Tactical Urbanism: Planning Tools for a Mobility Transition?

Net-Zero Future 2024

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Background

Why *Tactical Urbanism*?

- Reflexive, adaptive means of urban experimentation
- Able to respond to sudden challenges
- Lower risks associated with failure, allows policymakers to take risks with design or try new ideas in new places (policy transfer)
- Can demonstrate feasibility of change

Aims of the paper:

- Understand 'state of the art': where are we in the field and practice?
- What are the main blockages for effective utilisation of temporariness in active travel planning?
- (How) can these blockages be overcome?

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Theoretical Framework

- Conceptual framing derived from *Transition Studies* (TS)
  - Elements of the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) (Geels, 2012)
  - Necessary processes and dynamics for enabling transition via niche developments
  - Basic elements for evaluating cases against
- Criteria outlined by Bertolini (2020) as necessary for a street experiment to have *transitionary potential*
  - Radical; challenge driven; feasible; strategic; communicative/mobilising
    - How balanced are these criteria in practice?

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Methods

- Semi-systematic literature review
- Abductive thematic analysis based on framework & RQs
- A broad search as possible
  - Relevant key phrases: tactical urbanism; street experiments; pop-up
  - General term "temporary" alongside active travel terms
    - Aim of including cases beyond established vocabulary
    - Required significant manual review of results
- Academic texts published in English
  - Aim of remaining neutral but…
  - Excludes regional journals published in other languages
  - Clear Global North dominance…

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Case Study Cities Analysed in Selected Literature (Global View)
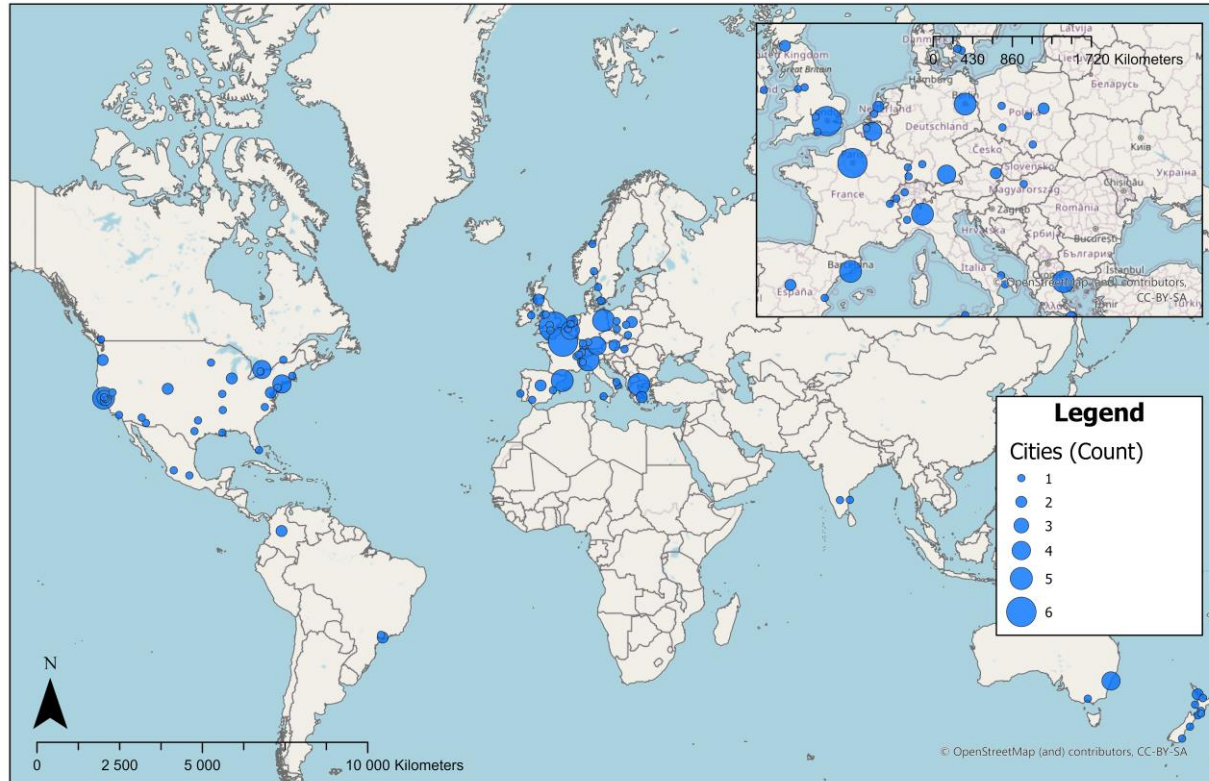
Geographical Overview of Cases

Results 1: Radical

- Large variation between cases, contextual dependency
  - Level of radicality in change dependent on precursive state, attitudes to change
  - Structural acceptance of niche, (spatial) entrenchment of regime
- Radicality requires a challenge to the existing regime
  - Reclassifying valuable routes/street space
  - However, many interventions utilise 'spare' space, risk aversion (Lovelace et al., 2020)
- Radicality largely in conflict with other characteristics, particularly *feasibility*
  - Aided with attention to *communication* and *strategy*
  - Institutional resistance to controversy

Street closure for 1.May party in Oslo, Norway

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Results 2: Challenge Driven

- Evidence of addressing particular societal challenges
- Cases most often lacking situation as drivers towards addressing *long-term* challenges
  - Implications for criterium *strategic*
- Challenge of COVID-19 framed as temporary, emergency state
  - Requires repositioning once initial rationalisation subsides: what *other* challenge(s) can be addressed?
- Legitimation not often well *communicated* to residents/road users
  - Certain challenges more effective for creating acceptance e.g. concerns for children's road safety via School/Active/Open Streets
  - Support for cycling alone can lead to *bikelash*

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Results 3: Feasible

Image: Fyhri et al. (2021)

- Interpretation 1: Feasible to implement (Bertolini, 2020)
  - Enabled by temporariness: cheap, fast and reversible… But naturally makes them vulnerable to removal.
  - «Pop-up» infrastructures
- Interpretation 2: Feasible to upscale/reproduce
  - Connection to *strategy* and *challenge driven*: must be able to continue along trajectory towards large-scale, long-term goals.
  - Should demonstrate feasibility of the change, lead to permanency
  - Complex role of participation and public consultation

Pop-up protected bike lane experiment in Oslo, Norway

Results 4: Strategic

Pilot street space reallocation in Trondheim, Norway

- Critical for long-term viability of street space reallocation
- Can take many forms:
  - *Communication* strategy: how is information about the project disseminated and public feedback used in development? At what stages?
  - *Evaluation* strategy: what is learned?
  - *Implementation* strategy
- Requiring lacking political drive at institutional level (Savini & Bertolini, 2019; Sierhuis et al., 2024), but also vulnerable to temporariness of funding and governance.
- Paris as success case: strategic continuation of existing plans (Moran, 2022).

Results 5: Communicative

- Communication between institutional actors
  - Evolving actor networks required for development
  - Problems arise with incongruent success measures and goal formulations: key in UK case studies e.g. Oxford & Liverpool (Buck, 2023; Dudley et al., 2022)
    - Complications when necessary to involve multiscalar competencies and decision makers
- Communication between government and citizens
  - Experiments should get people talking (Bertolini, 2020)!
  - To participate or not to participate? Benefits and drawbacks to co-creation strategies
  - Justification: presentation of challenge and demographic
  - Requires willingness to make changes in response to feedback

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Discussion

Remaining parts of Oslo's *bilfritt byliv* summer project in March, 2024

- Field currently lacks clear evidence for long-term impacts in most cases, certainty in cases of removal
- Some cases showed promising long-term transitionary quality
  - Paris as standout case: clear engagement with all criteria, legitimation for further development
  - Short-termism, lacking strategic linking to long-term visions for urban mobility
- Others vulnerable to structural conditions at higher level, requiring change higher up to be viable

Implications for Research & Practice

Field meeting for a temporary walkway project in Trondheim, Norway

- Short-term projects should still be thought of as an entire process, long-term goals in mind from the beginning
  - Not always viable in practice, vulnerable to changes in governance and funding
- Nature of temporariness should be carefully considered to derive most value from opportunity to experiment
  - What is the value of planning in this way?
- Lacking longitudinal/follow-up attention to how projects develop after first stage
- Closer attention to communication and citizen involvement

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