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# Temporary uses / Pop-up spaces

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**Abstract.** The traditional way of urban planning the city is often too slow to meet the quick changes in the needs and behaviour of inhabitants, which are occurring much faster than in the past. Cities' layouts change accordingly, with the consequence that many buildings and infrastructures remain under-used or empty since they are no longer able to fit the needs of their users. From a spatial planning perspective, abandoned or underused buildings are considered the most valid alternative for cities to thrive without consuming a large amount of virgin soil, a finite resource. However, reuse practices are often at odds with economic, political and technical barriers that may prevent the transformation. Temporary uses can represent a lever in this perspective, giving citizens and communities the opportunity to affirm their right to participate in city life through proximity activism. In addition, the implementation of pop-up environments for temporary developments represents a possible solution to meet a city's needs of flexibility, adaptation, and resilience. Pop-up spaces can be seen as forms of spatial and social innovation, allowing new actors to contribute to urban transformation, giving a voice to groups of people who would otherwise be invisible. Pop-up environments inside empty buildings have allowed citizens to appropriate these spaces for the creation of places for productivity and work, as well as for artistic and cultural events.

**Keywords:** Temporary uses; Pop-up; Urban regeneration.

## 1. Temporary uses

Urban strategies have changed throughout history, changing the way cities are planned. Contemporary cities are increasingly subject to transformations. Social needs, citizens' behaviour and innovation in technologies evolve over time and cities' configuration change accordingly, with the consequence that many buildings and infrastructures remain under-used or empty since they are no longer able to fit the needs of their users. The spatial planning approach should be able to provide, among others, strategies, and tools for implementing adaptive actions so that cities can adapt to change and create resilient communities [1]. One starting point for examining adaptive actions from the perspective of spatial planning is considering abandoned or under-used buildings as the most valid alternative for cities to thrive without consuming a large amount of virgin soil. It also addresses the global challenge of resource scarcity, supporting one of the main environmental challenges at European level; it contributes to solving the global problem of land degradation and consumption which may impact on the increase of natural disasters and social issues such as migration. Land is indeed a finite resource, and it is consumed due to many human activities such as urbanisation and the creation of new infrastructures that should meet the increasing demand of people to live in urban areas. It is estimated that over 500 km<sup>2</sup> of agriculture or natural land disappear every year in the EU, as it is converted into artificial areas,<sup>1</sup> and both Europe and the United Nations have encouraged Member States to achieve "no net land take" by 2050, meaning that regeneration practices have to be developed, focusing more on the rehabilitation and adaptation of the existing built environment rather than on new constructions. Moreover, adaptive actions are considered of key importance for urban systems in the transition towards

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index_en.htm)

the new paradigm of sustainable circular cities [1] that is gaining momentum in the European scenario with many cities embracing the circular economy challenge [2].

However, reuse practices often are at odds with economic, political and technical barriers that may prevent transformation [3] and temporary uses can represent a lever in this perspective; the temporary and reversible nature of the transformation can also help in the celerity of execution and in testing the transformation's effectiveness, bypassing administrative procedures that can be shorter, especially if compared to the demolition and reconstruction process [4].

In addition, the reuse of existing properties through temporary activities offers the opportunity for citizens and communities to affirm their right to participate in city life through proximity activism. Reuse, especially temporary reuse, is also used with the aim to explore the different opportunities that the building or the site can offer by using them in different way and involving different actors such as activists, a government, or by creative practitioners seeking affordable work spaces. Temporary uses can also be seen as an opportunity for users to show alternatives to demolition, by protesting against pending demolition acts

Reuse and temporary reuse offer the possibility of transforming and reinventing the city according to specific desires and through forms of social and civic activism. The temporary status of migrants often limits their mobility and restrains their access to public spaces, also influencing the way they live urban spaces [5]. These challenges aside, migration can be seen as a driver for regeneration processes, especially in areas that suffer from population decline like the rural ones [6]. In the framework of RURITAGE project<sup>2</sup>, it is possible to find an example of how the adaptive reuse of buildings has enabled migrants to join the local community, fostering integration and the creation of an inclusive society. The "role-model" identified by the project is the initiative undertaken by PIAM Onlus, an NGO working in Italy's Asti province to integrate migrants into society. In 2014, the Prefecture of Asti requested an increasing number of hospitality structures for migrants in order to tackle an emergency situation. PIAM Onlus, in cooperation with the COALA Consortium, obtained permission to host foreigners in the historic building of Villa Quagliana, an ancient villa owned by Oblates of St. Joseph, located in Asti countryside and semi-abandoned for some years. Migrants have been involved in the restoration works and the renovation has made it possible to host 45 migrants, with the creation of guest rooms and more flexible spaces for the organisation of various events such as conferences, film screenings and parties. Regeneration practices in the local area include other heritage-based activities which have seen migrants fully integrate into the local community. The cultivation of ancient grains and distribution across the territory have fostered relationships with local farmers, while the recovery of an old vineyard and its cultivation has involved a collaboration with oenologists who have trained migrants for this purpose. This has led to the creation of a migrant-ethnic cuisine catering initiative that is still ongoing in the province.

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<sup>2</sup> The European project "RURITAGE: Rural regeneration through systemic heritage-led strategies" has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 776465. [www.ruritage.eu](http://www.ruritage.eu)

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## 2. Pop-up spaces

Besides the needs to plan future urban scenarios and enact building and technical regulations in order to improve citizens' quality of life and urban quality, technological innovation now affects the way people live within the city, with the emergence of new infrastructure, new land use and new space availability. The traditional way of urban planning is often too slow to meet the quick changes in the needs and behaviour of inhabitants, which are occurring much faster than in the past. In this context, the implementation of pop-up environments for temporary developments could be a solution to meet a city's needs of flexibility, adaptation, and resilience [1].

A pop-up environment can be intended as a type of construction that due to characteristics such as lightweight technologies and fast and easy assembly/disassembly operations, occupies the ground only temporarily, being adaptable to different uses and target groups thanks to its flexible structures. Reversibility, adaptive reuse and recyclability of units and components are key criteria for the transition from a linear model of consumption and production to the circular economy one. Focusing on this latter, its basic principles consist in designing out the concept of waste and keeping materials and resources in the economic system as long as possible and at their higher value. If these principles are applied to adaptive reuse and recyclability of components, there are advantages in terms of celerity and affordability that would not normally be achieved with a traditional permanent design, whilst reducing construction waste [2]. In this respect, pop-up environments are associated to circular economy principles and many cities have experienced them on their pathways to reaching the status of circular cities, since they represent a demonstration of how cities can improve their adaptive capacity fostering reuse and recycling opportunities [3]. Pop-up places demonstrate the flexibility of urban sites, suggesting they can be continuously transformed by different temporary uses. In general, pop-ups produce removable and mobile places, able to relocate in a short time and adapt to new sites [4]. The PLACE/Ladywell pop-up is a concrete example of the application of the London Circular Economy route map in the construction sector. Lewisham Council, with support of the Mayor of London, funded a project that enabled the reuse of the former Ladywell Leisure Centre, which was demolished in 2014 and left vacant. The project consisted of creating buildings in which the upper floors are temporary houses managed by Lewisham Council while the ground floors offer affordable mixed-use spaces for local start-ups and entrepreneurs. The temporary housing development will remain on site for between 1-4 years, providing 24 homes for local people, thereby

contributing to solving the housing crisis in London. In addition, all units exceed the current standard space requirements by 10%, helping the council to meet an existing shortfall in high quality temporary and two-bed accommodation while long term regeneration plans are being developed. PLACE/Ladywell has been constructed with prefabricated and modular cells that can be dismantled and moved to another location within the borough after several years on site.

Pop-up spaces are experimental sites and can be seen as forms of spatial and social innovation, allowing new actors to contribute to urban transformation. In this respect, temporary transformation can give a voice to groups of people who would otherwise be invisible, even if engaging the social dimension with this kind of temporary use is not easy to achieve. However, it can be seen as a driver for social inclusion since pop-up spaces often show the real needs of communities, triggering the public debate and allowing the people involved in the temporary use project to become or return to be part of society. In addition, volunteers that might participate in the projects can become social innovators by committing their time and energy [5]. Moreover, the positive impacts that pop-up environments have brought to cities can be seen from various perspectives. First, the uniqueness of the place, a social-spatial innovation with the interesting combination between the design and the actors that managed to create it. Second, the benefits such as social cohesion and the place-related economic impact generated with the establishment of new hubs and leisure functions. Third, the difference and variation that these types of places would bring to the urban environment, providing new possibilities, dynamism and controversy which are valuable for the city [6]. Pop-up environments inside empty buildings have allowed citizens to appropriate these spaces for the creation of productivity and work places, as well as for artistic and cultural events. In addition, not often are pop-up spaces born in vacant spaces but the way in which pop-up identifies vacancy relies upon a normative approach. Indeed, spaces of transgression or spaces for marginalised social groups are not recognised when spaces are designated as empty and are ready for pop-up experiments.

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