

Evaluating Tactical Urbanism Initiatives through the prism of Placemaking

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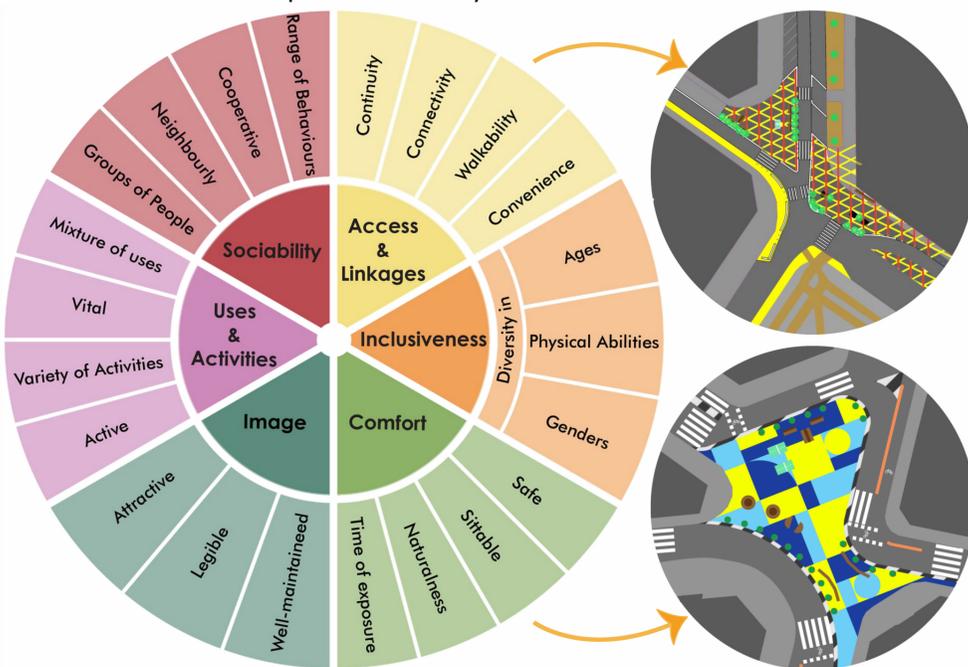
Abstract: Tactical urbanism is an approach to urban planning and design that employs temporary, low-cost, and usually bottom-up initiatives to make fast, incremental enhancements to the public spaces and streets of a city or community. This study examines whether tactical urbanism is capable of producing successful places by evaluating such initiatives based on key Placemaking principles and other prominent features of public spaces. To do so, an evaluation model was constructed and applied in one of Europe's most renowned tactical urbanism initiatives, the "Piazze Aperte" program of Milan.

Theoretical framework

Tactical Urbanism is defined as an approach to neighborhood building and activation using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies. It is a strategy implemented by various organizations, such as governmental bodies, commercial enterprises, non-profit organizations, civic associations, and individual actors. **Placemaking** is a collaborative process that revitalizes public spaces by enhancing community bonds while focusing on physical, cultural, and social characteristics for continuous development. Using the main principles of placemaking in tactical urbanism can lead to the creation of vibrant and inclusive temporary interventions quickly and inexpensively.

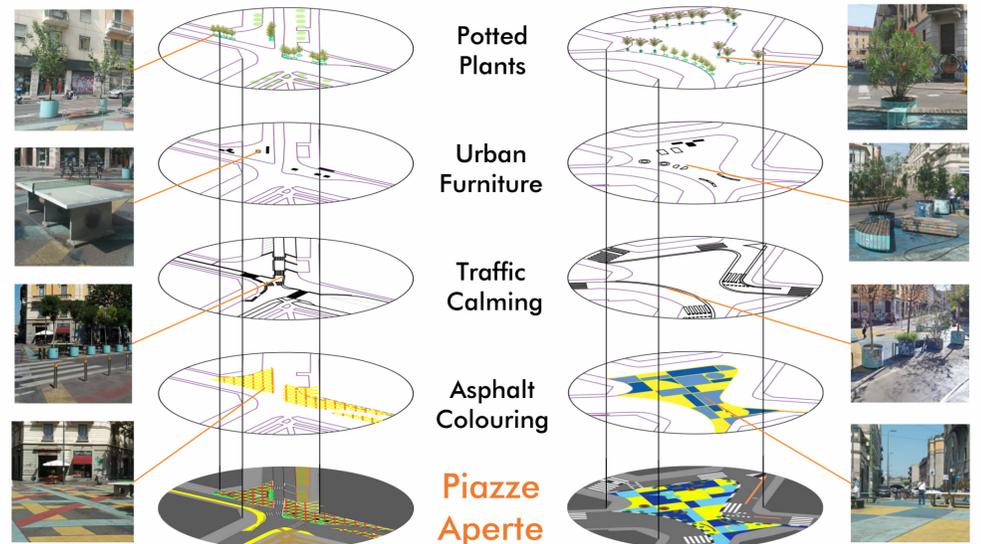
Methodology

Based on existing public space evaluation frameworks a new model was formulated and adapted to the attributes of tactical urbanism. The model comprises of 6 principal qualities and 22 variables that are evaluated through visual observations, key-informant interviews, and spatial analysis.



Tactical Urbanism evaluation model and layouts of the case studies. (Author, 2023)

Case Study: "Piazze Aperte", Milan, Italy



Intervention analysis of Piazza Bacone (left) and Arcobalena (right). (Author, 2023)

The evaluation model was applied to two tactical urbanism interventions, Piazza Arcobalena and Piazza Bacone, which are part of the "Piazze Aperte" project, a collaborative initiative by the City of Milan. The project aims to improve public spaces through urban regeneration and sustainable mobility, using a "tactical urbanism" approach to transform underutilized areas into communal hubs and pedestrian zones. The visual observations were conducted for 7 days at each site with three 2-hour intervals per day. For additional insight, five key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders from different backgrounds, such as residents, academia, architects, community representatives, and government officials. The spatial analysis was used to measure tangible indicators such as micro-mobility network continuity, user's spatial distribution, neighbourhood land use evaluation, etc.



Codesign of P. Bacone (winwinoffice), and current P. Bacone & Arcobalena (author).

Conclusions & future work

So far, the evaluation of the two sites has shown that in both cases, the tactical urbanism approach was able to create adequate public spaces considering its limitations. The urban qualities that the interventions have enhanced the most are access & linkages, sociability, and uses & activities. However, the low budget and restricted resources are not able to create an aesthetically pleasing environment that can effectively incorporate natural elements into its design. Future research could involve the quantification of the variables into metrics that would provide comparable and more objective results. Further evaluation of tactical urbanism projects could lead to the identification of the main challenges of this approach and the development of strategies to overcome them.

References

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