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Glimpses of a New Profession within Tactical Urbanism

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In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in *urban tactics*. While a precise definition of the banner *urban tactics* is problematic, the generally recognized common features of such practices are the short-term, the small spatial scale, a playful attitude and the attention to locally available resources. It is an ambiguous phenomenon, both in its theorization and in its impact on public policies. The focus of this research is on the category of actors mainly enacting such practices: a growing body of new professional realities, who are stepping out disciplinary boundaries and engaging with complex spatial processes. This new generation of supposed subversive, socially minded and politically-motivated groups is experimenting with self-initiated projects, new forms of financing and alternative organizational structures, mostly in the form of multidisciplinary and precarious collectives. Exploratory and interpretative in nature, this paper suggests some potential lines of investigation to be followed.

Keywords: Spatial agency, urban tactics, do-it-yourself urbanism, expertise.

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Introduction

In 2012, at the 13th edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale, known as one of the most prestigious architecture events in the world, the U.S. Pavilion “Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good” got a “Special Mention” from the jury. The pavilion presented a collection of pictures of a variegated range of unsolicited, temporary and improvised initiatives. Among the images, one could see wood benches popping out in unconventional spaces, artistic interventions in abandoned areas or groups of people cultivating vegetables on a public flowerbed. “Is that architecture?” someone could argue.

In 2015, a London-based collective of architects Assemble got awarded with the prestigious visual art prize known as “Turner Prize”. The awarded project regarded the physical restructuring of the abandoned buildings of a street in Liverpool through an active collaboration with the residents of the area. “Is that art?” could be argued.

Regardless the controversies about the belonging to a specific discipline, these examples were shown just to suggest the idea that in the last decade a certain way to approach the urban is getting growing popularity, even by means of very powerful and established channels. This “certain way to approach the urban” is referred to in this contribution as tactical urbanism, a recently coined nomenclature used especially in North America to refer to this kind of practices (Silva, 2016; Brenner, 2015).

The first observation supported in this paper is that this popularity is pushing, and it is pushed by the creation of a new profession, of which conceptual borders are still blurred. Indeed, a growing number of practitioners started to deal with unplanned and spontaneous interventions and saw in this way of acting a new potential entrepreneurial path. These new professional realities, considered in this contribution in the European context, are performing at the intersection between the construction of a social project and the search for new working possibilities; and mixing entrepreneurship and practices traditionally associated with forms of dissent, such as unsanctioned appropriation of public space and promotion of instances of self-organization of small communities.

The objective of this paper is to draw the attention towards this new actor participating in urban regeneration processes and to suggest some potential lines of investigation. Exploratory in nature, this paper is an expression of a work in progress and it represents a first attempt to start a reflection on the assembling processes of an emerging expert authority within the jurisdiction of space management. Data for this study were collected using 15 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with urban practitioners actively trying to professionalize urban tactics. The interview had been conducted personally in the European context between October 2016 and November 2017.

The essay has been organized in the following way: The first section offers an overview of the methodology through which the data had been collected. Particularly, it aims at clarifying the sampling process to choose the interviewees. Then, as a necessary premise to the investigated phenomenon, the second section introduces the label “tactical urbanism”, questioning its meaning and relevance as a definition. The paper will then go on with the section “activists by profession”, framing the profile of the urban practitioners under analysis. This section attempts to sketch this profile both theoretically, with a brief literature review on the phenomenon, and empirically, through excerpts from the interviews with the practitioners themselves. The fourth section is concerned with the introduction of two possible lines of investigation to be followed. More than giving answers, this paper aims at drawing attention

towards this hybrid category of actors; and at stimulating a reflection on its agency in the context of urban regeneration.

A Methodological Premise

As it will be clear in the next section, the label *urban tactics* is everything, but precise. In this context, it becomes quite arbitrary to identify the groups that should constitute the emergent category of urban practitioners professionalizing urban tactics mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, a brief focus on the sampling process is needed. Indeed, while in the next sections the porosity of the category will be theoretically addressed and will be presented as a fruitful cause of speculative reflection; here it is presented primarly as a practical issue.

The very initial criteria to select the informants had been very vague and porous. The starting point was merely the search for professionals who approach urban development with an 'original, less exclusive, more open-minded attitude, more in touch with the reality of society' (Collectif Etc, 2015, p. 28).

Furthermore, most of the times the groups themselves defy categorization. In the introduction of a publication promoted by one collective of architects (Collectif Etc, 2015); I interviewed, Thierry Paquot, a French philosopher dealing with urbanism, found it interesting to reflect on the name of the collective: "etc". The choice of such a name reveals their unwillingness to be put on a list to be categorized and defined, and it refers directly to what stays outside the list. Another collective I interviewed is called "ATIsuffix", which is a *suffix* more than a name, a declination to be attached to different verbs. The created neologisms become then the names of the projects.

Even if they are everything but helpful in narrowing the field, these choices of names unveil certain attention given to classification and definitions. Indeed, these very self-reflexive actors, are strongly engaging themselves in reasoning on their own identity. This has made particularly clear that 'groups are not silent things (…) group delineation is not only one of the occupations of social scientists, but also the very constant task of the actor themselves' (Latour, 2005, pp. 32–33). It then appeared consistent to use a snowball sampling technique, meaning to follow the suggestions and the contacts of the groups interviewed, whose network of connections and collaboration defined a kind of community of practice (Wenger, 2008). The starting points were the groups already well-known because they had been quoted in other scientific literature or because of the popularity given by their projects. This has allowed access to more embryonal groups, which are still in an ongoing process of professionalization.

The result of the sampling was 15 collectives. Most of the interviews had been collected in Italy, both in the North (Turin, Venice, Piacenza, Bologna), and in the South (Rome, Bari) of the country. Occasionally; the suggestions of the interviewees required to extend the empirical work outside the national borders: specifically, in Marseille, Brussels, and Lisbon. All the groups considered in this contribution had become active in the last decade. The average age of the subjects was between 25 and 35 years, and the great majority has a background in architecture. However, snowball sampling is a nonprobability technique, which means that the resulting samples should not be considered as representatives of the population being studied. Thus, this information is just exposed in order to give an insight into the subjects providing the data for this paper.

Framing the Banner "Tactical Urbanism"

Chair bombing, guerrilla gardening, temporary appropriation of parking plots, and pop-up installations on public space, these are some of the practices that in the opinion of some authors (Inti *et al.*, 2015; Oswalt *et al*., 2013) may be contributing to a new paradigm of urbanism. The purpose of this section is to frame this trend, which, throughout this paper, will be referred to as "tactical urbanism". Indeed, as reported and critically addressed by Iveson (2013), there are different ways to refer to the same kind of practices.

Language is not neutral, and the term depends on the aspect chosen to be the common denominator. By instance, "do-it-yourself" or "grassroots" urbanism usually reminds to the anti-professional nature of the urban actors enacting the interventions. However, given that the professionalization of these practices as an ongoing process is an assumption of this paper, considering the non-professional nature of the actors as the characterizing feature would be a paradox. In the same logic, labels such as "insurgent" or "guerrilla" urbanism are insisting on the antagonistic character of the practices, but this is a feature which is too hard to define and to assess to constitute a distinctive characteristic.

One prominent voice in the debate on such loosely defined urban practices is Douglas (for a recent review of his work see Douglas, 2018); who, in the attempt of creating a different category from vandalism, individual expression or radical urban activism, had coined the term "do-it-yourself urban design" (Douglas, 2014). This reminds broadly to 'small-scale and creative, unauthorized yet intentionally functional and civic-minded "contributions" or "improvements" to urban spaces' (Douglas, 2014, p. 6). In this case, the peculiar feature, more than the nature of the actors, would be the lack of authorization of the initiatives. Once again, this criterion seems too exclusive; the urban practitioners considered here often, besides not always, manage to get the authorization for the interventions.

The label "tactical urbanism" on the other side appears as a very open banner. This nomenclature was born recently, in 2010 (Silva, 2016), in the context of North American through public salons[2], open seminars, and workshops[3] and the publications of a series of handbooks[4] for practitioners developed by two design agencies, CoDesign Studio[5] , and Street Plans Collective[6]. But what does *tactical urbanism* mean? Besides its increasing popularity, the current scientific literature on the topic denounces a significant inaccuracy in its meaning, referring to the abovementioned handbook just as an "unproblematic collectivisation of rather disparate activities" (Mould, 2014, p.531) without any explanatory potential.

Indeed, the adjective *tactical* does not imply any particular nature of the tacticians, neither any specific legal conformations of the interventions. It is maybe exactly this vagueness and adaptability that are pushing the spreading of this term. An outstanding example of the popularity of the term is gaining is the exhibition "Uneven Growth. Tactical Urbanism for Expanding Megacities" promoted in 2015 by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) of New York. The curators of the exhibition asked six multidisciplinary teams to develop strategies for six

[2] The Salons are public meetings organized by Street Plans Collective. The first one was held in Queens, New York and in 2012 other three similar events had been organized: in Philadelphia (US), in Memphis (US) and in Santiago (Chile).
[3] A complete list of the huge number of workshops and seminars on Tactical Urbanism held by the staff of the studio "Street Plans Collaborative" is available here: https://www.street-plans.com/trainings-workshops/completed-lectures-workshops/ [last access 31/08/2018]
[4] The free download of the "Tactical Urbanism" guides, included an Italian and a Spanish version, is available at http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/guides/ [last access 31/08/2018]
[5] More info at https://codesignstudio.com.au/
[6] More info at https://www.street-plans.com/

megacities taking inspiration from the principles of tactical urbanisms, which on the website of the event is synthetically defined as “temporary, bottom-up interventions that aim to make cities more liveable and participatory”[7] .

The use of this term in such an important institution convinced a prominent scholar in urban studies, Neil Brenner, to take this banner into consideration. In the attempt of shedding light on the terms, Brenner (2015) identified some distinctive features of the initiatives under the umbrella-term of tactical urbanism, such as: short time horizon, small spatial scale, mobilization of locally available resources and a certain degree of open-endedness. However, in the same text, he denounced the fact that even among the practitioners there is divergence on the meaning of the notion. As mentioned before, urban tactics is a concept ill-defined and problematic (Mould, 2014). Its inconsistency risks to make the definition irrelevant.

In order to grasp the peculiar features, if any, implied by this term, it is suggested here to recall the roots of the epithet “tactical”. The use of the term “tactics” in this field has a clear reference in the work of Michel De Certeau (1984). In his understanding, tactics could be defined as *micro-dispositifs* of resistance in everyday life to hegemonic discourses. The basic idea is that tactics emerge from the interstices when there is an opportunity and they represent a specific response to the contingent circumstances. Their peculiarity, differently from the antithetic strategies, is to be based *on time and not on space.* In the words of De Certeau: ‘strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the establishment of a place offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power’ (Certeau, 1984, pp. 38–39). This would mean that as soon as this trend becomes a paradigm, it loses its defining feature: the disconnected, improvised and random nature. On the other side, as Iveson (2013) stresses, without a bigger picture, there is no change. However, the political potential of these practices, which urgently needs more exploration, is not the focus of this contribution. This section just aimed at framing a blurred definition of tactical urbanism as a necessary introduction of the profile of urban practitioners who are going to be introduced in the next section.

In conclusion, urban tactics are framed throughout this paper as interventions that are popping out without an overall vision, rather promoting adaptation and potential incrementality in a pragmatic and opportunistic way.

At the Threshold of Categories

Dealing with different fields, from the community engagement to self-built urban furniture, these urban practitioners are challenging disciplinary borders and rules. Is it legitimate to call you architect if you never designed a building? Could you be a planner if you never signed a plan? If new approaches are arising in the field of urban regeneration, we may need a new vocabulary to deal with them. The aim of this section is to recall some of the attempts in the scientific literature to codify this kind of emerging expertise. *How to name this young generation who is trying to build up a new professional identity, that intersects design skills, social and political commitment, and civic engagement?*

As mentioned in the methodological section, it is a field in which there is no sharp distinction between theorists and practitioners, often practice and theory are developing together. Indeed, most of the available literature on the phenomenon of this emerging profession comes from the practitioners themselves. Among the practitioners who are also active in the production of scientific literature, in order to start a map of the main references, it is worth to cite Doina

[7] http://uneven-growth.moma.org/?_ga=1.63003501.313782902.1488103900 [last access 20/04/2018]

Petrescu. She is a good example of this double identity of practitioner and researcher. She is the co-founder, together with the husband Constantin Petcu, of the practice *atelier architecture autogérée (aaa)* and professor at the Architectural School of Sheffield, UK. Their practice, very successful nowadays in terms of visibility considering how much is exhibited and published, would belong to the first generation of this kind of expertise in Europe and it is a reference to many new practitioners. Their centrality is witnessed also by the fact of having been the coordinator of an EU funded project "European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City (PEPRAV)" between September 2006 and 2007. The project resulted in two publications[8] which collected interviews and reflections on the transformation of (not only) architectural practice.

The label *Alternative Practice and Research on the City* is intentionally very generic to maintain a certain degree of openness. In the introduction of the first publication, it is specified that the selection criteria have been affinity and friendship, a mechanism that should not be surprising since the theme is properly about informality, collaboration, and DIY spirit. In the case of aaa, *urban tactics* are the label the practitioners themselves are using to refer to the interventions of their "transgressive practice" (Petrescu & Petcou, 2013). The focus is put on the concept of *transgression*, the practice has 'broken the rules of the "commissioned project"' (Petrescu & Petcou, 2013, p. 61); starting spontaneously the projects and 'transgressed the professional regulations' (*ibidem)*; opening to the users the access to the design process. This specific idea of *transgressing* or *hacking* the profession came out also in some of the interviews. As anticipated before, most of the subjects presented a background in architecture, but they are all trying to reshape, or hack, the meaning of architecture. "It would be a relief to not feel delegitimized because you are not building a wall" one interviewee said, "rather you are doing a performance, but you can say 'that's architecture for me, I am shaping the space'" (member of ATIsuffix, 25/10/2016, Rome). This means questioning architecture, as another group clearly and intentionally stated: "most of the times we say we are architects (…) but it is a strategy because by saying that we are showing to the architects: 'look, we can also work in a different way'" (member of collectifetc, 22/10/2016, Marseille).

Related to the idea of transgression*, conflict* and *responsibility* are other two recurring and key concepts to understand the philosophy of such a movement of professionals. The focus on conflict is central in the work of another scholar and practitioner. Markus Miessen, who is one of the detractors of the mantra of participation (see Miessen, 2011) in the field of architecture, and who developed, in conversation with Chantal Mouffe, the idea of an "agonistic mode of participation" (Miessen, 2011). He worked a lot on the possible and transforming role of the architect and edited a series of books[9] with Nikolaus Hirsch, all regarding critical spatial practices and engaging with their political dimension. The label proposed by Miessen is "crossbench practitioner" (2011; 2016), using the metaphor of the crossbench politician in the British House of Lords as a reference. The metaphor is based on the idea of *autonomy*: as the crossbencher does not belong to a specific party and could swing its alliances. Similarly, the crossbench practitioner is defined by its practice and not through discipline or profession.

Once again, the interviews confirmed this skepticism about belonging to a specific discipline. Or better, it is lived as a non-interesting matter, as in the case of one interviewee "we are not interested in being put into boxes (…) you can call it whatever, architecture, interior design,

[8] The project has been founded by the CULTURE 2000 program of the European Union and it was run as a partnership between atelier d'architecture autogérée, the University of Sheffield, Recyclart and MetroZones. The two publications are titled "Urban/act: A handbook for alternative practice" and "Trans-Local-Act: Cultural Practices Within and Across".
[9] Markus Miessen and Nikolaus Hirsch edited 7 editions of the Critical Spatial Practice Series between 2012 and 2015.

carpentry, we don't care how you call it" (member of orizzontale, 26/10/2016, Rome). The basic idea is that you can dive among different disciplines and pick just what you need, as clearly stated in another interview: "we don't feel the need to belong to a discipline, we use the practical and conceptual tools that we need, taking them from different disciplines" (member of ATIsuffix, 25/10/2016, Rome). However, other interviewees expressed the need to narrow the field of action. On one side, with the objective of being differentiated from other practitioners: "there is a macro-area of practitioners refereed as *cultural workers*, but I don't identify with them, because we are actually specialized, some of us are taking also postgraduate courses, we are dealing with space" she said, "and since you are specialized in that, could you be still called just cultural worker? I don't think so" (member of labzip+, 23/10/2017). On the other side, developing an identity and having the words to express it, means also to develop more legitimacy, to be recognizable.

Another effort in the codification of this growing body of professional reality had been made by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, who developed the online database spatial agency[10], which evolved in a publication[11] as well. Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2009) affirm to conceive as a spatial agent 'who effects change through the empowerment of others' (Till, 2009, p. 99). The central point is to uncover the potential for architecture and urban planning 'to be engaged with and thus critical of the existing' (Doucet & Cupers, 2009, p. 1). The authors explicitly decided to avoid the use of the word architecture, preferring a more complex and general term: spatial. The term "agency" reminds directly to the projective attitude, indeed the creators of the database spatial agency 'understand criticality primarily as a matter of practice, yet inevitably guided by theory' (Doucet & Cupers, 2009, p. 4). In this logic, the database could be briefly defined as a collection of experiences of *criticality in practice*.

The idea of 'agency' is fascinating and one of the collectives I interviewed even used it as a reference to choose its own name: kiez.agency. Many of the groups admitted having spent quite a lot of time deciding the name. This is not surprising since, without clear-cut definitions, you need a meaningful name to identify yourself. In the case above, for example, while "agency" reminds to the work of Jeremy Till, the word "kiez" is a German word, hard to be translated. It reminds to a kind of territorial community even if not officially recognized. It primarily refers to the community of a neighbourhood and less to its physical borders or configuration. This choice could be translated in the statement of the will to work with people in places, and not on empty spaces. Another group is named Rivularia, which is the name of a seaweed. It is parasitic seaweed, as these urban practices have a parasitic attitude towards the city. The seaweed finds its home in the interstices and allows the main organism to live. The basic idea of this metaphor recalls pretty much the reasonings that were done in the previous section about the roots of the word tactics in the work of De Certeau.

The struggle both in the academic literature both in the everyday activities of the groups to find out a definition mirrors the variety and the widespread of this kind of experiences. The enthusiasm and vitality usually associated with these experiences result quite appealing to a growing percentage of a new generation of architects and urban planners. The motivations behind this kind of choice are certainly variegated. There are some structural drivers such as high rates of unemployment in the traditional labor market. At the same time, there is a common disillusionment regarding the institutional participatory approach, which appears depoliticized and deprived by its originally emancipatory ambitions (Blundell-Jones, 2009; Fainstein, 2015; Miessen, 2011). Furthermore, the engagement with actual situations and very

[10] The database is available at http://www.spatialagency.net/
[11] Awan, N., Schneider, T., & Till, J. (2013). Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture. London: Routledge.

local issues, somehow giving up to project future scenarios, reflects the fragmented and existentially precarious elements of the contemporary times.

These hybrid urban professionals are struggling to find a place, standing on the blurring borders between amateurism and professionalism, and exploiting their double identity of experts and citizens. If asked to define their own work, none of the interviewees could. A new vocabulary would be needed to describe such a way of working, even if the lack of a definition is not perceived as a problem. On the contrary, finding out a definition is perceived even as threatening, somehow closing new possibilities, while these groups aim to avoid routine and to stay open to new forms of experimentations.

Potential Causes for Reflection

Although the phenomenon could be considered marginal in relation to its size and the scale of its impacts (as suggested by Brenner, 2015, with the *neutrality scenario*), it is suggested here that these new urban actors could be considered emblematic of some contemporary trends in urban transformation and urban studies and they are therefore worthy of being further scrutinized. Two lines of investigation are proposed as a starting point. The first one regards the controversial political potential of this category of actors, and it aims at contributing to the debate on the risk of neoliberal co-optation of practices of resistance. The second issue underlined regards the spread of these groups in different local contexts, and it potentially touches the debate on the transfer of urban ideas, practices, and policies.

The first concern could be summarized in the following questions: *What is the political potential of these urban practitioners? Would it be possible to frame them as a subject with a specific political agency? Or, on the contrary, are these practitioners depriving the practices of urban tactics of all their emancipatory and provocative stances engaging them in professional practice?* These are very broad questions and they basically remind to the role of what Margit Mayer (2013) called *first world activism*. It is not in the ambition of this paper to give a definitive answer to those very complex and broad questions. Rather this contribution aims at suggesting an original interpretative key to look at these issues. One way to address the professionalization processes in relation to the political potential of these subjects could be to associate it to the precarious conditions of the individuals involved, with the consequent contradictions of the profit-driven logic it implies and the framing of self-precarization (Ferreri & Dawson, 2017) as an oppressive governmental instrument.

Without denying the importance of such a perspective, it is proposed here to focus on another side of the issue: the power that could be gained by establishing an expert authority. Indeed, constructing an expert authority *is* a political process, if it is assumed that expertise is not ‘a free-floating cluster of knowledge, capacities, and skills’ (Newman & Clarke, 2017, p. 2), but the unstable and contingent result of a contentious process. Taking this perspective, the professionalization process is not undermining the political potential of the practices, but rather it could be framed as a political strategy of empowerment. There are some insights into the interviews which could suggest the intentional use of this strategy in order to get more legitimacy in a governance network, but further research in this direction should be developed.

The other issue raised above regards the diffusion of these practices. *How does it happen that in a reasonably short time frame the same practices are experimented in so many incommensurate cities? What can be learned by the diffusion mechanisms of this kind of expertise?*

In other words, it is proposed here to study how a specific category of actors, this new generation of professionals, reproduces its own community and identity. In order to explore this dimension, the recent literature on urban policy mobilities (for a satisfactory review see McCann & Ward, 2011) could be very useful. Much of this literature agrees on the non-linearity of the contemporary urban policy and practices transfer. It is actually not a transfer, rather a *translation* (McFarlane, 2011), as policies moving around get 'assembled, disassembled, and reassembled along the way' (McCann & Ward, 2011, p. 43). The first implication of this finding is that it contrasts the diffusionist model, acknowledging the relational nature of knowledge. This prevents simplifying the intentionality and the direction of the transfer and allows to draw more complex geographies of power. This means to unveil what Massey (in McCann & Ward, 2011) names 'the local production of the global' (2011, pp. 8–9).

Assuming a true relational perspective, a fruitful idea could be to frame the people belonging, or trying to belong, to this emergent expertise directly among the infrastructures that channel mobilities. Ordinary people, in this case specifically, the members of the architectural collectives, can be considered transfer agents assuming a "middling transnationalism" (Smith, 2005) perspective, which poses the focus exactly on the practices, struggles and mobile lifestyles of middle-class social actors, such as the skilled workers, object of this study. Indeed, some of the groups were born because of the influence of some peers. One interviewee for example remembered: "I got to know this culture for the public space in Spain, I was there because of an internship in another field, but there they are so organized about[12] and then I came back and with some friends we started to do things here" (member of praxis, 25/10/2017, Piacenza).

In other cases, some older collectives acted as incubators. For example, the members of the collective ATIsuffix in Rome were students of Francesco Careri, one of the founders of the collective Stalker/ON. They got to know each other there and then they decided to emancipate themselves. Another example of this trajectory is kiez.agency, based in Bologna, which had been incubated by the association Architetti di Strada, where the three members have experienced for the first time working autonomously together. Plinto, another group, based in Turin and born as a student organization, is another case: they inherited the brand from a former group of students who graduated and left the university. These are all cases in which other people acted as infrastructures and nourished the birth of new groups.

A study on the trajectories of these groups could help in visualizing the complexity and the diversity of reasons behind such processes of professionalization. However, to investigate how and why the groups engaged with urban tactics appears very intricate. Indeed, it could be tricky to ask the informants, in this case, the members of the collectives, from where their ideas came from. Most of the times, ideas cannot be followed; discourses are assimilated rapidly and often unconsciously and then reinvented locally. It could be that local actors '"invent" policy ideas which are very widely known, or which might emerge in different places at the same time' (Robinson, 2015, p. 832), but they did not arrive, they are somehow born locally. Ideas do not travel, a metaphor which reminds to a bounded and defined thing moving around, rather they pop up in different places, adapted and translated in the specific circumstances. *How to study then how an idea was born?*

[12] He later referred to the network Arquitecturas Colectivas (more info at https://arquitecturascolectivas.net/)

Conclusion

This paper had two objectives. First, it aimed at drawing attention to an ambivalent profile 'in which dissent and entrepreneurship have become almost indistinguishable' (Cupers, 2014, p. 7). In line with the topic 'Planning and Entrepreneurship', this figure regards both planning, being emblematic of a growing trend in urbanism; and entrepreneurship, being an example of a start-up in the field.

The very first thesis supported by the paper is that tactical urbanism, besides being often presented as a form of civic activism, is developing and spreading around together with a new profession, which is still hard to clearly define. However, while in the academic literature there is a lack of proper terminology to highlight the phenomenon (Mould, 2014: Iveson, 2013), on the field these professional realities are already active.

Secondly, the paper suggests some lines of investigation to better frame this phenomenon. The focus is drawn on the controversial political power of these actors and on their potential role as transfer agents. These two issues are apparently separated, but strictly connected. Indeed, both issues address this new category with the same intention: refusing to dismiss these experiences just as an example of neoliberal endorsement of spatial micro-practices.

On one side, assuming a constructionist conception of expertise is legitimate and allows to frame the construction of an expert authority as a political process, able to be an expression of emancipation. Following this logic, they are not passive receivers of broader trends, but rather the professionalization efforts unveil spaces for their agency. Likewise, highlighting the diverse starting points and trajectories of these practices again reminds to the agency involved in the mobility process, denying the reading of this trend or any other social order as an outcome 'of impervious, omnipotent, out there structures or systems, but right here coordinated (although not always rational) by agreements and arrangements based in contingently formed skills and interpretations' (Jacobs & Merriman, 2011, p. 212). Overlooking this would 'overestimate the coherence of 'the powerful' and the seamlessness with which 'order' is produced' (Sharp, 2000, p. 280).

Hopefully, it will stimulate a reflection on these issues, opening the path to more studies in this direction.

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