

Temporary use defines the city

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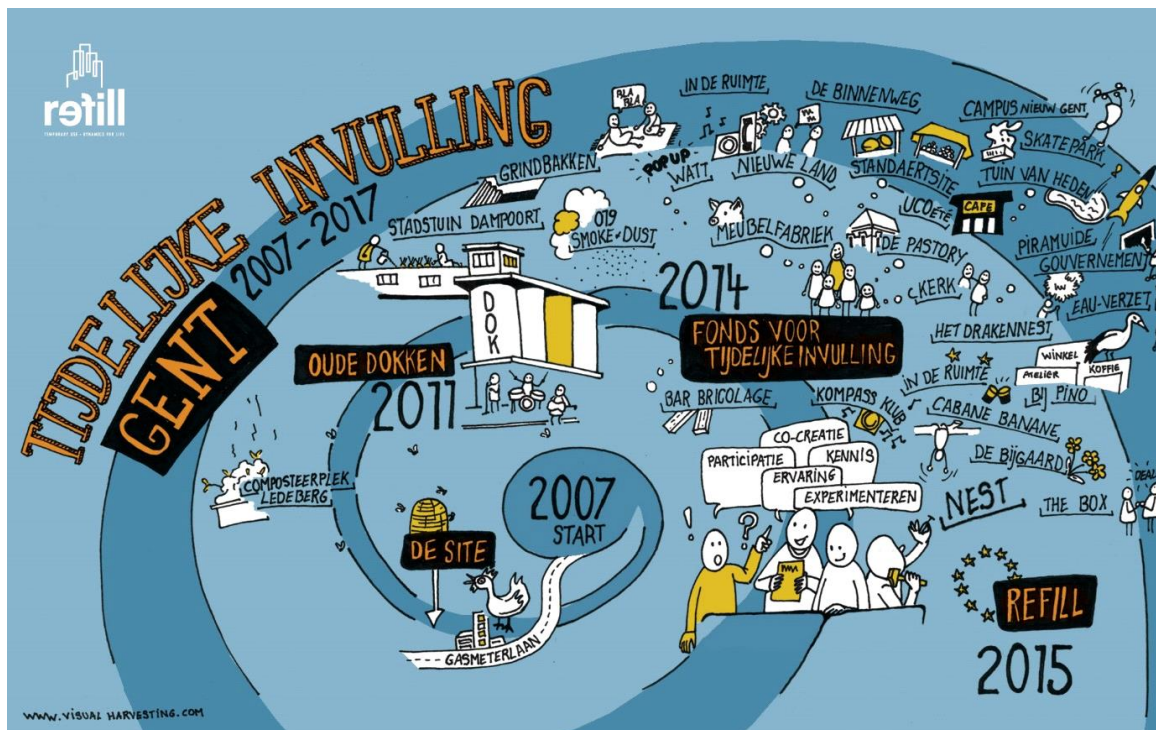
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## Introduction

Temporary use is hot. Over the past few years, citizens have “temporarily used” vacant spaces just about anywhere in Europe; from guerrilla gardening and protest picnics for a car-free city centre to artistic interventions and self-made leisure areas at brownfield sites and in abandoned buildings. Even though temporary use is not a new concept – itinerant markets, circuses, music and theatre festivals have been around for ages – the fact that it is now implemented as a flexible and strategic tool by governments and private developers is. In 2007, the City of Ghent jumped on the bandwagon. Based on the observation that citizen participation and co-creation are key to a high-quality and sustainable urban (regeneration) project and that the period between development and implementation of regeneration projects is often very long, the city decided to actively support citizens and organisations who (temporarily) use vacant buildings and brownfield sites.

The two first temporary use projects in Ghent almost instantly became iconic examples: *De Site* (2007-2017) in the Rabot district provided citizens with space and time to grow and play, and *DOK* (2010 – now) has transformed an unused harbour area located between Gent-Dampoort railway station and the Muide-Meulestede-Afrikalaan neighbourhood into a unique ‘wharf for leisure and creative manoeuvres’. Both projects received high praise as they specifically explored and revealed (the debate about) new possibilities (and boundaries) in terms of spatial quality, urban coexistence and local policies. With the *Temporary Use Fund* (2014), the City of Ghent wanted to continue to foster dynamism and innovation. The Fund annually distributes 300,000 euro to temporarily use “unused spaces from an economic, social, cultural and participative perspective”. In the meantime, the European Urbact programme *Refill* (2015-2018) has examined (1) how the municipal administration can share knowledge, experiences, challenges and tools both within and outside the city, (2) how the city can set the example in terms of sustainable development, and (3) how a more flexible governmental organisation can shape new connections, coalitions and an adequate legal framework.



Temporary use has exploded. Today, Ghent boasts no less than 22 temporary use projects, scattered across the city. Eight initiatives have finished. If you take a look at the [overview](#), you immediately notice their diversity and creativity. Thirty arts centres, urban gardens, meeting places and workshops have been opened within the scope of 'temporary use'. Although they are different in terms of history, duration and scope, they have all been established by committed and unique citizen groups and organisations who emphasise the importance of other types of connections between institutions, disciplines and industries. As opposed to many civil society players, citizens engaged in temporary use projects look beyond existing procedures and standards; they opt for alternative structures and methods to take matters into their own hands and secure a place in the societal debate and urban space. We see an important role here for the government, both now and in the future. The City of Ghent must stimulate this social renewal and change, without compromising the freedom of these innovative citizens' initiatives in terms of organisation and content. In addition, the city must monitor the challenges and precarious concerns (economic reality in our city, housing issues, access to public spaces, etc.) for which temporary use can serve as a forum and sustainable lever.

With this action plan, the Policy Participation department, who coordinates the temporary use projects, sets some important guidelines. In what follows, we take a quick look at our own experiences and the lessons learnt from the *Refill* project, before looking at the future. The ULG is the local group of temporary users who have met on a quarterly basis over the past three years to formulate actions, carry out pilot projects and draw conclusions. We distinguish two important forms of temporary use, each requiring a specific approach and toolbox: (1) temporary use as 'an incubator for creative minds and entrepreneurs' and (2) temporary use as a 'lab and catalyst for urban issues'.

## Temporary use at the crossroads of the present and the future

With these temporary use projects, the City of Ghent has opened up a complex and fascinating world. It is complex due to the large number of actors, interests and lines of reasoning at play and fascinating at the same time, as temporary use involves spaces that are (now) vacant and which (currently) offer numerous possibilities. The findings of the Policy Participation department are based on their own experiences (2007 – now). We summarise in three points how temporary use projects have challenged and reframed a number of self-evident assumptions and how they have led to surprising situations and contacts.

### 1. Actual co-creation

Temporary use projects revolve around actual co-creation, where the different parties are not limited to their knowledge of the neighbourhood and their direct experiences.

Within this scope, the City of Ghent takes up a ‘negotiating role’.

Entering into dialogue with all kinds of partners (citizens, organisations, etc.), the City examines the way in which a shared commitment concerning the temporary use of a certain space can take shape. Neighbourhood managers act as neutral mediators to clarify grey areas: all parties gain a better understanding of both citizens’ initiatives and urban requirements and can pursue the best compromise together. Thanks to their central role in the municipal organisation and their helicopter view (across different topics), they can leverage opportunities and make the necessary connections inside and outside the city.

### 2. Between hardware and software

Temporary use opens up other doors than urban development hardware. It acts as a mediator between “hard” (e.g. the economic sector) and “soft” (social work, education, healthcare, etc.) actors.

Many societal challenges such as poverty, integration, ecology and quality of life are complex and exceed specific sectors. They require an integrated, horizontal approach. Temporary use projects can offer small-scale solutions (e.g. a repair shop, culture participation, solidarity initiatives) and directly impact the many societal challenges (youth, poverty, integration, etc.) we are faced with. They mostly depend on the commitment of citizens, the community, etc. The methods these projects are based on are social and inclusive.

Economic start-ups are frequently looking for accessible and affordable space in the city. Temporary use can boost economic and social rehabilitation in the local community and at the same time give the neighbourhood a better image. The availability of affordable space attracts new initiatives and start-ups. Such initiatives reinforce one another, build partnerships and are an incubator for business ecosystems. These ecosystems create platforms to stimulate the local urban economy and to create new jobs in the city.

Temporary use creates new employment opportunities in the city. New entrepreneurs and start-ups involved in temporary use projects create job opportunities for several citizens, including employees with a lower degree or with other skills than the traditional job profiles in the centre of the city.

Temporary use projects also boost innovation and entrepreneurship by giving pioneers the space and a context to create, discover, experience and grow into a fully-fledged economic actor. The innovative character is often linked to the possibility to conduct experiments. Examples include: new forms of urban farming (rooftop gardening), experimentation with new technological applications (3D printing, apps), etc.

### **3. Temporary use as an essential part of a project process**

Temporary use provides a source of inspiration for (1) new collaboration projects and (2) the revision of programmes, equipment and management of urban regeneration projects.

(1) Cf. vital coalitions of Filip De Rynck. Vital coalitions between government bodies and citizens' initiatives are desired and are based on cooperation, partnership and agreements about the roles the government and citizens' initiatives play as well as regular assessment and adjustment of these agreements.

(2) Temporary use is not a form of emergency urbanism, it is not a band-aid solution. On the contrary, it is an innovative urban regeneration method – emergent urbanism – and thus forms a valuable component within the scope of urban regeneration projects.

The experience with temporary use shows us that it has become an integrated part of long-term planning, which provides opportunities to experiment with different functions, objectives and target groups. A temporary no man's land offers the possibility to create, explore and experience the city differently. Its temporary nature allows us to bypass the general rules applicable to the management and exploitation of 'normal' spaces. And this is how innovation is born. On temporary use sites, creative solutions can be tested.

Temporary use projects can create expectations for the future purpose of the site: it is important to preserve and consolidate the successful elements of the project. The challenge to consolidate the successful elements of temporary use projects is not so much to find a physical permanent space but rather to reinforce the network and the commitment that have resulted from the project. It is also important to make the expectations and objectives of the temporary use project explicit from the very beginning. This does not mean that the objectives cannot be changed throughout the project in response to new insights.

## **Lessons learnt from the European partnership "Refill"**

### **What is Refill? Why? Who?**

The City of Ghent has been experimenting with the temporary use of brownfield sites and empty buildings for over a decade – often in the context of urban regeneration projects. These urban regeneration projects usually take very long to get from the development to the implementation stage. That is why the City of Ghent encourages its inhabitants to use the sites and buildings in the meantime. This counters neglect, brings new dynamism to neighbourhoods and adds value to the city’s development. The two first temporary use projects in Ghent almost instantly became iconic examples: “De Site” (2007-2017) and “DOK” (2010 – now), which inspired many future temporary use initiatives scattered across Ghent (partly thanks to the Temporary Use Fund).

This increase in temporary use projects created a number of new challenges for the city: (1) how should the City support these initiatives, (2) how can we set the example in terms of sustainable development, and (3) how can we build new connections and coalitions and shape an adequate legal framework with a more flexible governmental organisation?

Within the Refill network, the City of Ghent shared its expertise on temporary use with 9 other European cities for two and a half years. The partnering cities were Nantes (France), Athens (Greece), Cluj-Napoca (Romania), Ostrava (Czech Republic), Poznań (Poland), Riga (Latvia), Helsinki (Finland), Bremen (Germany) and Amersfoort (the Netherlands). Ghent took care of the coordination of the network. The partnership lasted from 15 September 2015 until 3 May 2018.

The 10 partnering cities looked into the challenges concerning the participation and co-creation policy and developed a toolbox with supporting tools to facilitate temporary use in the European cities.

Refill was funded by the European Urbact programme. More information can be found on the website of Urbact: <http://urbact.eu/Refill>

## **Refill’s operating process**

In addition to sharing knowledge on a European level, Refill also created a broad learning network at a local level. This network included representatives of the Refill cities, coordinators of temporary use projects, project developers and political representatives (see members on page 16-17).

This local workgroup (Urbact Local Group - ULG) started the Refill journey with a SWOT analyses to determine the state of affairs of the Ghent policy on temporary use. Subsequently, they carried out a visionary exercise to create enthusiasm among the partners, identify a number of lessons learnt and launch improvement actions together. The 9 partnering cities visited Ghent. From an objective point of view, they emphasised our strengths and formulated recommendations to continue the learning process.

## **Local workgroup – Three pillars and a multitude of actions**

The local workgroup (ULG) focused on three pillars to **optimise the Ghent policy on Temporary Use:**

- *Diversification of the scope and offer:* cf. specific calls (target groups, topics, etc.) for a specific scope
- *Optimisation of partnerships:* (a) matching the supply and demand for space, (b) optimisation of the temporary use process (cf. manual), (c) communication
- *Embedment of temporary use as a laboratory:* (a) embedment of methods, (b) effect measurement, (c) development of a proper assessment tool

In addition, the ULG proposed an overall organisational shift. If we, as a city, want to partner with bottom-up temporary use projects, we must dare to question our own role, structure and decision-making processes. In a quickly changing society, we must develop into a more open and flexible organisation in order to remain as connected as possible with the living environment of citizens and to respond to changing needs and requirements.

The ULG proposed the following targets:

- Look for a more integrated and horizontal working method, setting aside restrictive rules and policies;
- Further develop the new role of 'official 2.0' based on the function of neighbourhood manager as a mediator (connector, networker, caretaker, somebody who thinks outside the box and who can feel the pulse of the city);
- Look for new coalitions with several municipal actors;
- Look for flexible rules aligned to the needs of society and legal frameworks supporting new initiatives instead of restricting them.
- Provide organisations with spaces where they can conduct trial-and-error experiments.

With these three pillars in mind, the ULG has proposed a number of actions within the scope of the Refill project and has organised actual exercises and experiments providing us with the necessary insights into future temporary use challenges over the past two and a half years.

Examples include:

- Pillar 1:

### **NEST as an experiment for creativity, cooperative and democratic management and a decision model**

Having moved its main municipal library to a new location, the City of Ghent and the departments involved were looking for a temporary purpose (8 months) for the old library building. Due to the central location in the city and the purpose of the building, preference was given to a single coordinator for the project who was willing to accommodate multiple initiatives in one large building and connect several types of activities. The temporary use of the library had to be a beacon of creativity, social innovation, an economic incubator and an employment opportunity. The multidisciplinary jury of the Temporary Use Fund, together with the Economy department, selected a suitable candidate. Experimentation with cooperative management and a democratic decision model were of crucial importance for the jury. The NEST survey at the end of the temporary use project (it eventually lasted 12 months) completed by 20 participating initiatives, has provided us with the necessary insights into the supporting role of the city in future temporary use projects. We will discuss this in detail later on.



- Pillar 2:

(a) Two **matchmaking** workshops were organised to connect suppliers of unused premises with demanders of space.

The first matchmaking event was a kind of fair where 150 potential initiatives were brought together within the scope of the temporary use project for the old library. This networking event, facilitated by the City, resulted in the submission of the NEST file and allowed each of the 150 participating initiatives to broaden their network as they met other applicants as well as the municipal departments involved.

A second successful experiment took place within the scope of the final Refill conference. This matchmaking event was aimed at the suppliers of unused premises and demanders of space. The Economy department facilitated several kinds of speed date sessions for 114 participants. The survey following the event pointed out that 72% of the attendants actually made a match.

The experience with both matchmaking events is excellent. It is a suitable tool to bring together new temporary users and to pursue our facilitating role with regard to new projects as a government.

The matchmaking tool can also be used to connect private property owners with temporary use candidates (see TOOL 2 “Match supply and demand”).



(b) The temporary use manual maps the process each temporary user has to go through when starting up their temporary use project. It was not the intention to oversimplify the process; the idea was to inventory all necessary steps and create a log with the right contacts and forms.



(c) Within the Refill project, a lot of attention has been paid to **communication and promotion of temporary use projects**.

Some examples include: a brochure on temporary use, an overview of all ongoing and finished temporary use projects on the City of Ghent’s website (these projects are also depicted on a digital map), communication in the



city magazine about several temporary use projects, articles in the magazine 'Lokaal' about the Refill project, about Ghent's temporary use policy and about NEST, a promotional video about temporary use in Ghent that can be used at international conferences, a digital record of several temporary use projects (e.g. the end of De Site, the experiment in NEST and the experience with other temporary projects).

- Pillar 3:

### **University research into the value of temporary use. How can we measure that value?**

A study conducted at the Catholic University of Leuven (KULeuven) developed a framework which makes it possible to assess the effects of temporary use. It is now important to practically implement this framework when evaluating temporary use projects. (see annex 1 – analytical framework for analysing sustainable co-creation of public outcomes and values)

## **Continued temporary use: recommendations and actions**

A decade of experimenting with temporary use in Ghent, two and a half years of knowledge exchange within Refill, and inspiration drawn from Europe have learnt us that temporary use can facilitate the pursuit of various objectives. It could be interesting for the city to make the different ambitions with regard to temporary use more explicit and implement them in a more conscious, pro-active and strategic manner (allow local residents to appropriate vacant spaces and create a new dynamism, try out innovative and economic initiatives and projects, create employment, dynamise dormant neighbourhoods and conduct experiments for slow and inclusive urban planning).

Overall, we can distinguish two types of temporary use in Ghent:

- temporary use as an 'incubator for creative minds and entrepreneurs'
- temporary use as a 'lab and catalyst for urban issues'

Both types are not mutually exclusive, but help to structure the complex temporary use landscape more clearly.

## 1. Temporary use as an ‘incubator for creative minds and entrepreneurs’

Ghent boasts countless creative people who want to give shape to the city. The numerous pioneers and bottom-up citizens' initiatives stimulate the transition in our society and co-create solutions for our city's societal challenges.

All this requires space. Unfortunately, space is becoming increasingly scarce and this poses a threat to the dynamism. The available space is often too expensive for new initiatives, creative minds and start-ups. As a result, the demand for temporary use of space is growing. The provision of space to innovative start-ups remains necessary to continue to ensure the dynamism in Ghent.

Many demanders of space are not primarily looking for a temporary use, but are satisfied with the time they are allowed to be in a building within the scope of temporary use, because it is often the only space allocated to them. It gives them the opportunity (space and time) to experiment, grow and professionalise. Once the temporary use has been discontinued, these initiatives are frequently looking for a new permanent space to continue their activities.

### Support tools

The city needs to take up a **(facilitating) role**. In other words: it needs to actively and permanently map vacant spaces and hidden spaces, actively trace unoccupied buildings, match supply and demand, ensure there is sufficient playtime and playroom, communicate clearly and constantly on the period of use, and provide follow-up (what happens after the temporary use?).

- **TOOL 1: trace and map vacant spaces, hidden spaces and unoccupied buildings**

Hidden spaces: many buildings feature empty or underused spaces. Think for instance of the plinth of an apartment block, empty flats, churches (cf. repurposing of 15 churches in Ghent), brownfields awaiting redevelopment, large buildings, shops, sheds or the space under viaducts.

*“RE-ST” defines the concept of ‘hidden spaces’ as the built or unbuilt space vaguely present on different scales which hovers between (re)development and nature restoration. Hidden spaces are spaces we have created but whose existence we are often no longer aware of. RE-ST will define various typologies of hidden space and investigate strategies for dealing with these spaces. You could call it a spatial waste policy. Cleaning up wasted space is the design challenge. By mapping the often invisible oversupply of space and raising awareness about it, they wish to contribute to the spatial policy pursued in Flanders.”*

One of the implications is that space is not put to optimum use. Think for example of corporate car parks, school buildings, offices and meeting rooms that are empty at night and on weekends. These underused spaces in our city also provide opportunities in terms of temporary, multifunctional and mixed use.

Vacant spaces: Although hidden spaces need to be actively traced and repurposed, not all spaces require development and some vacant spaces need to be left unplanned in the spatial planning context so that experiments are possible.

We argue that our city's spatial planning should be based on the principle of 'slow urbanism' according to which an area is left 'vacant' and a land-use plan and design are not immediately drawn up. In case such a 'vacant space' is provided when preparing structure plans for neighbourhoods, it will be given the necessary time (several years) to grow, making a participative and innovative spatial planning method possible. The positive effects of temporary use of vacant spaces can be integrated into the neighbourhood plans in the long term, giving rise to an organic form of district or city development.

Unoccupied buildings: the City of Ghent has developed a policy whereby unoccupied buildings are traced. We advocate active communication with the owners of empty properties as to the advantages of temporary use. These advantages include: prevention of squatting and vandalism, maintenance and creation of a positive image.

When the brochure on unoccupied buildings is reprinted, an article on the possibilities and advantages of temporary use will be added. The brochure concerning the 'temporary use policy in Ghent' drawn up within the context of Refill can be utilised for this purpose.

Communication should not only be targeted to individual owners of empty properties, but also to project developers who are active in our city. This way, more space can be provided to the numerous parties who require space in our city.

Other areas that need to be investigated further are discussed below.

The new privacy legislation makes it impossible to retrieve the details of private owners through the list of unoccupied buildings. This is problematic for those who require space and do not belong to the City of Ghent, because they can no longer contact private owners of unoccupied buildings themselves to convince them of the temporary use concept if they do not have their contact details.

We need to find a solution to this problem. Does the City of Ghent intend to actively approach the owners of buildings listed as unoccupied in order to find a temporary use for these premises? Such a process would consist of the following steps: draw up a list of unoccupied spaces, identify the owners, check the land use, contact the owners and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of temporary use. This project is already implemented by the Economy department for commercial premises / sites. We need to examine whether it is advisable to implement this process for other types of temporary use. We have to look into this matter together with the Housing department, since empty properties will primarily be used for temporary housing projects.

The ULG expressly asks the City of Ghent not to establish any partnerships with commercial managers for unoccupied city property, but to give priority to organisations serving a social purpose, including workshop organisations, within the scope of a structural partnership with the Property Management department. We call for the Property Management department to continue its 3-track policy and to give the highest priority to temporary housing projects, subsequently consider neighbourhood-oriented or socio-cultural uses and as a last resort rely on private managers. Over the last 10 years, we have placed as much emphasis as possible on neighbourhood-oriented initiatives. We now wish to open up these initiatives to all creative minds and entrepreneurs in different fields as well as organisations serving a social purpose.

- **TOOL 2: match supply and demand**

It is not easy for temporary use initiators to negotiate with the different municipal departments and the owners of buildings or sites, especially during the start-up phase of their project. In this context, the municipal departments (including the neighbourhood managers of the Policy Participation department) have often acted as 'matchmakers' and assisted the various stakeholders in their search for the best approach to temporary use. The role of 'matchmaker' is absolutely essential. The city must continue to provide space to this type of 'officials 2.0' who think outside the box, develop a strong network, connect different stakeholders, look for creative solutions and are able to experiment.

The Policy Participation department and other departments such as Economy conducted experiments in 2017, and in 2018 they launched the first spatial matchmaking event, bringing the suppliers and demanders of space into contact and thus matching supply and demand. We need to make permanent use of the matchmaking tool to approach private owners and assist them during the start-up phase of a temporary use project.

A systematic (digital + physical) city-wide forum is required for the preparation of these matchmaking events and for the centralisation of the many scattered requests for space submitted to the city. The different requests for space submitted to the various municipal departments (culture, economy, housing, social affairs, community) are then collected and strategically analysed to determine which (public and private) buildings are eligible for what type of temporary use. This way, the city is able to actively invest in temporary use.

Within this scope, we wish to work together with organisations that serve a social purpose and are active in the field of unoccupied building management, e.g. workshop organisations.

It should be noted that many demanders of space are not primarily looking for a temporary use, but are satisfied with the time they are allowed to be in a building within the scope of temporary use, because it is often the only space allocated to them. Temporary use provides these initiatives with the space and time they require to grow and professionalise, but once the temporary use has been discontinued, these initiatives are frequently looking for a new permanent space to continue their activities. Adequate follow-up of successful initiatives is therefore essential. A city-wide forum in which different departments are represented should therefore play a role in this.

### **A city-wide forum as a learning network concerning shared use of space**

Numerous temporary use projects experiment with shared use of space, on the one hand to optimise the use of the (limited) available space, on the other hand to maximise the cross-fertilisation between existing initiatives. Many of these temporary projects are looking for innovative management models and new organisational forms.

The objectives of a city-wide forum can include active investment in experiments regarding shared use of space and the combination of several functions. The city-wide forum can constitute a learning network to collect and exchange insights with regard to shared use of space as well as new management models and organisational forms. These insights can provide inspiration for other projects such as the Standaert site, De Wasserij, Buren van de Abdij, Balenmagazijn and NEST as well as recently launched projects such as the Meibloem site, Ateljee vzw in De Muide, St. Macharius church, Rabot church, etc.

## **Allow the necessary time**

It is important to pay attention to the type of space and the period of time that will be dedicated to temporary use. 'Time' is an important factor: temporary initiatives require sufficient time to become successful (the time required depends on the nature of the initiative). An evaluation of the 'NEST' experiment in the former municipal library has demonstrated that the period of time (1 year) was too short for the organisation of such an extensive and innovative temporary management project. Such an experiment in which different initiatives are combined to jointly manage a 6700 m<sup>2</sup> building and develop a substantial activity programme requires more than 12 months to make growth, evaluation and adjustment possible.

- **TOOL 3: provide support tools via the Temporary Use Fund**

The Temporary Use Fund provides permanent support to this type of demanders of space. The advantages of the existing Temporary Use Fund (€ 300,000 a year) include the pooling of resources and the development of collaboration between the municipal departments. It is an instrument for co-creation as the city does not have to play the role of host in a temporary use context, but can 'let it go'. The existing fund should be continued since it is in the interest of groups which require (a limited amount of) financial support and little assistance, and are able to start very quickly. The application procedure is a very smooth process.

At the moment, the fund is used to finalise infrastructure works in terms of safety requirements and accessibility to the general public.

Other areas need to be investigated further.

We consider it appropriate to expand the fund with additional resources in the future. We have noticed that these demanders of space benefit greatly from additional assistance and support, for instance in the preparation of a financial plan, the search for a suitable business model, the preparation of a revenue and expenditure plan and the development of a start-up.

Temporary use gives fledgling organisations, citizens' initiatives and start-ups the opportunity to elaborate their idea/concept/activity. At this stage, they should get the chance to develop their base, their financial plan, their business model, their organisational and legal form, and to grow and learn, so that they are able to consolidate once the temporary use has been discontinued.

We need to determine how we can provide coaching and/or training to the social entrepreneurs behind fledgling (citizens') initiatives, often organised as a non-profit association, if they cannot make use of traditional support tools such as Startersfabriek and OOG, because they are not entrepreneurs in the strict sense of the term.

Either the available assistance provided by Startersfabriek must be expanded to include social entrepreneurs, or we need to offer alternative coaching solutions (with the city providing support to non-profit organisations via the Sociale Innovatiefabriek) (Social Innovation Factory).

## **2. Temporary use as a ‘lab and catalyst for urban issues’**

Contemporary cities face a great deal of complex social, spatial, economic and ecological challenges for which there is no simple solution. We notice that new forms of solidarity and involvement spring up in the city to respond to these challenges. The numerous pioneers and bottom-up citizens' initiatives stimulate the transition in our society and co-create solutions for societal challenges in this urban context, which is often seen as a laboratory.

Temporary use is therefore a powerful tool to make our cities ‘resilient’ and investigate future solutions by means of co-creation. Temporary use provides room (e.g. physical space and flexible regulations) for experimentation with these societal challenges and their solutions.

A decade of experimenting with temporary use in Ghent has taught us that numerous projects came into existence that were focused on the creation of neighbourhood-oriented meeting places and that became incubators for creativity, art and culture. Temporary use has also created the right environment for the development of social innovation.

The Refill workgroup is of the opinion that temporary use projects can also be implemented in the future to conduct co-creative experiments, e.g. (a) ‘mobile habitats’ to address the urgent housing shortage, (b) super-diversity and polarisation (in partnership with the Social departments), and (c) activation of sheds and workshops (in partnership with the Economy and Employment departments). This way, we strategically apply the temporary use concept as a catalyst to stimulate new dynamism with regard to the urban challenges we are currently facing.

Within this scope, we make use of the following 3 tools:

- TOOL – match the urgent need for housing with the available space

### **Mobile habitats in temporary use projects**

Several households are currently living in caravans, vehicles and other mobile constructions in our city. These diversely composed households are scattered across different locations in Ghent, often residing illegally on private premises. The uncertainty of their situation is a major stress factor for these families. The combination of this uncertainty with continuous moving around makes it very difficult to find a sustainable housing solution, primarily for the families in question, but also for all supervisors and social workers involved.

Ideally, we could provide these families with a temporary fixed residence on a number of sites. This solves the problem of uncertainty, and enables social workers and other departments to look for a permanent housing solution. These families will be assisted by the same social workers and other departments that currently follow up on these cases.

We will check whether it is possible to introduce temporary habitats as one of the temporary functions of sites with a temporary use (e.g. DOK, Standaert site, De Wasserrij, Santo fire station and Meibloem site). A number of

utilities are usually available on these sites, depending on the temporary use project. These utilities can also be used for temporary housing.

We can link the temporary housing function to the demand for permanent supervision of the site, a kind of caretaker function. Among the current mobile housing residents there are several stronger profiles that could play a caretaker role. Of course, the selection of these people is crucial. Provided that sufficient assistance and support are provided by the city, temporary housing can result in an activation in society thanks to the acquisition of social skills and the assumption of certain responsibilities. A combination of stronger profiles and more vulnerable profiles is also an option. The number of residents and their composition will always have to be considered for each location.

Concretely, the Meibloem site and the Santo fire station offer this possibility, and Samenlevingsopbouw Gent vzw has a similar request for the CLT site in Meulestede.

- TOOL – coordinate a specific use with an urban challenge

#### **A temporary neighbourhood workshop at the Meibloem site where attention is paid to super-diversity**

In anticipation of the repurposing of the Meibloem site, we are looking for a temporary use of 3 years. This gives us the opportunity to experiment with functions that are useful to the community. The activities and initiatives will include entrepreneurship, volunteer work, public gardens, a place for youngsters, and a sports and playing field.

**For this use, the city wishes to maximise opportunities for the neighbourhood and its residents, with particular attention for:**

- The neighbours
  - Literally: the neighbours of the Meibloem site and their well-earned (night's) rest. The state of the buildings and the enclosed nature of the site are certainly limiting factors.
  - Figuratively: the organisations located nearby such as De Koer, Sportschool9Duust, Trafiek, De Vieze Gasten, the community centre and the re-use centre. Initiatives are preferably complementary to the activities of these partners. Several candidates who require space may also rely on them.
- Diversity and youth
  - Brugse Poort is a neighbourhood characterised by diversity in every sense of the word. Children and youngsters under 25 represent one third of the neighbourhood's population, 17% is over 60, and half of the residents have foreign roots. Our aim is to see this diversity reflected in the temporary use.
- Work – ranging from volunteer work to entrepreneurship
  - There is a lot to be done at this site. We hope that as many residents as possible will play an active role in the project. From sporadic volunteers to permanent professionals.
  - We believe that the presence of committed entrepreneurs enriches the project as a whole.



- The collective
  - The temporary users will collectively take care of the fit-outs and management of the site and buildings. This will require extra commitment in addition to their own activities.
  - We will determine together how to divide up the work in a fair manner.
  - We should see to it that the project remains open and accessible. New initiatives should be able to develop, and there should be openness towards new partners.
  - The best possible use must be made of the spaces. So not every user should have their own space. We need to look collectively for a working method that ensures the available space is used as efficiently as possible by the community.
  
- TOOL – Temporary solution for a programmatic need

**Vzw Ateljee in Muide – activation of sheds and workshops (in partnership with the Economy and Employment departments).**

The city of Gent, Sogent and a group of residents of Muide-Meulestede are looking for a temporary use for Shed B on the former site of Ateljee vzw, for a minimum period of 3 years. This temporary use will help to revitalise and strengthen the economic fabric, and in particular **activate the sheds and workshops in the neighbourhood**.

We are looking for a partner who wishes to manage Shed B and temporarily use it for initiatives related to manufacturing companies that require a manufacturing space or workshop. By manufacturing companies we mean companies that produce something tangible, be it manually or by machine. For various reasons, it is difficult to carry out these activities in another type of space, e.g. an office. These reasons may be diverse: need for gates for delivery or shipping of goods, machines and raw materials, need for higher ceilings, activities requiring a particular type of floor because they generate (a limited amount of) dust and dirt.

The task requires the temporary user of Shed B to experiment with shared use of space and to facilitate and promote cooperation between the different manufacturing companies: this includes sharing services, space and equipment as well as actively looking for links between the neighbourhood and the entrepreneurs who use the shed and organising activities to facilitate mutual understanding and cross-fertilisation.

The task requires the temporary user to act as a radar in the neighbourhood and trace underused or unused premises and determine to what extent the space can be activated. The aim is to activate these 'sheds' in the neighbourhood and use them for economic activities. It is also possible to set up a system in which companies can rent a temporary location in Shed B and move on to an underused or unused shed, warehouse or workshop in the neighbourhood later on. This way, Shed B can serve as an experimental space / transit space.

## Support tools

The limited financial support provided by the fund for temporary use will not suffice for these strategic projects. They need to be translated into a professional assignment (cf. covenant) which is supported by the city with additional resources. In this case, the challenge is to maintain the commitment in the long term, even when the temporary use has been discontinued or when the need has changed.

Within this scope, cooperation with other departments is of the utmost importance. Co-funding from the departments involved in the organisation of new projects is crucial as well.

## 3. Areas of attention for a more strategic temporary use policy

The above-mentioned typologies, support tools and the actions carried out within the scope of Refill demonstrate that, over the past few years, a lot of work has been done for temporary use and that this practice has become part and parcel of the urban fabric in Ghent (and across Europe).

The trial-and-error experimental phase is almost behind us, and supporting and stimulating tools have been developed and validated. However, the integration of temporary use as a valuable and sustainable tool for urban development and regeneration requires a strategic approach focusing on the long-term effects of temporary use.

To this end, we will map the tools and actions developed by the municipal organisation and detect blind spots. Afterwards, we will convert these elements into a long-term and short-term strategy.

The instruments that have been developed so far can be categorised into six strategies:

- Mapping opportunities (unoccupied buildings, hidden spaces, etc.)
- Matchmaking (matching supply and demand)
- Financial support (cf. fund)
- Coaching projects (cf. the role of neighbourhood management) for temporary use (citizens' initiatives)
- Forums / Learning networks (ULG, etc.)
- Coordinating the start-up of specific temporary uses (initiative to be taken by the city, possibly in collaboration with citizens)
- Covering the temporary programmatic need

The sum of these instruments has not yet resulted in a strategy. A number of aspects need to be explored further to reach this goal:

- **Define clear expectations and objectives**

By temporarily transforming unpurposed places, new functions can be investigated and expectations are raised for future purposing. It is important to clearly define the expectations and objectives of temporary use from the beginning.

Refill has experimented with a new tool, a [temporary use value creation plan](#). (See annex 2 Value Creation Plan). This tool is a method to make the expectations and objectives of all stakeholders explicit from the beginning of a temporary use project. The value creation plan establishes a framework in which an agreement can be reached between a temporary use candidate and the owner of an unoccupied space. Similar to the completion of a business model, this document provides a simple canvas which helps both parties to look into the possibilities and objectives of a temporary use project. The plan contains a limited number of questions that cannot be ignored and which all parties must answer clearly. Who are the key stakeholders involved? What are the common goals, values, needs and activities? What assets are proposed? What happens once the temporary period is over? What will happen if something changes (timing, space)?

The ULG remarks that the focus has been on the neighbourhood-oriented aspect of temporary use over the past few years, as a result of which it seems as if temporary use is incomplete without the neighbourhood-oriented aspect. The city has drawn up a menu of expectations: the neighbourhood-oriented aspect is one element, but does not have to be the only one. If the city is involved in a temporary use project, it will need to indicate which expectations from the menu need to be fulfilled for that specific location. The neighbourhood-oriented aspect remains important, but is always different. A city-wide forum (matching supply and demand as described above) and a learning network regarding temporary use can permanently diversify the range of available temporary use projects, since a lot depends on the building (what is possible in the building, for how long?) and on the person or organisation requiring space for experimentation in our city.

- **Investigate how initiatives can be consolidated**

Experience has shown that temporary use should continue to be an integrated part of long-term planning. Temporary use offers opportunities for experimentation with different functions, objectives and target groups. The insights derived from temporary use should be implemented in long-term processes.

We advocate the active implementation of temporary use as a tool in urban regeneration processes, as a participative approach in similar long-term processes, as an instrument of slow urbanism (to further develop ideas collectively and look for public support).

We advocate the implementation of temporary use as a strategic tool within the context of urban regeneration processes, as an experiment to visualise the future, as a laboratory to try out functions and as a catalyst to fulfil particular needs and achieve objectives.

Temporary use makes it possible to detect signals / reveal situations. It is not up to the temporary user to solve the issue. Professionals need to be available to contribute to the project.

- It is necessary to sufficiently inform the temporary users on the site allocated to them (neighbourhood, environment), to provide them with insight into the dynamics of the location, and let them know which departments/organisations they can turn to for further information.
- During the start-up and in the course of the temporary use project, sufficient contact should be maintained with the temporary users (either formalised contact in supervisory groups or steering groups, or sporadic and less structured contact) to make evaluation and adjustment possible.

The question “What happens once that temporary period is over?” cannot be answered properly. There is no ‘fixed follow-up approach’. It is important to provide customised support and assistance. The question remains: What is it we wish to consolidate? And the answer is: Not everything should be consolidated.

Consolidation of temporary initiatives can imply that there is room for the professionalisation of initiatives, which raises new questions. On the other hand, we should continue to create space for small, non-professional organisations.

It is important to pay attention to the 'invisible' effects (the social networks, partnerships and dynamism that develop). The economic function of a temporary use can leverage consolidation.

- **Explore and test possible organisational forms and management models**

By means of temporary use, the City of Ghent and Sogent invest in a minimum management function of underused and unused municipal properties. Everyone agrees that the manager and caretaker function (temporary users – city – owner) is essential, but no ideal formula for this function has been found yet. No resources are usually provided to manage temporary use projects, and this certainly constitutes a gap in major projects (e.g. in case of NEST).

We therefore should continue to search collectively and experiment permanently with sustainable and alternative management models, organisational forms and funding. In case of other citizens' collectives and commons projects we see the same kind of quest for new and shared organisational forms and management models. For the temporary users it may be interesting to learn from other projects and introduce new insights into their project. Ghent's participation in the Urbact Transfer network 'Civic Estate' aimed at the professionalisation of such initiatives together with other European cities (e.g. Naples, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Gdansk) may also be very interesting for the network of temporary users.

Experimentation with organisational forms and management models in temporary use projects may result in insights into other projects, such as new joint initiatives in permanently shared use of space or in multifunctional permanent spaces (such as the Standaert site and De Wasserij).

- **Develop a point of contact for temporary use**

Further optimisation of temporary use requires a central point of contact within the municipal organisation. The point of contact needs to be centrally (not thematically) organised since temporary use projects cannot be categorised on the basis of their theme. In addition, it is important that this point of contact can be connected to the living environment of citizens and is not oriented merely internally.

### **Continue the learning network**

The Policy Participation department undertakes to continue the learning network regarding temporary use that resulted from the Refill ULG group. The aim is to learn from each other, make temporary use projects and their coordinators more visible and highlight and recognise the dynamism generated by temporary use in our city.

Temporary use constitutes an important pool of citizens' initiatives, collectives and associations of the future. It is essential to strengthen and professionalise this pool and collectively look for alternative funding, business models, facilitation and assistance, on the basis of the partner city concept. Furthermore, they are the requesting party.

### **Continue the organisational shift**

Temporary use confronts us with a municipal organisation that is still compartmentalised. The point of contact continues to work on flexible solutions that address the challenges temporary use projects and temporary users

are confronted with. In addition, we can promote temporary use by advocating flexible legislation at the Flemish level of government.

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