



TEMPORARY USE • DYNAMICS FOR LIFE



REFILL POLITICAL MEETING

Athens, 26 February 2018

REFILL POLITICAL MEETING, ATHENS

Mayors and high-level elected representatives from REFILL partner cities meet in Athens to discuss the concept of temporary use of vacancy and its future impact in our cities.

In many European cities we see the growth of innovative forms of solidarity and commitment at local level. Governments are no longer the only actor to solve complex challenges faced in cities where bottom-up civic initiatives nourish the transitions in our society and co-create the solutions. In this respect, the concept of temporary use is a powerful tool to make our cities "future fit" and since the concept of temporary use is interacting with many other urban dynamics it creates the right environment for social innovation to develop.

The Political Event gives REFILL cities the opportunity to present their best practices on temporary use, exchange experiences and debate on the challenges of social innovation. Visits to relevant initiatives and projects undertaken in Athens will also take place while participants will have time to exchange ideas on the next steps of the REFILL project.

AGENDA

09:00 Welcome to Serafeio Center

09:45 – 10:15 Welcome by Mayor Kaminis

10:15 – 11:00 Inspirational stories: "How to engage bottom up initiatives"?

- Introduction by Amalia Zepou, Vice Mayor of Athens for Civil Society and Innovation
- Story of participation and co-creation by Daniel Termont, Mayor of the City of Ghent

11:00 – 12:15 Debate: The concept of Temporary use and the challenges and opportunities in different REFILL cities

Invitees: Daniel Termont, Mayor of Ghent, Hans Buijtelaar, Vice Mayor of Amersfoort, Joachim Lohse, Senator of the Environment, Urban Development and Mobility of Bremen, Ovidiu Cimpean, Director of Local Development and Project management division of Cluj-Napoca, Nasima Razmyar, Deputy Mayor for Culture and Leisure of Helsinki, Bassem Asseh, Vice mayor of Nantes, Kateřina Šebestová, Deputy Mayor of Ostrava, Agnieszka Górczewska, Deputy Director of the Project Coordination and Urban Regeneration Office of Poznan, Irina Mikelsone, Deputy Director of the Construction Management Board of Riga

Moderated by François Jegou, Lead expert of Refill



12:15 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 17:30 Site visits:

- CRS (Catholic Relief Services) Building hosting refugees
- Kypseli Market
- Synathina Kiosk

19:30- 21:30 Dinner

REPORT

The URBACT-methodology is all about creating synergies between the golden triangle of city administration, civil society and political representatives. Only when those 3 parties put their shoulders under the implementation of the Integrated Action Plans that every city is designing, these can have real impact.



Therefore, the REFILL-network was keen to organize a political session to involve the last group of this triangle to participate in a network meeting. Seven out of ten cities sent a political representative to Athens for a political debate where they could exchange with their colleagues on how to engage citizens and bottom-up initiatives through the participative practice of temporary use. They exchanged also on how as political representatives they can support this process.



Amalia Zepou, Deputy Mayor for Civil Society and Innovation of the hosting city, welcomed the network and revealed some interesting projects that introduced new way of policy making for Athens. She sketched an image of the city with over 1.000 empty buildings. A problem that increased heavily due to the country's economic and financial crisis. The [Synathina digital platform](#) however maps out more than 270 community groups, trying to interlink them. It was the starting point for the first temporary use project in the city, called '[Traces of Commerce](#)'. In this empty arcade a business incubator was tested out for several periods. The City was enthusiastic about this approach and decided to take it a step further and launched an open call for the revitalization of the abandoned [Kypseli Market](#). The bid was won by a dynamic organization, Impact Hub, that developed a collaborative management structure to run the place and fill it with a mix of young entrepreneurs, cultural and educational actors and an administrative one stop shop.

Next was an inspirational speech from Daniel Termont, mayor of the Lead Partner's city of Ghent. Policy proposals to overcome complex urban challenges, are no longer invented in the City Hall alone. The future is to the cities who co-create these solutions with their citizens. This requires an organizational shift for city administrations, requiring from civil servants to adopt a more facilitating and enabling role towards civic initiative takers. Not only does this mean to question legal frameworks, it also means that the city administration doesn't always have to decide or act for the citizens. Citizens themselves should come with proposals and politicians and city administration can facilitate.

In the political debate, the other cities joined, represented by their Deputy Mayors in charge of (aspects of) temporary use. The central question being: how can you as a politician lever on the city policy in order to facilitate and stimulate temporary use and other forms of co-creation with citizens and bottom up initiatives?

The debate pointed out the similarities between cities: citizens reclaiming their position in the process of city making. The willingness of citizens to participate, but also the search of cities on how to deal with that. On the other hand, there was a variety of strategies present around the table. The City of Bremen has an agency for temporary use, the ZZZ. The city of Ghent works with a Fund for Temporary Use, while the city of Helsinki experiments with digitalisation to disclose underused spaces through systems of smart locks.

The politicians praised that REFILL is fighting a problem – i.e. vacancy – and turning it into a solution – i.e. temporary use. It was even mentioned that in some contexts of influx of migrants, high unemployment, huge vacancy, temporary use is not only fun to do, but a necessity. They even recognized the seeds for inventing new forms of democracy and policy participation in the collaborative practice of temporary use.

All political representatives agreed that it was worthwhile to invest in temporary use and the networks it creates, for several reasons. It's not enough anymore to inform or consult citizens. Citizens want to *act*. And that is exactly the opportunity temporary use offers them. In doing so, they enhance social cohesion in the neighborhood. But since these temporary places are often a breeding place for experimentation, it is also where social innovation occurs. Not to forget the chances it gives to new forms of economic activities. Even though difficult situations can occur once the permanent development takes over the place of the temporary, the added value it creates remains high.



Last but not least, several politicians stressed the importance but also the potential to engage vulnerable groups in temporary use. They are not always the loudest and therefore often missed in participation and consultation processes. Therefore, since temporary use is a very hands on form of participation and co-creation, it is an ideal opportunity to engage people from migrant and refugee communities, youngsters, elderly,...



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Temporary use has become a necessity to fight the social and environmental crisis. It supports active citizens as they explore new urban solutions. But it remains a challenge to adapt the city governance into a form of decision-making that is less top-down and more based on co-creation with the people. The following nine inspiring quotes summarise the conclusions and policy recommendations of the REFILL Political Meeting.

Temporary use as a necessity

Empty places and buildings are assets

“Why not use the space that we have?”

Vacant places are no longer seen as a problem but as an asset in REFILL cities. They are used to host emerging practices, incubate new ideas, host social and cultural innovation, empower new urban economies and so on. More than an opportunity, such spaces have even become a necessity to fight the social and environmental crisis, in order to become more resilient cities.



Temporary use for placemaking

“Temporary use enables a form of urban planning that does not predetermine usages of places.”

It allows for experiments in collaboration with citizens before deciding upon redevelopment. *“It turns placemaking into a bottom-up process rather than a top-down one.”*

Cities as laboratories of tomorrow

“Cities are big enough to think big and small enough to act.”

Innovations are growing locally and *“Decisions about what needs to be done in a city will increasingly come from the streets.”* Temporary use spaces are living laboratories. They are part of what makes *“cities tools to invent the future of Europe and to conceive new forms of democracy”*.

Leading together with citizens

Enabling and accommodating bottom-up actions

“Public places are not owned by the municipality; they belong to the citizens.”

Facilitating temporary use and making it a new normal is a way to make *“public space available as a public service”*, to accommodate social innovation and ensure vibrant and creative cities.

Supporting active citizens

“In the city administration we have too many problem finders and not enough problem solvers.”

Temporary users bring administrations in touch with active grassroots initiatives exploring new urban solutions. *“Letting some control go to innovative citizens is not losing power. On the contrary. Supportive politicians can be proud of what citizens are doing for the city.”* The role of city administration is to listen to and to activate forces for positive change.

Giving access to vulnerable users

Particular attention should be given to youth and elderly, the economically weak, minorities and migrants: *“We must not forget to also engage groups which are not quite as vocal. They must feel that those projects are interesting for them, too.”* Today it's no longer sufficient to organise participation by informing or consulting people. Citizens want to act. This active method of participation has the potential to also reach those groups often left aside in traditional participation processes.



Temporary use as a tool to change city governance

Temporary use to show obstacles

“Facilitation of temporary use is not an easy ride. Since it is innovative, there is no roadmap.”

Temporary use challenges us to think about questions never thought of before. As an example: how can temporary use trigger citizens’ problem solving capacities? How does it show the ways in which public administration can evolve, away from top-down decision-making and more toward informed co-creation with the people, with less rigidity, more agile procedures and facilitation for emerging forms of active welfare?

Experimental bottom-up governance

“Cities want to be smart. Smart cities cannot be smart without smart citizens”.

Creating space for temporary use in the city administration and legal framework is a way to allow citizens to propose solutions for the problems they encounter. *“It’s giving cities the freedom to experiment, but also to make mistakes and to learn from them”.*

Leveraging on city coalitions to inspire changes

“Taking part to REFILL gave us a legitimation for what we are doing in our city since such practices were unknown and unprecedented here.”

Good practices of temporary use, facilitation processes and enabling tools were diffused across the network and beyond. *“Being able to present successful examples of temporary use from other cities can help you convince your colleagues in your own city”.*





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