Tactical urbanism begins with people. The concept began with citizen led initiatives that act as urban installations. In the beginning, the term tactical referred to the unsanctioned nature of the process. The installation may solve a problem such as an unsafe crosswalk, unsafe bicycle pathway, or an intersection that simply does not function. Planners adopted tactical urbanism because it was a process that engaged the community at all stages of a public design project. By sanctioning public led installations of tacticians, planners were able to ask the community what is important to them and through which tangible means can public spaces better meet the community needs. Various types of tactical urbanism have cropped up over the years, including Ciclovia inspired open streets project such as ManyFest (Winnipeg, September 9-11, 2016).

People-centered places are now being sought to enliven downtowns throughout Canada and the world. People are becoming the focus and central concern for lively urban streets, better health and wellness, strong community ties and for improving business climate. Urban places must inspire the locals to attract, retain and foster strong communities. In direct contrast to the Toronto PATH and a top-down planning process, tactical urbanism begins with community.
One seminal tactical urban event is recurring with the City Repair Project, in Portland Oregon. This community group aims to create unique, novel places where humans connect with nature. One of their pet projects is called Intersection Repair, where the community identifies a street intersection that requires community improvement and feng shui. A block party commences. Families paint the pavement. Dads and everyone drink beer (root beer for the kids). Community bonds become strong; people feel for their intersection. The lasting effects of the event are seen for months, until the last paint washes away throughout the rainy season. The community is concerned as much with the temporary street intervention as the community building process itself. The aim of the project is building strong, lasting communities through creation of place-based memories.

City Repair Project, Portland Oregon

In contrast to the cultural and ecological approach to unsanctioned tactical events, sanctioned tactical urbanism is capable of employing a powerful economic lens. VIVA Vancouver: creating vibrant pedestrian spaces is such a project. It consists of a composition of various small scale strategies including parklets, pavements to plazas, and countless events to encourage humans to connect with their city. It fosters a culture of connection with the city brand and the economies of an urban existence. As the city is interested in improving business climate for luxury brands such as Burberry, Gucci, Omega, and others, increasing pedestrian traffic is a central technique employed. According to Sébastian Darchen, both Vancouver and Toronto in their place-making approaches have focused on using sanctioned tactical planning and place-making as a trendy means to improve business climate (2013, 437). Although he suggests that people centred places is an emerging trend in planning, connecting people with communities can hardly be thought of as a trend but rather a way of life.

VIVA Vancouver

City Repair Facts:
1. Small scale projects;
2. Unsanctioned & led by community members;
3. Impact is felt within the community; and
4. Grassroots.

VIVA Facts:
1. Large scale project;
2. Sanctioned, endorsed, & organized by city;
3. Impact is felt throughout the region; and
4. Economic and culture focus.

NOTES

MICRO

MACRO
Bike Sharing as Tactical Urbanism:

Bike share systems were never expected to succeed. Yet the growth of bike sharing in North America became exponential and now over 700 cities around the world share bicycles. Small cities and large cities throughout the United States have joined the lifestyle trend, ranging from Chicago, Illinois, with 4760 bikes and 476 stations, down to Madison, Wisconsin, with 350 bikes and 40 stations. Even major cities with frigid temperatures have adopted cycle sharing. In Ottawa, the RightBike system offers the standard classic upright cycle equipped with basket, and they offer a cargo transport with large luggage carrying capacity. Montreal, another frigid winter city, has long been the canonic to Canadian cycle sharing. BIXI, the Montreal based system, began in 2009 and has since expanded to encompass Toronto, with discussion of expansions in Vancouver and possibly Edmonton. In winter cities, operations are seasonal.

All these cities aside, the City of Denver Colorado grew to include a bike sharing system. It began as a temporary intervention, in 2008, in order to provide immediate relief for projected congestions during the Democratic National Convention (DNC), and to tackle issues of climate change and people health. They used volunteers manning stations and donated bikes in what was known as Freewheel’n. As a city primarily dedicated to motor vehicles, Denver rapidly began transitioning into a cycle friendly place. The temporary experiment invigorated and empowered local community groups to grow, flourish into more sophisticated entities. The process which was planned by the city, hybridized the grassroots tactical urban approach of the City Repair Project with the transplanting interventions of VIVA Vancouver, into a dialogue between macro and micro where one informs the other. The City of Denver took the opportunity during the DNC to test-run a system that was being experimented with globally. Upon completion of the tests, the Mayor and City had fully planted the seeds for a fruitful development of the not for profit B-Cycle.
Tactical Urbanism to Winnipeg

1. Without a large active community of people living in the Portage and Main region, a tactical urban intervention may require the city to sanction events and lay groundwork for the process of change. The sanctioning of events must envision a timeline of iterations that progressively engage the community to decide which solutions best suite the needs of the Downtown Winnipeg population.

2. Short term events and installations led by community and city partnerships can lead to new economic niches, and cultural outlets such as the summer equivalent of cooling hut competitions and food trucks. The City of Winnipeg should lay foundations for grassroots organizations, as opposed to imposing interventions. This will build strong communities as they did in Portland, even without the largest principle community base.

4. Denver, with a city population of 600,000 or so can implement bike sharing operations and tactical urbanism events that bolster community, city ties, and improve city liveability. The implementation of a bike share program was extremely affordable at 15$ a month, compared to the subsidized bus pass currently offered by Winnipeg transit at 70$ a month. Each iteration of tactical event should be extremely low risk and low cost.

5. Winnipeg should learn from Ottawa and Montreal that affordable active transportation does work in winter cities and improves the lives of people. The winter city myth was broken in both cities as they implemented extremely successful seasonal bike sharing operations.

6. VIVA Vancouver informs us that cities are economic machines that compete for people, talent and professionals. Tactical urban events are a tool to improve a cities competitive advantage.