-down strategies provides an approach to placemaking that uniquely facilitates creative practice and allows for a resurgence in non-commercialized public placemaking. We identify a process of manoeuvres (or strategic tactics) between de Certeau's two concepts in which key participants undertake a translational process, to unlock the resources needed to support tactical placemaking.

**Key words: austerity, participatory design, community activism, tactics, strategies**

## **INTRODUCTION**

'Austerity Urbanism' is defined here as the way in which the urban environment is affected by difficult economic conditions; in particular, those economic conditions created by government strategies to systematically reduce public expenditure (Blyth, 2013). The current preponderance of the term austerity has emerged as a more or less accepted approach to running

economies post-2008 Wall Street Crash (Peck, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013) and tends to particularly involve cuts to the social state. Even nearly a decade on from the crash, the term is still “a keyword for these ostensibly post-crisis times” (Peck, 2012: 626), and there are increasing suggestions that we are living in an “age of austerity” [1] (Cameron, 2009; Edsall, 2012; Featherstone et al., 2012; Schui, 2014), with swingeing public spending cuts in the UK, Europe and the USA continuing into 2016 and beyond (HM Treasury, 2016; Financial Times, 2016).

It has been argued that this age of austerity has perpetuated continuous reductions in funding to political targets of austerity programs—the ‘undeserving’ poor, disabled, minorities and other marginalized populations, public-sector workers and ‘bureaucratized’ infrastructures; all cuts which tend to disproportionately hit cities (Peck, 2012). This is combined with cuts in support for public space itself at the urban scale, in the context of a public realm that has already largely been privatized through a neoliberal approach to development; where corporations, not citizens have taken control of the public realm. (Minton, 2012; Harvey, 2013; Rice, 2013).

Alongside a politics of austerity, governments worldwide have further sought to address the over-stretching of public services by increasing devolution and decentralisation. In the UK, the ‘Big Society’ concept (Cabinet Office, 2010: 3) proposed shared governance, both reducing public spending and increasing participation in the development of local communities. As the framework for achieving this, the Localism Act aimed to transfer decision-making to local people, replacing ‘top-down’ with ‘bottom-up’ and allowing local people to shape local processes, open up public services to their needs and to promote social action. In its shift from government to governance (Buser et al, 2013), Localism presents a unique opportunity to redistribute knowledge and decision-making power over the built environment to the people it affects every day; enabling community members to engage in a form of civic agency [2]. However, it has received much criticism for the complexities of its delivery mechanisms and the weight of responsibility placed on community volunteers

(Bullivant et al, 2016). Further, the structures and rhetoric of localism suggests a strategic, top-down definition of community where those with time, resources, social capital and knowledge are best placed to become involved in the process, entrenching inequality (Featherstone, 2008). Top-down definitions of community pre-determine in a strategic manner, what a community is and could be argued that they are a decoy, or a Trojan horse, which keep communities happy and distracted with the illusion that they are able to make a difference to their urban environments.

In this article, we explore these issues by investigating the processes involved in small-scale urban practices that engage community groups in participatory placemaking. These approaches draw on bottom-up tactics to empower local community groups to take ownership of small communal spaces as an alternative to developing government or commercially funded parks and urban spaces, but are also often supported strategically by small grants provided by local and national governments.

We argue that the interplay between formal top-down strategies and informal bottom-up tactics offers a new approach to urban placemaking. It provides a powerful format that empowers local community groups to take ownership of local communal spaces in a way that uniquely facilitates creative practice and allows for a resurgence in non-commercialized public placemaking that ultimately begins to reclaim public space as democratic space, and creates “opportunity for progressive urban design and a rupture in business-as-usual urban development” (Gray, 2016: 4). In this way the research advances existing knowledge by positioning this practice theoretically and in doing so conceptualizes a complex interplay between the strategies and tactics dialectic in which key participants undertake manoeuvres (or strategic tactics) which act somewhere between these two poles. Manoeuvres are understood as translational processes that are able to unlock strategically allocated resources to support more tactical participatory placemaking. These negotiations are a powerful tool for exploring an emerging resistance to the commodification of

the public urban realm in which austerity has been a perhaps surprising ally (Anderson et al., 2016; Havers, 2013). This claim will be illustrated with reference to our engagement as part of the architecture collective Hands-on-Bristol in the co-creation of a community-run pocket park in Bedminster, Bristol.

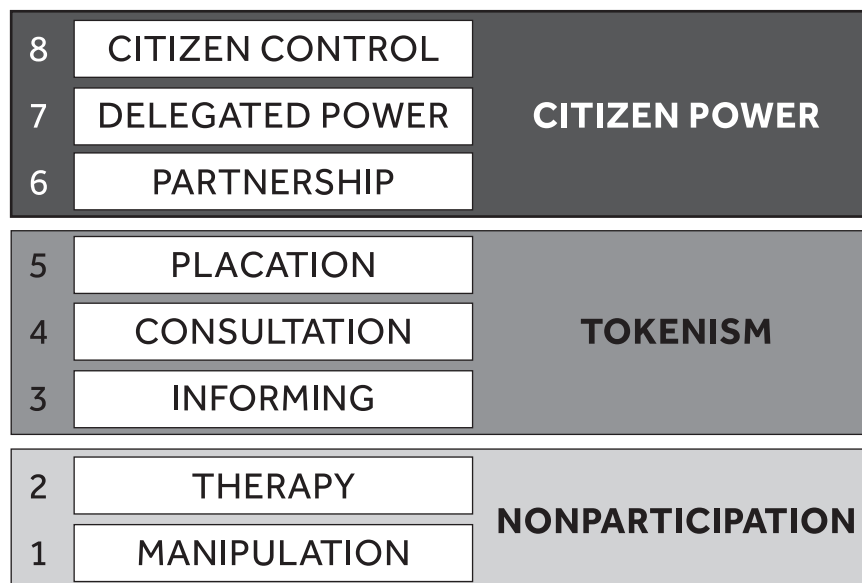
## **B FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT: THE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF PARTICIPATORY PLACEMAKING**

Michel de Certeau's definition of strategies and tactics are helpful in understanding the creation of new forms of urban placemaking that have at least in part been created by devolving responsibility (and indeed the associated costs) from central and local governments to community groups. For de Certeau, strategies are planned and implemented in conformity with abstract, objective models of space, reinforcing existing control and power structures (de Certeau, 1984). In contrast, tactics are temporal, improvised and opportunistic, grounded in everyday practices of living and dwelling: "Derived from de Certeau's appropriation of the military terminology; strategies relate to the overall, long-term, abstract aim (and the means of achieving this). Tactics relates more to short-term contingent manoeuvres and practices in context, frequently without a coherent or explicit plan of action" (Rice, 2017: 7). Tactics are not often not rigidly pre-planned but are contingently enacted, taking advantage, using the element of surprise to get things done (Petrescu et al, 2013). They are non-powerful, "the space of the other" (de Certeau, 1984: 36) and rely on subversion, inventiveness, wit and mobility (Petrescu et al, 2013). As Petrescu identifies, tactics can be understood as ways to transgress laws and regulations, professional boundaries and dominant power structures in order to encourage local people to re-appropriate space and co-create self managed spaces (Petrescu et al, 2013).

As such, tactics are often inevitably associated with participatory processes, where we understand participatory design to be characterized by a "breaking

down of unnecessary or unhelpful boundaries” (Rice 2017: 2) to actively involve all stakeholders in the design process. In particular these boundaries resist the separation between experts and non-experts. Whereas in traditional (non-participatory) design, the designer, and/or team of experts, take the lead and control the process, in participatory design, non-experts become part of the design team. As users are experts of their own lived experiences, they can participate in design decisions and even participate as designers themselves (Rendell 2004; Robertson and Simonsen 2012, Jensen, 2006; Luck, 2003).

The way in which participation is enacted is fundamental to both the spirit of the participation and its relationship with the location of power in decision-making. Arnstein (1969) defines a ladder of participation (see fig 1) with ‘informing’ and ‘placation’ at the bottom of the ladder described as a form of tokenism, whereas ‘partnership’, ‘delegated power’ and ‘citizen control’ which are located at the top of the ladder, are understood as forms of participation which give citizens power. ‘Citizen control’ reflects some of the tactics of participatory placemaking whilst the other end of Arnstein’s ladder has more parallels with strategies.



*Fig 1, Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (redrawn from Arnstein, 1969)*

It is the upper rungs of the ladder which are fundamental to empowering citizens to effectively tailor local processes, assets and services to their needs (Taylor & Hill 2011) and which suggests direct citizen action (DIY Urbanism for example (Iveson, 2013)) and/or partnership based ‘hybrid forums’ (which bring together an alliance of experts, non-experts, politicians, scientists and citizens to deal with complex problems (Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe, 2011)). These complex contested issues are what Latour (2005) calls “matters of concern, requiring new, innovative and collaborative approaches. Lefebvre teaches us that the production of space is a contested process, underpinned by struggles for power over issues such as ‘capital, property rights, planning codes, spatial design, law, various policing techniques and technologies, education, socialization, and labour” (Iveson 2013: 942). Participatory placemaking particularly can be seen as a mode of: “object-oriented democracy” (Latour 2005b: 16) where an assemblage of actors, interests, institutions, and frameworks come together in a collective approach to contested design issues. Participatory placemaking has the potential to engage tactics to subvert or circumvent existing power struggles to enable communities to take control in order to produce places which suit them and in doing so invites ‘others’ to participate in those struggles.

### **ENACTING THE CITY: THE PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE OF HANDS-ON-BRISTOL**

In the following section we will explore in depth the co-creation of a community run pocket park, in an Urban Area of deprivation in Bristol, UK, through our involvement as participants in the architectural activist collective Hands-on-Bristol. The project involved an on-going engagement with the local community group which ultimately led to the co-creation of a local pocket park that is currently managed by an informal community group whilst also being formally underwritten by the initiating community partnership. Through its inception, implementation and on-going governance, one small project has involved students, a lawyer, a housing association, educators, an architect, an

urban regeneration consultant, a storyteller, government funders, photographers, business leaders, neighbours, a community partnership, passers-by, local schools, the urban gym, a local café, a pub and volunteer bankers.

Hands-on-Bristol is a 'Live Architecture Lab' that acts as a hybrid forum to bring together community members, architects, trainee architects and academics to work together in order to co-create a brief, timescale, budget, product and processes to generate outcomes that make positive changes within the city. We are located as part of a University School of Architecture and in some ways we act like a participatory architecture or urban design practice but we are non-professional (in that we are not paid any fees (that would typically be paid for architectural services)) and our practice is underpinned by a radical social program based on ethical principles, and an alternative, not-for-profit economic model. Projects have been running since 2012 and to date have involved 38 different community groups, including neighbourhood community groups and community interest companies, a co-housing cooperative, a town team, third sector organisations, public space improvement groups, a farm run for people with learning disabilities and autism, a community partnership, an environmental action group, a housing association, and many more. [3]

Our involvement in the process as part of Hands-on-Bristol was seen as a form of participatory action research (PAR) through which we were able to actively participate in a process of creating a new public space. PAR "represents a well-documented tradition of active-risk taking and experimentation in social reflectivity backed up by evidential reasoning and learning through experience and real action" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013: 4). PAR in this context is the methodology adopted through which the researchers seek to answer the question of how and in what ways might transformative change can be effected through collaborative placemaking design practices (Kemmis et al. 2013). We were involved in action research as participants and observers. On the one hand, as part of Hands-On-Bristol we were teachers, designers and activists



interested in “urban interstices” (Petrescu et al. 2013: 61) and the role their creative reimagining and reuse might have in urban placemaking. On the other hand we were researchers and observers, engaging in the processes, conversations and events over the six-month process.

The following account draws on our own active engagement and experimentation followed by critical reflection on the processes and actors involved. We participated in client and community meetings and public engagement events throughout the process. We draw from meeting minutes, email exchanges, photographic observations, feedback from over 100 participants on two community days, focus groups with two groups of students involved in the project and interviews with two key community and professional participants. The research is presented as a timeline of the process, followed by a critical reflection understood within the theoretical framework of de Certeau’s concepts of strategies and tactics.

### **Phase 1, Civic Agency: The identification of a potential public space**

Hands-on-Bristol (HoB) has been working with Bedminster East since 2012. The area is in the most deprived 10% in England for economic, environmental and social deprivation (Bristol, 2015) and HoB began a collaboration which was initially focussed around how to regenerate the high street. Through an on-going engagement HoB undertook a range of projects including temporary urban interventions, market stalls and urban realm design proposals. In October 2015, a community representative identified a small pocket of overgrown and fly-tipped land behind a stone archway, closed off to the public by a padlocked iron gate, as a potential site of investigation. This initiated a sequence of tactical interventions by the group that led to the co-creation of a public pocket park on this privately owned pocket of derelict land.

The first phase brought together Hands-on-Bristol, an urban regeneration consultant (working on behalf of the community but paid for by the Local

Authority regeneration budget) and community participants to draw attention to the neglected and overgrown space – making visible what was an otherwise invisible space. A public event was staged on the pavement outside of the still locked space and participants were invited to record their dreams for the space beyond by writing text on colourful translucent flags, reminiscent of Nepalese prayer flags. This temporary tactical practice engaged with just under 100 passers-by along with local shop-owners, and effectively ratified further engagement with the site as a place of potential. Drawing upon the dreams of the participants as inspiration, alternative realities for the site were designed and visualized, drawing on more strategic processes of planning and abstraction.

Following the positive response from this first event, a conversation with the landowners (a housing association who own and manage a sheltered housing scheme connected to the site) was initiated in order to discuss the possibilities of opening up the site to the public. They were reluctant to support the project, citing concerns around antisocial behaviour, security for their residents and the legal aspects of opening the site up to the public. The housing association were using top-down strategies to exclude the public from this space. However they agreed to come to a consultation session and presentation of ideas in a local café. Here the urban regeneration consultant was key in negotiating an agreement, pushing a decision by accusing the housing association of deliberately obstructing what the public had clearly supported, when the opening of the park would be at no cost to their organisation. This pressured the housing association into agreeing they would look into opening the site if there was unanimous agreement from a quorate group of their residents. There existed a legal right of way across the site, which had been closed off for at least 20 years, so a compromise agreement was made to create a limited pocket park, which would however close off the right of way with a fence. In addition the design direction of using the space as a storytelling space (as had emerged through the public consultation) was chosen as an appropriate approach.

In this phase the interplay between the tactical moves of physically intervening on the space and inviting others to join in dreaming of alternative uses coincided with strategic agreements from landowners in negotiation within an existing right-of-way legal context. The urban consultant was able to negotiate the strategic elements by undertaking a manoeuvre (strategic tactic) to exploit the temporary interventions into the site to evidence community support for the project alongside highlighting the way that the right-of-way had illegally been closed off.

### **Phase 2, Reclaiming Land: Formalising Legal and Financial Agreements**

Once the agreement was made in principle the group worked to undertake a semi-public event with the residents of the sheltered housing using a more developed set of drawings to visualize how the space could be used as a storytelling space. They leafleted the residents about the event and invited them to join them for tea and cakes, ordered from a nearby café and reinforcing the relationship between local independent businesses and the project. The event ultimately led to an agreement for the pocket park to go ahead.

At this point the urban regeneration consultant used the creative tactical interventions that had already happened on and around the project as the basis of a funding bid for UK Department for Communities and Local Government Pocket Park Funding. The funding was ‘support for communities to manage small green spaces’ (DCLG, 2015) and provided up to £15K for groups to generate and/or manage a small space (up to a maximum of 0.4 hectares) that must be open to all [4]. This required connections with the strategic funding opportunities available and an ability to ‘translate’ tactical activities into a written form to ‘suit’ the formal process. The bid was successful and brought a relatively modest budget of £12,000.

This led to more formal negotiations with the landowners to agree the legal framework for leasing the land. The landowners were slow and obstructive at

this stage; proposing prohibitive fees for the drawing up of the lease. However again, HoB negotiated (through quite a confrontational exchange) the lease (with a number of intimidating conditions) at a reasonable cost.

In this phase Hands-on-Bristol tactically worked outside of the formal structures to seed the idea of the project, brought on board a wide range of community stakeholders and negotiated the approval in principle. Tactical strategies were used to negotiate formal land-ownership structures and to gain funding to support the project (which also depended on the formal structures of the community organisation to have the systems able to receive the funds, accept the liability for the project and to pay for legal agreements). In this way the activities demonstrate the “ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend[ing] a political dimension to everyday practices” (de Certeau, 1984: xvii)

### **Phase 3, Marking Territory: The Physical Manifestation of the Pocket Park**

Having gained formal support, the project shifted again to involve a new group of participants engaged to realise the project. The visualized dreams (the seductive sketches produced by Hands-on-Bristol) which captured the imagination of the community and funders, needed to be converted into a buildable reality. There was a tactical approach to work with volunteer fabricators, however the strategic (legal liability issues) required the appointment of a local fabricator and local architect whilst Hands-on-Bristol negotiated a material donation and an ongoing process of community engagement on the site. For the first time in 20 years the gates were opened up to the public, and an open invite made to come and explore and help to clear the site. This opened a “different world [that transformed] another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient” (de Certeau, 1984: xxi). Posters and social media advertised the event, and interestingly this led to a local landlord (who HoB had informally been told had been using the place as a material/rubbish store) clearing much of the space in advance. The site

clearing event led to the involvement of a small group (around 10) of engaged community members who were happy to get hands-on in rubbish and rubble clearance, cutting back plants and so on. In addition a ½ scale model of the project was demonstrated on site.

The appointment of a formal ‘fabricator’ meant that intentions to involve the community in the assembly process were dropped, so a further opportunity for community co-creation was lost. Nonetheless, throughout the process local shop-owners and businesses were involved, by holding meetings in local cafes, by asking them to keep the keys to the space and to advertise events; a neighbouring business (who was the main objector to the project) was nonetheless coerced into helping to manoeuvre the model (which required 4 people to move) onto the site.

In the run up towards the final opening of the park, an open call was made to the local community to contribute towards the opening. As a result there were two professional photographers, a professional storyteller and a musician who all volunteered their time. This allowed the space to open with an immediate community relevance and ownership. At the opening event a small group of volunteers were inaugurated as guardians of the park. This meant that they were given keys to the gates and effective collective responsibility for maintaining the space.

The park was opened to much enthusiasm from community members and passers by, however in contrast to the official opening of a council run park, it was clearly still a work in progress. The budget had been spent on making a beautiful (and subsequently award winning) intervention into the space in the form of a community-scale storytelling bench, and making good the existing walls and planting, but this left the ground surface unfinished and a definite need for additional planting. It was this unfinished quality along with the appointment of the guardians which helped to reinforce the need for subsequent community involvement.

At this stage the project saw the tactical approach of working with volunteer builders thwarted by strategic requirements to take on liability for the build. However what did remain was a tactical approach to invite community to be a part - in clearing the site; in performing and recording the opening, and in maintaining the site post 'completion'. Finally the decision to fabricate using a formal fabricator and architect whilst making use of opportunities of donated materials can be seen as a manoeuvre (strategic tactic) that acts somewhere between these positions.

#### **Phase 4, Community-led Public Placemaking**

Subsequent to the park opening, and the appointment of the park's guardians, the new community group self-organized and set up a first meeting. This initial meeting brought various local expertise, including 2 members who had been involved in community gardening projects, and 1 member who is part of a volunteering community action running group. The discussions focused on the greening of the space, as well as the establishment of a social media presence, finding a book cupboard for an on-site book exchange for the storytelling space, as well as negotiating a water butt on site. Subsequently the group and wider community have continued to act upon the site in various ways: a volunteering session with a major leading bank was organized to construct planters; multiple small funding applications have been sought – some successfully– and the group have gained sponsorship in plants from a local garden centre; there are surprising donations made to the park- an on-going book exchange, as well as the placement of little trinkets in various nooks and crannies around the space; an anonymous person has regularly left food out for a resident fox; and while there has been some graffiti and vandalism on the site, this has been quickly repaired by the guardians.

The on-going maintenance of the space is undertaken as an entirely voluntary process by the guardians which seems to have resulted in an 'ownership' of the space. Rubbish and vandalism is cleared quickly which reinforces the look of

the space as well cared for, and because the community group feel ownership, they are also continuously engaging in creatively developing the space. There has even been a proposal to register the park for weddings. Throughout the process the project has brought together people who would not otherwise have had any connections to each other, and in that way can be seen as building social capital (Dekker and Uslaner, 2001), which in turn has potential for positive impacts on both the individuals involved as well as the communities of which they are a part.

At this phase, the project acts almost entirely in tactical and tactically strategic ways: The activities undertaken are embedded in everyday life and draw on strategic elements (such as funding structures and volunteer structures) to get things done. Community members have been empowered to act creatively to appropriate the space to suit their own needs. So the “tactics introduce a Brownian movement into the system. They ... show the extent to which intelligence is inseparable from the everyday struggles and pleasure that it articulates ... without capitalizing, that is, without taking control over time” (de Certeau, 1984: xx). In contrast the project demonstrates “an art of manipulating and enjoying” (de Certeau, 1984: xxii).

### CRITICAL REFLECTION



Fig 2, Strategies and Tactics as Processes for Change

The different phases of the project demonstrate an interplay between tactics and strategies (see fig. 2); between the formal strategies of the existing control and power structures (as represented by the Housing Association, legal frameworks, government funding and land ownership) and the improvised tactics of the community representatives (the creative interventions, visualising

alternatives, consensus building, participatory placemaking, and community guardianship). However our research identifies that the conceptual frame of tactics and strategies limits reflection on the potential to act interstitially between these two poles. This is often made possible by people who, understanding the language of both parties- the language of both strategies and tactics- and are able to work fluidly between the two, almost in a role of translation. In reality this involved seeking tactical involvement from Hands-on-Bristol, strategically submitting the design proposals for funding, negotiating land-owner demands and legal red-tape, and then tactically handing over responsibility for maintenance to the guardians whilst also signing off insurance and legal responsibility to the more formally constituted community organisation. This kind of agility of approach was essential in realising positive changes that made use of existing structures whilst not being constrained by them.

As such we understand the work as a form of critical spatial practice (Rendell, 2006: 20), a term which “draws attention not only to the importance of the critical, but also to the spatial, indicating the interest in exploring the specifically spatial aspects of interdisciplinary processes or practices that operate between art and architecture”. Critical spatial practice forms part of a broader participatory action research territory, sharing as it does many of the methods and underlying theory. The inherently creative, playful and designerly (Cross, 2001) approaches towards placemaking take practices from art, architecture, pedagogy and other disciplines that share a concern for socio-spatial transformation in a reflexive process. We argue that this approach draws on both tactical and strategic approaches to act critically (for example in highlighting land that is not being valuably used) and in acting spatially to reclaim privatized space back into the public realm: essentially reversing the trend towards privatisation of public space. As Meireis (2015: 9) argues, “the initiators of such critical spatial practices could then be interpreted as civil agents, conquerors who enter unknown territory and reclaim land for the



emancipated, self-organising citizen to join in and engage as proactive member of the critical mass in a critical revision of successes and problems”. This identifies the power of the tactical, bottom-up approaches to resist existing structures, to make visible alternative solutions, to actively make changes, and to empower others to do the same. However, this position can also be criticized for implying a deficit model – in that land is reclaimed *for* the citizen (however emancipated they might be) rather than *by* the citizen. The case study describes instead a collaboration, in which ‘citizens’ (in this case community members) are also working as civil agents; the whole group reclaims the land using a range of different tactics in collaboration; land is reclaimed with (and by) the citizen.

Formal systems were also an important part of the ingredients. The project needed the funding and the legal arrangements in order to give the project permanence and security. However, those formal systems only became active through the tactics of bottom-up modes of practice – those initial conquerors who made visible the unknown territory, and allowed the community to dream of reclaiming land. Formal systems were the tether for capturing those dreams and rooting them to a particular physical space and timeframe, and this led to a more formal phase of physical realisation for the project.

In the context of austerity, this form of civic agency can be seen as a powerful way to enable communities to create public spaces that respond to their own wants and dreams. At a time when new public spaces are unlikely to be funded, and existing spaces are facing cuts in maintenance, a model that enables new community spaces to be generated with a tiny budgetary input and no formal on-going maintenance costs seems like a positive solution in the circumstances. When this is combined with the opportunity for communities to take ownership of their own spaces, to act creatively, and to simultaneously build social capital then it seems like a win-win solution.

The place-making project was used as a vehicle to promote and explore ‘object-oriented democracy’ in action. The aim being to draw together an assemblage of institutional partners, place, performance, plants, poetry, participants and pieces of legislation in an open and democratic designerly process. As with any democracy, the aim was to widen participation as broadly as possible to reduce the tendency towards entrenching or exacerbating existing inequalities. Participant recruitment targeted the four critical categories (highlighted by Featherstone, 2008): time, resources, social capital and knowledge. Tactics and strategies were deployed contingently to address these issues in action. For example, a strategic decision was made to work in a deprived area, which enabled participants with lower levels of social capital and limited access to resources to engage locally. Nonetheless there were limitations to widening participation, those in precarious housing situations tended to move (or more accurately, be moved) away from the immediate area; reducing their longer-term involvement. We also employed more tactical methods, for example, street-stalls with free (homemade) cakes and coffee were offered to entice passers-by, in order to reduce the friction of time or resources – so even those with only a few moments were able to contribute to the data gathering and design generation process. Furthermore, the tactic of handing-back control at various stages of the process, was a strategic attempt to shift power away from designers and other professionals to members of the local community.

The format of devolved community-realized urbanism does not lead to inevitable success however. In the same timeframe as the development of the Bedminster park, another 6 pocket parks (DCLG, 2016) were funded in Bristol, and another 2 pocket parks were realized nearby using Business Improvement District funding and procured in a more traditional way. Some of these nearby parks have been blighted by vandalism and generate on-going costs for the local business organisation that supported them. They have not built community engagement or facilitated a handover of community

responsibility for the projects as they function at Arnstein's level of tokenism rather than citizen power. They are certainly a positive addition to the visual landscape and have added planting to an otherwise hard urban landscape, but arguably do not have the same social cohesion impact.

The fine line between success and failure seems to be reliant on three key processes: 1. Tactics – bottom-up activities which take advantage of local conditions, engage local communities, undertake direct action and construct a collective vision for the project; 2. Manoeuvres - in which tactics are undertaken strategically, and strategies are exploited tactically to negotiate and exploit formal processes to unlock the formal systems necessary to realize the project; and 3. Strategies – Top-down strategies that affect the realisation of the project in positive ways (such as grants to support community-led initiative) and restrictive ways (such as legal contexts and land ownership) that can work either to advantage or disadvantage the project (see fig. 3).



*Fig 3, Manoeuvres Act Between Tactics and Strategies*

de Certeau was inspired by Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War' to identify Strategies and Tactics, so the term Manoeuvre seems an appropriate term for activity that happens between these two states, and also has military roots in Tsu's work, in which a key manoeuvre is the bringing together of different elements into one force (Giles, 2009: 23). The Oxford English Dictionary (2000) defines a manoeuvre as "a tactical or strategic movement or change of position" thus bringing together both strategy and tactics, whereas the Google dictionary describes the action to 'manoeuvre is to carefully guide or manipulate (someone or something) in order to achieve an end' (Google, 2017). The interstitial place of the manoeuvre is where the most powerful activity in the

project was undertaken. These included exploiting the tactical design interventions of Hands-on-Bristol to gain strategic support for the project from existing power structures of the land-owner, and exploiting government strategies to facilitate tactical direct action on the site. This suggests that the zone of manoeuvres inhabits the zone between the two forms of action, in a spectrum which acknowledges activity might be more or less active along the spectrum between the two approaches.

The project demonstrates how a space that has long been abandoned has been radically repurposed through collaborative creativity, in a way that resists the strategic direction of “pervasive commodification of the urban space”. (Meireis, 2015:15). Through the participatory process (even whilst those engaged in the projects are not necessarily conscious of this as a statement) those involved are nonetheless enacting their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968). The project calls on the tactics of the everyday (Petrescu et al, 2014), those of cooking, site clearing, chatting, drawing and dreaming to engage amateurs and professionals alongside students and activists to create a space of democratic engagement. At all stages, the project can be seen as an open invite to participation and direct action: from the initial consciousness raising about the space and generation of ideas or dreams for the site, to the community clearing and sketching out of the proposals on site, to the final installation which installed a key, beautiful element but which left the rest of the space incomplete. In this way the project as a whole provided a more open-ended public space which can be seen as a strategically open invite to tactically participate in its making. As de Certeau (1984: xix) describes, “a tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance”.

The project’s statement of democratic action is all the more powerful for the project’s realisation on privately owned land, as a reversal of the trend towards privatisation and commodification (Minton, 2006). However it is easy to celebrate this as a dynamic act of “small-a anarchism [that is] the real locus of

historical dynamism” (Graeber, 2013: 89) and forget the strategic top-down funding that helped to realize the project. It can be argued then that instead of acting in tactical resistance to, or subversion of, existing models, these projects are “in danger of converging with the very nature of capitalist production” (Mereis, 2015: 5). Perhaps in reality the lessons are somewhat more nuanced. The project does rely on those top-down strategies and does play into the hands of a strategic desire to ‘do more with less’. However the tactical strategies employed also successfully wrestled space from private owners into public use and control and empowered community groups along the way. As such this small project demonstrates a small resistance to the limits placed on “creativity, participation and progressive politics” in temporary or low-budget urban spaces that remain “ultimately constrained by private property relations and the permission of landowners” Gray (2018: 21). It has generated a space that is more socially inclusive than more formally generated public spaces and perhaps exemplifies Anderson’s optimistic position that whilst “the global recession is causing widespread suffering and hardship [...], in some respects, it may turn out be a good thing for the future development of our towns and cities” (2010: 18); it has facilitated an agility in working tactically within strategically directed micro-budgets, whilst simultaneously galvanising community-led action and drawing in localized private sponsorship.

Key to understanding the impact this kind of approach could have on the future development of our towns and cities is scalability. The speculation pressure on land in dense cities is considerable (Harvey, 2008). At the micro scale the pressure to develop land for commercial gain is limited; probably the land repurposed in this project was too small to be of much commercial value (in addition the value was further diminished by a right of way running across the site). As a result it seems unlikely that this project structure could work to repurpose whole plots of land that have more inherent value. However the project does suggest a number of lessons that are scaleable. Firstly in large developments where gardens or public open space are being proposed, the

structure of participatory placemaking suggests that rather than providing instant ‘ready-made’ spaces that are completed on day one, there is potential to provide incomplete spaces, that invite community groups to participate in the evolving generation of the space to suit their own needs. This allows designers to intervene in ways that can promote the “unpredictable interactions” championed by Sennett (1970: 98) and create “expressive public spaces that encourage people to interact ... catalyse the emergence of unplanned activities ... [and] inspire tolerance towards difference and a built environment that can easily adapt to changing situations” (Sendra, 2015: 821). Lim argues that allowing incomplete spaces in this way promotes innovation, flexibility and responsiveness in the context of financial turmoil (2011: 2). It also chimes with de Certeau’s notion of tactics in contrast to what he calls a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), in that “a tactic depends on time [rather than space] – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seize ‘on the wing’. Whatever it wins, it does not keep” (1984: xix). This also reinforces the notion that it is not land, or space that is seized, but rather its (the space’s) appropriation for non ‘proper’ purposes over time.

The second model of scaleability acknowledges that this kind of tactical repurposing is most likely to happen in small pockets of land, but understands this as having the potential to be almost infinitely repeatable. In this way many small projects can be seen collectively as enabling big changes in urban environments.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Contrary to concerns that austerity is solely causing losses to communities, this participatory action research project adds to the argument that in some situations austerity has begun to generate positive results that can facilitate a shift from corporation to citizen control. Despite a lack of funding to support formal methods of procurement, creative practitioners are able to use

improvized and opportunistic tactics to initiate participatory projects that engage communities in the making and remaking of their own community places. These tactics involve community groups in everyday activities of site clearing, gardening, chatting and imagining to bring into being projects that would otherwise not have happened. These spaces form pockets of resistance to market-led strategies for the development of public places into private space; These projects stand *against* maximising private profit and *for* maximising action-oriented democracy.

Simultaneously, of perhaps equal importance in the realisation of projects is the need for some strategic, top-down support. Strategies are often portrayed as necessarily bad; as part of the commercialization and privatization of space. Many local government strategies merely reproduce the existing power structures, however there are some strategies that are seeking to genuinely increase citizen power and improve democratic action. Strategies that protect the rights of citizens (rights of way laws for example) and that promote community-led placemaking (such as the Pocket Park Funding) are fundamental to making spaces that have any degree of permanence. These strategies challenge existing control and power structures and support the rights of individuals rather than the rights of corporations, and are harmonious with tactics and bottom-up activities. As part of this, there is a key role for project participants who are able to undertake tactical manoeuvres – to opportunistically subvert existing structures of power to unlock the formal systems necessary to permanently realize the project. Tactics can attain greater power when they are harmonized to appropriate strategies to their own end. In this case-study certain actors (for example, action researchers) act as interpreters between tactics and strategies. These people act as interpreters between the language of tactics and the language of strategies.

The research identifies that de Certeau's binary model of tactics and strategies fails to acknowledge the fuzzy areas between the two in which places can be re-appropriated for a community's own ends. This process can be understood

as manoeuvres - in which tactics are undertaken strategically, and strategies are exploited tactically to unlock the formal systems to poach the territory of others and begin to recreate spaces of democratic action. A key example of a manoeuvre (or a strategic tactic) seen in this study was the incompleteness of the final intervention, which acted as one of the key ways in which people were invited to reappropriate the space for their own everyday situations.

The structures of localism are not fine grain enough to actually be able to deal with individual action. Existing top-down governance structures tend to be rather monolithic and inflexible; meaning that only very specific organisations and institutions can access funding. Tactics are mostly carried out by individuals and informal groups. However, funding by large top-down institutions or local governments strategies needs to be given to semi-organised groups (to align with their formal financial accounting procedures). There is a void between these two. Manoeuvres help fill this void, enabling individuals to coalesce into quasi-formal collectives in order to manipulate the funding mechanisms. This is where tactical action opens up a void – in this case a positive space – which in this study allowed individuals to act.

The concept of manoeuvres strengthens the possibility of a shift in power that enables citizens to become producers of space rather than consumers; and a shift in power away from corporations to citizens.

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Footnotes:

- [1] David Cameron brought the expression 'age of austerity' into mainstream parlance in his keynote speech to the Conservative Party forum in Cheltenham on 26 April 2009 (<http://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/601367>), in which he promised an end to 'irresponsible' excessive government spending. The suggestion by Lord O'Neill that the age of austerity had come to an end in 2015 was widely dismissed (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/georgeosborne/11756258/Age-of-austerity-is-over-minister-claims-despite-deep-cuts-to-come.html>)
- [2] Civic agency is defined as 'the capacity of each individual, working alone or in groups, to view what happens in the world in a critical way and to ... bring about positive change' (Forestiere, 2015).
- [3] The project and its outputs have been recognized with an Honourable Mention in the Live projects Network Awards 2017 (<https://designcorps.org/seed-awards-about/>) and was selected as one of the 'Best Student Design-Build Projects Worldwide 2016'

by ArchDaily. (<http://www.archdaily.com/794566/the-best-student-design-build-projects-worldwide-2016>) and is a finalist for the Green Gown Awards 2017 (<http://www.greengownawards.org/2017-finalists>)

[4] The programme aimed to ‘increase the impact that can be achieved by making the multiple benefits a pocket park can deliver (for health, wellbeing, community integration) available to people who may not have had access to them before’ (DCLG, 2015). In particular the bids were targeted towards ‘deprived urban areas’ (DCLG, 2015).