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"Contingent Urbanism: When Tactics Become the Strategy"

A lecture by BD Wortham-Galvin,

The July 2013 edition of Architect magazine featured an article entitled ‘Newest Urbanism.’ In their word play on what design praxis might succeed the popular late twentieth century New Urbanism movement in the United States, Architect introduced to the uninitiated the concept of tactical urbanism. Their narrative rooted tactical urbanism’s contemporary origins in 2005 in the transformation of a parking space into a small park in San Francisco by the firm Rebar. Defining tactical urbanism as ‘temporary, cheap, and usually grassroots interventions—including so-called guerrilla gardens, pop-up parks, food carts, and ‘open streets’ projects—that are designed to improve city life on a block-by-block, street-by-street basis,’ the article claims that it took this approach to shaping the city less than a decade to mainstream into the practices of U.S. cities and firms alike.

While Architect used the term tactical urbanism, to characterize this effort (borrowing it from the Street Plans Collaborative and their guidebook Tactical Urbanism 2: Short-Term Action, Long Term Change), other terms abound: participatory urbanism, open-source urbanism, pop-up urbanism, minor urbanism, guerrilla urbanism, city repair, or DIY urbanism. This talk will use the term contingent urbanism to discuss how ordinary people are engaged in making place and how designers and planners might learn from it.