



**Living Landscapes - Landscapes for living
Paesaggi Abitati
Conference Proceedings
Florence, February-June 2012**

Planum. The Journal of Urbanism, n. 27, vol.2/2013
www.planum.net | ISSN 1723-0993
Proceedings published in October 2013

Time and Regeneration: Temporary Reuse in Lost Spaces

Flavia De Girolamo

Dipartimento DATA, Sapienza Università di Roma
flavia.degirolamo@uniroma1.it
m: (+39) 339 8859947

In the current framework of digital technologies for architecture and urban design, the following essay questions the figure of the designer as promoter of environmental contents in order to trigger spatial inclusion and awareness to enhance resilience and livability in contemporary cities. The curator is a facilitator of complex processes of transformation and regeneration who rises territorial issues carefully selecting narratives (data) and geographies (places) as common playground for the improvement of the urban performance. The design strategy proposed under these conditions, interprets the city as a spatial agenda that interweaves sources, resources and agents for a more proficient use of the available space, especially the one not conceptualized or leftover. The project becomes then a chronography of the different tempi of the places, allowing multiple scenarios of use and conversion of chosen locations coupled with physical operation of landscape design and territorial transformation.

Introduction

Many researches have been carried out with regard to the debate on the contemporary public spaces. Most of them have paid attention to the under managed spaces, focusing the discussion on the causes and origins of the phenomenon.

As a result, the literature on this kind of spaces is rich and many authors (Boeri, 1996; Louikatos-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998; Pagano & Bowman, 2000; Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Nielsen, 2002; Clement, 2005; Groth & Corjin, 2005; Franck & Stevens, 2007; Forni, 2010; Trancik, 1986) described these spaces with several interpretations which produce, as a result, semantic confusion. However, this literature does not capture one of the main topics that characterize the dynamism of the contemporary city and the essential transience of urban life: the temporariness. Against this background, the purpose of this research is to answer the research question: “How can temporariness become an opportunity for the regeneration of under managed spaces?”

More specifically, this research has two objectives as follows:

1. To analyze the under managed spaces in a new perspective through the interpretation of temporariness (or of the temporariness concept) in the contemporary city;
2. To verify that temporary and impermanent uses can be an incentive to a bottom-up urban regeneration process.

The paper has been divided into three parts. Firstly, it reviews the literature relevant to under managed spaces in order to set the background within which the subject is explored and report on the state of the art. Secondly, a new theoretical definition of such areas is discussed. Thirdly, the paper presents an overview of particularly interesting examples of uses and practices by means of some case studies so as to highlight the flourishing of temporary urbanism.

Under Managed Spaces: A Theoretical Approach

Since 1986, when for the first time Trancik studied a particular kind of under managed spaces (Carmona, 2010), the so-called lost space, many researches started to deepen the subject and provided many definitions and suggested several interpretations such as loose, liminal, vacant, in-between, transitional, indeterminated, free, neglected spaces.

In most cases, while adding some slight semantic differences, these definitions have contributed to increase confusion about the subject. At the same time, these definitions have touched upon the details and, in some ways, have considered only the causes and changes at the basis of the phenomenon.

However, emphasis should be placed not only on the causes which generate lost spaces. Following this extensive analysis of the causes, it is now useful to focus on what can be made of such spaces, namely their potentials and opportunities for regeneration they offer to the contemporary city.

In this first part, the contribution aims at identifying the multifarious definitions and at organizing them so that they can be better understood in relation to the research's hypothesis.

A huge literature exists around the physical decline of spaces and various authors have discussed the problem of under managed spaces.

Trancik first used the term lost spaces to describe «spaces that are in need of re design, anti-spaces, making no positive contribution to the surrounds or users» (Trancik, 1986; p. 3); examples of lost spaces are:

«the base of high-rise towers or unused sunken plazas, parking lots, the edges of freeway, that nobody cares about maintaining, abandoned waterfronts, train yards, vacated military sites, and industrial complexes, deteriorated parks and marginal public-housing projects». (Trancik, 1986; p. 3)





Figure 1 | Rome: an example of lost space

He tried to explore the origin of this phenomenon and, under a postmodernist point of view, restricted the causes to urban renewal practices, the system of mobility centred on cars, the privatization of public space and the dominance of private over public interests, the functional separation of uses (zoning policies) and to the effects of the Modern Movement in architectural design. Trancik underlined how all these causes involved in the loss of values and meanings were traditionally associated with urban open space, generating this kind of contemporary spaces.

Loukaitou-Sideris, instead, in 1996 described this kind of spaces as a crack in the city, because they correspond to «in-between spaces, residual, under-utilised and often deteriorating (...) where abandonment and deterioration have filled vacant space with trash and human waste» (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996; p. 91).

The concept of loss was deeply analysed by Franck and Stevens (2006). Referring to a concept developed by Sommer (1974), Franck and Stevens applied the cognitive category of looseness to urban public spaces, defining tight spaces as allowing a type of regular, granted and planned use, and loose spaces offering possibilities for different activities, unrelated to the original designed purpose for a particular space.

This interpretation introduces the social actors and users and suggests a reflection on the action. «It's people's actions which make a space loose, with or without official sanction and with or without physical features that support those actions.»(Franck, Stevens, 2006; p. 2)

There are so many hidden and silent practices in these spaces. In found public spaces (traditional, opposite of loose) people live with a spatial control. The action is regulated by rules and behaviours. Actually, in loose spaces people relax, observe, buy or sell, protest and celebrate, even without a permission. It happens because «loose spaces allow the spontaneous events and practices»(Franck, Stevens, 2006; p. 94). These are spaces offering location for activities that make a public space a loose space.

The dichotomy between action and inaction evolves in the relation between formal and informal, which is strictly connected to the formal and the informal use of space.

«Viewing looseness as a dialectical process reveals its development through tensions: between intended and established activities, rules and meanings and those that are unanticipated and may create conflict. Loose use of urban space often

shows people's conscious reaction against rules, expectations and constraints.» (Franck, Stevens, 2006; p. 26).

Accordingly, Pagano and Bowman (2000) described the looseness of vacant land as environmentally contaminated land, trashed lots and abandoned buildings:

«the common designation of vacant land often refers to many different types of unutilized or underutilized parcels - perimeter agricultural or uncultivated land; recently razed land; derelict land; land with abandoned buildings and structures; brownfields; green-fields» (Pagano, Bowman, 2000; p. 2);

they argued that the blame for creating vacant land lies squarely with the influence of market forces (what kind of tax this spaces rely on, whether property, sales, or income).

However, not all authors are critical of these under managed spaces; for example, Hajer and Reijndorp when describing the in-between spaces, Clement in defining the *délaissé* and Worpole and Knox introducing the slack spaces, claimed that this kind of urban spaces «can also act to bring together disparate activities, occupiers and characters in a manner that creates valuable exchanges and connections» (Carmona, 2010; p. 44).

Year	Author	Definition
1974	Sommer	Tight Space, Hard Space
1986	Trancik	Lost Space
1996	Loukaitou-Sideris	Cracks in the City
1996	Solà-Morales	Terrain Vague
2000	Pagano & Bowman	Vacant Land
2001	Hajer & Reijndorp	In Between Space
2002	Nielsen	Superflous Landscape
2003	La Varra	Post-it City
2005	Clément	Délaissé
2005	Groth, Corjin	Indetermined Space
2007	Worpole & Knox	Slack Space
2007	Franck & Stevens	Loose Space

Table 1 | An overview on under managed spaces

Over time, the subject developed more tassonomic interpretations; many critical analysis elaborated within the French socio - anthropological researches (Augè, 2008, 2009) have contributed to increase the interest in under managed spaces.

Time And Space

These analyses need a broader definition of lost spaces in which some aspects that characterize this phenomenon in the contemporary city can be incorporated. For this reason, the present contribution introduces a new interpretative category for the description of the under managed spaces, *aree intervallo*, which attempts to analyse the phenomenon through a different point of lens. This idiomatic expression aims to combine the spatial and morphological aspect of the kind of space we are discussing with the temporariness concept; in fact, space and time are the key elements of the interpretation that is introduced here. Assuming the duality in space and time as essential, the research aims to analyse the transitional period between two stages: before and after the definitive transformation in something new (from under managed to over managed, from lost to found).

Referring to what the New York State Department (2009) defined as “opportunities waiting to happen”, lost spaces in the contemporary urban framework can be described as functionless and meaningless spaces: in other words, empty. This leads to the following hypothesis: if lost spaces are “holes” in the maps (Vasset, 2007), voids within the urban fabric empty of meaning, lacking clear functions, where time seems to have stood still, they are spaces which lie in wait for something. How can urban planning (formal or informal planning actions) approach this perspective? Maybe considering these spaces as opportunities that planning



has to recognize and develop, in an urban regeneration point of view. In urban planning and design there has been little analysis of this aspect; temporariness and impermanence are rarely viewed as key components of growth and regeneration.

The research analyses two gaps: the first between the time before and the time after the change and the second one between the spatial morphology and the functional standstill.

It's not about fear of empty spaces, *horror vacui* or pedantic need to design and fill the gaps in the city, but only a new way to take the contemporary opportunities.

Temporariness And Temporary (Re)Uses

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the main research question is: "how can temporariness become an opportunity for the regeneration of *aree intervallo*?" The term temporariness denotes a finite period of time with a defined beginning and a defined end; in this period some activities and some uses are performed. They can be formal or informal, legal or illegal, planned or unplanned. But all of them are impermanent.

«What are these spaces, locations and uses that are defined by temporality? Temporary spaces opened up by temporary projects, whether they are produced by economic or aesthetic, urban planning, cultural reasons or simply by a desire to use something. (...) They are not empty; they are screens onto which something is projected, but they already contained information beforehand. (...) The choice of locations is in part random and in part deliberate, but it has specific effects on these places.» (Haydin, Temel, 2007; p. 59)

From this specific point of view and referring to Bishop and Lesley (2012), Haydin and Temel (2007) and Inti (2011), it is possible to define three broad analytical categories to understand temporariness:

1. culture and counterculture;
2. activism and community use;
3. disorder and unrest.

The first category, culture and counterculture, refers to the creative uses of the space made by a new contemporary user of the under managed spaces; as Rodwin states, the *neo-bohemien* is linked to the creative milieu; he/she belongs to a cultural niche that uses, often by occupying, the under managed space, transforming it into his personal atelier. This emerging practice is changing the perception and the use of some derelict and vacant spaces, in terms of regeneration.

Some public policies are contributing to increase these urban, social and financial opportunities, because supporting arts and culture is supporting local economic and social redevelopment; the case of La Chapelle-Stalingrad in Paris is an example of collaboration between public administration and creative milieu.

La Chapelle-Stalingrad is located at the frontier of the 18th and 19th district, enclosed between Gare du Nord railways and Gare de l'Est ones. This neighborhood, even if it is a part of the central city, considered as an outlying area, was characterized by several empty and derelict spaces. Many of them were squatted and became a real problem for neighbors, authorities and landlords. However, some of the empty spaces were occupied by artists. In 2001 the public authorities (it is important to underline that in 2001 a political shift occurred at the Paris city council. After 25 years of conservatives supremacy, the new elected mayor, Bertrand Delanoé, was a member of the Socialist Party; this political turn was translated into a new urban policy) decided to make a deal with the creative milieu of the area through a specific agreement of temporary use. Non-profit organizations, NGOs and artists communities were authorized to settle down in the empty areas. The occupation, free of charge and legal, was established by a temporary-reuse contract. However, this is not the only example where the local authorities combined temporariness and regeneration. In London, where the slake space movement was born, the Art Council, the London Development Agency and the CIDA – Cultural Industries Development Agency aim to take the opportunities of the empty spaces for cultural and creative (re)uses. A similar experience is found in Amsterdam with the Bureau Broedplaatsen,

a public office that manages the empty, derelict, in-between spaces mapping so as to control the opportunities of temporary reuse contracts.

The same coordination practice exists in Germany involving cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, with the so-called Leerstand Melder. The research of Berlin's Urban Catalyst states that:

«The areas which defy market economy exploitation and are apparently left without any function are in fact a breeding ground for unexpected activities. Away from traditional social conventions, an enormous range of temporary reuses developed including vegetable gardens, leisure and sport facilities, youth and pop culture, shop and industry, inventors and business start up. Wasteland became a testing ground for new activities. (...) and the temporary reuse becomes a starting point for a new type of long-term use» (Urban Catalyst, 2007; p. 101).

The second category refers to activism and community uses. This kind of temporary uses is often promoted by associations, groups of citizens and local organizations in order to reuse little empty urban spaces. For example, community gardens and community recreation projects try to fulfill people's requirements and to compensate the lack of public services.

These bottom-up practices provide a catalyst for neighbourhood and community development, stimulate social interaction and create income opportunities and economic development.

For example, in New York City, since 1973, some self-organized neighbourhood groups have been creating areas for rest and recreation in neglected urban neighborhoods. When the tax crisis led New York City to urban decline, with consequent abandonment of large portions of public and private land characterized by drug and crime problems, a self-organized group called Green Guerrillas began cleaning up many empty properties on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and converting them into gardens. Other activists followed this practice in all of the city's five boroughs. In 1978 the city authorities launched the Operation Green Thumb; this contract leases spaces to community gardeners for one dollar per year provided that they recognize that the land belongs to the city and not to a specific owner or to them. Currently there are about 750 community gardens in New York City leased with temporary contracts.

Within the third category, disorder and unrest, squatting plays a key role. Squatting is a paradigmatic case of temporary reuse. The original purpose of this illegal and informal practice is bringing an empty space or building back into beneficial use. This use consists in an illegal occupation, a parasitical exploitation of a void. Squatting has a long history, especially in Germany. In Berlin, the city renewal programme (1964-1965) planned to demolish most of the nineteenth-century blocks. So, private owners did not repair and keep up their properties and left them vacant. As a consequence, in 1981 in Kreuzberg (west Berlin) there were about 150 squatted buildings. Moreover, there were destroyed structures after the Second War and the fall of the Berlin wall, like railway depots, stations and maintenance sites, disused docks and riverside areas, military training grounds, demolished house estate, the no-man's land along the wall. This circumstance, together with the economic and social transformation due to the reunification of East and West Berlin, encouraged «a significant counter flow of individuals who saw the potential of east Berlin with its cheap housing and vacant buildings as an ideal locality for a freer, less regulated lifestyle.» (Bishop, Lesley, 2012; p. 165). In this case, the boundary between permanent and impermanent uses or practices is very ephemeral: over the years, in some cases, squatters have become consolidated users of those spaces.

Another kind of protest and unrest uses in *aree intervallo* are the activities related to political actions. These practices aim to overthrow a condition and subvert a planned use. For example, occupations against an urban renewal project.

The theoretical approach discussed in this contribution, based on a new interpretative category for the description of contemporary under managed spaces, suggests a reflection on the role of time and space. The *aree intervallo* reveal a significant relation between space and time, offering a different way of interpreting



opportunities, which is too often disorganized.

However, it is necessary to bring more flexibility into the planning system, which sometimes designs great strategic plans but leaves some areas «in a curious limbo while they are being prepared» (Bishop, Lesley, 2012; p. 19). Urban planning has the key to take the opportunities waiting to happen. And if temporary reuse was the key?

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