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# Temporary Permanence: the Intermittent City

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The permanent and the temporary in cities are not at odds—everything lasts at least until its own end, and nothing, as yet, has lasted through to the end of time itself. A measure of relative change, something can only exist in time at all, let alone throughout time (per-manent), by virtue of change either in its internal or external relations. Being temporary or permanent is therefore largely a function of initial intention—a way of speaking, rather than a fact about the world.

While changes to a city's spatial character can be cumbersome and controversial, tweaks to the temporal texture are often impactful and inexpensive. Below we example successful city practices in (§1) the temporary use of spaces, such as the revitalisation of dilapidated or abandoned buildings; (§2) permanent activities for temporary city dwellers, allowing a flow of visitors to become integral to urban landscapes; and (§3) permanent activities occupying temporary spaces, such as mobile artistic and cultural programmes.

## Unpausing the city—temporary use of spaces

«The city is alive, the city is expanding / Living in the city can be demanding.»

Flight of the Conchords, *Inner City Pressure*

There is always scope within a city to create better Pareto efficiency, especially through abandoned or underutilised spaces which could be exploited to everybody's gain. Such spaces are, in this excellent article by Aurelie de Smet, referred to as *pauzelandshappen*.<sup>1</sup> One manner of unpausing the urban landscape is through the temporary adaptive reuse of these spaces<sup>2</sup>. Reuse is adaptive when it is rooted in the culture of the locality in which it arises, and sustainable when it generates new uses for already existing resources, embracing at once a continuity and cyclicity that are the respective hallmarks of the permanent and the temporary. Sustainable adaptive reuse can benefit local culture, while attracting new investments and inspiring innovation.



▶ "Reportage after Recyclart," <https://youtu.be/JNchXNhja3o>.

Such temporary use of spaces can go much deeper than the pop-up shop.<sup>3</sup> In the best scenario, they can combine culture, commerce and public services in one pleasing package. Recyclart is a temporary space that occupied an abandoned train station in Brussels. This multidisciplinary arts centre organises musical concerts, performances, lectures and art exhibitions which are free and open to the public, with a special focus on fostering local talent and creating community engagement.

The bar and restaurant attached to this venue served a double function.

1 Aurelie de Smet, "The role of temporary use in urban (re)development: examples from Brussels," *Brussels Studies* 72 (2013), DOI: 10.4000/brussels.1196.

2 See ROCK's forthcoming Guidelines on Sustainable Adaptive Reuse.

3 <https://monocle.com/radio/shows/the-urbanist/299/mohamed-haouache-chief-executive-of-storefront/>

Not only were they social spaces where community was kindled, they are also training centres where local people learned cooking and catering. In the artists' workshop, training was organised in woodworking and metalwork. Cultural vibrancy thus went hand in hand with vocational skills. Funding from Brussels municipality, as well as the Flemish and Walloon regional governments helped to make this project a reality, bringing life to this formerly abandoned zone.

This institution begs the question of what it really means to be "temporary". Having inhabited the station on a temporary basis for two decades, Recyclart was recently asked to vacate the space due to fire regulations. After an enormous public outcry, the city found a new abandoned location, an old printing house in Molenbeek, to house the organisation—along with the promise to reinstate them in their initial location as soon as renovations are complete.

Temporary reuse of spaces is often an opportunity to display a vision of a city's future, a glance into the crystal ball. This is by no means limited to buildings. Indeed, it finds one of its most poignant and widespread displays in PARKing days,<sup>4</sup> days of the year in which people reclaim space that has been allocated to cars for the wider public domain. Through campaigns such as European Mobility Week, the practice, born in San Francisco, has taken root across Europe in cities from Berlin and Bologna to Tivat and Lindau.

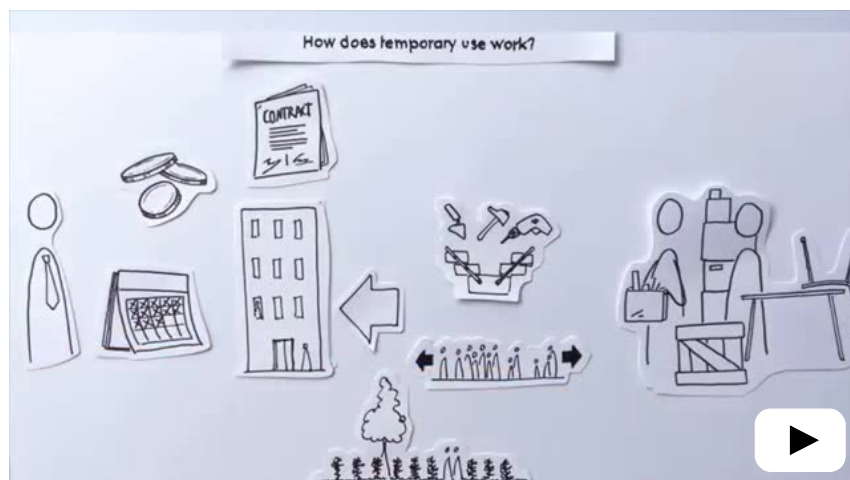
Schools, youth clubs, sports clubs, NGOs and businesses, especially local merchants, join forces to find creative uses for the liberated plots. As much as activities, these are spaces for dialogue, where different sections of society learn to co-organise and cooperate, and where passers-by have the opportunity to enter new spheres. As a direct reaction to the colonisation of public space by the private car, these temporary actions are instrumental in creating a place-based vision of the city, a vision which has been gaining traction more permanently in recent years.

The act of celebration can temporarily highlight a permanent cultural domain, renewing and invigorating aspects of a city's character. Creative, cultural arts and events such as Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven, and the Light Festival in Lyon, open for a brief moment a window through which the local cultural identity and cultural heritage can burst. The heritage of the two cities is embedded in the genesis of these cultural events. When new and old design innovations are put on display, in the former case, or the whole city explodes with light in the latter, a temporary excitation gives a fresh relevance to a permanent element of the cities' cultural foundations. The temporary use does not admonish the disuse of space. Just as some people need a moment of silence before they can add to a conversation, so these paused spaces offer opportunities for ventures of a character not suited to the regular dynamics of ownership and organisation.

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4 <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/09/from-parking-to-parklet/539952/>

## Fostering temporary use



▶ "REFILL—temporary use for dummies", <https://youtu.be/Z8L2r0ccJsU>.

While temporary use is at its best as a bottom-up process, cities can take some initiative to foster such activities. Regulation, for example, can be formulated to allow less strict treatment of temporary spaces. Standards for health and safety restrictions, licences to trade, and permission to hold events can all be flexibly applied in the context of a temporary manifestation. Cluj-Napoca encourages temporary reuse through TEAM (Technology, Evolution, Entrepreneurship and Microenterprises) and CREIC (Regional Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries). These start-up incubator/hubs see the city supplying temporary spaces in empty city buildings to enthusiastic entrepreneurs.<sup>5</sup> Dedicated groups negotiate with fire safety officials etc. to assess real risks and reach a compromise about how strictly legislation must be enforced.

Cities can set aside funds to encourage adaptive reuse, often in the form of seed funding that helps projects to kick off. Such projects have the potential to generate their own micro-economies, through manageable rents, tickets for events, sales and crowdfunding. EU grants and tenders for innovation can also be combined with ongoing developments.<sup>6</sup> It is important to remember that cultural projects are not just a spend, but also an investment. The £170m Liverpool spent on being capital of culture (much of it on temporary manifestations and events) is estimated to have brought in a return of £750m over the following decade.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the enforcement of often existent penalties for disused space can encourage owners to be more receptive to those offering to put a space to use where it might otherwise lie idle. Strict fines placed on buildings that

<sup>5</sup> See *Refil Magazine* 1 (November 2016), [<https://refillthecity.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/refill-magazine-11.pdf>].

<sup>6</sup> See ROCKs forthcoming Guidelines on Sustainable Adaptive Reuse.

<sup>7</sup> Beatriz Garcia, Ruth Melville, Tamsin Cox, *Creating an Impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2010), [http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/GarciaEtal2010Creating\\_an\\_Impact-Impacts08.pdf](http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/GarciaEtal2010Creating_an_Impact-Impacts08.pdf).



FIG. 1 Zollverein park. Photo Wikimedia Commons

stay empty or are allowed to decay while awaiting redevelopment or sale can allow mutually beneficial relationships to open up between owners and innovators.

## One-trip-stands – achieving intimacy with temporary populations

«Use of cultural heritage tourism [...] can contribute to a positive sense of multicultural identity when the distinctiveness of a people and place are recognized by powerful actors that include government, foreign tourists, and local society.»

A. K. Soper<sup>8</sup>

Just as cities are working to counter the underutilisation of spaces, so too they are building synaptic structures to maximally exploit the tourism and through-migration that have become permanent features of our cosmopolis. There are many ways of engineering a cross-pollination that enriches both temporary and permanent city residents.

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<sup>8</sup> Anne K. Soper, "Mauritian Landscapes of Culture, Identity, and Tourism", in *Landscape, Tourism, and Meaning*, ed. Michelle M. Metro-Roland, Daniel C. Knudsen, Charles E. Greer (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 51ff.

Tourism creates a permanent flow of temporary visitors who can, if their presence is properly harnessed, have major positive impacts on local cultural heritage. As well as creating jobs and direct financial injections in local economies, tourists encourage and reward local government for the rejuvenation, preservation, and increased accessibility of cultural sites. This in turn can encourage pride within local community, as they see that their cultural practices and institutions provide value and engagement for outsiders. As well as physical spaces, tourism can encourage the preservation and documentation of local crafts and traditions.

The recognition of Zollverein Park<sup>9</sup> in the Ruhr region as a UNESCO world heritage site spurred a €14,500,000 project to turn this 800,000 m<sup>2</sup> area into a major local and tourist attraction. Now a permanent turnover of 1.5 million temporary visitors has helped to fuel the creation of 1,000 new jobs and 170 enterprises (70% of which are in the creative sector) and generates €68.4 million annually including approximately €11 million of VAT and €1.5 million in other taxes. As well as fuelling the local economy, and sustaining local jobs and innovation, the flow of temporary guests has allowed the area to guarantee the permanence of its own industrial cultural heritage.

Most pronouncedly in southern states, migrant and refugee populations are an increasingly permanent feature, often made up of temporarily present individuals. Migrants, and especially refugees, arriving in Athens live in a climate of uncertainty. Many do not know how long they will remain in Athens, where unemployment is very high, or whether they will be able to continue their journey through Europe or suffer ejection. In reaction to this difficult situation, Athens is creating channels for symbiotic relationships to develop between its permanent and temporary communities.

The project “Curing the limbo,” funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, offers temporary housing and a cash allowance to refugees in return for their participation in citizen initiatives, such as urban roof-top farming and ethnic cuisine labs. It also offers them the chance to combine temporary employment with on-the-job language courses and soft skills training. In this way, the temporary residents can enrich the host culture while themselves benefiting from local support.<sup>10</sup>

As outlined in detail in EUROCIITIES guidelines<sup>11</sup> for cities on the role of culture in the integration of migrants and newcomers, cities can take concrete action to create opportunities for mutual learning and intercultural dialogue. For example, by providing shared public participative spaces. The impact of such places is greatest when established civic institutions such as libraries or museums are involved as this encourages public par-

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9 [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Ruhr\\_Zollverein\\_Park\\_04112015.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Ruhr_Zollverein_Park_04112015.pdf).

10 <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/athens>.

11 [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCIITIES\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_cities\\_on\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_culture\\_in\\_the\\_integration\\_of\\_refugees,\\_migrants\\_and\\_asylum\\_seekers\\_Sept\\_2016.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCIITIES_Guidelines_for_cities_on_the_role_of_culture_in_the_integration_of_refugees,_migrants_and_asylum_seekers_Sept_2016.pdf).



FIG. 2 Photo Musée passager



FIG. 3 Photo Musée passager

ticipation. Intercultural activities can and should strengthen the self-esteem of the participants by allowing them to share their skills and experience instead of drawing attention to issues such as their lack of language skills.

## Mobile culture

Public art can transfer power to people and invite active discussion rather than just passing observation. It can increase the vital-

ity of public space and work with the surrounding environment; temporary time sensitive projects can make the art even more precious. Birmingham, Public Art Strategy<sup>12</sup>

Try as cities might, there are some people that all the free drinks and *hors-d'oeuvres* in China wouldn't lure into a museum or cultural centre. To those of us who can walk in without a second thought, the barriers to entry that many people feel are difficult to detect. Such barriers can and should be removed, but in the meantime, what's to stop the cultural offer leaping through them, and whizzing out into the city?

Museums and institutions need to reinvent themselves and go seek contact with the audience. Either by bringing them in and co-designing cultural programmes, or by going out themselves and engage with citizens in a different way.

Ile-de-France's *Musée passager* does just that. A mobile, temporary and open museum, it travels through suburban cities in the region, showcasing local and international artists. This 150 square-metre pavilion does not just host inspiring works of contemporary art, it also functions as a venue for cultural events, including performances, concerts, conferences and workshops. While the region 100% finances the museum itself, private partners lend support for additional cultural activities, but without the chance to influence the specially curated programme.

Traveling from city to city, the museum welcomes about 10% of the region's population annually, providing a safe space to become more familiar with art, and to interface with one's own community. In the future, the museum hopes to develop even stronger ties with local schools and regional cultural centres. You can learn more about this highly replicable practice in this Culture for Cities and Regions case study.<sup>13</sup>

The city of Birmingham has gone one step further by developing an official Public Art Strategy which recognises the public value of, and seeks to encourage, temporary art: "It is important to remember the rich legacy of temporary projects and events which have affected the experience of residents of and visitors to the city [...] Such projects have had a lasting effect on individuals' and communities' perception of and relationship with the city."<sup>14</sup>

The very first point of the action plan included in this strategy is to identify sites where discussions could be opened with developers to have temporary artworks put in place in the lead up to new developments. The EUROCIITIES study of the state of public art in European cities<sup>15</sup> provides

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12 Birmingham City Council, *Collaborations in Place-based Creative Practice: Birmingham Public Art Strategy 2015-2019* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 2015), 14.

13 [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/IDF\\_Musee\\_passager\\_30062015.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/IDF_Musee_passager_30062015.pdf).

14 Birmingham City Council, *Collaborations*, 14.

15 [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/State\\_of\\_the\\_public\\_art\\_in\\_European\\_cities\\_-\\_A\\_EUROCIITIES\\_study.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/State_of_the_public_art_in_European_cities_-_A_EUROCIITIES_study.pdf).



an outline not only of the strategies and priorities that cities are putting in place to develop their public art offer, but also a number of examples of participatory practices and policy recommendations.

## Power of the unpredicted

«The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter [...] The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole.»

G. W. F. Hegel, *Preface to the Phenomenology of Mind*<sup>16</sup>

When a city becomes a hatchery for many temporary events, when the regulatory climate and wider vision of the politicians are clement to multiple and successful fledgling flights, what begins to develop is a permanent infrastructure for temporary events. People on the margins realise that there is an opportunity for them to bring their cultural offer to the public. They can slip into a space just as a hermit crab slips into an empty shell, and out again as soon as it's outgrown.

Beyond temporary spaces, the recognition of the importance of temporary city dwellers allows structures to form around them through which a cultural osmosis can occur. With these membranes in place—heritage sites, cultural events, participatory spaces—value can pass between the permanent residents and the tourists, migrants and refugees that flow ceaselessly through.

Finally, there is the nomadic event that is permanent within its own trajectory, but temporary from the dominant perspective of settled life and infrastructure. These travelling cultural offers can invigorate a city with the momentum of their journey. As a function of their "instability", they can attract those alienated by more firmly planted institutions, and therefore create new dialogues with more diverse audiences.

In these ways and many more, the temporary can get a permanent foothold in a city, and serve as a catalyst for new visions of, and paths towards, our shared urban future.

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<sup>16</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Preface to the Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910).