

Conference Paper

Crossing Boundaries–Tactical Urbanism Practices in Guangzhou City

Fanying Jiang¹, SueAnne Ware², and Wei Gao¹¹South China Agricultural University, College of Forestry and Landscape Architecture, Guangzhou, China²The University of Newcastle Australia, School of Architecture and Built Environment, Callaghan NSW, Australia

Abstract

Tactical Urbanism is a growing movement across the world in which individuals, communities, and municipalities are improving their cities by using short-term, low-cost, and small-scale interventions and policies to catalyze long term change. The aim of this paper is to test the principles and the approach of tactical urbanism to solve Guangzhou's local public spaces problems by showcasing two tactical urbanism projects which have been completed in the Guangzhou urban context. These two cases reveal the opportunities that bottom-up approaches like tactical urbanism can build a bridge to conjunct with long term planning efforts and complete the top-down mechanisms. In the Zhusigang community case, we examine the spontaneously unplanned practices in the local community, which resemble "Tactical urbanism" principles, and their spatial appropriation and utilization of marginalised community spaces. We assess how and where daily activities are happening and what other amenities could be provide by temporarily introducing these activities into a local gallery space. In the former textile factory case, we present examples that make the case for temporary, flexible and experimental responses to urban vacant land, then conclude by outlining the potential benefits and drawbacks of this temporary use model.

This paper explores the existing practices of appropriation and the potential of temporary occupation in the city and concludes with thoughts on how tactical urbanism, an international movement, might gain a foothold in the context of local Chinese communities.

Keywords: Tactical Urbanism, Space Utilization, Community, Daily Life

Corresponding Author:

Fanying Jiang
547031045@qq.com

Received: 15 March 2019

Accepted: 25 May 2019

Published: 20 November 2019

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

© Fanying Jiang et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Architecture across Boundaries Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Guangzhou city is the third largest metropolitan area in China after Beijing and Shanghai. To accommodate population growth, the urban area within Guangzhou has expanded constantly since the founding of new China. Currently, it encompasses 7343sq. km and the main districts are heavily over-concentrated. Guangzhou accommodates 14.5 million inhabitants and it is one of the most significant political and cultural focal point

 OPEN ACCESS

in the South China region. Guangzhou city has a history of 2000 years, the traditional mixed residential community in Guangzhou has the dual protection value of material and spiritual, but the urban environment is aging, the open space is insufficient, and the quality of community living environment is poor. The public space of city as a bridge between the old and the new urban environment, urban renewal can effectively implement the impact there. Therefore, improving the quality of urban open space is one of the most direct ways to improve the environmental quality of the Guangzhou old town.

The public space of city has the advantages of small-scale development, diversification, humanization and environmental quality. Recent studies abroad have focused on the interaction between community population and spatial environment rather than on environmental patterns. At present, the construction of open space in our country is generally carried out from top to bottom, and mostly stays at the level of promoting ecology and landscape beautification. The deep social and cultural values of urban space have not been widely noticed. The research on users' needs and the interaction mechanism of environmental behavior in public space is insufficient, and the environment of many traditional communities has been consolidated. There is no feedback data after treatment. This is also the fundamental reason why sustained environmental renewal does not bring sustained environmental improvement.¹

Tactical urbanism is a growing movement across the world in which individuals, communities, and municipalities are improving their cities by using short-term, low-cost, and small-scale interventions and policies to catalyze long term change.² While larger scale efforts do have their place, incremental, small-scale improvements are increasingly seen as a way to stage more substantial investments. Tactical urbanism approach allows a host of local actors to test new concepts before making substantial political and financial commitments. The aim of this paper is to test the principles and the approach of tactical urbanism to solve Guangzhou's local public spaces problems by showcasing two tactical urbanism projects called "Guangzhou Tactics" which have been completed in the Guangzhou urban context. The sites in this research are in Guangzhou, as the larger context of the study is about understanding the phenomena of public space utilization in China and forms of Asian urbanism.

2. Tactical Urbanism

2.1. A Bridge Complete the Top-down Mechanisms

City planners and public leaders are frequently preoccupied with making large-scale, transformative change in the built environment. While stadiums, museums, large waterfront parks, and convention centers are all big-ticket items with measurable curb appeal—for some—such projects require a substantial investment of time, as well as political, social, and fiscal capital. Moreover, their long term economic or social benefit cannot be guaranteed.³

In addition, large-scale development is also easy to ignore and erase the specific characteristics of local history and culture. Informal, small-scale urban creation can accept the “cultural planning” that gives local community character. Therefore, the traditional strategic planning method is only on the half way of the success. If designers and citizens can update the ideas, challenge the situation from small, simple, local things, and transform the urban space through bottom-up “tactics” to promote improvement, these acts may obtain better results.⁴

2.2. Design Process of Tactical Urbanism

The design process of tactical urbanism is a series of bottom-up intervention. In many cases, tactical urbanism design activities are carried out by local communities and social organizations to classify and solve the problems that local governments can not solve. The design process of tactical urbanism is embodied in a cycle of “build-measure-learn” actions (Figure 1). From initially construct a temporary, low-cost design concept, and rapidly build out the design, launch it on the site for testing, learn and analyze the feedback data, then to generate a further new design, these series of cycling process are very important. Repeating the design process of this cycle means that the tactical urbanism is composed of a series of “small” experiments and design practices.²

Lydon and Garcia have emphasized that “it is important to remember the purpose of tactical urbanism, short-term interventions should be placed within the framework of achieving long-term change.” Achieving permanent change through short-term actions is the most definite difference between tactical urbanism and other temporary urban planning and designs. With not only temporary or short-term features, but also long-term and gradual features. If a tactical urbanism project is approved by the city government or investor, it can be used as a template to incorporate into the official planning process,



Figure 1

and the city may therefore increase incremental planning to implement the best bottom-up innovations on a larger scale. If a project is unsuccessful or not needed, it can also be easily removed or improved. Many tactical urbanism projects start with unapproved short-term actions, and after a period of testing, they can become legal and approved long-term projects.²

3. Case Studies: A Criticism Review on Tactical Urbanism Practices in Guangzhou City

This chapter showcases the authors' two tactical urbanism practices in the typical urban residential public spaces in the densely populated old city of Guangzhou. These two tactical urbanism practices both stay in short-term activities. The design and transformation of the site with low-cost, non-durable materials by citizens' spontaneous development, and the design techniques and processes of tactical urbanism to solve public space problems in the context of Chinese city have been researched and explored. The methodology of these works are done by means of "research through design". Designing as a way of researching has been used as a research methodology by several other scholars and designers as a way exploring, experimenting and challenging existing notions about spaces and cities. Variations of techniques such as mapping, evaluating design ideas through drawings and modelling, curating exhibitions, observing and photographing, and interrogating personal design processes have been employed as methods in design research.⁵

3.1. Guangzhou Tactic: The Case of Zhusigang Community

3.1.1. Project Context

Zhusigang community where one of the tactical urbanism practice took place, is right in the middle of Guangzhou city with a variety of users and daily activities interacts with urban high density residential spaces, and many public spaces in there are not doing the required role. This reflects the phenomena of discontinuous planning processes that are suffered and responded to daily by inhabitants. Guangzhou Tactic project here took two axes, the first one was by a survey for the inhabitants' spontaneously unplanned practices which resemble "Tactical urbanism" principles in the this community, and their spatial appropriation and utilization of marginalised community spaces. The second axis was temporarily introducing these activities into a local gallery space to find out what other amenities could be provide.

3.1.2. The unplanned practices

The activities were surveyed in the community public space can divide into 2 categories. (A.) The first one is the street handcraft shops that unsanctioned by the city administrator, walking in the grey zone but serves the inhabitants' daily needs greatly. (B.) The second kind is the inhabitants' daily entertainment activities in the open spaces.

A. For the unsanctioned street shops, initially a map was prepared (Figure 2), that illustrates the analyses for the survey of the locations of the shops in the community added to it photos samples (Figure 3-6) and that shows the existing situation.



Figure 2

The street barber shop (Figure 3), with a simple mirror on the wall and a chair, already existing in the community for 2 years, locating in between the community and a large city hospital. The reason for the owner to choosing this location is that this road is

the only way for patients and their families to enter and leave the community and the hospital, so there is a large flow of people, and the city administrator would not drive her away there.

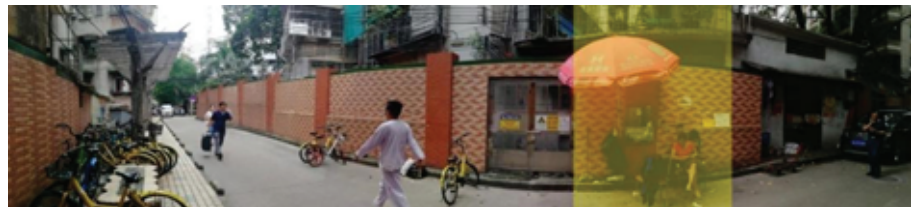


Figure 3

The cobbler stall includes a sewing machine, tool boxes and a stool. The cobbler has been working in the community about 18 years and he stay in a fixed position right behind a bus stop in the center of the community. But he placed his sign at a crossroad (about 50 meters to the stall) (Figure 4). He maintain his personal space from the stream of people by using the sign as advertising,



Figure 4

After his work clock, the cobbler leaves his stall beside a security post (Figure 5) and asks the security of the community to look after his staff in return of some money.



Figure 5

The recovery workers purchase recyclable goods door to door around the community by using wagon or tricycle. They first came here because this area was under

construction and there was a lot of scrap for them to collect. Now it is a fixed place for residents to find them. Their daily route in the community were mapped. (Figure 6)

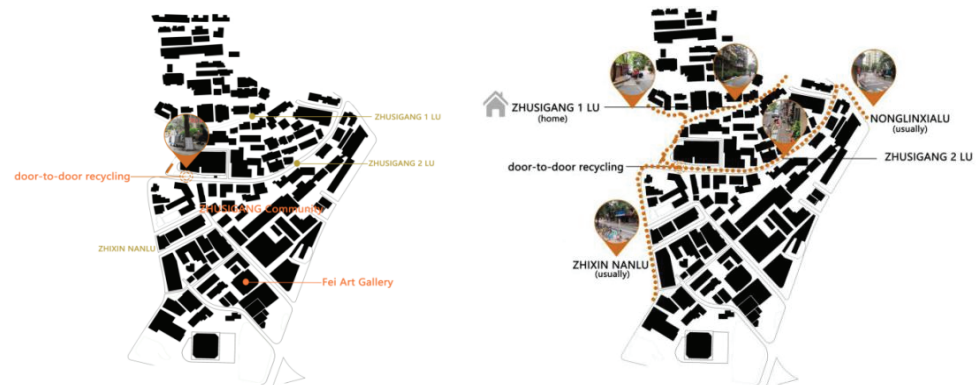


Figure 6

The street handcraft shops offer a large part of conveniences to the community. As the city administrator minimize its control on this type of vendor in the community, trading on the street is an open way for those who has a good relationship with the administrator. And the people also use to share in buying their services.

B. The other kind of the daily activities in this community open spaces is the entertainments of the community inhabitants. Now a day, it is very popular that people use their spare time to carry out various square activities in the open space in China, such as square dance, Taiji activities. Square activities are usually spontaneously formed by a group of people using available public spaces and whose main purpose are to strengthen their health. In the Zhusigang community, the inhabitants mainly go to two spaces to have their square activities: a street park call telecom square and the front yard of KFC restaurant. (Figure 7-8)



Figure 7

These two sites has been analyzed to assess why the square activities happen there and what the activities need more from the currant sites.

First of all, both sites have the spaces big enough for the group activities.



Figure 8



Figure 9

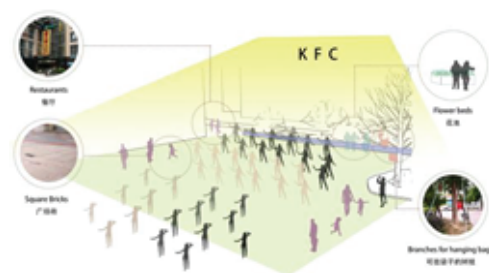


Figure 10

The telecom square has the advantages like having large trees to provide shade in the morning, and having chairs, rocks and flowerbeds for the dancers to rest. The disadvantages is its bumpy pavement, and relatively small spaces (Figure 9). The KFC front yard with a big flat site, flowerbeds for sitting, small tree's branches for ladies to hang their bags, and because it is away from the community so the activities will not disturb the neighborhoods, attracts 3 dancing groups dancing in this place everyday. But the dazzling light from the billboards and many people come and go from the restaurants cut down the advantages (Figure 10).

3.1.3. The events in a local gallery

The second axis of Guangzhou Tactic in Zhusigang community was temporarily introducing activities analyzed above into a local gallery in the community to find out what other amenities could be provide to the inhabitants.

A. The first action was to invite several Taiji lovers who have been practicing in telecom square everyday for years to come to the gallery outdoor space. Five Taiji lovers began to perform in that morning at their usual practicing time and last about 30-40 minutes long (Figure 11).



Figure 11



Figure 12

B. 36 photos that telling the stories about the community were took and putted on the boundary wall of the gallery. This act aimed to enhance the memories of the community to the residents and bridging the distance between the inhabitants and the gallery space (Figure 12).

C. The last action in the Zhusigang community was hosting a community evening party in the gallery space and aiming to renewing the residents' awareness for their community open space. The site were prepared with stage lights which liked the square dancers usually like and with simple props that the gallery can provide (Figure 13-14). Guangzhou Tactic invited the community square dancers and enthusiastic residents to perform at the party in return of postcards and gifts, also made a Wechat News Website



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

to advertise. In the evening party, a total of 5 teams performed and the performance attracted a lot of audience. (Figure 15) After the performance, the audience automatically joined the dance with the square dancers.

3.1.4. Findings

The inhabitants act a great role in utilizing public in the Zhusigang community, which has a direct link with applying the tactical urbanism principles. The movement of street

shops has a direct relation with the events in the space, the weather, customers' flow, some are all over the day timing. And the street shops have a great roles as an actor to complete the scene of applying the tactical urbanism procedures, in putting the tested activities and inhabitants needs trades and buying environment, with low cost activities and without complicated legal processing preparation for licensed areas and places for their allocation. And the inhabitants also utilize and appropriate their living space through their participation in group entertainment activities. All of these benefits were unplanned and required no new investment from the city. None of this acts was planned or programmed in the traditional sense, instead, these spontaneous activities rose up in the absence of planning.

Hereby, we reached a very clear point for a direct link between the tactical urbanism principles and the phenomena in the open spaces. We can point out the spontaneously unplanned practices that have been carried out by inhabitants, individuals, which run out "Tactical urbanism" principle, can draw attention to the community space's shortcomings in policy and physical design, and the tactical urbanism events have organized by Guangzhou Tactic allow people to physically experience alternative options. The tactical urbanism project have been conducted in the Zhusigang community allow the inhabitant's feedback to be expressed through use and demonstrated preferences, and through widen the public engagement this tactical urbanism project help deepen the understanding of Zhisigang community local user's needs at the neighborhood and block scale.

3.2. Guangzhou Tactic: The Case of Former Textile Factory

3.2.1. Project Context

The second tactical urbanism project conducted by Guangzhou Tactic located at a former textile factory which had gentrified into an modern office park (Figure 16). The former workers of the factory live in high-rise housing which surrounding and overlooks the site, yet in the site's redevelopment, the surrounding community members was locked out. The bitumen surfaces and lack of shade in Guangzhou's sub-tropical climate, further exasperated rudimentary attempts to provide external amenity for the site's newer residents (Figure 17).

In this project, Guangzhou Tactic sought to reinvite the surrounding marginalised community back into the site's public realm and reactivate the harsh micro-climate of



Figure 16

场地现状
Site Status



正门进去空旷地没有座椅许多人坐在台阶上



缺乏体验互动性的公共装置 许多人都是自带东西来玩

座椅摆放方式单调且缺乏遮阳设施

Figure 17

the site. The total duration of the project was two weeks, the works include proto-typing and testing ideas with local community members on the fly.

3.2.2. The interventions



Figure 18

A. One of the intervention techniques was adding colour to the site by using ribbons, which also captured the wind and provide some shades to the site (Figure 18). This move

created visual intrigue, provided opportunities for the residents to interacting with the forms of urban nature.

B. And the second act was to add various types of street furnishing for those people who were active in the park. (Figure 19)



Figure 19

C. Also a series of performances and artistic activities were conducted for the community members.(Figure 20) By activating the site with those who felt excluded, a new set of community ecologies soon formed. What started out as a series of urban stunts, soon became an invitation to co-inhabit the public realm. The people work in the office started after school programs for local children to learn how to do their own WeChat apps. Aunties and grandparents who often are child carers for toddlers, began to repopulate the factory sites where they once worked.



Figure 20

3.2.3. Finding

These practices demonstrates an quick treatments that enhance the function of the site. This infantile stage of tactical urbanism provides an opportunity to experiment with the experimentation, also draw people's attention to perceived shortcomings and inspire people's action in the site. With widening public engagement, this tactical urbanism project allow for feedback to be expressed through use and demonstrated preferences, rather than stated preferences alone and deepen the understanding of local user's needs at the neighborhood, block or building scale.

Through this project, by encouraging people to work together in this new ways, can strengthen the relationships between residents, non-profits, local businesses, and government agencies. To improve the site in the long-term, further conversation is needed with community and business leadership in this office park about what that long-term concept looks like and how it will be managed. The city government and developers need to understand the importance of community members and businesses having a direct role in programming during the planning and design process; the more control they have, the more organic, grassroots programming can occur.

4. Conclusion

Navigating through the tactical spectrum is a daunting task, this new interventions created by creative worldwide urbanists can be implemented at any given time. Urban design both as a process and as an experience leaves something to be desired from the perspective of community members as it is largely in the control of planning departments. Tactical urbanism can be one of the easiest methods to get communities involved in urban design due its quick, cheap, and temporary nature. The two cases reveal the opportunities that bottom-up approaches like tactical urbanism can build a bridge to conjunct with long term planning efforts and complete the top-down mechanisms in the urban planning process in Chinese context. This paper explores the existing practices of appropriation and the potential of temporary occupation in the city and concludes with thoughts on how tactical urbanism, an international movement, might gain a foothold in the context of local Chinese communities.

However, rules and regulations enacted by municipalities still act as barriers. In Guangzhou, if the intervention activities are unsanctioned by municipal governments, the interventions can be potentially removed from the public eye before any noticeable impact can be assessed. While this is not inherently a bad thing – non-compliance to traffic regulations can potentially make areas more unsafe, whether it is through slippery road surfaces caused by paint or the obstruction of the right-of-way which can make maneuvering difficult – this extra step in the design process can hinder the ability for communities to seize the opportunity to create design.

References

- [1] Zhu Xiaolei. (2011). POE on Public Street Corner of Xiguan Community in Guangzhou. *Journal of Huazhong Architecture*, vol. 10, pp. 78–81.

- [2] The Street Plans Collaborative. (2016). *Tactical Urbanism Guide to Materials and Design Version 1.0*. <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/>.
- [3] Mike Lydon, Anthony Garcia, et al. (2015). *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change*. Island Press.
- [4] Zhang Hanqing, Chen Lili. (2016). Research on Tactical Urbanism from Urban Planning Perspective. *Journal of Urban Planning Forum*, vol. 5, pp. 35–41.
- [5] Khalilah Zakariya. (2011). *Fleeting Feast Mapping and Accommodating Temporary Markets*. PhD dissertation, RMIT University.