TEMPORARY USE OF SPACE AS A FACTOR IN THE REVITALISATION OF BROWNFIELD SITES IN URBAN AREAS

IZVLEČEK

In cities the most useless sites are long term abandoned and vacant spaces. Temporary use of buildings and building sites is seen as an informal practice that effectively solves the problems of brownfield sites in urban areas. Professional literature justifies temporary use as positive because of its contribution to practicing more flexible planning and alternative governance of cities. On the other hand, different forms and modes of temporary use of space can initiate a new, innovative and inclusive culture of urban life. The review of key literature points out that, as a rule, traditional procedures of urban planning fail to recognise the benefits of temporary use of space, instead of tolerating allowing and conditioning it as a developmental instrument. Therefore the article focuses on the significance and positive outcomes of temporary use of space as an important factor of economic, social, cultural, and environmental regeneration of cities. The criteria applied in the selection refer to scientific excellence checked against the SJR (Scimago Journal & Country Rank) portal as well as against WOS (Web of Science) database and the largest database of peer-reviewed literature Elsevier Scopus.

KLJUČNE BESEDJE

opuščene stavbe, razvrednotena območja, ponovna raba stavb, začasna raba urbanega prostora

ABSTRACT

In cities the most useless sites are long term abandoned and vacant spaces. Temporary use of buildings and building sites is seen as an informal practice that effectively solves the problems of brownfield sites in urban areas. Professional literature justifies temporary use as positive because of its contribution to practicing more flexible planning and alternative governance of cities. On the other hand, different forms and modes of temporary use of space can initiate a new, innovative and inclusive culture of urban life. The review of key literature points out that, as a rule, traditional procedures of urban planning fail to recognise the benefits of temporary use of space, instead of tolerating allowing and conditioning it as a developmental instrument. Therefore the article focuses on the significance and positive outcomes of temporary use of space as an important factor of economic, social, cultural, and environmental regeneration of cities. The criteria applied in the selection refer to scientific excellence checked against the SJR (Scimago Journal & Country Rank) portal as well as against WOS (Web of Science) database and the largest database of peer-reviewed literature Elsevier Scopus.

KEY-WORDS

Vacant buildings, brownfield sites, reuse of buildings, temporary use of urban space
1. INTRODUCTION — FROM TEMPORARY USE TO REUSE OF BUILDINGS AND SPACES

The best way of preserving buildings, building land, and other spaces is when they are in constant use. Reuse of buildings and spaces has an extremely important role in assuring sustainable development of cities. One of the main environmental benefits of the reuse of buildings is preserving the so-called embodied energy that was needed for the construction of the original building (Adaptive Reuse, Preserving our past, building our future, 2004). As energy all the processes and materials needed for the construction of a building can be understood: from the acquisition and production of building materials and equipment, their transport to the energy needed for all works in the construction of the building. With the reuse of a building this embodied energy is preserved, which gives projects greater environmental sustainability than the construction of a completely new building. The construction of new buildings requires much more energy than buildings that are obtained with renewal or buildings with adapted reuse. As a rule demolition of buildings and construction of new ones are wasteful interventions, which do not contribute to the efficient use of energy, materials, space, and to the overall benefit for the society. Assuring permanent use of buildings for contemporary needs is therefore one of the key components of the developmental model based on the principles of creativity (Cf.: Lah, Seljak, Krmelj, 2015: 201). To come to adequate reuse of buildings and spaces, precisely temporary use can in many cases be an intermediate step.

Mlinar (2009) draws attention to the fact that in comparison to its spatial dimension temporal organization of residential and living environment is extremely discriminated and poorly studied. He underlines especially housing and urban planning, in which architecture dominates, mainly preserve their static nature and produce “final” solutions. He notes, further, these planned final solutions “contradict the changes taking place according to the rules of life cycle and long-term changes of social development. In living environment this inconsistency can in turn mean overburdening or underuse of spaces, devices and the like. In the tradition of idiographic research the past and the future are treated as a sequence of individual phenomena or events, which does not provide the basis for foresight or steering” (2009: 79). He notes, further, the practice of urban planning to date is mainly established on planned spatial arrangements, the intended use or arrangement of which has been finally determined in advance. It is mainly limited to spatial dimension of planning and does not comprise the foreseeable dynamics in different time periods (day, week, season, generation, etc.), so conflicts can arise that are manifested in overloaded spatial units or in unused, vacant and brownfield areas.

Burckhardt (1985: 241) points out inter alia in the process of design or urban planning account should also be taken of impacts on human relationships: “We must think of what impact our interventions will have on the connections and relationships among people.” Klaff (2014) states “one-dimensional focus on just the predetermined end result leads to the situation social structures are preserved only with difficulties or are disrupted and must be established anew after the project has been come to its end.”

More attention should be paid to prior, temporary, intermediate, changing use of space and account taken of the temporal sequence of different functions of the same spatial units (Mlinar, 2009: 84).

The modes and procedures of planned control of spatial planning are namely too lengthy and too rigid to be able to follow the needs of the development of a city and the dynamics of initiatives, underlines Koželj (2008). “Contemporary urban planning shall not define, but make things possible” (Koželj, 2008:4).

2. TEMPORARY USE OF SPACE

2.1 Informal practices of spatial planning

In the past few decades informal approaches or community practices of spatial planning have proliferated and gained force such as: “participatory urbanism”, bottom up urbanism”, “tactical urbanism”, “pop-up projects”, “guerrilla urbanism”, “DIY urbanism” and “temporary projects or temporary use of space “open-source urbanism”, “intermediate use”, “intermediate projects or intermediate use” as well as “emergent urbanism”. Common to all the above practices is in principle they are carried out outside the frame-
works of institutional urban planning, they are based on small financial means, and that with more or less temporary uses they initiate deliberation about long-term change and encourage reuse of space. This kind of unconventional approaches to spatial planning have emerged as a response to insufficiently successful public management of space. In this context it is necessary to highlight excessive formalisation of processes, which due to their inflexibility often characterise spatial planning in the developed world, while simultaneously they are not able to manage private and individual interests for common and public welfare, which is more present in less developed parts of the world. In addition to this Peterlin (2015) points out this kind of informal practices are reaction to worsening financial situations of local administrations, which practically all around the world are in constant real decrease. At the same time he says the discussed practices can also be understood as attempts of introducing “alternative production, administrative, and economic models developing in different spheres of the society as a reaction to evident difficulties of the prevailing neoliberal model of market economy” (Peterlin, 2015: 6).

Although informal or community practices have been multiplying in space, they have not yet been accepted or recognised as a positive phenomenon for urban development. Their functioning is rather unsearched, only in recent years they have become the subject of wider debate and attempts of raising their visibility in wider public. In the following we will present the characteristics, functioning, and the impact temporary use as informal practice can trigger in brownfield sites in urban areas.

With Creative practices temporary use of space shapes urban scenes that assume a new content role in the city. According to Bugarič (2010) urban scenes are shaped on the basis of developmental scenarios and events with the purpose of presentation to the wider public and its education on the topic of brownfield sites in urban areas.

2.2 Definition of temporary use

Scientific literature provides different definitions of temporary use. In contemporary context temporary use of space refers to the use that takes place between two institutionalised uses of a particular space; it is about a kind of interim period. Berwyn (2012: 169) states for temporary use of space short-term projects are characteristic that bring underused, unused or vacant space creative new use “beneficial to the society or economy”.

First we will try to define the concept of temporariness. Temporary is a temporal concept that is difficult to define. It does not have a clear meaning; it is linked to different connotations and uses. It refers to a limited time period, to a limited time of duration. From this follows that everything is temporary, everything
has its end, nothing lasts forever, only that some things last longer than others. The fundamental problem with any temporary duration (phenomenon) is that it cannot be defined, or that it can only be exactly recognised once its duration has come to an end. Why, then, temporary uses of space are called temporary, although their time of use has not yet expired?

Andres (2012: 759) defines it as “a set of practices with short-term effect of progress in the time, when space is ruled by economic and urban or political disorder”. Andres puts greater emphasis on the characteristics of the temporary use of space, while saying about temporariness or the time of duration that their “life-span varies from a couple of months to several years” (2012: 759).

Haydn and Termal (2006: 17) have developed a definition that comprises both characteristic features as well as the temporal element of temporary use and come to the conclusion that those uses are temporary which from the very beginning were planned as transient and short-term. According to their definition their fundamental characteristic is temporal determination. We could conclude from this it is irrelevant whether temporary use remains temporary or becomes permanent, what matters is the original idea is temporally defined as temporary. This definition resembles the definition presented by Bishop and Williams (2012: 5) in their book The Temporary City, only that due to its numerous diversities the authors of this book deliberately omit the characteristic features of temporary use. Their definition is not conditioned with the type of the use of space, it is not essential whether it is about formal or non-formal use of space, whether rent is payable or not, whether the use is short-term or long-term; what matters is the purpose of the user, the investor, or the planner is temporary.

The given definition, where temporal non-definedness is the fundamental characteristic of temporary use, has also been taken over by other researchers (Németh, Langhorst, 2014), which indicates the appropriateness of the definition.

Various definitions of “temporariness” have been presented, it is, however, much more difficult to determine and explain the concept of the “purpose” of temporary use of space. The initiator might wish to carry out a project that would last for as long as possible, hoping it could become permanent, yet due to certain circumstances, such as say property owner’s different wish, this does not become a reality. We can thus conclude from this the interpretation of temporary use often depends on the perspective or the position in which the participants find themselves. What needs to be added to the definition designed by Bishop and Williams (2012) is temporariness can also be defined with the conclusion of a formal agreement, where the purpose of temporary use of space is clearly defined among all involved in the process. A use of space is thus temporary when the agreement is based on temporariness; in case permanent use is defined in the contract we can no longer speak about temporary use.

3. URNAN WASTELANDS

New urban wastelands are continually developing in European cities as side effects of economic, technological and political changes. (Hentilä, Lindborg, 2003: 1). These abandoned industrial zones or former traffic nodes (railways, harbours) were typically built in the late 19th or in the early 20th century to the fringe of old city centres. The combination of low estate values with high potential land rents have turned these “urban wastelands” to important scenes of urban transformation. Residual spaces, especially those at strategic locations, generally very quickly recover as they attract investors who use them for commercial or housing purposes, while other areas can remain vacant for years, say Hentilä and Lindborg, (2003) emphasising in addition: “These areas turn to potential places for temporary ‘lower secondary uses’ since no ‘primary higher uses’ are attracted of them” (Hentilä, Lindborg, 2003: 1). The factors creating temporal gaps and in consequence “urban wastelands” are delays in political decision making and in planning processes, lengthy and unclear planning processes and rules, weak demand in the local estate market, unclear ownership or exceptionally high construction costs caused by soil contamination and massive old infrastructures, as further highlighted by Hentilä and Lindborg (2003).
The duration and the extent of the time gap depend on the economic and social situation of the concrete site in which certain spatial vacuum appears. A closer insight into derelict areas in the city, such as in the case of the former Rog factory in Ljubljana, shows in absence of economic development an area can develop into new forms of alternative culture and simultaneously allow the development of new forms of co-existence.

After several years of solitariness the abandoned factory Rog, a building protected as cultural heritage, revived through diverse activist, cultural and educational activities of indigenous social initiatives, which created their premises in the abandoned factory. At squatting the abandoned factory the users started from the need for establishing common or autonomous spaces that should be outside the relation between the public and the private, where all who are co-managing the space define the rules of joint action” (Kurnik, Beznec, 2009). A shared space has emerged that reaches beyond the logic of exclusion and control and allows the development of non-commercial activity (Kurnik, Beznec, 2009).

One of the possible forms of temporary use has been presented. The latter namely appears in most diverse forms and comprises a wide range of contents. Temporary users exploit urban wastelands or brownfield sites in urban areas as refuge or as development incubator for the assertion of their ideas. In this way diverse, in most cases mixed uses of space develop. The most often temporary uses of residual urban areas are related to youth culture (e.g. music, clubs, etc.), the world of art, spare time / sport, start-up enterprises, alternative cultural practices, educational, migrant, and social contents. In all cases abandoned and vacant spaces become research areas for a new kind of activities where it is possible to test various activities with low financial input and low risk. These experiments can also fail, or they can develop into successful content proposals. In such cases temporary use of space becomes the starting point for a new type of activities. In these areas topical events are produced in popular culture, in art, and in new media. Although led with extremely low budgets, they become very important scenes of cultural production of the city.

4. TEMPORARY USE AS A MEANS OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND URBAN REVITALIZATION

4.1 Facilitating urban change

Examples of good practice, such as the Onkraj gradbišča [Beyond the Building Site] project in Ljubljana prove temporary use can become important for testing urban development planning ideas in situations for which a high degree of uncertainty is characteristic. “With the assistance of provisional solutions a poorly defined problem can develop into a clearly defined one” (Havemann, Schild, 2007: 54). In 2010, in cooperation with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and with other persons interested, the initiators changed the long closed building site at Resljeva ulica in Ljubljana into community space intended for gardens, socialising, education, and culture. From a symptom of real estate speculation the large construction pit in the middle of residential neighbourhood transformed into a space that implements and promotes the process of rehabilitation and revitalisation of brownfield sites in urban areas (and not the final solution), and more active role of the population in governing and co-governing the city.

4.2 Economic effects of temporary use

Temporary use represents a cheap measure both for owners of property as well as for city administration, as the majority of the cost for tools, renewal, work, and risk is covered by temporary users (Urban Pioneers, 2007). In their introductory study of temporary use in Berlin the group Urban Catalysts presented convincing economic benefits for the owners of property whose assets momentarily have no market value, showing temporary use has the potential to “raise the value of their property, improve its image, and attract more potential tenants” (Urban Pioneers, 2007: 37). Minimum rent allows temporary users to launch their ideas and create incubators of various contents with the aim of transforming non-formal modes into occupational and permanent activities (Urban Pioneers, 2007). Temporary uses increase social and economic diversity, because they give space to experimentation and create hybrids between culture and economy. This is especially important at the time when new, economic activities are developing that are more oriented into solidarity and community such as cooperatives and other similar forms of social economy.

4.3 Social and cultural aspects of temporary use

At the time of temporary use with their activities, programmes, and services temporary users provide various cultural-artistic and social contents that represent an important element of non-material urban cultural capital. At the same time processes of gentrification and touristification appear on the revitalised brownfield sites in urban areas. On the example of Rog factory Uršič (2011:8-9) highlights “revitalisation should therefore not primarily be used solely as renewal that will increase the attractiveness of the city centre, but as a form of densification of various social and cultural roles, events, meetings, information, people.” In this capital sees raw material for the valorisation and profit and can, in this way, “through investment ruin the lively activity of autonomous social networks” (Kurnik, 2010).

In this context temporary use of space is defined as an increasingly relevant topic for the development of forms of urban regeneration based on alternative principles of functioning and on different agents of urban transformation. It is about functioning to which community practices that endeavour for “public good” in space award meaning and not practices that intervene in the space because of individual interests for commodification and profitability of space. In this sense also the actors are “different”; because they are not driven by the tendency for earnings; these are largely more or less spontaneous project groups of creative people who temporarily join in a space to express their cultural, artistic, political, and social creed. From this follows that temporary use of space contributes to the revitalisation of brownfield sites in urban areas and simultaneously it contributes to social and cultural capital of the city and to its sustainable development.
5. Conclusion

Temporary use of space can function as a catalyst for long-term sustainable development of urban space. As Kees Kees Christiaanse explains in the introductory chapter of the work Urban Catalyst, “now informal uses are increasingly accepted as a precious indicator of potential growth. Temporary use can give impetus to new developments and influence their urban quality. This is nowhere more relevant than in urban wastelands and in other residual spaces where traditional developmental methods have failed. High construction cost, frequently resistance of public against homogeneous mass investment projects, lengthy planning procedures and strict regulation, uncertainty and risk associated with defining programmes of use at the time of economic and social change, insufficiency of municipality budgets for subventions to such developments, and – most of all – low and even declining investment in many cities have left many spaces vacant (Ostwald, Overmeyer, Misselwitz, 2013: 5).

Besides, temporary use represents inventive recycling of space and the development of the principle of arranging built environment, which for a city is a more efficacious principle than leaving areas to predesigned massive megaprojects. Reuse of vacant urban areas contributes to more efficient use of space in the city and carries the potential for a reasonable assessment of long-term potential development of these areas. Temporary uses can namely have strong impact on future plans for a definite space, if in this way the area, we previously held to be derelict and non-functional, is revitalised and its potential is presented in the range of options which we otherwise might never have even thought of. Here we can once more highlight the case of the project Onkraj gradbišča, because in it a construction pit in the middle of Ljubljana turned into an urban garden.

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