POP UP CITY
POP UP CITY
POP UP CITY

Terry Schwarz and Steve Rugare, editors

published by Kent State University’s
Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative

supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation
for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts

with major support from
The George Gund Foundation
The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) is the combined home of Kent State’s graduate program in urban design and the public service activities of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design.

The graduate program offers a professional degree in architecture with a focus on urban design, as well as a Master of Urban Design degree for students with a prior professional qualification in a design discipline. Certificate programs are also available.

The CUDC’s professional staff of designers are committed to improving the quality of urban places through technical design assistance, research and advocacy. Supported by the Ohio Board of Regents’ Urban University Program, the university and private philanthropy, the UDC offers architectural and urban design expertise in the service of urban communities, design professionals, and non-profit and academic partners in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

Kent State University

The mission of Kent State University is to prepare students for responsible citizenship and productive careers, broaden intellectual perspectives and foster ethical and humanitarian values. Our faculty and staff are engaged in teaching, research, creative expression, service and partnerships that address the needs of a complex and changing world. Kent State’s eight-campus system, anchored by the largest residential campus in the region, serves as a key resource for economic, social, cultural and technological advancement.

Kent State is a supportive and inclusive learning community devoted to teaching excellence and academic freedom. By discovering and sharing knowledge in a broad array of graduate and undergraduate programs, Kent State University meets the dynamic needs of a global society.
...is an imprint of Kent State University’s Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative. These anthologies will examine themes in contemporary urban design, urban architecture and planning that emerge from the challenges posed by the economic and ecological transformations of the 21st century. These challenges—many of them particularly evident in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio—expose crucial gaps in the conceptual framework of urbanism. Based in the practical experience of the CUDC but drawing on the expertise of a wide range of researchers and practitioners, these books seek to contribute to the understanding of those gaps and new solutions that might remedy them.
The staff of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative extend our deepest gratitude to colleagues in Berlin, Halle, and Chicago who contributed their work to Urban Infill Volume 2: Pop Up City. In this volume, Philipp Oswalt, Klaus Overmeyer, and Philipp Misselwitz provide a valuable framework for understanding the origins and outcomes of temporary and unplanned uses. Jennifer Malloy looks at the temporary use phenomenon as a counterculture urban development strategy. Tore Dobberstein and Andreas Haase provide an illustrated travelogue of their adventures in Cleveland. Elke Knöβ and Wolfgang Grillitsch explore the Dolmusch X-Press – a social and spatial experiment in the theatrics of temporary transit. And I offer a Cleveland perspective on the role of temporary use in a transitional city.

We also thank the hundreds of friends and supporters who continue to provide their land, buildings, time, ideas, knowledge, and influence to the wispy but heartfelt efforts of Pop Up City. The Civic Innovation Lab, the Sears-Swetland Foundation, the George Gund Foundation and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts provided generous support for the Pop Up City initiative and the publication of this book. —Terry Schwarz, ed.
patterns
of the
UNplanned
Temporary uses are unplanned, but they are present in every larger city. Often, they play an important role in a city’s public and cultural life as well as in its urban development, but they have thus far been almost completely ignored in official policymaking and city planning circles. But why do temporary uses occur in the first place? And how do they develop? Can structures be discovered in the unplanned?
Vacancy as a Resource

Every temporary use has its starting point in empty buildings and disused sites that go unused for some period of time, whether shorter or longer. What is traditionally regarded as failure on the part of city planners and real estate developers not infrequently represents an opportunity and a resource when seen from the perspective of other actors.

Since the end of the Second World War, inner-city spaces in the developed, industrialized countries have repeatedly fallen into disuse. While the first to do so were areas that had been destroyed in the war, since the 1960s enormous industrial and infrastructural sites have been abandoned as a result of deindustrialization and modernization. Suburbanization, structural economic transformation, and the change of political system from the socialist to the postsocialist states; real estate speculation, failed planning projects, as well as the withdrawal of military units from numerous sites and the departure of portions of the population—all of these have contributed to the emergence of various forms of vacancy. Former industrial areas, waterfront areas, railroad stations and airports, unused commercial parks, empty residential neighborhoods and public institutions, as well as vacant lots of various sizes constitute seemingly functionless zones that linger for years and often decades in a state of transition between their old uses and new ones. Property owners, project developers, and city planners are in many cases unable to develop such properties within a reasonable period of time.

The reasons for this are many and complex. In many cases, the sheer size of an area requires a long development timeframe. Often there is no demand for the new envisioned use, so that real estate developers wait for market conditions to improve. Soil contamination, the requirements imposed by departments of historic preservation, and the need for extensive development measures can make for high development costs. An ownership situation that is murky or complex can also impede the development of a property. Sometimes, sites are intentionally left undeveloped as part of a process of long-term infrastructure planning.

Today, there are vacant spaces and structures in every city, sometimes on a considerable scale. These spaces and structures can be used at low cost for limited periods, provided those who use them are willing to put up with their relatively poor condition. In large part thanks to the increasing supply of such spaces and structures, a special clientele has long since emerged for their use: the so-called temporary users.

Thus, the constant process of change and redevelopment in cities leads to a kind of urban three-field crop rotation system. Just as medieval agriculture fields would lie fallow for a season after two periods of use so the soil could regenerate—that is, become fertile
again—so urban spaces now “lie fallow” from time to time during the transition from one use to another, a process in which the periods of ostensible disuse in fact possess strategic significance.

**Who Are the Temporary Users?**

Temporary users have little in the way of financial resources, but they have a large amount of social and cultural capital, a high degree of energy and commitment, and great willingness to improvise. Generally speaking, new spaces are not taken over by longtime residents of an area but by newcomers, people whose lives are in a state of flux. Three groups of actors can be distinguished on the basis of their relationship to established social structures:

The first group consists of young entrepreneurs and hatchers of schemes who use an urban niche as a springboard for the realization of an idea. With little starting capital, a concept can be tested and then, if it is successful, firmly established and further expanded. In other words, temporary use offers a low entry threshold and possible avenue for the potential establishment of an economic, cultural, or social concept. Typically, the actors in this category are young, well-educated people between school and career; they include students, migrants, and others.
The second group consists of actors who engage in temporary use as a kind of hobby. They have a regular income and look, for example, to sociocultural projects or the initiation of sports-related uses to provide them with enriching experiences beyond conventional categories. These actors belong to established social structures, but parallel to these they seek the freedom to pursue experimental life practices.

The third group includes trailer- and houseboat-owners as well as homeless people. This relatively small subset of temporary users is looking for opportunities to “drop out” of society and build alternative living arrangements.

Common to all temporary users is a tendency to set to work quickly and spontaneously in their chosen location and a willingness to work with existing conditions, a process in which experimental, often improvised solutions are frequently used to adapt the space to their needs. For the opportunity to use a site or building at low cost or even no cost, they are willing to accept an element of temporal insecurity, whether in the form of a short-term rental agreement, the absence of a rental agreement, or the illegal status of the use. The question of a larger timeframe rarely enters the picture at the beginning of a use, but it can begin to do so if the use is successful. The notion of temporariness encompasses various concepts of time-limited use, from one-time events to projects that last a single season, to initiatives that were originally designed to be short-term but later turn out to be lasting as a result of gradual growth and increasing professionalization.

What Locations Are Chosen?

It may seem surprising, but in terms of centrality of location and accessibility, the spatial preferences of temporary users are often no different from those of the conventional real estate market. With their cultural, recreational, gastronomic, and neighborhood offerings, temporary users seek to attract a lively walk-in clientele, which sooner or later not infrequently places them in competition with financially powerful commercial activities. Temporary users are quicker, however, since they need very little in the way of material requirements in order to get up and running in a given location. They are also a great deal more flexible, since they manage quite well with marked qualitative limitations. They are also more creative. They discover urban architectural potentials, have a flair for unusual locations, and worry very little about the existing image of the site they have selected. Unlike those in the mainstream real estate market, temporary users do not expect a site to meet established standards of structure, state of renovation, and surroundings, but attach importance to the unknown and unexpected. They benefit from sites that are currently devalued, both socially as well as in terms of the real estate market, and hence are often undervalued as well.
The types of spaces chosen for temporary uses are as diverse as those selected for conventional uses. Specific types of use look for spaces that are suitable for them. Conversely, specific kinds of space attract temporary uses that match their particular character. For example, users engaged in informal commerce look for locations with high pedestrian traffic and thus prefer locations near railroad stations, department stores, and major intersections. Clubs wish to be easily accessible. They often use unusual facilities in order to make themselves distinctive, but they avoid residential neighborhoods because of the noise problem. By contrast, sociocultural institutions depend precisely on a close connection with a neighborhood. Start-up offices and galleries also value the connection with a neighborhood, in part because of the availability of walk-in customers, in part because of the presence of service providers in the immediate vicinity, e.g., restaurants and cafés.

Generally speaking, uses benefit from the presence of similar activities nearby, and this encourages the development of larger areas and neighboring spaces. Many temporary users choose a site less for its location than because of the temporary user milieu that already exists there. They want to participate in precisely that milieu. Because of their more or less public character, most temporary uses are located near city centers. In outlying districts, by contrast—to the extent that they arise in such areas at all—most temporary uses are located near homes.

By no means all disused urban sites are suitable for temporary use. Generally speaking, the more intact a site’s infrastructure, the more accessible it is, and the denser the network of potential actors, the greater the likelihood that a temporary use will arise there. If the investment required to renovate a space is too high, if it lies too far off the beaten track, or if suitable users are unavailable, it will remain unused. This latter point becomes especially clear in the case of many smaller, shrinking cities where the younger, more active population has moved away and there is virtually no influx of new residents. In such cases, a large supply of vacant spaces and structures does not attract temporary uses, because the initiators are lacking.
What Role Do Networks Play?

As a rule, temporary uses do not arise in isolation but in clusters, whether in a large disused industrial area or scattered throughout a neighborhood with a high vacancy rate. These clusters generate specific identities. Whereas in the case of shopping centers, the formation of such an image is artificially generated by project managers through the selection of lessees and directed by a centralized leadership, with temporary use identity emerges over time. It is the result of social networks and the values of all the individual participants. If the supply of space is adequate, the first pioneers are followed by friends and acquaintances. Particularly in the initial phase of development, conditions are ideal for rapid “cell growth.”

Since most temporary users have only a small amount of capital, their social and professional networks are among their most important resources. On the one hand, it is these that make it possible to initiate a temporary use in the first place; on the other, temporary activities in turn lead to new cooperation. It is possible to distinguish two kinds of network formation:

The melting pot: For many temporary users, the shared site becomes a melting pot. This experience is the result of mutual support, communal activity, and professional cooperation. Temporary users deal with their lack of financial resources and the inadequate condition of their spaces through mutual aid. Professional cooperation also gives rise to local economies, which in turn engender relations of non-monetary exchange among the various temporary users. Moreover, their communal appropriation of the site acquires an aura that is initially internal but develops a public component as their activity increases, an aura by means of which the users also identify themselves as a group. This communally generated identity compensates for the instability of the situation, above all for the uncertainty regarding the duration of the use. The existential endangerment of a temporary use community tends to reinforce it rather than lead to its dissolution. The need to assert their own interests against owners and authorities – to negotiate regarding the duration of the use and the granting of additional permits while mobilizing public awareness at the local level: all of this strengthens cohesion among the users. Finally, it can also lead to the emergence of formalized structures such as associations or corporations.

Branching: Conversely, the temporary character of temporary uses leads to the formation of networks through branching. Once a joint project is over, the participants often go their separate ways and initiate multiple new temporary uses in parallel in different locations. Thus, a temporary club may spawn a bar, a booking agency, or a record label. The offshoots of the initial project are independent entities, but they are closely linked through cooperation. On the one hand, temporary uses are dependent on networks; on the other, they themselves contribute intensively to the formation of new ones.
How Do Temporary Users Appropriate Spaces?

The spaces that host temporary uses were often built for entirely different purposes. They usually lack the necessary amenities; not infrequently, they are slated for demolition; sometimes they are building shells. Heating, the supply of electricity, light, and water, traffic safety, and fire protection are inadequate for the purposes of virtually any conceivable use. The owners, however—because they receive little or no rental income—have no interest in investing in construction measures on behalf of the temporary use. For their part, the temporary users not only lack the capital for larger investments but also the long-term security that would make such expenditures worthwhile.

Temporary users confront this dilemma with the principle of maximum adaptation. At least in the beginning, they usually use a space as is, improvise a lot, and recycle whatever they can. They accept limitations on use, avoid or ignore official requirements as far as possible, and in the process sometimes accept illegal conditions.

Temporary users also make a virtue of necessity. Thanks to the fact that the site is largely left in its original state, it becomes possible to preserve its aura and historical character. This allows for unusual aesthetic experiences, particularly as it has often been a long time since the space has been seen by the public. Historical artifacts—for example, from industrial culture or postwar modernism—are appropriated and carried forward.

BMX biking within the shell of the now-demolished Palace of the Republic, Berlin, 2004
into the present and the future. Characteristic and also visible to the visitor is an easily readable multilayeredness: the site is overlaid with a series of interventions that decidedly belong, aesthetically, to the present, and culturally to contexts different from that of the site’s original development. These interventions provide important stimuli to the design-related fields—the visual arts, graphic design, and architecture—stimuli that reach far beyond the actual temporary use.

What Actors Are Involved?

In addition to the temporary users themselves, a whole range of other actors is also involved in temporary uses. The first of these are the agents, who usually instigate larger temporary use projects and help them get off the ground without ever being users themselves. They create framework conditions that make it possible for others to launch a temporary use, including lease contracts with owners, official permits, political and administrative support, and organizational structures. A crucial factor in the effectiveness of such agents is their ability to function as a bridge. They not only enjoy the sympathy of the temporary users; they also have a good understanding of their informal mechanisms, because they themselves come in part from the same milieu. At the same time, they can also speak the language of the authorities and the owners, which puts them in a good position to mediate between these opposing milieus. Once they have initiated a project, the agents usually withdraw, leaving its development to the temporary users themselves.

Originally, the agents have purely idealistic motivations and act without a contract or financial incentive. They are initially found in the temporary user milieu and municipal agencies, especially those that are responsible for the administration of real estate. Thus far, the agents in government offices have primarily operated “under the radar.” They act from their own sense of personal engagement, with no contract from the administrators or municipal policymakers and politicians. Instead, they use the freedom to maneuver that goes along with their position to engage in a kind of micropolitics that supports the social and cultural intentions of weaker actors in the city by offering them the opportunity to launch temporary uses. This also promotes a better development trajectory for the city as a whole.

In recent years, the phenomenon of temporary use has been discovered by municipal policymakers and politicians, and the result has been that there are now official agents in addition to informal ones. Their work has emerged as an important factor in the development of temporary uses, and this in turn has resulted in that work becoming formalized and professionalized. Cities now create special administrative offices to coordinate temporary uses or contract with private entities to do so, as in the context of neighborhood management. Because of the high demand, private agencies have been
created in many locations; such agencies work on behalf of owners and municipalities to bring spaces together with temporary users. With an office on site and in keeping with a concept developed in coordination with their client, they attempt to attract and, as it were, “curate” specific temporary user milieus. With the skill of experienced pilots, they support the temporary users in building organizational structures, planning, marketing, obtaining funds, and securing permits. At the same time, they attempt to recruit owners to make spaces and structures available on a temporary basis, advise them in selecting temporary users, and help resolve legal problems.

Next to the users, the owners of properties are the most important party. It is a prerequisite of every temporary use that it be tolerated—either explicitly or implicitly—or contractually permitted by the owner. In view of the fact that, in either case, the owner is also responsible for the safety and security of his property, making it available for use involves an element of risk, depending on the condition of the buildings. Moreover, the expense of managing and caring for the property is disproportionate to any possible rental income the owner might receive.

On the other hand, there can also be many non-monetary advantages for the owner. Such advantages may include a new and positive image for the location, the creation of a specific identity, public awareness of the site, and the prevention of vandalism and decay. Temporary users may attract permanent users or become long-term tenants themselves. And with all this, the investment costs to be shouldered by the owner are low if not nonexistent. For these reasons, more and more owners are accepting and even initiating temporary uses.

However, even in situations where their properties have stood empty for many years, many owners are unwilling to take this step. Temporary use does not meet their expectations of a high return on their investment. They are also afraid that the use will become permanent or that they will have to contend with conflicts when seeking to end it. This attitude is especially common among investors who have purchased abandoned areas with the intention of developing them immediately. Whereas large real estate portfolio companies that have owned properties for decades can afford to let them stand empty—or be the scene of temporary uses—for long periods of time, investors have loans that they need to repay within a limited timeframe. They depend on developing the property as quickly as possible and therefore view temporary users as an obstacle. In a number of countries, however, there are laws limiting the power of disposal of owners who no longer use their properties. Such owners are required to tolerate temporary uses.

Policymakers and administrators are involved in processes of temporary use in multiple ways. First, every use of a built structure is subject to legal regulation and official licensing requirements, compliance with which is controlled by the government authorities.
Depending on how the authorities interpret regulations regarding fire protection, traffic safety, health, and a great deal more, temporary uses can be enabled or prevented. It is no accident that temporary uses sprang up throughout the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the socialist system, since governmental authority only continued to operate to a limited extent. Once the administrative structures had become consolidated again in the new political conditions, the boom was over.

Although temporary uses largely go against the classical control and organizational practices of government entities, for a number of reasons they have now become an attractive urban development option for policymakers and administrators. Facing increasingly tight budgets, city administrations hope that by cooperating with pioneers from civil society they will be able to stabilize socially weak neighborhoods, reactivate vacant sites, and create new public spaces, all without any significant financial expense. Temporary use milieus create new images for entire neighborhoods, images that are usually viewed quite positively by the majority of residents as well as being attractive to investors. From a city planning perspective, this creates new options for developing sites that have long defied all classical city planning attempts to work with them. In addition, city and location development become possible even for sites that have no hope of attracting investments even in the medium term.

All this has led to a situation in which many cities have not only become more tolerant in their licensing practices but also stimulate and enable temporary uses in other ways. For example, in cases where a private owner makes his property available to temporary users, cities are sometimes willing to offer a payment guarantee or release him from liability and property taxes. Moreover, many cities own a large amount of property themselves, which they are able to make available for temporary use when it is not being used. Beyond this, some cities promote temporary uses by creating temporary use agencies, making such use a subject of planning processes, and including it in city planning contracts.

In the mediation and negotiation process, indeed in the entire process of communication among temporary users, property owners, and municipal authorities, the media sometimes play an important role. As financially weak as temporary users may be, their activities often remedy the social and cultural deficits of particular neighborhoods and open up possibilities that are positively viewed by a majority of the residents. For this reason, media reports tend to serve the interests of temporary users and hence strengthen their position vis-à-vis owners and authorities. Press coverage also helps to win over politicians, persuading them to champion particular projects. Hence it is not surprising that – especially in conflicts – temporary users engage in targeted public relations campaigns. However, good press is by no means a guarantee of success in negotiations. Not infrequently, the owner, the administration, and even politicians disregard public opinion.
At the same time, policymakers and property owners can also benefit from reaction in the media. If temporary users have settled in a particular location and a creative milieu has grown up among them, this changes the external perception of the location and leads to a change in its image. In the increasing competition for locations, informal activities are that extra something special in the arsenal of “creative cities,” a title to which many cities seek to lay claim today. In this connection, subcultural hotspots are discovered and exploited more rapidly today than ever before, not only by the mass media but also by city marketing. Prominent examples of cities that have changed their image thanks to temporary uses are “Cool Manchester” in the 1980s and “das Neue Berlin” (“the New Berlin”) in the 1990s. Media attention can help to consolidate temporary uses, but it can also hasten their end. If a location becomes attractive to investors because its image has been enhanced by temporary use, that usually spells the end for temporary users.

Even before the media enter the picture, direct public awareness has a role to play as the “customer” of temporary uses. For temporary users are rarely sufficient unto themselves, but seek to appeal to a public—whether it is broad and inclusive or a small niche audience—to whom they offer culture, excitement, or particular services. Consumers initially learn of the activities of temporary users by word of mouth, through flyers, or through emails from friends and acquaintances; the novelty of the use and the fact that it is so little known tend to make for a certain exclusivity, which naturally contributes to the appeal of the temporary use. Often, the activities cannot be detected from the street without specific instructions, which is also advantageous in view of possible legal violations. In contrast to classical economic and cultural life, the boundaries between suppliers and demanders are often not clearly drawn; a single person can switch sides quickly or even play both roles at once. It is also possible for an area to be used informally without temporary use being involved. This occurs when consumers appropriate it directly, playing games and engaging in athletic activities there, going for walks, having picnics and camping, or having parties in the absence of any special facilities for the purpose.

How Do Temporary Uses Develop?

The simplest case is that of the “stopgap,” whose plans for a site involve only a limited time period, whether it be a day, a month, or a year. However, many temporary actors do not see themselves as temporary users at all, but display a clear interest in consolidating their use or even making it permanent. For this group, temporary use offers an opportunity to circumvent the usual start-up difficulties and clear away obstacles to the realization of their ideas.
When perpetuating temporary uses, the initiators confront the task of formalizing informal structures. Informality has its price. For the continued existence of a temporary use, it is simpler and cheaper—and sometimes even necessary—over the long term to consolidate the hardware and the software. This affects the internal organization of the temporary users, their relationship to the owners and authorities, and the design of the site. In the course of consolidation, what was initially a loosely structured group of like-minded people acting more or less as a collective, without any hierarchy, must be converted into the formal and contractually capable structure of a registered association or limited liability corporation. In the process, some portion of the—initially often enormous—spontaneity of the participants is often lost. Beyond this, rivalries and even power struggles often develop among the initiators, which may end with one or another of the founding participants feeling completely marginalized. However, without such conflicts and the hierarchization and marginalization that accompany them, it is virtually impossible to apply for financial assistance, obtain loans, or enter into contracts.

In terms of the temporary users’ relationship to property owners, formalization means that instead of merely being tolerated, they strive to obtain a rental contract, if possible with the option of a long-term or even hereditary lease or purchase of the property. Many temporary uses come to an end when the owner refuses to accept any further temporary use of his property. This often leads to conflicts, which temporary users then deliberately publicize. Often, municipal city planning and cultural agencies intervene in the public interest and attempt to mediate between the opposing fronts. Not infrequently, temporary users are able to avoid the threatened end of their use by moving to a new location, a change that usually also involves the updating of their concept and further formal consolidation.

However, problems may also be caused by the requirements of the authorities, for the legal regulations regarding temporary uses are ultimately no different from those for permanent ones. If, on the one hand, with the perpetuation of a temporary use, the authorities demand the fulfillment of a wide range of requirements, and if on the other the building fabric and technical infrastructure of the site are too poor and necessary investment costs too high, the result may be a predicament that can lead quickly to the end of the temporary use.

What Do Temporary Uses Achieve?

First of all, they stimulate the development of the location in question. Programs and profiles become established. Their influence continues to be felt even after the end of the temporary use. For in many respects, they can continue to determine the use of the site even long after its temporary use is over. Sometimes, it is the temporary uses themselves
that turn into permanent ones. In addition, temporary uses change the image of their location and attract other uses to settle there. Often, temporary uses cause buildings that were previously slated for demolition to be preserved, renovated, and modernized.

Even independently of their original location, temporary uses can establish new use concepts. Hitherto unknown types of uses are developed on the basis of temporary uses, and when they are successful they continue to unfold and develop in other locations. In the process, temporary uses may become the nuclei for new companies and new cultural and social institutions. Finally, temporary uses also have an impact on the biography of their initiators. The calling becomes a profession; new occupational profiles come into being; the actors acquire much of the knowledge of their new professions as autodidacts. Even if in most cases temporary uses only exist for a limited time, they may have lasting and long-term effects on the development of locations, economic sectors, and cultural fields. In this case, they serve as an urgently needed rejuvenating treatment for established structures that are no longer capable of renewing themselves by their own efforts.

Temporary use in the break between old uses and planned ones (Klaus Overmeyer)