A Temporary City: Temporary Use as a Tool for Urban Design in the Creation of Convivial Urban Space

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Abstract: There has been increasing attention across international settings on temporary use as a tool for activating underutilised urban space. In the current context of economic uncertainty, temporary use projects provide a viable alternative to significant financial investment. Until recently, planning and urban design strategies and master plans have typically been driven by long-term visions. Whilst various barriers to their implementation exist, the planning and urban design professions are beginning to acknowledge the significant role temporary use can play in the evolution of a city and the creation of convivial urban spaces.

Informed by interviews with eleven key industry stakeholders, this paper presents an analysis of the current approach to temporary use in the case study of the City of Adelaide and provides recommendations for a best practice approach to their efficient implementation and management.

In order to allow for their efficient implementation, the research suggests that the existing barriers to temporary use in Adelaide need to be removed to allow for grass roots activation and to take place alongside government initiatives to ensure temporary use does not become institutionalised. In order to achieve this, the government must shift from its role from a regulator, to one of a facilitator. The research contends that the government cannot simply create a 'vibrant' city, as people lie at the heart of truly convivial urban spaces.

1 Introduction

Whilst planning has been mostly concerned with permanence and an 'ends-oriented' approach to development, cities the world over are increasingly looking to creative, flexible and short term solutions for the activation of urban areas. In the current climate of economic uncertainty and hardship, temporary use offers opportunities for the reinvigoration of disused or underutilised urban space without the need for significant financial investment.

Vacant and underutilised spaces convey a negative image of a city and are not conducive to social interactions, or an enjoyable urban experience. Vacant buildings go unused and are a wasted resource, whilst poorly utilised public space presents safety concerns, whether real or imagined. Both public and private urban space, when vacant or underutilised, diminishes the community's confidence in the area, detracts from investment, and discourages other activity from occurring there (Zagami, 2009).

Many cities looking to encourage the revitalisation and redevelopment of urban areas are experiencing a lack of resources, power and control to implement formal master plans (Bishop & Williams, 2012). As a means of activating spaces, temporary use presents an opportunity to occupy vacant or underutilised spaces, both public and private. Planning systems, however, are typically focused not on short-term uses, but on longer-term developments and more permanent uses (Earls, 2011, p. 5). This is the case with the planning system in the City of Adelaide, South Australia. Inflexible planning controls currently diminish the timeliness and viability of temporary use implementation, particularly those not run under the government's Splash Adelaide initiative.

The aim of this paper is to identify how temporary uses can be better implemented and incorporated into urban planning and urban design systems in order to enhance the urban experience and better enable the community, as well as government, to fill the gaps within city's urban fabric.

The first part of the paper presents a background regarding temporary use, and how it relates to urban design, followed by the research method. The results and findings of the stakeholder's opinions on how temporary use can be better implemented and supported in Adelaide are presented, followed by

a discussion and general recommendations for effective temporary use implementation in the City of Adelaide.

2 Background

Bishop and Williams (2012, p. 5) define temporary use as 'interim' or 'stop-gap' solutions for a 'finite period of time with a defined beginning and end'. Temporary use presents planners with a tool for exploring the possibilities for longer-term development, whilst supporting robust urban design outcomes in the short-term. Although the benefits of temporary use as a means of activation and idea testing have been acknowledged and demonstrated through its implementation in various urban settings including New York and Melbourne, there has been relatively little discussion as to how temporary use can be promoted as a tool for urban planning and better integrated within the planning system.

Within the context of the City of Adelaide, temporary activation projects are gaining recognition for their role in reinvigorating the city. Since 2010, the city has witnessed the implementation of the Splash Adelaide 'Pilot Projects' by Adelaide City Council, as well as the formation of the not-for-profit organisation Renew Adelaide. These two initiatives have brought temporary activation into the public and urban planning spotlights, setting in motion alternative thinking for design and city activation. Various obstacles including inflexible and complex planning controls and building regulations, however, hinder the efficient implementation and financial viability of these projects, disincentivising 'grass roots' activation by individuals without the support of existing programs and government-run initiatives.

There is recognition that temporary uses of space often operate outside the formal planning process and the traditional method for the production of space (Overmeyer, 2007). As such, there are inherent tensions between the temporary bottom-up unplanned character and the more prescriptive top-down urban production processes. It could be argued, however, that the temporary uses 'are the spaces of the future: a training ground and experimental zone for the future city' (Overmeyer, 2007, p. 18). Previous research has suggested that these temporary uses are important in the evolution of a city, offering insight into how these types of spaces could be better facilitated within the city (Neméth & Langhorst, 2013; Overmeyer, 2007). Other research has presented detailed examples of temporary use projects in the northern hemisphere (Hou, 2010; Lehmann, 2009; Lydon, 2012) or explored how they have led to the wider urban regeneration of an area (Andres, 2011, 2013; Colomb, 2012). twenty-first century Berlin there has been an increase in the temporary use of disused space within the city by individuals, groups or entrepreneurs. These have been adapted for creative uses such as community gardens, bars, sculpture parks or alternative living. The local policy makers and real estate investors used this existing creative spirit within the locality to market the area and increase economic profitability (Colomb, 2012; Neméth & Langhorst, 2013; Overmeyer, 2007). increasingly widespread attention of such projects has assisted in catalysing the implementation of temporary projects elsewhere. Indeed, temporary use has only recently gained the attention of urban planning professionals, yet as explained by Bishop and Williams (2012, p. 7) 'have always been a vital part of urban culture. They fill the gaps and enliven the urban experience, and they can bring considerable benefit when sensitively incorporated into urban planning'.

3 Research method

This research cumulates theoretical ideas and concepts relating to urban design, activation and culture. The research involved a phenomenological social theory, encompassing an interpretivist theoretical perspective. This interpretivist theoretical perspective withstands that objectivity and value-free research is not possible, as what is studied is invariably influenced by social factors and the values of research participants and researcher (Marsh *et al.*, 2009).

Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with urban design and development professionals from a range of backgrounds including private consultancy, local government, state government, and the publicly funded former Integrated Design Commission (IDC).

4 Results and findings

All the interviewees agreed that temporary use projects, in general, are a valid way to promote activation in the city. Urban design consultants, both from public and private sector, indicated that a major reason for their success is that they 'renew focus on the city and utilization of the city'. They believe temporary use projects are 'a really good way of bringing people to an area on a continual basis due to offering them a changing environment'.

State Government stakeholders contended that the temporary use projects are catalysts and 'certainly not a long term strategy'. They considered activation projects, such as 'pop-ups' to be a 'response to the long term structural underfunding of public programs in cities'. However, a local government representative offered some optimism, acknowledging that 'being able to something temporarily which is quicker, cheaper, easier... is far better than not doing anything at all'.

One private consultant noted that there is a role for temporary use projects in all types of urban spaces, including those that are considered to be healthy, active spaces, not only in 'reactivating dead spaces'. They remarked that in this sense, temporary use projects have 'a dual role and we shouldn't see them as trying to make amends for bad spaces; we should see them as a normal part of the way cities are'.

Regarding the success of the Splash Adelaide initiative projects, the interviewees provided a mixture of responses and levels of enthusiasm. The majority of stakeholders believed that Splash Adelaide had been successful, primarily for attracting people to the city and increasing the diversity of people using a given space. A number of the interviewees, including an interviewee from Arts SA, commended Adelaide City Council for simply attempting the project and 'their intent to just do something and provoke interest'. One participant, who was part of the Splash Adelaide team, believed '...they all have their merits in different ways, all for different reasons... it's easy to forget the value of just something small like a deckchair.'

A State Government Urban Planner was less enthusiastic about the Splash Adelaide projects, suggesting that the initiative was not adequately thought through and a 'little bit mindless' in its approach to activation in a city such as Adelaide, which lacks a significant residential population within the CBD. Whilst they believed that a more holistic approach to activation is the key to success, it was suggested that the initiative could 'turn into something great' if cohesive partnerships between state and local government and the community were broached.

Some of the suggestions were focused on government-led initiatives and structured frameworks, whilst others recommended a more grass roots, community-led approach. The majority of participants, however, suggested that a more balanced partnership between government and the community would be the preferred approach.

A State Government Planner recommended that the government should be involved in temporary use projects through their funding and facilitation, however such initiatives 'are best left to organically develop' through community involvement and leadership. Another respondent, who recommended that the government should play a facilitator role so that temporary users 'don't have to fight through a tonne of red tape', echoed this view. A non-government, non-profit organization representative believed that there needs to be a move towards less government driven initiatives and to find ways to 'directly empower the small business community to run those pop-ups themselves'.

The interviewee from Arts SA expressed concern that too much government involvement, including funding, would ruin the effectiveness of temporary use projects, and would not be reflective of what the local community wants or expects, stating:

as soon as you start putting government money towards pop-up culture, that in itself loses something... I've heard a couple of young entrepreneurs that are doing really interesting things say, "we just want the government to get out of our way, we don't necessarily want them to do anything".

Others, including a respondent from Adelaide City Council considered that a balance between community and government initiative is important for temporary use projects. They believed that 'there is a place for both of them... because it's not just Adelaide City Council's city, it's everyone's city'.

5 Discussion and recommendations

5.1.1 How can temporary use be used as a tool for urban design to create an enhanced urban experience?

Interviewees stressed that successful spaces are not always a product of good design, deeming that 'it's also really important to have some community activation'. In terms of its use as a tool for urban design, temporary use presents opportunities for the activation of underutilised urban areas to enhance the urban experience. The findings of this research bear many parallels with other studies relating to temporary use and the potential benefits that temporary use projects can have, and the opportunities they present (including Studio Urban Catalyst, 2003; Oswalt, 2000; Ostwald, 2004; Graham, 2012). Temporary use allows the city to offer a changing environment for users, providing new and exciting attractions to draw people to an area.

According to the majority of the stakeholders, vacant shopfronts and buildings reflect negatively upon the city, and reduce the quality of the public realm. This is also supported by a previous study by Earls (2011). Whilst building and shopfront vacancy was viewed by several of the interviewees to be a consequence of the natural cycles that cities endure, the interviewees saw the merit of temporarily occupying vacant buildings. In this sense, temporary use offers the potential to fill the 'gaps'.

Through the activation of underutilised sites, temporary use can create an increased perception of safety in the city, particularly at night. As suggested by Roberts and Greed (2001, p. 43), people have an increased perception of safety when there is an adequate critical mass of people in their surroundings. The research has identified that the perceived lack of safety in areas of Adelaide is an issue, and continues to discourage the use of urban spaces, particularly at night time.

Whilst the government contributed 1.8 million dollars in recent lighting and safety improvements and activation projects in the city (Adelaide City Council, 2011, p. 39), the findings of this research suggest that perception of safety is still a problem within the City of Adelaide.

Temporary use as a tool for activating urban spaces presents the opportunity for increasing activity, and consequently the perception of safety in an area. Street level activation through the occupation of vacant properties provides additional attractions within public space to encourage pedestrians and activity, and increase critical mass. In this sense, the outcomes of temporary use in terms of urban design are mutually supportive: activation promotes critical mass, which enhances safety in area, which in turn promotes public and private interest in an area and subsequently leads to further activation, therefore completing the cycle (refer figure 1).

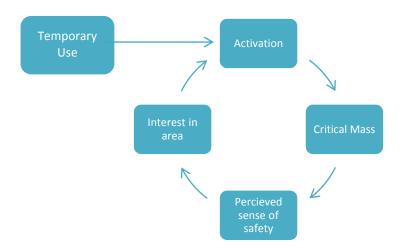


Figure 1 The 'activation' cycle

Source: Authors

Thus, temporary use can contribute to the creation of useable, attractive places in several key ways: improving the quality of the public realm, activating vacant or underutilised areas and providing an attraction throughout the day and night and increasing a critical mass of people. This critical mass of people therefore increases the perceived sense of safety in the area.

Temporary use expands the domain of urban design from the exclusive world of the designer, to a more participatory process that allows the community to shape their urban environment. In line with previous studies (including Oswalt, 2000; Studio Urban Catalyst, 2003; Alkemade, 2009), the benefit of activating existing infrastructure, buildings and land with limited resources presents opportunities for those with limited capital to 'actively design the city and its space' (Oswalt, 2000, p. 2). The nature of temporary use, therefore, ensures that not only the planners and urban designers can shape the city and the spaces within it, but also the community.

The accessibility and limited financial risk of temporary use presents opportunities for creative ideas to be tested, which is in line with the previous research undertaken by others, including Graham (2012), and Oswalt *et al* (2009). Such idea testing can range from the ways in which urban spaces can be used in order to guide longer-term development, to small-scale creative business ventures or installations in the landscape.

High quality urban spaces enhance the use of a space by providing attractive areas to sit, gather and recreate, within the public realm. As described by one interviewee 'urban design is not just about what things look like, it's about making spaces more useable and places where people want to be'.

This research has affirmed that as a tool for urban design, temporary use can have a significant influence on how a place is experienced, and how it functions within the broader context of the city. The findings of the research are consistent with those of Gehl (1987) and Brown *et al* (2009) in so far that urban design influences public spaces in three key ways: the experience of place, the number of people actively using the space, and the activities occurring there.

5.2 What are the barriers to the efficient implementation of temporary use projects in the City of Adelaide?

For the benefits of temporary use to be fully realised in Adelaide numerous barriers to their implementation must be addressed. These obstacles relate to the various economic, social and environmental aspects of temporary use.

The biggest barrier to temporary use in Adelaide is the current ineffective and inefficient approach to their implementation. The government's vision for a 'vibrant' city and the planning system currently in place to facilitate this vision are not aligned. The Adelaide City Council Strategic Plan 2012-16 identifies 'pop-up venues' to 'activate underutilised spaces' as an example of how art, culture, and creative industries can thrive in the city and allow for the incubation of creative ideas. The City Council's Development Plan, however, lacks support required make these visions a reality. The current provisions for temporary use and development suggest that they are a secondary preference to long-term use that should be disguised within their landscape, rather than being acknowledged as a way to enhance the public realm:

Where there is no immediate prospect of a long term use, a temporary use for up to 24 months (excluding temporary car parks) is encouraged. Temporary uses of vacant

or underdeveloped land should be landscaped, screened and/or treated so that negative impacts to the public realm are minimised (Adelaide City Council, 2015, p. 70).

The current provisions suggest that there is not a widespread acknowledgement of the benefits temporary use can have on the quality of the public realm.

Additionally, the by-laws and permit systems for limited range of temporary use projects are hard to navigate and involve lengthy approval processes. Whilst the Splash Adelaide pilot projects have been instrumental in raising awareness of temporary use in public spaces, these projects only take place within a fast-tracked approval achieved through a purposely-designed system. The provision of this fast-tracked system suggests that the current planning system is inefficient and does not fully support or acknowledge the role temporary use can play in creating convivial urban spaces.

Whilst Renew Adelaide provides an important platform for those seeking a temporary space within buildings, various barriers preclude many potential temporary users from the city's vacant buildings and shopfronts. The former IDC outlined several key barriers to the activation of vacant buildings as a lack of incentives for property owners, lack of financial support for start-up businesses, limited affordable building stock, strict building code requirements, and a lack of training and support for creative enterprise (Integrated Design Commission, 2012, p. 5). Several of these barriers were identified by the research, namely the lack of financial support, building code requirements and lack of incentives for property owners.

The stringent requirements of the Building Code of Australia are the most significant barrier to temporary and adaptive reuse of buildings in Adelaide. This barrier is diminishing the financial viability of occupying these spaces. Currently, the Building Code of Australia is specifically designed for new buildings, making the conversion or adaptive reuse of existing buildings a costly exercise. Stakeholders highlighted that 'in terms of actually converting those buildings to ensure that they meet the standard of the Building Code... it's really difficult'. Due to the costs and constraints, the process of getting through the building regulation system is a major factor determining whether or not the project will succeed. To overcome some of these barriers, an interviewee from the State Government suggested that the Council could establish a framework for temporary reuse, including provisions for insurances and rate offsets, adding that the current approach to building reuse was convoluted, making vacant buildings 'complex to use on a temporary basis'. It emerged from interview that we could look towards interstate examples to address the barriers in Adelaide. The interviewee described the current situated in Melbourne and the implementation of an adaptive sub-code introduced as part of the 'Postcode 3000 reforms', mentioning that the sub-code system had been useful in implementing reuse projects and in significantly reducing the cost of occupying the space.

The lack of incentive for property owners in Adelaide to provide rent-free or low-rent spaces for temporary use projects is another major barrier in Adelaide. Currently, the Incentives for property owners to provide spaces for temporary use projects would allow for entrepreneurs and creative industries to establish themselves and their ideas whilst activating vacant and underutilised shopfronts within the city.

Unlike many other studies in this field (including Hentila & Lindborg, 2003; Blumner, 2006) the research has also identified concerns regarding the implementation of temporary use. These concerns are inextricably linked to the barriers currently preventing the efficient implementation of temporary use.

Inflexible planning controls, combined with a lack of support for grassroots activation, stringent building code requirements and a lack of incentives for property owners present a major concern for temporary use. These barriers preclude grassroots activation from taking place alongside government led initiatives. Too much government control of temporary use can lead to a lack a sense of community ownership. Institutionalisation of temporary use therefore presents the risk of creating superficial and contrived attempts to activate urban spaces.

Thus far, Adelaide City Council has initiated the vast majority of temporary use projects that have taken place within Adelaide's public space. Whilst it was acknowledged by many of the interviewees that the projects attracted additional people to the spaces, some of the interviewees warned that their apparent vibrancy can be superficial, and projects can become stagnant within their environment.

In the past few years both the State and Local Government have been focusing of the promotion of city revitalisation, including the government's recent 'Vibrant Adelaide' campaign and the Splash Adelaide initiative. As noted by one interviewee, there is a growing backlash from the community against the government's persistent attempts to achieve a 'vibrant' city. This growing a sub-cultural backlash against government—led interventions and initiatives attempting to promote 'vibrant' city spaces is becoming evident through various forms of social and published media, with "vibrant" becoming a favoured 'buzzword' of government, planners and politicians.

This issue of institutionalisation was not widely emphasised by previous studies. Whilst the community response to these strategies may be well founded, it is important not to negate the role of government-led initiatives such as Splash Adelaide, as they play an important role in increasing the community's awareness of temporary use. The key thing to ensure is that these projects have a legacy for future temporary use. Accordingly, this legacy will only be realised if the existing barriers to these projects are removed so that they are accessible to the wider community. As identified by Jane Jacobs (1961, p. 238), 'cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.'

An excess of government-led projects presents a further concern. As identified through the interviews with the stakeholders, is the potential for temporary use to overshadow the need for long-term change. As described by one interviewee, temporary projects are often a response to the 'long-term structural underfunding' of cities. This concern was also raised by another participants, who suggested that a temporary project can become 'a good moral release valve for taking on more structural change' and therefore 'not addressing the fundamental issues'

Temporary use should not overshadow the need for longer-term infrastructure and should not be seen as a final solution to long-term problems. Instead, temporary use should be seen as a way of demonstrating 'what can be done' within the urban environment, involving both government and the community as 'city shapers'. In this sense, temporary use is complementary tool, not a substitute, for planning and urban design and long-term development. Interviewees suggested that setting a time limit for temporary projects would be useful way to prevent 'stagnation' of the sites. One of the State Government participants said 'there was a lot of criticism from small business who felt that suddenly finding a council subsidised café directly opposite them didn't go down that well'. They qualified that if done carefully, the temporary use can be 'complementary' to existing businesses, bringing additional potential customers to an area. They acknowledged that 'the good thing about... temporary activation is that it allows us to debate what we value and what we want our city to be'.

Ultimately, removing the barriers to temporary use implementation to allow for community-led activation will reduce the need for government funds that are currently being contributed to creating a 'vibrant' city. Local business owners, entrepreneurs, and residents will be better placed to activate areas of the city without the need for government intervention. Government funds could therefore be used for longer-term infrastructure and service needs.

As quoted by Christensen (2012) in an article issued by online publication 'Our World Today', Adelaide Lord Mayor Stephen Yarwood acknowledged that 'to survive, Adelaide has to become cool...If we don't build an entrepreneurialism and give young people a reason to stay in Adelaide, economically we are facing a crisis'. The need to provide opportunities for start-up businesses is critical, not only for Adelaide's image, but for the economic future of the city and the ability to retain our younger population and provide real opportunities for the community to play an active role in designing the city. There is no shortage of creative talent and ideas, but a surplus of 'red tape' and a lack of 'tailored' temporary use policies to make ideas a reality.

The interviews with the stakeholders identified that as a tool for urban design, temporary use presents a valuable opportunity to enhance both public and private space in the city, and their broader urban context. The research has identified two overarching preconditions to the success of temporary use in Adelaide: the efficiency of its implementation and its ability to provide an enhanced urban experience. The stakeholders identified that the current planning controls are not flexible enough in order to achieve these conditions. In particular, the interviewees highlighted the need to support community-led 'grassroots' activation through a more streamlined approval process and clearer policies and guidelines for temporary use. This suggests that the current approach to temporary use in Adelaide needs to be revised to address the barriers currently preventing its implementation.

5.3 What recommendations can be made for a best practice approach to implementing temporary use projects within the City of Adelaide?

The future of temporary use in Adelaide is dependent upon how it responds to the existing conditions, and the efficiency with which it is implemented. Temporary use should not be viewed in isolation from urban design, but as a tool for achieving positive design outcomes in a responsive, accessible way. The implementation of temporary use in Adelaide has the potential to achieve a dual outcome: enhancing activity and use of urban space, and policy allowances for community-led ventures including start-up businesses.

Adelaide's approach to temporary use needs to be tailored to suit the city and its community, as the approach to their implementation elsewhere will not necessarily be appropriate for the promotion of convivial urban spaces in Adelaide. As such, the role of government in temporary use, and the ways in which public participation in the process can be enhanced, needs to be explored within the context of Adelaide. A redefinition of the relationship between government and community is needed to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to shape their city. Once a best practice approach is reached, the potential for temporary use will be realised and grassroots activation will be able to play a more active role in the city and its future.

In order to allow for the efficient implementation of temporary use projects in Adelaide, several recommendations have been offered:

- 1. Develop a framework for temporary use projects, in which government plays a facilitator role. This would involve a targeted policy approach to temporary use, rather than funding support or government-led initiatives.
- 2. Support temporary use by providing clear information, guidelines and checklists for potential temporary users for various temporary users, including temporary street vendors, stall holders, and event organisers and other possibilities not currently covered by Adelaide City Council's by-laws and permits. This could involve a step-by-step 'how to' guide for temporary users, from idea conception, to implementation and operation.
- 3. Provide an incentive for property owners who support temporary use projects.
- 4. Revise the Building Code requirements for adaptive and temporary reuse.

6 Conclusion

The rigidity of traditional planning systems has narrowed the scope for flexible responses to the everchanging conditions of cities and needs and desires of their inhabitants. Particularly prominent in times of economic uncertainty, vacant and underutilised urban spaces blight the urban landscape and diminish the urban experience for the user.

Quality urban design presents the opportunity to enhance the urban experience and instil a greater confidence in an area. The way in which a space is designed has an impact upon how that space functions, how it is used, and how it is experienced. As a tool for urban design, temporary use allows for flexible interventions within the urban landscape, acting as pilot projects for longer-term development, whilst supporting quality urban design outcomes in the shorter term. Through activation, street level interest, and an enhanced public realm, temporary use can attract a critical mass of people

to a previously underutilised area, increasing safety and achieving a more useable, convivial place to be.

In Adelaide, the current approach to temporary use is hindering its effectiveness. Inflexible planning controls, coupled with the threat of institutionalisation of temporary use projects are diminishing the viability and value of temporary use and its accessibility to the wider community. Ultimately, the research contends that government cannot merely create a 'vibrant' city, as people lie at the heart of truly convivial urban spaces. In order for temporary use to be truly effective, the government needs to shift from its role as regulator, to one of facilitator. Planning policy must respond to the need to facilitate temporary use projects in a proactive manner.

Whilst temporary use should not be seen as a way of avoiding the need for long-term change, planners should view temporary use projects as a means of testing ideas and incubating start-up businesses and entrepreneurial ventures to reveal the possibilities of space and fill the gaps in the meantime.

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