

## **Abstract**

This article questions how the worldwidely spread citizen-led approach Tactical Urbanism, as described by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, can contribute to long-term change and spatial justice. Or is it, through the mistrust in public planning, just a camouflage for the neoliberal urban agenda? A hobby for the already privileged in the inner city?

Could it be of better use and developed as a tool for social empowerment in so called problem areas? How could the low-income conflictual million programme suburbs of Järva in northwest Stockholm, facing urban transformation and gentrification, benefit from the new public city guidelines "idébyen stadsförbättring" (idea-based urban improvement)?

These vaguely formulated guidelines are maybe intentionally unclear to promote a searching and testing of this new kind of tactical approach by both citizens and administrations.

My suggestion is a long-term program for Järva area that would test the new city guidelines departing from these neighborhoods' needs. An open-source manual for interventions based on the small or large experiences of tactical interventions in these areas could be created by the inhabitants encouraged by a moderator/facilitator, being a group of artists, committed to a long-term engagement in the area.

## **Making Urgent Tactical Urbanism**

### **Introduction**

I will first briefly describe how Mike Lydon & Anthony Garcia promote the approach of Tactical Urbanism in an American context that has inspired others to use the tactical strategy worldwide. Then I will question their lack of problematizing the fact that not all citizens are equally equipped with means, time and knowledge to undertake tactical projects.

Can tactical projects really contribute to long-term change and spatial justice or is it, through the mistrust in public planning, a camouflage for the neoliberal urban agenda?

How could the neighborhoods in Järva benefit from the new public city guidelines, idea-based urban improvement (Stockholm Stad, 2013)?

I suggest that the marginalised urban users in the millionprogramme suburbs of Järva, north of Stockholm, submitted to an ongoing urban transformation, should be encouraged to use the tactical method. It would there serve a better purpose than in "hipsterfied" innercity Södermalm by the wealthy middle-class reinforcing their "comfort zones".

## Why Tactical Urbanism?

Mike Lydon & Anthony Garcia show in their promotional survey *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change* (2015) how this approach has been growing strongly in American cities in the last decade due to the Great Recession, the return to the cities from the suburbs, the growth of radical connectivity but also to the widening gap between the government and citizens (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.63-64).

They present how tactical projects succeed in building and activating neighborhoods with short-term, low-cost urban interventions aiming for a long-term change in a larger scale. Through the power of social interaction in an open collaborative learning-process the method develops creatively an efficient use of resources in a response to both a perceived deficiency in the physical urban space and the slow and manytimes outdated conventional urban building processes (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.2-3). Both authorities, citizens and planners can initiate tactical projects existing in a wide range between sanctioned and unsanctioned implementations. Though, activist guerilla gardening is of course more likely to be performed by citizens, but can be sanctioned afterwards by local authorities (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.9).

Lydon & Garcia have identified three common and overlapping implementations of the approach: 1) Citizen-led civil disobedience and protests to show the need and possibility of change skirting public procedures of permission; 2) as a tool for public participation in planning and development processes instead of the existing structure for civic dialogue that often attract only a few. Better decisions can be made engaging a more diverse group of residents, and 3) A "phase 0" - a quick pilot version that can bring quantitative and qualitative data before the realization of the large scale project (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.12-16).

Tactical urban strategies mitigate, according to the study of Lydon & Garcia, the tension between bottom-up (tactical) and top-down (strategical) approaches by creating better public spaces. They claim that governments should work more tactically and citizens more strategically, collaboratively for the same goals to create better cities (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.10).

The projects carried out in America are according to Lydon & Garcia mostly related to the fatigue of cars perceived as dominating too much urban space. Like innovative traffic and transportation solutions, open spaces for leisure in former lethal street intersections, (*Intersection Repair*), temporary markets in former car-parkings, building better blocks initiatives, small-scale building initiatives like bus-stops, signs for walkability in the city (*Walk Your City*), painted crosswalks and remedies for slowing down traffic speed in dangerous high traffic (*Pavement to Plazas*). The tactical projects have not only met many citizens concerns but are also often consistent with the city government's general policies for neighborhood safety, and therefore were implemented permanently incorporated in the city ordinances. All these successful projects used sharing online tools for the long-term impact. Rebar's *Park(ing)Day* has a well-developed open-source non-profit commons through Creative Commons which has been adopted worldwide, filling the framework with site-specific responses (Lydon & Garcia, 2015, p.92-169).

Tactical Urbanism is clearly a right-to-the-city-movement of a political ongoing struggle, as in Purcell's understanding of Lefebvre, for revolution beyond capitalism and property rights that redefines the urban space as part of the social network. Lefebvre places the "urban", the lived space for people at the core, not the capitalist commodified "city" (Purcell, 2013, p.148-

149).And the city contains already the fragments of the "urban: a not-yet-realized potential for urban life" everywhere in situations where use value and self-management of space arise (Purcell, 2013,p.151).

I believe, even if Lydon&Garcia never mention it, that the tactical mindset is actually also close to what Lefebvre intended in his project of radical "urgent utopia". It criticizes, according to Purcell's work on Lefebvre, the existing society and aims towards another possible future world beyond capitalist society, leading to a socialist society of collective awakened self-management. The realm of urgent utopia is located between an ideal non-reachable utopia and short-term realism, combining the real and the ideal. Purcell holds that Lefebvre's utopia is quite attainable, though it needs a changed attitude of thinking of other possible worlds, questioning the present. A "revolution (...) that requires millions of everyday acts of resistance and creation" and eventually the impossible transforms into the possible (Purcell, 2013,p.150-151).



*Open Space I*, mirrorinstallation, Husby, (Järva), 2012. Artist: Anna Hesselgren (photo).  
Investigation of spaces in-between in urban transformation. Part of the research project *Performing the Common*.

### **Tactical projects - for spatial justice and long-term change ?**

Participatory tactical projects are problematic as they can be a way of justifying the increased lack of responsibility for planning by the city governments and even further feeding the hegemonic neoliberal urban capitalist agenda. As Bradley argues, self-organised urban commons can be exploited for marketing strategies of private real estate as these relatively small projects cannot defy large urban development processes (Bradley, 2015,p.91).

I find in Lydon&Garcia's description of tactical projects very little understanding for the disadvantaged in society. In their survey there are no examples of Tactical Urbanism in low-income, problematic conflictual areas reflecting residents desires for better urban neighborhoods nor how it would be possible to involve them in these kind of projects. Though Lydon&Garcia mean that equity often is the focus in these projects, they merely observe that the marginalised or those uninterested of all ages are difficult to engage (Lydon&Garcia, 2015, p.11).

Many conventional open urban planning processes tend to appeal to those already privileged in society with time, interest and education to engage in these issues. Instead of inviting people for showing urban proposals in the City Hall, the proposals should, Lydon&Garcia argues, be brought to where the inhabitants are in order to better involve them in the work of designing the future shared living space (Ibid,p.11-12).

But doesn't the problem remain, that those most marginalised citizens still are not showing up. Wouldn't it be a important to include those unheard voices of the majority, the "Other", for our better future coexistence?

And isn't the question of spatial justice something that tactical approach as a tool would be very suitable for and could work on more consciously?

In the design thinking manual's very useful checklist formulated by Lydon&Garcia as guidelines for the tactical making the starting point is "empathy", meaning that a careful consideration has to be made whom the project may benefit or disturb. Finding this out might lead to adjustments but also to more people joining the project, sharing concerns of the problem adressed (Ibid,p.173-174). Though, I still miss a concern for how to involve those unreachable who do not answer the questions.

But there are other compelling tactical spatial approaches, like the French team *aaa* (Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée), more inclined to promote social change and social empowerment in their long-term projects undertaken in Parisian suburbs.

They aim through encouraging the inhabitants to critically transform temporary underused urban space at making the city more democratic. The social collaborative processes shape common spaces and provide as they say a "resistance to profit driven development". They promote the co-existence of a diversity of life-styles and living practices (*aaa*, 2015).

In La Chappelle, a multicultural, low-income neighborhood north of Paris the project *ECOBox*, a temporary garden collaboratively created with the residents in an abandoned area filled with many different activities (playing, cooking, cultural debates etc.) was initiated in 2001. It became an important self-organized social platform for creativity for a few years with the daily presence and collaborative work of its initiator *aaa*. The urban garden concept, organisation and negotiation skills were passed on to its users that, politically awakened after the threath of eviction of the garden, started creating more self-managed gardens in the neighborhood (Bradley, 2015,p.98,100).

Team *aaa* has also after *ECOBox* engaged in another suburban neighborhood in Paris, Colombes, with the project *R-urban*. In a fully city-sanctioned large-scale project they are building an eco-community with urban sustainable agriculture and a self-built cooperative housing with experimental community spaces, run by its users as urban commons. It is made as a prototype, free for others to learn from and develop further like the Creative Commons rules, with a open-source strategy following the criteria of commons, which they intend to

make as a model for the refurbishment of neglected suburban areas worldwide (Ibid, p.100; *aaa*, 2015).

I appreciate Bradley's suggestion that the open-source commons could be a way out of the hold of neoliberal urban agenda and towards a sharing economy (Ibid) made possible through the digital evolution. Like the hacktivism that Lydon&Garcia mean tactical urbanism has so much in common with in finding ways to skirt the system (Lydon&Garcia, 2015,p.78). They also point out how the projects they describe have benefitted from radical connectivity with the many available web-based tools in creating, funding, documenting and communicating the story of the projects. Like for Matt Tomsaulo's initial Walk Raleigh "guerrilla wayfinding" project's possibilities of long-term impact (Lydon&Garcia, 2015,p.90; *Walk(YourCity)*, 2015).

### **Tactical approach - a challenge to the neoliberal urban agenda?**

According to Brenner only very few cases of Tactical Urbanism can fight the neoliberal capitalist urban policy. The approach is only subversive when it disturbs hegemonic market-oriented governance taken for "common-sense" and proposes an alternative urban future based on spatial justice in a bottom-up approach (Brenner, 2015,p.5). And, as Lydon&Gracia also insist, it is important to place the tactical projects in a long-term thinking, aiming for policy changes. Brenner argues that spatial professionals should engage more systematically with progressive urban interventions towards "institutional (re)designing" the systems of policies controlling the production of space (Ibid,p.7).

Another promising strategy of tactical large-scale intervention is the URBZ/Ensamble-POP-lab that work with a counter-strategy to protect so-called slum neighborhoods from large land development by Mumbai's neoliberalized economy. Through a design strategy promoting a counter-image of the "slum" as a space of productivity and creativity: a "tabula pronta" ("ready slate"), not as a "tabula rasa" easily erased when the area is exploited. Through reinforcing spatial practices that already exist in the neighborhoods they present a model of "up-building" that helps residents to construct new possibilities for local economic and social development. To give the slum a better reputation than being seen as a place for backwardness, also in its own residents' eyes (Brenner, 2015,p.11).

But Brenner is pessimistic and means that in the absence of a political movement questioning the neoliberal urban growth model it is hard to make a difference in the long run for the slums. He points at the tension of finding alternatives to neoliberal urbanism and urban interventions that places themselves *outside* the institutions. (Ibid,p.7) As long as the policies of public infrastructures remain the same planning will continue camouflaging the crisis of neoliberal politics and economy of urban development.

Evenso, Brenner is hopeful that tactical urbanism could constitute a radical counter-force if these projects pose truly critical questions on contemporary urbanism. They can with collectively shared capacities in the production of the city promote alternative, better structures of co-existence and economy (Ibid,p.12,16).



*Open Space II*, mirrorinstallation, Husby, (Järva), 2012. Artist: Anna Hesselgren (photo).  
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### ***"Idea-based urban improvement"- tactical guidelines for Stockholm***

The municipality of Stockholm presented in 2014 new guidelines as part of the civic dialogue, for making a better city through encouraging and facilitating citizens to propose self-organized short-term innovative urban interventions to the city district managements. The purpose is to open up our shared public space for small-scale development projects to make the city more lively and attractive. It states only shortly being inspired by the urban tactics in Times Square and San Fransisco. The projects should also be replicatable in other parts of the city. A budget of 10 million SEK was deposited.

The former mayor Sten Nordin wrote it should be easy to propose ideas about the development of Stockholm, the officials should be receptive and help through the process. He also expressed the concern to adapt the communication towards the target groups that ususally have difficulties in influencing their immediate environment (Stockholm Stad, 2013, p.4-5).

The guidelines are perceived generally positively by the city district boards but as quite unclear in how the approach differs from already established citizen dialogues. A strategy of the new ways of communication is missing according to many officials that Martin Bretz interviewed in his study of the guidelines (Bretz, 2015, p.44-45).

The officials find this new policy to foster democratic values, a more sustainable city and as breaking the social barriers. It will also contribute to a better relationship between the citizens and the municipality. Though, a clear trend is that the major part of the project ideas that have been submitted since 2014 came from residents in the wealthy middleclass innercity areas and

villa-suburbs. The voices of the large majority have not been heard, which is seen by some officials as negatively reinforcing the existing power relations (Bretz, 2015, p.50-51).

Bretz means that a central coordinator that deals with these problems and more knowledge in the city districts about the definition of tactical approaches is needed (Bretz, 2015, p.61). But these guidelines are, as I understand them, intentionally vaguely formulated to be further developed by the local district officials and residents. A searching and testing of this new kind of tactical approach would come up with new changed and hopefully better policies more attentive to the needs of the residents in Stockholm. With not so strict rules as for what kind of city interventions are being approved of would also promote the creation of truly innovative not yet seen improvements, which is also one of the criterias spelled out in the guidelines. The wish is also to define what the notion "innovative" should stand for (Stockholm Stad, 2013, p.57). Since 2014 a boule court for pensioners in Tensta, mural paintings and urban gardening in many places in Stockholm are among the projects that have been initiated, some ongoing, others finished (Bretz, 2015, p.48).

I find it remarkable that in the responses on proposal for guidelines it is only one of the city district boards, the middle-class high-income inner city district board of Kungsholmen, that points out the necessity of including marginalised groups (Stockholm Stad, 2013, p.53). I agree with the suburban Rinkeby-Kista district board that considers the guidelines as an appropriate approach to be applied in millionprogram areas in the large network of organisations, corporations, associations, schools, and authorities named *Järva-Andan (The Spirit of Järva)* (Stockholm Stad, 2013, p.54).

As mentioned earlier in Lydon& Garcia's tactical manual departs from "empathy", a concern for whom the project is undertaken for (Lydon&Garcia,2015, p.173-174). I would like to include in this the responsibility for marginalised groups and their living environments in need of improvements as perceived by outsiders, non-residents. As Lydon&Garcia seem to mean, tactical projects originates from a personal problem in one's own neighborhood, but I think citizens and especially design professionals also can and should perceive these things in others' neighborhoods. Some of the local city district boards seem to interpret the guidelines as it is only dwellers in the hood that are allowed to come up with city improving projects. This is however not what the released guidelines from the municipal government state (Stockholm Stad, 2013,p.5).

### **Proposal: *Tactical Järva***

I would like to propose a specific program for the millionprogram suburbs in Järva district to be developed. Following the city's guidelines short-term interventions would be stimulated but in a framework of long-term change both in the physical environment and in a development of the policies as intended in the tactical approach (Lydon&Garcia,2015).

A group of artists and other spatial practitioners, with interest in and experience of relational, collaborative, urban approaches, like myself, could fill a gap as intermediators between residents not used to civic participation and the city officials and other organizations. They would facilitate and negotiate application and implementation processes working in a long-term commitment with the community. I agree with Bradley that the role of the artists in critical spatial practice would be, as Schneider and Till suggest (cited in Bradley, 2015, p.91)

"agents of progressive politics", where the authorship is transformed into a collaborative working process with shared outcome (Bradley, 2015, p.91).

As a brief outline, workshops will be held to investigate collaborately the urban area and gather diverse data in a collective process aiming at creating truly innovative urban interventions that will be tested and developed further together. Methods will be created in the process and coordinated with all the neighborhoods in Järva, then shared as an open-source sharing approach (protected by Creative Commons) online for communication and facilitating further project developments. A cooperation with active local associations and other groups like *Järva-Andan(The Spirit of Järva)* will be established. The Public Art Agency Sweden will in 2016 present examples of artistic improvements to public spaces together with local partners in millionprogrammes in Sweden. If they choose to work in Järva it could benefit my proposal (Public Art Agency Sweden,2015).

The program would be inspired by team *aaa's* work, the artistic participatory action research *Hustadt,Inshallah*, by Apolonija Šušteršič in a German suburb (Šušteršič, 2013) and the artist Kerstin Bergendal's long-term engagement in Hallonbergen's urban transformation (Parklek, 2015).

I want to conclude this short article emphasizing that encouraging tactical projects in Järva is a great opportunity for Stockholm to develop and clarify the guidelines for idea-based urban improvement through the context of these suburbs in need of empathy. It would be an experimental "urgent utopia"-social-empowerment movement departing from these neighborhoods' desires, capacities and resources ("tabula pronta") improving their reputation and self-esteem. But it would also benefit Stockholm in large with innovative solutions for cohabitation and urban improvements.

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