

TEMPORARY USE

Matthias Bürgin

Brownfield sites and other abandoned buildings stand mostly longer disused than planned. On the other hand there is almost always a need for reasonably priced room for creative industries, socio-cultural purposes and urban housing. The temporary use and management of such premises is not a new phenomenon. During the last 15 years, regulatory bodies as well as researchers have acknowledged the high contribution of cleverly planned and run temporary use projects to urban and neighborhood development. Still, owners, developers, and investors hesitantly support this trend. Today there are two approaches for temporary use of postindustrial premises:

INTROVERSION

Traditionally, brownfield sites were randomly rented for temporary use. This resulted in an exclusive benefit for the landlord: Provision and increase of proceeds/income compared to vacancy, maintenance of the site and prevention of vandalism

EXTROVERSION

Extroverted temporary use combines the interests of the municipality, the civil society, the tenants, as well as those of the owners. From worldwide experiences the effects and benefits for the city and its society are an opening and general accessibility of urban waste land, the improvement of the urban environment, generation of an urban identity, public sphere and urbaneness. Extroverted temporary use turns back a “non-place” to a true part of the city. It enables networking with the neighborhoods and the whole city by connecting people. It furthermore leads to overall vitalization of certain areas by filling gaps in community requirements. The projects often serve as a source of innovation for economy and culture, start-ups and the creative industries. They provide a niche for cultural production, presentation and trendsetting, and are often enough socio-cultural places for gathering, activities and trend sports. Extroverted temporary use creates space instead of consuming space and can thus creates social growth by fostering complexity and ambiguity.

For the activists/tenants temporary uses can offer low priced rooms, enable (commercial) start-ups, create jobs, and serve as an inspiration and scope for new ideas. Often it's an opportunity for one's self-fulfillment as it's simply a place with less rules and many opportunities. Lastly, the tenants take an active part in urban liveliness by revitalizing the formerly unused spaces.

BETTER COMMERCIALIZATION

All above mentioned effects and benefits enable the owner or developer to create added values, while planning a conversion or a revitalization of a premise; all in all, leading towards better commercial perspectives.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A SIDE EFFECT

Extroverted temporary use projects also increase the balance of sustainability for a variety of reasons: resources, extended usability & structural preservation, less

material flow (less grey energy and CO₂-emissions), less landscape consumption, reduction of environmental risks, income for clean-up of toxic waste deposits, prevention of dissemination of contaminations or conservation thereof. And for the society: fostering of well-being, social competences, identity, freedom, openness, tolerance, participation and solidarity, active partnership in the urban development process, promotion of social diversity.

URBAN QUALITIES

Extroverted temporary use projects are able to foster urban qualities of which the neighborhood and the entire city may profit, such as high density of interactions, strong local economic cycles, broad public awareness, an eagerness to experiment, cooperativeness, inventiveness, social networking and diversity within the neighborhood and community as well as an increased flexibility and adaptability.

SILENT STIGMA OF FLAW

Though authorities and researchers intensively care about the benefits of temporary use projects, still owners and developers are very hesitant on the subject matter. Compared to the large number of vacant sites and houses, their focus on extroverted temporary use projects is quite low. As there are no studies available about the reasons for this reservation, I assume that the reasons lie in an overall lack of experience with the temporary use of brownfield sites, a lack of information about temporary use projects and successful solutions, an absence of self-acting gathering of information, a fear of (uncontrollable) changes, as well as as sort of shame in admitting to own a brownfield site and not having concrete development plans yet.

NO RISKS – SIMPLY CHALLENGES

The known assumed risks of temporary use projects are: confusing subletting, blurry splitting of utilities, missing demand and inappropriate supply of space, difficult permission procedures, secondary vandalism, and uncontrollable general development. Such doubts are rather simple challenges that can be managed by appropriate legal and methodical approaches such as: adequate leasing contracts, control of subletting, innovative splitting models for utilities, consideration of local needs and sensitivities. Concerning permission procedures, however, there are actually improvement opportunities in quiet a number of already implemented temporary use projects. In most places this is a matter of political debate, which has big chance of success, once initiated. However, the debate has to be initiated, and is worthwhile compared to the gains of extroverted temporary use.

If though a temporary use project were driven solely by exploitation logics and were to imminently becoming permanent, that might turn into a real stumbling block. Extroverted temporary use projects are mainly nourished by social capital and qualities accomplished during the temporary use of a site/building. If purely ROI interests threaten an otherwise successful project, the “final solution” might well be impeded. In such a case, it would turn out wisely to reconsider the strategies for conversion, aiming for a gentle transformation of already gained qualities within the project, in order to keep the return stable but decrease the need for investment.

BEST PRACTICE FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

From the experience with known past and current projects some hints can be given for a successful upgrade of a neighborhood/city by an extroverted temporary use project: act as early as possible and plan an early integration of all stakeholders – strive commitment (owners/developers/investors – municipalities – possible actors/tenants). Do consider and include local needs and seek to engage key-agents. In order to be successful and accepted by the local residents, one should aim at a balanced development strategy: as much bottom-up as possible, but just as much top-down as really needed.

THE SITUATION IN RIGA

The reevaluation potential of extroverted temporary use project is proven by successful practices in central Europe and worldwide. They are documented in many governmental, research, and public reports such as the: Urban Pioneers (German), Zone*Imaginaire (German), Swiss online-guidelines temporary use (German and French), Sustainable Development of Quarters (German), Stadt:Pilot Spezial (German), City as Loft (English), Urban Catalyst (German).

Within the setting of the forum “Empty Spaces” in October 2013 there were field trips to three current projects in Riga: *Kanepes Culturas centrs*, *Tabakas fabrika* und *Totaldobze*. These first-hand insights and the presentations of the local activists impressionably brought forward the huge demand for reasonably prized room and space to evolve and develop activities in the realms of arts, creative industries, socio-cultural as well as educative projects and business ideas. There were many high-qualified and motivated actors ready to get started in the fall of 2013 in Riga. As a matter of fact, there were sufficient disused buildings, sites, and rooms to satisfy everybody's needs, however, supply and demand didn't find together, yet. There were still big nontransparent obstacles on the part of the authorities and the owners to overcome, and there was still a lack of

resources in order to be able to support the temporary use projects. The official town planning seemed to be acting very passively, too – planning actions but start when owners of a brownfield site proclaims their development intents. In Riga there is a lack of handy strategies and concepts that could surpass the pure ROI orientated development, and that particularly would strengthen the further development of the urban civil society, as well.

In order to achieve a successful reactivation of brownfield sites, owners and authorities in Riga would have to be convinced about the benefits of temporary use projects. Despite the special legal regulation in Latvia, it should be feasible with minimal investments to make unused sites reusable and to consign them to trustworthy renters/social-/cultural-developers, thus satisfying the high demand for room as well as the societal and quality oriented urban development of Riga.

SUMMING UP

Temporary use projects – if properly managed – provide various benefits for brownfield sites, development areas as well as for the entire urban community. It is more effective and flexible to act than to build. With its broad effects temporary use projects should be implemented as an informal planning method to improve the local urban development. For best results temporary use projects need a proper management from the beginning to the very end. Only creative and extroverted temporary use projects for brownfield sites within a city are leading to added values and identity. They can lead to a main factor that supports a city in its effort to enhance inner growth and good charisma. If political authorities and actors of real estate business are clear-sighted, they will recognize this coherence and will increasingly care to establish and preserve the developing urban qualities of temporary use projects.

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There are many high-qualified and motivated actors ready to get started in Riga.

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