

TEMPORARY USE: MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAN RISKS

Matthias Bürgin, urban planner and Director of the Metis office, Basle
www.buerometis.ch, www.zwischennutzung.ch, www.zwischennutzung.net

Martina Baum You've been concerned for many years with the topic of temporary usage of brownfield areas, in projects such as the 'nt/areal' in Basle, as well as with theoretical analyses such as the 'Acupuncture for Basle' study. What are the different kinds of potential that lie in temporary uses, as you see it?

Matthias Bürgin With regard to the potential, I basically think you have to look at it from three levels, from the three groups of protagonists involved. I should say to begin with that the different types of potential in each of these individual groups of protagonists overlap and are also interdependent. When things go well, it can lead to a win-win-win situation for all three groups.

Firstly, there's the group of owners. Temporary uses always generate added value in comparison with when industrial brownfields are left empty – at the very least, some basic rental income, often upgrading of the site or a rise in the property price. Temporary use can also serve as a test run for future usage. Various different usage options can be tried out during this phase, without a final decision having to be taken right at the very start of the project.

For the group of municipalities or towns, I basically see an opportunity for upgrading the whole development of the town or district. Temporary use can be an incubator and can promote the local economy, as well as acting as a reservoir for local deficiencies. An important potential for the users, as the third group of protagonists, is the availability of low-cost space to develop activities they require low-cost facilities for. The users often take responsibility for the space – i.e., they take part in the production of the city and are not merely consumers of space. The greater familiarity and identification with the city that result from this represent social capital.

MB How is temporary use best implemented deliberately in a development programme?

MB You first have to realize that an opportunity for temporary development actually exists. In principle, temporary usages can always be implemented on empty sites. With regard to how it's done, a distinction has to be made on the basis of who initiates it. In my experience, most temporary uses have so far emerged from the users themselves. It would be desirable if owners and municipalities could give some deliberate thought to the option of temporary usage in a development process as well. In everyday life, however, what I see much more often is that they are hesitant, there are barriers there and they have little experience to build on.

MB What sort of prerequisites are needed?

MB Two things. Firstly, there's a lack of information about the potential, as well as a lack of awareness of how the different kinds of potential can be used. I basically think that practices need to change, there has to be a paradigm change from a reactive to a proactive approach.

The interest in temporary uses certainly has to be linked to more than the mere exploitation logic of the property business. You must want to think in a user-oriented way and you have to keep an eye on the added value for the community that's possible. It's important to be willing to check predefined development goals as time goes on and revise them as well. Initiating temporary use and monitoring it is a planning task, just like traffic planning or environmental planning – i.e., it needs to be incorporated into a planning process on an equal footing and it needs to be budgeted for. As a final prerequisite, it also requires access to demand. The life-worlds of property owners and potential users are often far apart from each other. Mediation and persuasion are needed in order to bring the two groups together. As is usual with planning tools, targeted guidance of temporary uses also requires professionalism at the planning and action levels. Since temporary uses are also a tool for usage development, a willingness to enter into open communications and a process-based approach are indispensable. Optimal control and guidance of temporary use is achieved when owners, protagonists and the municipality are able to agree on a collaborative approach.

- MB In the 'nt/areal' project, a temporary usage of a former rail freight station in Basle, it is mainly the empty spaces that are being used temporarily. We've found that empty spaces in this type of area often play a secondary role. What effects and what role did the temporary use of the empty areas in particular have in the 'nt/areal' project?
- MB Empty spaces are a scarce commodity in cities like Basle. They're often also too highly defined with regard to their usage and design. The empty spaces in nt/areal are located in the middle of the city and they offer air to breathe. Lots of people have said, 'When I arrive there my thoughts go into high gear, that's where I get ideas.' With regard to usages, there are many that would not be feasible in interior spaces, and vice versa. So we were able to provide open space for various trend sports, as well as a Sunday market. In an undersupplied city district, it was simply important to have empty spaces that can be used. It's often forgotten that empty spaces can be played on and cultivated. In other projects I often see empty spaces being used as parking space for cars, unfortunately. We had a rental contract for the exterior spaces and for the interiors, and that made it possible for us to explore the subject of the exterior spaces.
- MB You've put together information about this topic on the platform www.zwischennutzung.net and in a 'Guide for Temporary Use', at the request of the Swiss Department of the Environment. How important is communicating and exchanging ideas?
- MB As I've mentioned, the protagonists don't yet have sufficient information. One task is therefore to carry out communication, persuasion and educational work. The second task is to communicate information about connections and also guidance for action. The decisive element in communication is that people know something and also want to communicate it. However, I should also say that there's no temporary

usage project that is exactly the same as another. Exchanges can stimulate the imagination and offer information.

- MB A new field for planners is arising in this area, beyond the classic planning tasks. What skills are needed for this, as you see it?
- MB The primary motivation has to be that you are carrying out a project like this not purely for the sake of building alone. Instead, the focus should be on the idea of added social value. To me, it seems important that you should be able to shift into different roles and work in networks. In terms of content, the most important element is that you should be able to read and reinterpret the local potential of spaces. This includes the potential of the local people, of course. In this sense, you can distinguish between two profiles with specific skills – the planner and the key agent.
- MB Sustainability and adaptable buildings are topics that affect not only the conversion of the existing building stock, but in particular also have to play a role in plans for new building as well. The energy performance of an individual building is only one aspect of this. What is it that needs to be done to make an ensemble of buildings or a district adaptable and thus suited to the future?
- MB To me, adaptability means that structures and their potential uses must simply not be too heavily defined, that spaces can be reinterpreted – and also perhaps that resistance needs to be overcome in the process. Often it's not an architectural issue, but rather a question of how the user is able to handle different spatial qualities. But do most people even have any desire to assimilate existing buildings?

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

Martina Baum

Dr. Martina Baum is an architect and urban planner specializing in the fields of urbanism, urban planning, and design. She has been director of STUDIO . URBANE STRATEGIEN in Karlsruhe (Germany) since 2008. She has worked as a lecturer and researcher at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. Both in practical work and in research studies, the office stands for an interdisciplinary and integrative approach in the fields of architecture, urban design, and urban planning. Martina Baum has been involved with conversions and temporary uses of converted areas for many years, both theoretically and in her practical work. Her dissertation on temporary uses and conversions of formerly industrial areas in Europe and North America was published in 2008 by KIT Scientific Publishing, Karlsruhe, under the title *Urbane Orte*.

Kees Christiaanse

The Dutch architect and urban planner Kees Christiaanse has held the Chair of Architecture and Urban Design at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich since 2003. He is not only well known through his numerous projects, but is also recognized as an innovative initiator of debates on theoretical and methodological issues in urban design. He has been involved in the topic of conversions and temporary uses for a number of years. He was a member of Urban Catalyst, a European Union-funded research project (2001–2003) that provided the first framework developed for systematic research into strategies for temporary usage of abandoned urban sites. He has significantly influenced the concept of 'city as loft' through numerous articles and lectures.

administration in Cologne, he worked in the field of project management as Director of Immobilienakademie Ltd. and for the Deutsche Bank in Berlin. In 1997, he founded BEOS Project Development Ltd. in Berlin, now called BEOS AG (BEOS plc). He has edited and written numerous publications on the topics of property investment, project development and asset management.

Matthias Bürgin

Matthias Bürgin is a freelance consultant and implementer of urban and cultural projects. His work focuses on usage development in industrial brownfield areas. He studied geography at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, and also works as a research assistant and project manager in the Competence Center for Typology & Planning in Architecture at Lucerne University of the Applied Sciences and Arts.

James Corner

James Corner is the founding partner of James Corner Field Operations, an urban design and landscape architectural practice based in New York City and London. He is also Professor and Chair of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design. He has received numerous awards and has been featured in 'top ten design lists' in several magazines. His published works include several books.

Daniel D'Oca

Daniel D'Oca is an urban planner. He received a master's degree in urban planning from Harvard Design School in 2002. He is Assistant Professor of Urban and Architecture History and Theory at the Maryland Institute College of Art and Design Critic in Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard Design School. He is a partner in Interboro, a New York