



**Making Do:
Tactical Urbanism and Creative Placemaking in
Transitional Christchurch, New Zealand.**

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**Rachel Barber
31783561**

Supervisor: Jeremy Northcote

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my own research. It contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university.

Rachel Barber

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ABSTRACT

When disaster struck Christchurch, New Zealand in 2010 and 2011 as a series of devastating earthquakes, the damage was so great that it left many parts of the city, including the former Central Business District, as virtual wastelands. Where once people lived, worked and shopped now lay a vast network of gravel squares, underutilised and underwhelming, with future construction still uncertain. In the aftermath of the earthquakes a number of local community organisations formed, with a view to transform these neglected spaces into vibrant temporary public spaces, by using tactical urbanism and creative placemaking methods to activate the sites. The sites are designed to act as placeholders, until such time as the city's permanent structures can be rebuilt, whilst also serving as an opportunity for urban experimentation in a low-cost, low-risk way. Three organisations in particular - Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble and Life in Vacant Spaces - were instrumental in achieving these ends, with some measure of success. This dissertation seeks to examine Christchurch's post-earthquake placemaking projects to investigate the circumstances which have organically produced creative urban interventions, before delving into the theory as to why they are required and why they might succeed at the task.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2010 and 2011, the city of Christchurch, New Zealand was struck by a series of major earthquakes. The largest quake in September 2010 caused serious damage to homes and buildings, but another occurring on the 22nd of February, 2011, was by far the more devastating. This 6.3 magnitude quake claimed 185 lives, left many areas prone to soil liquefaction, and wreaked extensive damage to buildings, roads and utility chains, leaving many areas, particularly the Central City and parts of the Eastern suburbs as virtually uninhabitable. In the aftermath, 70% of the Central City was slated for demolition, whole suburbs were Red-Zoned and Greater Christchurch's population shrank by 13,600 people. (CCC, 2012b). It was a disaster which fundamentally altered the face of Christchurch, and the people who live(d) there.

In the midst of the rebuild, which is proving to be both expensive and time-consuming, the people of Christchurch have been left with a city that is virtually unrecognisable from the city it was. Familiar landmarks have been torn down or cordoned off, workplaces and schools have been closed, and many people find themselves living in unfamiliar surrounds, separated from the places, people and lives that they knew.

This dissertation examines the unique place-based work that has formed a part of Christchurch's continued recovery, carried out by organisations such as Gap Filler, Greening The Rubble and Life In Vacant Spaces (LIVS) since the first earthquake struck. This type of work involves transforming spaces left empty or underutilised following the earthquakes and initial recovery efforts into vibrant public spaces; a technique which relies on relatively fast, inexpensive and decidedly amateur enthusiasm to construct temporary sites for public

good. Interventions may be as innocuous as placing an old refrigerator on a street corner filled with books, and inviting locals to use it as a book exchange (Bennett, Bodi & Boles, 2013, p. 166), or as ambitious as transforming an empty lot into a veritable shrine to temporary architecture, complete with a pavilion comprised entirely of recycled industrial pallets, from which to launch a summer's worth of impromptu art and entertainment (Bennett, Bodi & Boles, p.52). These sorts of projects are called any number of things. Mike Lydon calls it tactical urbanism (Lydon, 2012). Fred Kent calls it placemaking (Michaels, 2011). It can also go by 'D.I.Y', 'pop-up', 'guerrilla' or 'insurgent' urbanism, transitional architecture and more (Hou, 2010; Iveson, 2013; Lydon, 2012) with each term carrying with it its own set of assumptions and biases. This project may often use some of these terms interchangeably, but their use will generally imply a particular bias of my own. Indeed, I will often use the terms tactical urbanism and creative placemaking concurrently, as I feel that tactical urbanism implies the use of particular creative interventions, whereas creative placemaking is larger in scope, signifying the whole management of a place which embodies tactical urbanism principles.

This project aims to ask the questions:

How have tactical urbanism projects become a part of Christchurch's redevelopment, and why might they be suited to this task?

This project is not a comprehensive evaluation of the success of creative placemaking projects in Christchurch. Instead it seeks to examine creative placemaking and tactical urbanism principles from a theoretical standpoint, to determine why they might be suitable for use in a post-disaster recovery phase. Case studies from Christchurch's key placemaking organisations will be investigated, to determine how they were begun, what they seek to

accomplish, through what means and why. A brief evaluation of the organisations will attempt to link their work back to the theoretical basis on which they were founded.

In order to accomplish these ends, this project will firstly shed light on the context under investigation, by providing a clear snapshot of post-earthquake Christchurch, in terms of initial earthquake effects: physical, social, economic and cultural, and the beginnings of the recovery phase. The specific needs of a recovering city will be briefly examined, especially in terms of resilience, where the work of Daniel Aldrich (2010; 2012) in particular attempts to link the role of building resilience and building social capital.

This leads to an introduction of the general theory and ideas behind tactical urbanism and the purpose of creative placemaking, by first examining the politics of empty spaces, before drawing on the foundations of the movement by exploring the work of social theorists Ray Oldenburg, William Whyte and Robert Putnam. It will also examine how these ideas have been developed across the globe into innovative projects by key practitioners including Mike Lydon, Fred Kent and Marcus Westbury. The different approaches to the movement will also be discussed, including the contrast between the guerrilla interventions of the more radically inclined, and the respectably funded and sanctioned work ordained by councils. A number of criticisms have been levelled at tactical urbanism practitioners, and these will be explored, alongside the structural limitations and common challenges of the work.

Next, the project will use case studies from some of Christchurch's recent tactical urbanism projects from organisations including Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble and Life In Vacant Spaces. This section will explore what first inspired the organisations, and the role of public participation and decision-making in the initial planning process. It will particularly focus on

the tactical urbanism principles which have been used within the projects, how they have been made a reality, and for what purpose. The project will also examine the various avenues from which the projects drew funding, and the structures that allowed them to be possible. The project will also discuss the barrier of regulation, and investigate the idea as to whether regulation and creativity can only ever be mutually exclusive in a placemaking context.

Lastly, the urban interventions mentioned in the previous chapter will be briefly evaluated, as with those from which they draw inspiration, using economic indicators rather than social measures. This will attempt to describe how creative placemaking projects can have tangible effects in a community, to ascertain the likelihood that the realities of tactical urbanism match the lofty expectations of the theoretical principles.

II. CHRISTCHURCH: CITY IN TRANSITION

i. POST-EARTHQUAKE SNAPSHOT

Prior to the earthquakes, Christchurch was New Zealand's second largest city, with a population of 376,800 and the largest in the South Island. Located on the Canterbury Plain, the city acts as a service town for the local agricultural sector, which is the region's largest industry.

The September 4 2010 quake struck in the middle of the night, and whilst it was the largest earthquake to ever hit the region in terms of magnitude, no one was killed. It caused serious damage to many buildings and resulted in liquefaction, whereby soil takes on a liquid

consistency, where it can no longer support foundations and breaks through utility lines, disrupting basic services. Many areas of Christchurch are particularly vulnerable to liquefaction as the city was built on the site of a former swamp.

The February 22 2011 quake occurred in the middle of the day, when people were active on the city streets. Despite being of lower magnitude than the previous September quake, it occurred on a shallow fault line near the city centre, so was much more destructive.

Furthermore, a number of buildings were still awaiting repair from the September quake, and did not hold up to the earthquake as well as they might ordinarily have done. In the aftermath, 185 people lost their lives. The entire Central City and a number of eastern suburbs were red-zoned by officials and electricity, water, sewerage and other services were cut off. Initially, an estimated 70,000 people fled the city, due to the lack of services, widespread damage and fear of aftershocks, with nearby cities swelling under the strain (TEARA, 2013).

In 75% of the city, these services were returned within a week, but for some areas, basic services were not repaired for years. Residents relied on portaloos, generators and the good graces of their friends, families and employers in order to meet their basic needs (AP, 2013).

The 2010/2011 earthquakes in Christchurch are the costliest disasters, natural or otherwise, in New Zealand's history. 70% of the buildings in the CBD were either destroyed or slated for demolition, as well as 14,000 residential homes. After months of revisions, officials eventually estimated the cost of rebuilding Greater Christchurch at somewhere between NZ\$20-30 billion (Bayer, 2012).

A Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) report found that in addition to the estimated 13,600 people who permanently moved away from the area after the

earthquakes, many residents found themselves displaced locally, with 26% of respondents having been forced to move house either permanently or temporarily due to the earthquakes (CERA, 2012). Many found their usual social networks disrupted, and themselves cut off from familiar surroundings, if they still existed at all.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, CERA's Well-Being Survey, conducted in 2012 found that more than half of respondents believed that their quality of life had suffered after the earthquakes. (CERA, 2012). The survey also revealed that the three most prevalent negative impacts of the earthquake which affected the lives of the respondents were: ongoing issues with insurance; anxiety due to continuing aftershocks; and the lack of recreational and cultural activities since the earthquakes (CERA, 2012).

What is perhaps most interesting about the CERA survey is that locals also identified positives from their earthquake experiences. The top four positives that people drew from this were: a renewed zeal for life; pride in their own abilities to withstand disaster; increased family resilience; and a feeling a stronger sense of community (CERA, 2012).

ii. BUILDING RESILIENCE & SOCIAL CAPITAL

The United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines resilience as:

The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure (Bosher, 2010, p. 232).

In short, resilience is the ability of a community to withstand disaster or disruption and to return to normal life without sacrificing the ability to be better prepared for next time. This

is of particular relevance to Christchurch, as experts believe that future earthquakes are inevitable in the decades ahead, the only question remaining being how Christchurch intends to respond to the challenge (Brook, 2012).

Too often, efforts to bolster the ability of a city to withstand disaster, and indeed to “build back better” are focused on the strength of the built environment and the economy. This is a view that Lee Boshier believed to be extraordinarily short-sighted, as it does not also take into account the social, political and cultural aspect of recovery (Boshier, 2010).

Peter Hodgkinson and Michael Stewart (1998) examine the psychosocial effects of disasters on survivors, noting how common cases of grief, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other disorders can affect the ability of a person to adequately recover from a tragic event. They note: “Survival is not just the difference between living and dying – survival is to do with quality of life. Survival involves progressing from the event and its aftermath, and transforming the experience” (Hodgkinson & Stewart, 1998, p.2). In order to survive in these terms, in order to fully *thrive*, it is clear that more is required than to merely rebuild and return to work. This is where social capital begins to play a significant role in a wider recovery.

Robert Putnam broadly defines social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). It is the social glue that holds a community together, and the interactions which build it can be either formal or informal, from the strictures of a monthly council meeting, to a casual wave to the guy down the street. The important part is to regularly connect to others outside of your immediate circle of family and friends. This leads to a

widening of one's circle of trust, which can it turn blaze a trail for future mutual collaborations.

Daniel Aldrich, who has performed extensive research in the field of post-disaster recovery, considers social capital "the main engine of long-term recovery" (2010, p.1.). His examination and comparison of the post-disaster recoveries in Kobe (Japan), New Orleans (USA) and Tamil Nadu (India) one year after their respective tragedies concluded that the ability of a community to recover from disaster had little to do with the amount of aid money received, or the extent of the damage. Whilst he did not downplay the importance of aid and disaster-preparedness in recovery, he concluded that communities which displayed strong informal social networks and trust were quicker to recover than those that did not. These communities were able to quickly disperse relevant information between themselves, and begin their own informal recovery efforts independently of authorities, because they were able to organise at short notice (Aldrich, 2010).

The perceived benefits of strong social capital do not end with disaster recovery. Strong connections between people are linked to increased happiness and improved mental health. Trust between individuals in a community decreases crime, improves the functioning of public institutions and improves community self-image, as well as the outward image, with flow-on effects in regards to visitors and economic growth (Claridge, 2004). Whilst the effects are at times hard to measure, and slow to materialise, it is clear that social capital is key to building resilience in any community, but especially in one affected by disaster.

Naturally enough, the notion of social capital is not without its darker aspects. Whilst Putnam concerned himself with the inherent public good that derives from strong social capital, sociologist Peter Bourdieu draws attention to some of the negative aspects of social

capital. His primary focus was on the role of social networks in reinforcing social inequalities, by strengthening networks which excluded the lower social classes, through cronyism and cultural elitism (Gauntlett, 2011, p.132). Similarly, as David Gauntlett attests, “the Ku Klux Klan is a mutually supportive community group of enthusiasts with shared interests” (p.130) with demonstrably strong social capital, where dangerous ideas are fostered in a group setting. Likewise, the Nazi Germany’s emphasis on nationhood and community enabled its skewed vision to permeate every level of society, embedded in positive associations. Simply put, a social network is only ever as good as the people of which it is comprised. The bonds of social fellowship can be a great force for evil, or simply lazy reinforcement of bad habits, but they can also be the source of much good, given the right impetus and intentions.

Christchurch’s main challenges when it comes to the building of positive social capital and maintaining strong networks have already been briefly touched upon. Many residents have been displaced, removing them from the social networks on which they used to rely. Many social and cultural events and institutions have been closed, moved or downsized. Meetings of clubs and societies too have been interrupted. Furthermore, even venues for unorganised, informal interactions such as squares, parks, bars, shopping malls, cafés and entertainment venues have disappeared, reducing the average citizen’s ability to engage with their city and others who live there. The latter of these is of particular interest to the sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who referred to these places as “third places,” which is to say, the place where you would spend your time that is neither your first place (home) nor your second place (work) (Oldenburg, 1989, p.16). By definition, a third place is an informal public setting, open to all. The benefit of such a place, Oldenburg argues, is that it nourishes

the kinds of relationships and casual connections that are a necessary part of city life, without which one finds themselves lonely in the crowd (Oldenburg, 1989).

In this, one begins to see how place and social capital are, in fact, intertwined - a fact which has not escaped the attention of tactical urbanists and placemakers in their work.

III. INTRODUCING TACTICAL URBANISM AND CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

i. THE POLITICS OF EMPTY SPACE

If one is to understand the challenges of creative placemaking in the context of post-earthquake Christchurch, it is best to examine the raw materials which placemakers have had to work with, which is to say, a great number of empty spaces. An empty lot is never just an empty lot. Christchurch is dotted with many sites where buildings have been demolished and cleared, with the next phase of development has yet to take place (AP, 2013). Whilst the naked eye might see an entirely vacant site, devoid of activity and architecture, it is worth noting that there is a lot more to any empty place than gravel.

Places have an impact on our behaviour, and this is never more clearly articulated than when one examines the effect of city design on crime. From a policing perspective, empty lots are considered ideal places for conducting criminal activity. Security is lax, and the owners are often relatively uninvolved in the site. Furthermore, the general public also holds this view, and so tend to shy away from these places in favour of populated, occupied places which they feel are safer, which further exacerbates the problem, as the more isolated the location, the more attractive it supposedly becomes to the criminal element

(McKay, 1998). When it comes to site specific fears, open spaces are particularly feared due to the difficulties one finds in crossing and escaping the area quickly, as well as the perception that they are areas where “people’s behaviour (especially men’s behaviour) is seen as unregulated” (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 103). A good example of this is the Victoria Hills community in Kitchener, Canada, a community project which saw an empty lot turned into a community garden. Previously, the lot had been unoccupied and considered unsafe by locals, and police were often called there. The site was given a purpose and an overt sign of ownership, and the results were substantial. Local crime levels halved, and local residents were surveyed as feeling safer in their own community (McKay, 1998). From an environmental criminology standpoint, it is clear that empty spaces are seen as a problem to be addressed, due to their link to criminal activity and feelings of security within the public consciousness.

Naturally enough, it follows that occupied places are generally more pleasant places for people to congregate, and activating empty spaces also has positive economic repercussions. Marcus Westbury’s Renew Newcastle project saw artists and creative types occupying unused storefronts in Newcastle’s dilapidated city centre. In 2011, a report concluded that for every dollar spent on the project, it was estimated that it generated ten times that into the local economy (Renew Newcastle, 2013). The way in which the public perceives place can have a very real impact on communities at large.

Just as empty spaces present a physical manifestation of public fears and criminal opportunity, they also represent what they lack. Which is to say, when a building or structure is demolished, more is removed than just bricks and mortar. Quentin Stevens sums it up best when he writes, “For the individual walking through the city, images of the

past and present are confronted at random...may provide surprise (and even involuntary) triggers for memories of a collective history, traditions and rituals which had been forgotten" (Stevens, 2007, p. 14). In this, the cityscape is more than just a physical place, it also occupies a place in the mind of its visitors and inhabitants, to which they have linked their own identities, experiences, culture and memories. When a building or landmark is demolished, the physical anchor to these things is removed, and the results can be unsettling. As George Parker and Barnaby Bennett write of post-quake Christchurch;

You may recognise the street names and intersections, but the places are completely changed. You stand there, staring, struggling desperately to remember, struggling to articulate meaning out of the uncanny familiarity.

(Bennett, Bodi & Boles, 2013, p.4).

This disconnect between the past and present, as well as physical and mental landscapes is an unavoidable post-disaster response, one which contributes to general community dissatisfaction. And yet, out of the aftermath of the earthquakes, empty spaces may end up offering a new sort of safe haven one might never have considered. Following the more destructive quakes, it became quite a common response for residents of Christchurch to shy away from large structures, underground car parks and enclosed spaces. Places which were once traversed daily without a thought suddenly had become rife with danger (Gawith, 2011). Consequently, empty vacant spaces, open to the sky and far removed from large buildings, served as more preferable sites for activity than more traditional structures, and thus paved the way for Christchurch's burgeoning transitional space movements.

ii. TEMPORARY URBAN INTERVENTIONS

Despite a glut of knowledge available on the subject, most of the literature on tactical urbanism has never made its way to a library bookshelf. Listed by *Urban Times* as one of the “Top Planning Trends of 2012” (Nettler, 2012), the idea of tactical urbanism as a tool for social change is still a relatively new idea. Examples in practice are much more likely to be written about online, and shared via social media than through traditional scholarship. As such, many of the sources which are consulted in this dissertation are internet sources, derived from the websites of the organisations who have been working in this field, and those who have followed their progress online, as these are the best contemporary sources for tactical urbanism literature.

This is not to say that tactical urbanism does not have a significant body of academic literature from which to draw inspiration, including the work of prominent sociologists, planners, urbanists, psychologists and philosophers. The work in the area of public spaces and their possible social value rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s with the work of William H Whyte’s investigations into what makes successful public spaces (1980), and Ray Oldenburg’s claims as to the social necessity of third places (1989). And yet, both owed a large debt to the work of French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre.

Lefebvre was a sociologist and philosopher with distinctly Marxist leanings, who concerned himself with ideas of spatial justice, and different ways in which city spaces were approached and used. His primary work on the topic, *The Production of Space*, published in 1974 noted that places existed in three ways, which were how they were *perceived* by the public, how they were *conceived* by officials, planners and governments, and how they were *lived* by people together (Gottdiener, 1993). You will note that this mirrors much of our

earlier discussions of empty spaces as occupying both physical as mental landscapes. Lefebvre's primary argument is that due to the many layers on which a place exists, a place will therefore be a mirror to the society which created it. He argued that places formed by capitalism were prone to fragmentation and homogenisation (Gottdiener, 1993). If one examines the phenomenon of gentrification, and its whitewashing, homogenising effect on modern cities (Shapiro, 2013), this seems a hard point to dispute. Lefebvre considered spaces to serve as social tools, places of thought and action, and as such, places from which power could be wielded. David Harvey sums up this Marxist approach to space by declaring that: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (2008, p.23). This belief, though steeped in Marxist ideals, has nevertheless served as the basis for half a century of work in urban spaces, not least of which, the rise of tactical urbanism.

Tactical urbanism, as Mike Lydon explains it, is the process of using small-scale urban interventions to drive long-term change. The movement came to prominence in reaction to growing public discontent with traditional urban developments. Privately owned developments are the domain of the super wealthy, and generally characterised by a blatant disregard for existing aesthetic sensibilities, environmental degradation and local concerns. Publicly funded infrastructure projects like roads, stadiums and public parks take years to complete and require millions, sometimes billions of dollars to construct. Moreover, they are often undertaken with little-to-no public consultation or input, on inflexible schedules, after clearing exhaustive amounts of red-tape, and subject to political whim. (Lydon, 2012) Borne out of the anarchist tradition, tactical urbanism is the idea that citizens can shape their own surroundings, without relying on traditional power structures (Hou, 2010).

By starting small, (e.g. an empty lot, a block, a street verge), using inexpensive materials and voluntary labour, and often without asking permission, tactical urbanism interventions allow citizens to experiment with their urban landscape, without the risk associated with larger projects. The kinds of urban interventions that can take place under this banner are endless, but they can include street festivals, guerrilla gardening, chairbusting, pop-up shops, adbusting, weed-bombing, parklets, food trucks, block-wide rejuvenation programs and public performance and art.

Fred Kent, founder of the highly successful placemaking non-profit Project for Public Spaces (PPS), has adapted this kind of approach into a planning tool, which can be adopted by any number of organisations in their own communities. It is called “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” (LQC), which was originally coined by transitional space champion, Eric Reynolds, of Urban Space Management. The LQC method has been used across the globe, from Times Square (USA) to downtown Newcastle (Australia). The project can comprise a vast spectrum of urban interventions, but they operate on the understanding that the project idea is locally sourced, developed by locals in discussion with one another, and utilises local assets and people to see the project realised (PPS, 2013a).

Kent’s organisation was inspired by the work of pioneer urbanist William H. Whyte, whose book, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* was the culmination of years of observational studies conducted in public spaces to determine how people behave and socialise in public, and how their surroundings can impact on this behaviour (Whyte, 1980). By examining the relationship people have with their surroundings, Whyte was able to pioneer the creative placemaking movement, by showing that public spaces are also social spaces, and the

manipulation of one, can manipulate the other. It is the principle from which all experimental urbanism movements are derived, including tactical urbanism.

It is important to note that Lydon's considerations for successful tactical urbanism projects do not differ significantly from the LQC method which Kent favours, the only true difference being that Lydon's principles are yet to be wrapped up into catchy acronyms. His five key qualities for effective tactical urbanism projects include:

- A deliberative, phased approach to instigating change
- An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges
- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations
- Low-risk, with a possibility of high reward
- The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organisational capacity between public/private institutions, non-profits and their constituents (Lydon, 2012, p.2).

In this, the building of social capital is perhaps the primary goal of any placemaking endeavour, with art, design, function and other factors all serving this goal first and foremost. There exist numerous examples of public spaces which have delved too far down a design bent, and while they provide a rather novel spectator experience, they do not make for good public spaces, with the example of the Parc de la Villette in Paris springing to mind, where functionality has run second to intrigue (PPS, 2013b).

Whilst we have already briefly touched on the link which exists between public spaces and social capital, as championed by Ray Oldenburg in his book, *The Great Good Place*, it is important to note that the social benefits of a newly created public space are more than merely the provision of informal social encounters with peers and neighbours (Oldenburg,

1989). Tactical urbanism projects take a grassroots approach to placemaking, wherein the ideas and the labour are sourced locally, from the same people who stand to benefit from a project's success. As such, the benefits derived from a placemaking project are not just in their eventual public use, but also in the collaborative efforts that create them, which are in themselves, acts which build social capital.

iii. GUERRILLA VS. SANCTIONED URBANISM

Much of the appeal of tactical urbanism is in the "guerrilla" aspect of many creative interventions, and yet creative placemaking projects can fall anywhere on the legal spectrum from guerrilla gardeners transforming derelict spaces into aesthetically pleasing gardens without permission, under cover of darkness (Tracey, 2007), to publicly funded street festivals, where all of the proper insurance and permissions have been sought. In order to account for this range of approaches, one must consider firstly the motives of the organisation behind the project, the goals of the project and the means of those executing it.

For some, tactical urbanism is a political statement. In a world where public and private spaces are highly regulated and commercialised, where equal access is a pipedream, many tactical urbanism interventions offer a chance for dissent against a system which some may view as fundamentally flawed (Hou, 2010).

In Mexico City, a collective known as Camina, Haz Ciudad attempt to improve their city's walking and cycling infrastructure without relying on traditional planning processes. Having organised using social media, the group spray painted bicycle lanes and pedestrian crossings

onto roads, without seeking permission first. As organiser Jimena Veloz said: “What we do is kind of illegal... we know that, but the bigger purpose is to open up a discussion about what our cities need” (Peach, 2012). This is, in essence, the spirit of tactical urbanism, which is less concerned about the fate of urban interventions, and more so with the impact that they might have on the public consciousness, for however long they may last.

This is especially evident when one considers the phenomenon known as Park(ing) Day, wherein for one day a year, tactical urbanism aficionados reclaim metered parking spaces in their cities, and transform them into temporary public spaces (Lydon, 2012). This is often achieved by filling the spaces with furniture and other curiosities, designed to ensnare the interest of passers-by. It is a movement that was started by Rebar Group in 2005 in San Francisco, and has been carried out thereafter every year on the third Friday of September in cities across the globe.

The purpose of this event is not to permanently reclaim parking spaces for public use. This is not an Occupy movement, or a sit-in. Rather, it is a temporary project, the goals of which the organisers define as “to promote creativity, civic engagement, critical thinking, unscripted social interactions, generosity and play” (Rebar Group, 2012). And yet, unlike the work of Camina, Haz Ciudad, Park(ing) Day interventions are (for the most part) organised legally, with organisers either applying for permission from their local councils or simply feeding the meter, which allows them to occupy the space. The movement enjoys support from a number of forward-thinking cities internationally, who encourage their citizens to take part, from San Francisco (USA) to Fremantle (Australia).

The benefits of working within existing planning and regulatory parameters may seem contrary to the spirit of tactical urbanism, but naturally, there are benefits. Generally

speaking, the larger the intervention, the greater chance you have of finding yourself attracting the attention of not only the public, but the authorities. Park(ing) Day sought to remain a council-sanctioned activity because it wished to become a regular event, one which can grow in size and scope every year. The easiest way they were able to achieve this was to make creative use of parking spaces legally, so as not to waste time and energy fighting with authorities, as well as ease the moral conscience of an intrigued public, and maintain the goodwill of surrounding businesses.

Broadly speaking, the smaller and more temporary the project, the easier it is to avoid legal repercussions. Sometimes, the interventions are so simple, they do not even require permission. And yet, despite the risks, the idea of an ordinary citizen wielding the power to change their own physical environment is an attractive one. Borrowing from the playbook of social anarchists, the ability to change one's own city, even in a small way, is empowering, emboldening. A placemaking initiative in Brighton (UK) called Zocalo sees community members take furniture outside onto the pavement, in order to strike up conversations with their neighbours. The highlight of the idea, one participant says: "It's the simplicity of the idea that I like. There's no need for complicated or bureaucratic arrangements: just plonk a chair outside and see what happens" (Courage, 2013). The way in which these urban interventions have simplified the participatory process, by reducing or ignoring red tape, allows the locus of control to return to citizens, who now have renewed faith in their own abilities to change and control their own environments.

There are other concerns, besides politics, which dictate the legality of placemaking projects. Naturally enough, when one works using the mantra of "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper"

as one's touchstone, any impediment to these principles using "the proper channels" can swiftly kill a placemaking project, unless it embraces a guerrilla approach to fruition.

The act of seeking permission can be costly. On top of the up-front costs of any project, a fledgling placemaking initiative may struggle to find the funds to also cover council consents, security and public liability insurance, which do not necessarily come cheap.

Seeking approvals is also a time-sensitive issue, with key decisions subject to the whim of bureaucratic timetables. There is also the potential for the project to simply be denied approval, for any number of reasons from technical regulations and safety concerns to ideological points of difference.

iv. CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS AND CRITICS

For all of its good intentions, tactical urbanism is not without its critics. Most of these criticisms stem from the fact that, as Anne Gadwa Nicodemus most succinctly puts it, creative placemaking is a "fuzzy concept" (2013, p.1) This perceived fuzziness, or uncertainty, pertains to a number of features, including but not limited to the varied definitions used in describing this kind of work, the vague concepts which it deigns to achieve, and the ways in which it may have unknowing negative effects on the community.

The Renew Newcastle project came under fire from author Bruce Sterling, who labelled the project as "favela chic", where "you have no money, no job, and no prospects, but you are wired to the gills and really hot on Facebook" (Deslandes, 2013, p. 216). This criticism and others dismiss tactical urbanism projects as being too trendy, the work of inner-city hipsters with starry eyes, with projects that look cool, but result in little real world impact.

In many instances, city revitalisation, which is a key goal of any placemaking project, is also seen as synonymous with gentrification. In this, tactical urbanism is seen as merely another tool used to bring in young, well-off professionals or the “creative classes” (Florida, 2002) into an urban centre with shiny new attractions, driving up property prices, and increasing social inequity (Nicodemus, 2013).

Recent efforts to place parkettes on New Orleans’s St. Claude Avenue, inspired by Rebar’s Park(ing) Day successes, were met with criticism that the project was merely another way to attract rich people. But a greater flaw in tactical urban practice was uncovered when it was established that the project’s approach to placemaking was not quite as community-centric as originally claimed (Shapiro, 2013). Funding for the project was secured before there was any community consultation, essentially removing the community from the decision-making process, with no pre-existing community support leading the project, as is generally considered a guiding light of tactical urbanism. This represents a large challenge for placemakers, particularly those who have been transplanted from elsewhere to facilitate placemaking projects, and may be steering the community into their desired direction, rather than listening to their needs.

Perhaps the largest hurdle to letting community needs organically dictate the kinds of projects that are made, is that arts/placemaking funding structures are often designed in such a way that grant applications have to be submitted months before funds are released, which does not allow for timely solutions to community needs, and oftentimes must comply with certain stringent criteria in order to be funded, thus stifling creative ideas (Napier, 2012).

Another difficulty in silencing the critics is that it is hard to measure the success of tactical urbanism projects, as many of its goals seem quite intangible, including building social capital, and increasing liveability and vibrancy. These outcomes can be measured using public surveys, but they suffer from vague definitions, which can be interpreted differently, even by different stakeholders working in concert on the one project, and these kinds of surveys lack the legitimacy of hard numerical data (Claridge, 2004). Steps have been taken to address some of these issues, with placemaking funding body ArtPlace developing a blanket “vibrancy indicator” from which to evaluate and compare locations, which nevertheless suffers in that there exists no requirement for ArtPlace grantees to collect such data, and there are no plans to use what data there is, for dedicated research (Moss, 2012).

IV. CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN THE TRANSITIONAL CITY

i. INSTIGATING URBAN INTERVENTIONS

Contrary to popular belief, it was not the more destructive quake of February 22, 2011 which propelled Christchurch citizens into the world of creative placemaking. In actuality, Gap Filler and Greening the Rubble were both formed shortly after the initial 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck in September 2010. At that time, the city was grappling with the aftermath of their first major earthquake in recorded history. While no one was directly killed as a result, many (particularly historic) buildings were damaged, and utilities and roads were compromised, both by ground movement and the effects of liquefaction (TEARA, 2013). Furthermore, the citizens of Christchurch were shocked from complacency, losing an internal sense of security, in which Hodgkinson and Stewart would term “a corruption of

innocence” (1998, p.1). Strong aftershocks in the months following did little to reassure the public.

Gap Filler

Gap Filler’s earliest projects tapped into this public anxiety, organising light-hearted, informal events outside, where people felt safer. A charitable trust formed in October 2011, Gap Filler is by far the most well-known of Christchurch’s transitional organisations, with many of their projects drawing worldwide press. This attention reached fever-pitch in 2012 when a visiting Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall were photographed taking a turn on Gap Filler’s Dance-O-Mat, a project which transformed an empty lot into a coin-operated dancefloor (Gapfiller, 2012).

The impetus for creating the organisation came from a desire to contribute to the community in the aftermath of the September 2010 earthquake. At the time of the quake, Gap Filler co-founder and University of Canterbury academic Ryan Reynolds was in Wellington with a touring theatre production, and at a loss as to how to be of help. After a visit to Wellington’s iconic Kreuzberg Summer Café, located in a former car yard, Reynolds was inspired to do something similar (George, 2013), using the same spontaneous energy which he had previously employed in projects for the Free Theatre Company (Napier, 2012).

The first Gap Filler project was a collaborative effort with Greening the Rubble in November 2010, which saw the former site of a tyre shop and restaurant on Colombo Street (both demolished after the September quake), transformed into an outdoor entertainment venue, which included a garden café. The site hosted film screenings, live music and poetry

readings, and even a petanque court (Gapfiller, 2013; Greening the Rubble, 2013). The project was conceived under the notion that allowing people in the community to mingle with likeminded individuals in a relaxed and relatively safe atmosphere would have a cathartic effect. The idea of the inherent public good of informal gathering places is one championed by Ray Oldenburg (1989). This type of activity also contributes to increased social capital within the local community (Putnam, 2000) and in turn, help make the community more resilient to future disasters (Aldrich 2010;2012), which only increased in importance with every heavy aftershock, with its accompanying dip in community morale (CERA, 2012).

As of October 2013, Gap Filler has assisted with a total of 39 urban interventions across the city, from book fridges, to mini golf courses, to community chess sets, to the construction of their flagship project, the Pallet Pavillion, built on the site of the former Crowne Plaza Hotel, which is now the official home of Gap Filler headquarters.

In its early stages, the creators sought further inspiration for their urban rejuvenation projects in many places. Whilst presenting a lecture in Germany, Gap Filler founders Ryan Reynolds and Coralie Winn took the time to investigate the ways in which the two halves of Berlin was able to knit themselves together after fallout from a world war and forty years of separation using novel temporary interventions and public art as a foundation (Winn & Reynolds, 2012).

What started as a group of motivated volunteers has now become Gap Filler Charitable Trust, with a board, six part-time paid staff, and a small legion of regular volunteers. Whilst the organisation may have lost a sense of autonomy in becoming a formal trust, now answerable to its financial backers and unable to support “guerrilla” type urban

interventions due to legal ramifications, it has allowed local projects to grow in size and scope, and enjoys official support from local government and corporations. Turning the organisation into a charitable trust made it easier to secure funding, which has been taken from a variety of sources. Funds have primarily been sourced via grants, from, amongst others, Christchurch City Council, Creative New Zealand, Canterbury Community Trust, the Todd Foundation, the Tindall Foundation, Te Whanau Trust, Community Arts Funding Scheme, Christchurch Creative Communities and the Vodafone Canterbury Earthquake Fund. Funds have also been drawn from corporate sponsorship, from both local and national businesses, as well as donations from the public. The general public also played a large role in funding Gap Filler's Pallet Pavilion's second season, where the funds were gathered using the crowdfunding platform, PledgeMe (Gap Filler, 2013).

Gap Filler's four levels of support best indicate the sliding scale of public participation in forming a Gap Filler urban project. The first level is "Gap Filler presents", where the idea for the project is initiated by Gap Filler, or a public suggestion which they have taken on board, where most resources and staff are deployed to assist on the one project. These are usually large in scope, such as the Pallet Pavillion, which enlisted the help of over 250 volunteers (Bennett, Biodi & Boles, 2013) to build a temporary structure for live music, community use and events, made entirely from blue pallets. For these kinds of projects, Gap Filler leads the initiative, with volunteers helping to see the project through to completion.

The second level is "Supported by Gap Filler", with the original idea sourced from either the community, or Gap Filler, with up to 20 hours of support in finding backing, sorting permissions, organising volunteers and locating suitable sites; and NZ\$600 in financial

backing. They are covered under Gap Filler's insurance policy, but for the most part, they are the responsible of an independent person or group.

The third level is "With assistance from Gap Filler" which is an independently conceived idea which simply needs assistance with finding a suitable venue. This level involves up to 5 hours of support, which now falls under the responsibility of Life In Vacant Spaces, who act as brokers between community groups and landowners.

The fourth level is completely hands off. The Gap Filler website contains a page called "The Idea Repository" which acts as a forum where anyone in the wider community involved in creating urban interventions can seek out other people/ideas/materials/support which they require in order to see their own independent projects become a reality (Gap Filler, 2013).

As such, the local community plays a variety of roles in all aspects of Gap Filler's projects, in the ideation phase, as volunteers, as financial contributors, as patrons of the completed projects, and perhaps, as creators of their own interventions.

Greening the Rubble

Greening the Rubble was initially a loosely organised group, which began to meet within a month of the initial September 4, 2010 earthquake. The name of the organisation is derived from a letter to the Editor of *The Press* by Canterbury Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator Dr Wayne McCallum in late September, where he first used the term "greening the rubble" to propose using the placement of native plants and cultural events in damaged areas, as part of the recovery process (Montgomery, 2012). Whilst this may seem like a trivial concern in the wake of a large magnitude quake, but the fact that no one was killed in the first quake

removed a lot of the usual moral moratoriums that are places on non-humanitarian solutions following a disaster (Bosher, 2010), and this allowed a healthy dialogue to begin in the local media as to the right way to approach recovery. It is argued that this idea was so successful initially due to a pre-existing public concern about the state of green spaces in the Central City (Montgomery, 2012).

The movement took inspiration from a number of the remedial greening projects both locally and abroad, especially those that embraced that spirit of guerrilla gardening, whereby locals beautify otherwise derelict and unloved spaces with greenery, without permission, in order to improve both the appearance of their immediate surroundings, but also to improve the sense of pride which other citizens may have in their cities (Tracey, 2007). Whilst the influence of guerrilla gardening is clearly an illegal one, that is not the route that a newly founded Greening the Rubble elected to take.

In order to gain access to Central City sites that had been restricted following significant building damage, and in order to gain enough volunteers and funds to make a significant contribution, the organisation had to remain in the good graces of local authorities, not least the Christchurch City Council. For this reason, Greening the Rubble elected to only engage in lawful remedial greening work, reaching agreements with local landowners in order to temporarily develop vacant sites, much in the same way that Gap Filler did. In fact, the two often combined their resources, with their collaboration with the initial Gap Filler project on Colombo Street having already been mentioned.

Once Greening the Rubble was cemented as an organisation, it partnered with Living Streets Aotearoa, a national organisation which advocates for improved walking/cycling infrastructures and vibrant public spaces. It was through this organisation that Greening the

Rubble were able to manage their funds and their legal responsibilities, with the organisation becoming a charitable trust in 2012 (Montgomery, 2012). The organisation does however rely on funds and materials donated by citizens and local businesses, with an almost entirely volunteer workforce. Christchurch City Council, did however, contribute enough funds for a part-time employee for six months.

Since its inception, Greening the Rubble has successfully completed approximately twenty projects to date, including collaborations with other transitional organisations. These range from rolling out a temporary park on a street corner using some benches and pot plants, to designing and constructing an entire Nature Play Park for children with the assistance of the New Zealand Department of Conservation (Greening the Rubble, 2013).

Whilst Greening the Rubble is a perhaps less extreme organisation than those that initially inspired it, it has nevertheless managed to cling to the key tactical urbanism principles favoured by Mike Lydon (2012). In this, we have witnessed the organisation grow organically from idea to actualisation, in order to respond to a perceived community need, with its garden projects serving a similar social role as Gap Filler's urban interventions by rejuvenating empty spaces into places where people actually want to be, and in the process, providing meaningful occupation for those with a will to contribute.

Life In Vacant Spaces

My third case study is Life in Vacant Spaces (LIVS), which was formed in 2012 by Coralie Winn and Ryan Reynolds, of Gap Filler renown, to act as a broker between those wishing to launch transitional projects, and landowners. This is a function which was previously carried

out by Gap Filler, but it was soon obvious that there was a glut of creative ideas for transitional projects and a distinct lack of vacant spaces with permission to use. Sourcing such sites was time consuming, and mired in technicality, the effort for which was found to detract too much from Gap Filler's primary work, and as such, a separate charitable trust was formed to fill the need (LIVS, 2013). In this, the purpose of LIVS is not to implement creative projects, like Gap Filler, but simply to pair projects and places together in such a way that they can be undertaken.

LIVS took a great deal of inspiration from Marcus Westbury's Renew Newcastle project, and performs a similar function. This means that the organisation is primarily responsible for approaching landowners of vacant spaces, and making agreements where such spaces would be sub-letted to community members for use in transitional projects on a short-term basis (McDonald, 2012).

LIVS seeks to make establishing one's own transitional projects as simple and uncomplicated a process as possible, thus retaining the locus of control more prevalent in guerrilla-like endeavours (Courage, 2013) and preventing discouragement and frustration in those who have creative ideas but lack the know-how and influence to find appropriate venues for their projects. LIVS assumes the risk in bringing together both people and place, whilst handling all of the contracts and paperwork that are required to strike such deals, including liability insurance, health and safety regulations, security and legal agreements (McDonald, 2012).

The project is underpinned by the idea that landowners can be reasoned with, by discussing the potential benefits to them of temporarily sharing their vacant space, by examining other successful examples (Renew Newcastle, 2013). Whilst the landowners are expected to sub-

let their vacant sites for free, there are a number of purported benefits in their involvement, which LIVS general manager Susan O’Meagher considered to firstly be a matter of security; with occupied spaces less likely to be targeted by vandals, or become sites of antisocial behaviour. Whilst the site is occupied, the landowner can forego the need for regular security, as the group in charge of using the site will be responsible for its upkeep and security during their tenancy. This particular line of reasoning speaks to the environmental criminology work of McKay (1998), where he determined that transforming an underutilised, vacant space into an occupied space with a noticeable purpose manages to both decrease local crime levels and make locals feel more secure. The second of O’Meagher’s suggested benefits to the scheme include an increase in local foot traffic. Not only does this have the same crime and safety benefit of increased occupation in any space, increased foot traffic in an area also strengthens local businesses, and ensures that there will already be ready-made pedestrian shoppers and customers when the landowners do begin to utilise their land for their own purposes again (McDonald, 2012).

LIVS was initially formed with a NZ\$160,000 grant from Christchurch City Council, and has also since received backing from a number of local firms. They have done so in the belief that the organisation is an investment in both the social life of the city, in providing thriving public arenas and curiosities, but also in the economic future of the city, by increasing visibility of the attractions of the Central City to both visitors and locals (McDonald, 2012), familiarising residents with their new central business district, and in doing so, providing a market for the area’s commercial recovery.

V. RESPONSES TO CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN CHRISTCHURCH

i. TOURISM/ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The general direction of this dissertation has so far been designed to illustrate the potential social benefits of tactical urbanism and creative placemaking projects, and the perceived positive flow-on effects that these projects could have on a wider community, particularly one affected by disaster, such as Christchurch. The general understanding of creative placemaking projects is that they are altruistic, rather than profit-making endeavours. The creators of Park(ing) Day included a stipulation within their license agreement which states that anyone who builds a park under the Park(ing) Day banner worldwide, agrees to do so on the understanding that the project will be non-commercial. Rebar defends this stance, arguing that enough space in urban centres is already dedicated to commercial interests (Rebar Group, 2012). This is in line with Ray Oldenburg's views on public life, where he believed: "Advertising, in its ideology and effects, is the enemy of an informal public life. It breeds alienation" (Oldenburg, 1989, p.11). He considered that in order to truly flourish, public life needed to take place in a zone outside of, what he termed, "the cash nexus" (p.11) where consumption is king.

The benefits of tactical urbanism and creative interventions can be a hard sell to those that rely on profit as a motive. And yet, despite the non-profit nature of creative placemaking projects, and the decidedly ideological and social bent of their goals, there can also be flow-on economic benefits to the local economy.

It has already been previously stated, that Renew Newcastle projects were estimated to boost the local economy to the tune of ten times the amount the projects originally cost to

implement (Renew Newcastle, 2013). Similarly, the establishment of bicycle corrals in downtown Portland (USA) had such a positive effect on the on-street visibility of local retailers, and in turn their sales, that construction of further corrals have increased in the city exponentially in the last ten years, all at the request of local business owners (Andersen, 2013).

No conclusive studies have yet been conducted in Christchurch which directly evaluate the economic benefit derived from the work of organisations such as Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble and LIVS. Yet this does not mean that the potential benefits of these projects have been ignored. The Canterbury Development Corporation developed a strategy document for the Christchurch City Council in order to ascertain what was required in order to deliver a prosperous recovery to the Christchurch region. The document outlines a number of measures in order to maintain the competitiveness of Christchurch against other cities. Gap Filler's site activation projects are listed as part of key actions required to support innovation in Christchurch (Canterbury Development Corporation, 2013). Which is to say, creative placemaking has been officially endorsed by Christchurch's city makers as a vital part of the recovery process.

Christchurch's tourist industry was heavily impacted by the earthquakes, reportedly catering for 3.2 million international visitor nights a year before the earthquakes, down to 1 million the following year, and slow to recover. (Bradley, 2013). In a boon to the local tourism sector, Christchurch was featured as a Top 10 Cities to Visit in 2013 by travel guide giants Lonely Planet. A local hotel manager believed such an endorsement would bring the recovery forward a year, such is the influence of the publication. The reason for Christchurch's inclusion was due to the way it was "bouncing back with a new energy and

inventiveness”, and singled out Gap Filler projects as being of particular interest (Leathley, 2012). In this, what began as a locally-minded endeavour was able to generate international appeal, and in doing so, contribute to the economic life of the city, without an initial profit motive.

VI. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the role that tactical urbanism and creative placemaking can play in the recovery of an urban centre recovering from disaster, specifically Christchurch, New Zealand. By first examining the particular needs of Christchurch, and identifying patterns of displacement, alienation and anxiety amongst those that have remained in the wake of the recent spate of earthquakes, it seems clear that a social remedy is required on top of plans for structural recovery. An examination of the politics of empty spaces, and the rather large flow-on effect that their remediation can have on a surrounding areas, indicated that a project concentrating on these areas, is liable to have a profound and meaningful effect.

By exploring the foundations of tactical urbanism and creative placemaking practice, and the theorists who have influenced these practitioners, the potential social benefit from small urban interventions becomes much clearer. Very clear links are drawn between the social life of public spaces, as championed by Ray Oldenburg, the happiness drawn from collaboration with others, their effect on social capital, and the role that social capital can play specifically in recovery and resilience in disaster zones, as described by Daniel Aldrich, as which Christchurch now clearly qualifies.

A number of examples of successful tactical urbanism and creative placemaking projects have been explored, from Renew Newcastle, to Park(ing) Day, the Victoria Hills Community Garden and others. Also discussed are the inevitable drawbacks of the approach, from its undesirable associations with gentrification and reinforcing class barriers, as well as problems that can occur in implementation. The drawbacks and benefits of taking a guerrilla approach to tactical urbanism were also discussed, highlighting why the case studies chose to take a different path.

The work of Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble and Life in Vacant Spaces respectively is examined from initial inspiration to present day, as examples of tactical urbanism and creative placemaking projects, with a number of actions observed under the scope of how the work of these organisations has addressed the concerns of Christchurch's social recovery. Lastly, in order to appeal to those more concerned with the financial implications of spending money, time and effort on building something as intangible as social capital in the wake of so much real, physical destruction, a number of examples were cited as to the apparent economic benefits which can be directly attributed to Christchurch's transitional space projects, and others of a similar nature.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to have examined the literature of tactical urbanism and creative placemaking, alongside its more practical components, to illustrate the very real effect that even the smallest urban intervention can have on the well-being of a city, be they social, environmental or economic.

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