

D6.9 Policy roundtable (report)

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Persons and Beneficiary responsible for the deliverable	Antonio Vercellone (UNITO – until June 21), Patrizia di Monte (PDIMONTE) Verena Lenna (CLTB)
Reviewers	Ugo Mattei (UNITO) and Alessandra Quarta (UNITO),
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v.01	December 2020	Organization of the International Conference of Urban Commons and definition of temporary uses as policy roundtable	UNITO, PDIMONTE
v.02	March 2021	Identification of the speakers	UNITO, PDIMONTE, CLTB
v.03	June 2021	Presentation of the contributions	UNITO
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The gE.CO project organized a round table devoted to the topic of temporary uses which is one of the main axes of the project. A specific set of tools will be prepared to enable the regeneration of abandoned area or buildings. In order to provide policy inputs to EU public administrations, some theoretical profiles of temporary uses needed to be clarified, since different definitions and approaches exist among professionals and practitioners directly involved in this field. The round table has been hosted by the International Conference of Urban Commons, which took place in Turin on the 21st and 22nd of June 2021. During the round table three experiences of temporary uses in Europe were presented and discussed in order to isolate a common core of practices and meanings.

The first experience has been presented by Lorenza Manfredi, an architect who presented the Case of RAW Gelände in Berlin. The speaker highlighted the importance of temporary uses in the development of modern Berlin. In fact, since the Fall of the Wall, Berlin is perceived as a city where an emancipated diversity of citizens' initiatives can shape urban space. This idea originated through temporary appropriations that flourished thanks to the abundance of urban voids in the 90s. Some of them have become established in the city and have survived despite the recent growth of Berlin, that meant increased competition for available land. RAW Gelände is an area of 71,000 square metres whose disposal after German reunification has favoured interim uses. In spite of the various hiccups of the property assets and the difficulties of organizing and communicating following a democratic ideal between different groups with often mismatched objectives, a rich offer of social and cultural activities has developed in the area that became a key location for the whole neighbourhood.

The players on the site were confronted with a journey that has now lasted more than 20 years, without having been able to secure ownership of the area. Following the wake of large projects developed in the surroundings in recent times (Mercedes Platz, Zalando offices, Amazon tower among others) also RAW Gelände, that in 2015 went through another change of ownership, should be now developed and built. Thanks to the accumulations of competences of the actors, the public attention and the mediation and support of institutions at a local level, the owners started a dialogue process and finally the users were able to assert their proposals for some of the buildings - the *soziokulturelle L* - at the cost of an increase in building volume in the remaining area. A contradictory process that shows us the difficulties of maintaining spaces for the common good in central areas of Europe's largest cities, and the importance of temporary uses.

The second experience that was presented is titled "Active Ground Floors" and is based in Greece. Maria Xanthopoulou narrates a project placed in Thessaloniki, inside a very distinct neighbourhood, in the west part of the city centre. The thing that characterizes this place is the social, economic and urban degradation and the big number of void and no operative ground floor spaces. In the field study carried out by the speaker before enacting the project emerged that a big number of informal local communities were active in the neighbourhood. The typology of buildings in this area, are the classic Greek "polykatoikies" from the 60's and 70's that combines housing in the upper floors and commercial uses in the ground floor. However, last decade the impact of economic crisis left that part of the ground floors empty, locked and without any aspect of urban life. The main idea of the project is to convert these places into urban commons, and to involve the local citizens in this idea and start using them. With a variety of proposals for alternative uses, it promotes sharing, collaboration and participation that will build new relationships, networks, empowerment, inclusion, solidarity. To apply this change a number of steps, is planned, that will establish a partnership between the private owners of the ground floors and the financier of the project (city municipality or other public institution). The design proposals and the interventions proposed are all temporary, so as to return the space in its first condition by the end of the program.

The last contribution to the debate was presented by Nicola Marzot, a urban planner who talked about the relationship between temporary uses and planning law.



According to the speaker, vacant buildings and waiting lands are the unavoidable premises of any regeneration process, whose ambition is to give them a second life cycle, preventing their disposal, willing to involve unconventional actors. By pursuing this twofold goal, practitioners are encountering in their daily practice a considerable resistance, when not an explicit opposition, expressed by the planning law procedures as well as applications.

Social Ontology, especially in the speculative field inaugurated by the New Realism, considers the latter aspect as taken for granted, since it presumes the above-mentioned experimental practices pertain to the domain of the social reality, i.e., they do operate within its institutive and regulative set of principles and rules, based on a widely-accepted consensus.

In his speech, the contributor demonstrates the prejudicial character of this assumption. According to his view, it completely underestimates the specific character of the abandoned buildings as well as the unprecedented attitude of regeneration process themselves. In fact, while, not surprisingly, vacancies can temporarily affect the real estate market, being part of the physiology of the urban change, the brownfield appearance manifests the completion of the city life cycle, i.e., the crisis of its project, making suddenly explicit the pathological nature of the urban change, which is going on. Coherently, the reclamation process assumes the characters of a political act versus the pre-existing conditions. A critical reflection on inhabited buildings and areas bring therefore to reconsider the role of the legislation in the management of the city, and then explains the innovative role of “temporary use” occurrence in the regeneration process. With this respect, the speaker highlights the role of temporary uses in reshaping cities in the Italian Region Emilia Romagna, where one of the first legislation in Europe on this topic was in fact enacted.

The three contributions permitted to achieve a common unique definition of temporary uses which is generally a polysemic expression. With temporary uses, we intend the temporary assignment of an urban void to a community of citizens, which manage it and use it during the time needed to implement its regeneration and development. Temporary uses are generally applied to public spaces or to private spaces waiting to change their urban destination, during the process needed for projecting, proceeding and executing the bureaucracy and works needed to renovate the building. These procedures may last several years, during which the building normally remains abandoned. This is be rather irrational, since, on the one hand, such an abandonment may rise the costs of renovation, because of the lack of maintenance over time, while, on the other, the building could serve temporary needs of local communities, often searching for spaces to carry out social activities. This is where temporary uses come into place: allowing, on the one hand, the public administration not to lead to the abandonment a building which is undergoing a process of regeneration and, on the other, communities to carry out activities bearing a social value.

It should be said that the experience of temporary uses is quite new in the European dimension and the it does not bear a unitary legal framework. A part from some experiences where temporary uses have been developed in the form of local public policies, they are usually implemented through the creative use of administrative practice by public administrations with reference to specific projects.

The discussion emerged in the round table lifted the following conclusions:

- Temporary uses are a very efficient and effective way to fulfil two different needs: the one of not turning (or maintain) buildings into urban voids during the time needed to implement their renovation and the one of social communities to find spaces to carry out social activities.
- By this way, the whole urban area gets regenerated and benefits from the temporary use of the spaces in the neighbourhood.



- Temporary uses can also be used as a part of the regeneration process of the building, being living experimentation of the future final use or creative practical labs where citizens and public administrations, making use of the space, can co-design its final renovation project.
- Where temporary uses are in place, they amount to a best practice and are very effective in promoting the social use of spaces, preventing their abandonment and helping the process of regeneration of the building and of the whole area.
- The diffusion of temporary uses is very much prevented by the lack of administrative culture on the matter, as well as by legal issues.
- Legal issues: Not only all the European legal systems lack of a comprehensive discipline on temporary uses (the few existing legal disciplines being of a local nature), but the current legal system often results in preventing the adoption of this tool. In fact, the temporary nature of the assignment, the idea of direct participation of communities, the difficulties to assign liability, risks and costs, are all elements somewhat clashing with the current very rigid understanding of the legal regime governing urban areas.
- Administrative culture: the practice shows that where these legal difficulties are overcome, it is because of a strong administrative culture and political will helping these initiatives to spread. The result of the discussion shows that the enactment of offices of temporary uses within municipalities, namely administrative bodies specifically dedicated to it, may promote the culture of temporary uses within the administration (which may focus on the technicalities needed to implement them) as well as among communities, which will have a specific interlocutor to relate to implement and promote their projects. The diffusion of these offices is fundamental not only for experimenting the use of temporary uses at a local scale, but also to build the necessary know-how to improve the legislation in order to set forth the condition for their wide-spread at the European dimension.

