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Temporary urbanism as a new policy strategy: a contemporary panacea or a trojan horse?

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ABSTRACT
Over the last two decades, temporary uses of space are spreading in Europe as a new policy tool to recover vacant areas. The theoretical debate is divided between the promoters of these new forms of tailor-made urbanism and the detractors, who argue that temporary urbanism is increasingly subject to profit logic as an urban policy strategy. Through two French case studies (The ‘Grands Voisins’ in Paris and the ‘Transfer Project’ in Nantes), the article discusses the characteristics of temporary urban planning and its intrinsic tension between a contemporary panacea and a trojan horse. Can the ‘temporary city’ be a partial response to the issues of social inclusion, housing, and equal accessibility to spaces and amenities, which the contemporary city seems to fail in? Or is temporary urbanism just an alibi for administrations and local leaders to continue perpetrating neoliberal policies?

KEYWORDS
Temporary urbanism; vacancy; urban policies; urban regeneration; neoliberalism

1. Introduction
One of the major ‘problems’ facing contemporary European cities is the recovery of vacant spaces (Baing 2010). Currently, as some authors have already pointed out (see for example Kearns 2015; Till and McArdle 2015) vacancy has always been a feature of any city. However, in recent years, in part due to the global financial crisis of 2008, the debate about vacancy has become more vibrant and nowadays constitutes a central concern in the urban governance discourses of many European cities (De la Pena 2013; O’Callaghan and Lawton 2016; O’Callaghan, Di Felicianonio, and Byrne 2018). Vacancy is the result of moments of ‘indecision’ in urban production and moments of transition, such as the processes of deindustrialization and/or re-localisation (see Lever 1991; Carballo-Cruz 2012; Kotval-K, Meitl, and Kotval 2017; Freire Trigo 2020). It may also be the result of the long timescale that urban transformation very often requires.

Throughout Europe, the ever-increasing need to find cheap, quick-fix and tailor-made solutions to recover vacant areas has led to the conceptual emergence of new urban tactics of temporary use (Colomb 2012; Haydn and Temel 2006; Oswalt, Overmeyer, and Misselwitz 2013). Traditionally, the concept of temporary urbanism is linked to self-organised and alternative experiences (Hou 2010), which find their space outside institutional urban policies. However, in the last two decades, temporary uses seem to be increasingly co-opted within city development strategies, as new forms of spatial production (Madanipour 2017; Martin, Hincks, and Deas 2020), most notably in times of austerity urbanism (Peck 2012). The shift of temporary urbanism from marginal practice to mainstream urban policy (Madanipour 2018) in many European countries is an ambiguous and controversial topic. The contemporary theoretical debate is divided between the promoters and detractors. Temporary experiences lead by local governments are widely celebrated as participatory forms of
spatial transformation. At the same time, they are being increasingly criticized for moving towards a territorial marketing strategy that risks proposing new geographies of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

On the one hand, supporters of this new urban policy argue that temporariness constitutes a ‘more dynamic, flexible and adaptive urbanism’ (Bishop and Williams 2012, 5), and that it can provide great opportunities for future transformations (see Haydn and Temel 2006; Berwyn 2012). As Mould (2014, 529) points out, for many local authorities the creative paradigm of temporary uses has incredible leverage for urban change, making it ‘the latest iteration of cool, creative urban policy language’. Indeed, the book ‘The Power of Temporary use’ – within the European project Urban Catalyst (2001–2003) about temporary urban strategies in cities – highlights how ‘temporary uses can become an extremely successful, inclusive and innovative part of contemporary urban culture […] [temporay uses] do not emerge accidentally but are guided by different factors and rules’ (Urban Catalyst 2003, 4). Therefore, confidence in temporariness is openly stated, as is the need to control and govern the power of temporary uses mainly through governmental political strategies.

On the other hand, many scholars argue that the revitalization of neighbourhoods as a result of the temporary urbanism policies of many cities is increasingly reduced to the financial exploitation of the land (see in this regard the interesting discussions of Peck 2005; Andres 2013; Mayer 2013; O’Callaghan and Lawton 2016; Till and McArdle 2015).

The instrumentalisation of temporary uses as a new strategy of the ‘creative city’ is also considered a sign of the progressive de-politicization that characterizes the neoliberal city, where, as Hou (2020) claims, even practices that were once grassroots and subversive are progressively co-opted into institutional systems.

Our contribution seeks to position itself within this intense debate on temporary uses. The article aims to understand whether temporary uses can constitute an effective and inclusive urban strategy for cities with large disused assets and pressing social issues.

Two antithetical research questions guide our investigation: Can the ‘temporary city’ be a partial response to the issues of social inclusion, housing, and equal accessibility to spaces and amenities, which the consolidated contemporary city seems to fail in? Or is the temporary imperative turning into a trojan horse, which perpetuates neoliberal logic in spatial production, for the benefit of the few?

In order to answer these questions, two issues related to temporary use as a new public policy need be considered:

1. the spatial question, namely temporary uses as a possible trigger to address the vacancy problem and the unavoidable tension between an inclusive and empowering method of transformation and a new land profit maximization method.
2. The social question, namely the feasibility of considering temporary uses as a partial ‘quick’ and ‘tailor-made’ response to contemporary urban problems, which are very often unmet by traditional welfare and planning systems, and in the ability of temporary uses to prefigure desirable scenarios.

As Till and McArdle (2015) also point out, the recent theoretical debate on temporary uses has focused predominantly on the first point, while the – potential – social benefits of temporary uses have often been ignored.

In the first section, the paper provides a theoretical investigation of the concept of temporary urbanism, focusing on its characteristics (namely the temporal dimension and the actors involved in these processes), and its evolution from an informal practice to an institutional policy of urban transformation.

The second section concentrates on the French context and the two case studies located in Paris and Nantes that are the focus of our research. These two examples of temporary uses have been chosen because they constitute two novel cases on the international scientific debate, which represent a clear example of temporary urbanism as a new public policy.
The two cases were selected within the Research project URbANIsM – Urban RegenerAtioN Innovative Model, funded by Politecnico di Torino and Compagnia di San Paolo. The cases were analysed according to an in-depth policy document analysis and 28 qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with French and international experts of temporary urbanism from different disciplines (geographers, sociologists, urban planners, architects and urban designers) and practitioners directly involved in the two French case-studies. Interviews were conducted between September 2017 and June 2020, while two on-site inspections were carried out in July and September 2018.

In the final remarks, the paper introduces some general reflections about the use of temporary urbanism as an urban planning policy in contemporary cities, with new perspectives for further research.

2. Temporary urbanism: from practice to policy

The creative tactics of re-appropriation of space have, like vacancy, always been part of cities and frequently used to express dissent, claim the ‘right to the city’ of otherwise marginalized groups and support anti-capitalistic visions. A manifesto of these counter-power practices is the publication *T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, of the poet and essayist Peter Lamborn Wilson (under the pseudonym Hakim Bey) (Bey 1991). These forms of political activism have often been carried out through space occupation (see Chatterton and Pickerill 2010; Vasudevan 2015). As stated by De Certeau (1984, 38–39) ‘[these] strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the establishment of a place offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power’. Therefore, the ‘temporary’ component of these practices derived from the fact that they were not authorized and, therefore, precarious.

On the contrary, in the last twenty years, temporary uses are increasingly invoked by the institutions to deal with current uncertainty. As Ferreri (2015) points out, this gradual metamorphosis of temporary urbanism from marginal practice to mainstream policy has been facilitated by several publications dedicated to decision-makers and technicians (planners and architects), such as the Urban Catalyst Project (2001–2003). Indeed, Overmeyer (2007, 17) coordinator of Urban Catalyst, described temporary use as ‘a magical term […] for those many creative minds [and] for urban planners to whom it represents a chance for urban development. Bishop and Williams (2012, 213) suggest that ‘temporary activity represents a reaction to a world where the future is more uncertain and less secure, and a response to rapid economic, societal and technological changes that are shortening the present into smaller and smaller time frames’. The current seduction of temporary urbanism (Ferreri 2015) is due to its ability to respond to several contemporary cities’ critical issues. On the one hand, temporary uses offer low-cost opportunities (Németh and Langhorst 2014) for administrations to revitalize empty areas awaiting transformation. On the other hand, these temporary practices fit perfectly into the dominant paradigms of the ‘creative city’ (Florida 2002) and ‘social innovation’ (Mulgan et al. 2007; Bragaglia 2020), providing a way to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities.

In this regard, as many scholars acknowledge, temporary urbanism has become one of the major contemporary urban planning trends (Bishop and Williams 2012; Colomb 2012; Madanipour 2018). Temporary use as a new urban policy on many local municipalities’ agendas often becomes a way to stimulate growth while waiting for traditional space transformation possibilities. These aspects are clearly in dissonance with the original and autonomous experiences of temporary urbanism and are the basis of the critique against this new urban policy by many critical scholars (see, for instance, Colomb 2012; Tonkiss 2013; O’Callaghan and Lawton 2016; Till and Mc Ardle 2015). Drawing from Bragaglia and Caruso (2020), it is clear that temporary uses continue to exist as a grassroots practice. However, in the current scenario, they are also a well experimented public policy. In this article, we specifically deal with this latter dimension that temporary urbanism
has taken on. To do so, we believe that further clarification between temporary urbanism practices and policies is necessary. Indeed, Mould (2014) states that it is crucial to distinguish between the diverse set of informal, bottom-up practices grouped under the umbrella concept of ‘temporary urbanism’ and the new policy strategy on temporariness put in place by many local governments. As O’Callaghan and Lawton (2016, 74) noticed, the latter ‘tends to focus on a narrower sub-set of these practices and employs a selective narrative about their objectives’. Thus, the following sub-paragraph examines different types of temporary uses and discusses how some have been co-opted in the policy discourse. Subsequent sub-paragraphs aim then to clarify some of the main characteristics of temporary uses as public policy.

2.1. Typologies of temporary urbanism

Within the umbrella concept of temporary urbanism, a multitude of actions of short duration is currently included. In scientific literature, the different forms of temporary urbanism have often been codified through different categories. Some of these terms, coined to conceptualize different forms of temporary urbanism, have been incredibly successful (see, for instance, Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Hou 2010; Bishop and Williams 2012; Finn 2014; Lydon and Garcia 2015; Harris 2015; Madanipour 2017). Below, we outline the most frequently cited forms of temporary urbanism from the literature and highlight how each implies a particular meaning of ‘temporariness’.

This paper proposes a categorization of the concept of temporary urbanism, through some of the most frequently used ‘labels’ to describe these practices and/or policies (Figure 1). The terminology chosen to classify these forms of temporary urbanism is not casual. Terms such as ‘autonomous’ and ‘guerrilla’ ‘do-it-yourself’ emphasize the antagonistic and/or anti-professional nature of these practices. However, even these more radical forms of temporary urbanism are progressively co-opted into mainstream policy discourses. On the contrary, instead of stressing a counter-power character, other labels highlight the temporary dimension (e.g. pop-up urbanism) of these experiences.

Pickerill and Chatterton (2006, 1) describe ‘autonomous geographies’ as ‘spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalistic, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation’. Therefore, contemporary practices of ‘autonomous geographies’ are radical forms of transformation of space, which explicitly challenge dominant development agendas and have no relationship with institutional subjects.

Very close to the concept of ‘autonomous urbanism’ is the concept of ‘guerrilla urbanism’ which is defined by Hou (2010, 15) as a ‘practice […] that recognizes both the ability of citizens and

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**Figure 1.** Typologies of temporary urbanism, own processing.
opportunities in the existing urban conditions for radical and everyday changes against the dominant forces in the society. Again, in this definition, the emphasis is on the dimension of opposition to the institutional forms of space production. In a recent article Hou (2020, 118) stresses that guerrilla urbanism is ‘a form of counter-hegemonic spatial practices, distinct from its professionalized and institutionalized counterpart, namely tactical urbanism’. However, some urban policies of European cities are trying to domesticate/emulate this form of temporary urbanism (e.g. the Pla Buits project of Barcelona or the Permis de végétaliser in Paris).

DIY Urbanism is another concept that has recently met with great success: ‘though sometimes more playful commentary or temporary fixes than serious long-term solutions, DIY actions are nonetheless often innovative, sophisticated, and low-cost solutions to difficult or unaddressed urban problems’ (Finn 2014, 381). The character of ‘Do-it-yourself’ is therefore anti-professional, but not explicitly counter-hegemonic. This has made it easier to co-opt this form of temporary urbanism into local institutional policies, for example, to promote the recovery of small residual spaces.

Bishop and Williams (2012), have instead conceptualized the notion of the ‘temporary city’. They define it as ‘a manifestation of a more dynamic, flexible and adaptive urbanism [and] an opportunity to market a site or to start to change the image of an area, or even as a chance to gain some political capital with the local planning authorities’ (ibid: 43). As can be observed from the definition, the paradigm shift is substantial. In this case, temporariness does not derive from the precariousness of a radical and counter-hegemonic act, but from the opportunity to enhance spaces in the perspective of future development.

Another concept widely used in the field of temporary uses is ‘tactical urbanism’ defined by Lydon and Garcia (2015, 2) as ‘an approach to neighbourhood building and activation using short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions and policies. Tactical Urbanism is used by a range of actors, including governments, business and non-profit, citizen groups, and individuals’ (ibid). For this reason, Campo (2016, 389) considers it ‘a counter-urbanism well-positioned for the neoliberal world and can be incorporated into larger and more traditional planning initiatives’.

A further label that straddles practice and policies is ‘pop-up urbanism’. Harris (2015) defines this type of temporary use as a rapid and low-cost response to high vacancy rates. According to her ‘the imaginary of flexibility is thus promoted as more than a temporary response in times of economic uncertainty’ (ibid: 594). The characteristics of pop-up urbanism make it a tool that is well suited to urban regeneration policies. It is no coincidence that the city of Bremen has launched the ZZZ project (ZwischenZeitZentrale) for the recovery of urban voids through pop-up urbanism (Chang 2018).

Finally, ‘temporary urbanism’ is the most common term used for the temporary uses of space. One of the major theorists of the concept of ‘temporariness’ in urban planning, Ali Madanipour (2017, 143), defines ‘temporary urbanism’ as: ‘the range of short-term actions and events which take place in time, but their timing may not be in line with the predictable patterns of quantitative time’.

These categories should not be interpreted as silos, nor as to the only possible ones. However, they are the most commonly used terms in academic and public debate to refer to these forms of interim transformation of spaces. As seen, most of the typologies of temporary urbanism discussed, present a dual nature: as a practice and, increasingly, as an urban policy. This paper now focuses specifically on all those forms of temporary use promoted by the institutions that are not only practices but also public policy. It discusses two main aspects, namely the temporality and the actors involved.

2.2. How temporary?

Temporary urbanism refers to the temporal dimension of an urban process: it is clear that temporality is a crucial aspect of the process (Madanipour 2017; Galdini 2020; Bródy 2016). Autonomous
and radical practices are temporary because they are extremely precarious (e.g. risk of eviction). While in ‘institutional’ temporary urbanism practices, the ‘expiry date’ is usually explicit from the very beginning. Indeed, Bishop and Williams define temporary use as ‘an intentional phase’, where the ‘time-limited nature of the use is generally explicit’ (2012, 5). The limited and fixed temporal dimension is included in the contract of agreement between the temporary use subjects. It is the *conditio sine qua non* to start the transformation of the space in the meantime.

In urban policies, temporary uses are often intended to revitalize and unlock a given space’s latent potentialities. It constitutes a way for waiting for a ‘long-lasting transformation’, which can be stimulated precisely by the chosen temporary use. The space–time nexus is the key dimension in which temporary urbanism is manifested. The temporary condition that characterizes temporary uses should not be seen as a mere alternative option waiting for ‘something better to happen’. As Temel (2006, 55) highlights:

> ‘the temporary also has its own qualities and should not be viewed as merely a substitute for the fully adequate. This special quality can, for example, be that temporal limitation permits many things that would still be inconceivable if considered for the long term.’

Thus, temporary uses can be a valid method for experimenting with alternative solutions to some of the contemporary city’s problems. The emergence of the phenomenon of temporary urbanism brings out the role of temporality. According to Lefebvre (1967; 1991) and Soja (1999), ‘temporality’ has traditionally been overshadowed in urban planning discourses in favour of a focus on spatiality (Németh and Langhorst 2014).

### 2.3. Which actors?

The second element to better frame ‘temporary urbanism’ as a public policy is that of the actors involved in this type of space transformation. As pointed out by some authors (see Moore-Cherry and McCarthy 2016; Bragaglia and Caruso 2020), the actors involved in temporary use depend very much on the type of temporary use.

For instance, ‘autonomous urbanism’, by definition, involves in the transformation only certain subjects (e.g. neighbourhood groups, grassroots associations, squatters). On the contrary, the institutionalized temporary uses that we observe in this paper are generally aimed at activating different actors, namely the public, the private and civil society. Indeed, one of the elements that have led to temporary urbanism’s great success is precisely the fact that it can combine different interests (Figures 2 and 3), in what is often presented as a win-win solution. Public actors promote temporary uses because they are generally low-cost and quick fix transformation with visible results to test new solution to urban issues and make vacant areas more vibrant. Temporary uses are also a great opportunity to focus on spaces to be reconverted and find potential investors for a future transformation (Stevens and Ambler 2010).

Moreover, if a long-lasting transformation is already planned, temporary uses could constitute a useful tool for local governments to marketise urban areas and gather consensus around future development. Private actors (land/property owners or possible investors) can take advantage of temporary uses because the area is not illegally occupied. They can also take advantage of the economic valorization of the areas that frequently result from the temporary transformation. Temporary use also protects land from degradation and constitutes a manner of testing projects and observing the inhabitants’ reaction. For citizens, non-profit associations and other civil society actors, temporary uses are potentially an opportunity to obtain spaces – often for free – for creative and bottom-up social activities. Finally, temporary uses are also a manner to bring citizens closer to the transformation of urban spaces as they become active promoters of socio-spatial change and increase the sense of community (Tardiveau and Mallo 2014).

However, the fact that such different subjects are so well combined and that the power relations between the actors involved seem to be temporarily levelled out in a sort of co-governance process
should not lose sight of the fact that the actors’ interests are very different from each other. So there is an intrinsic tension within temporary urbanism as public policy.

3. Temporary urbanism in France: a new urban policy

Over the last decade, temporary urbanism has played an increasingly important role in France, and can currently be considered a new urban policy.

Traditionally, the French planning system relied on a typically top-down approach (Carpenter 2016) and big urban projects. However, since the 1980s, there has been a progressive shift to more local urban planning (Booth 2009). This was partly due to urban struggles that have produced new participatory projects (in this sense the Alma-Gare district in Roubaix is an emblematic case). Until
a few years ago, despite the progressive opening towards more collaborative and small-scale planning projects, the theme of temporary urbanism in France was still limited to an extra-institutional dimension. The global economic crisis and the difficulty in finding resources and investments to recover the disused areas have undoubtedly been a driving force for the emergence of temporary urban planning in France as a new policy tool (Jacquot and Morelle 2018). Temporary use as a new profitable urban strategy is also widely employed in areas where real estate values are already very high and urban transformation has never stopped, as in the Grand Paris area (Pinard and Morteau 2019).

In the 2018 report, the IAU – Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme of Ile-de-France Region stresses that temporary urbanism projects have been developing since the beginning of 2010 in a more institutional and supervised manner, often on the initiative of the property developers themselves. In Ile-de-France alone, 62 temporary sites have hatched since 2012 to reactivate vacant areas, both for as yet undefined uses of the site and transformation projects with long completion dates. The timescale for urban transformation in France lasts on average at least ten years. Moreover, before becoming a ZAC – Zone d’Aménagement Concerté (namely a ‘transformation zone’ for a long-term urban project), an area may remain vacant for several years (Interview, academic).

In August 2019, the City of Paris had signed with nineteen other public and private entities, including several real estate promoters, the ‘Charte en faveur du développement de l’occupation temporaire comme outil au service du territoire parisien’. The document officially recognizes temporary use as a ‘legitimate and profitable way of using urban space and as a tool for urban foreshadowing and social innovation’(Ville de Paris 2019) (Translation from French by the authors). The ‘temporary phenomenon’ has also spread in other cities such as Bordeaux, Marseille, Reims, Lille and Nantes, where seemingly ‘do-it-yourself’ spaces bloom. Some authors (see Pinard and Morteau 2019; Vivant 2020) have highlighted some contradictions in this institutionalized and aestheticised replicas of ‘squat’.

Moreover, Correia (2018) argues that temporary uses are mainly understood in France as a new strategy of exploiting the land and increasing the financial value of future real estate projects through urban scenarios built ad hoc to attract hipsters and the creative class. On the contrary, other authors have underlined how these spaces can respond to the general interest and social needs (see Dumont and Vivant 2016; Gonon 2017).

Conscious of this tension between temporary uses as a new panacea and a trojan horse, we analyse two specific temporary use projects in France: the Grands Voisins in Paris and the Transfer Project in Nantes. These two cases of temporary urbanism are very emblematic. Both projects result from a robust public direction, even though they seem to be projects initiated in a spontaneous and bottom-up manner. Both have received a great deal of media attention and perfectly fit into the creative city paradigm that is one of the leitmotifs in contemporary city urban agendas. Moreover, the two temporary projects also present an innovative shared governance model between public, private and civil society actors. In both cases, temporary urbanism is a way to accompany the area towards its permanent transformation. Both are a transformation zone (ZAC) where new homes, shops and offices are planned. However, in the case of Paris, the definitive transformation is already clearly defined. It proceeds simultaneously with the temporary use, while in the area of the former slaughterhouses of Nantes, there is not yet strictly defined long-term transformation project foreseen.

Finally, the approach to temporariness in the two sites is quite different. The Grands Voisins aims to respond to some of the central city’s issues by offering emergency accommodation, work assistance programmes for people in need and low-cost offices for start-up, and social space for all citizens. On the contrary, the Transfer project has a more artistic and creative vocation, and constitutes an alternative leisure area.

3.1. The Grands Voisins in Paris: a hybrid space devoted to social issues

Since the 2000s, the use of temporary urbanism has become incredibly à la mode in Paris. The city has placed various policies and projects to stimulate the temporary use of space, from ‘Paris Plage’ to ‘Réinventer Paris’, up to the official document to implement temporary urbanism.
However, Paris is also a city of great contradiction and social inequalities. Nowadays, Paris faces some pressing social challenges linked to the progressive increase in house and office prices (Nappi-Choulet and Maury 2011). In Paris, the number of homeless people or live in absolute poverty is increasing, in addition to a very high number of asylum seekers (OECD 2018). The urban space in Paris is where inequalities are generated; in this sense, temporary urbanism can also be a lever to reduce these inequalities.

In 2015, the Grands Voisins – ‘big neighbours’, a name chosen to evoke the idea of hospitality – the project took place inside the former Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospital, in the 14th arrondissement of Paris.

The hospital was closed in 2012, and the will be transformed into a new eco-district by 2023 (Figure 4). To prevent the vacancy of the area before the construction of the new neighbourhood, the municipality of Paris had stipulated an agreement with non-profit associations dealing with social issues for the temporary use of the area between 2015 and 2020. The temporary use of the space officially ended in October 2020. The Grands Voisins has been one of the largest transitory sites in Europe and represents a pioneering model of temporary space management.

The Grands Voisins was a hybrid space, which has combined temporary emergency houses for homeless and refugees, low-rent offices for resident entrepreneurs and start-ups, with the idea of being a new space of socialization and creativity for all visitors. The different vocations of the Grands Voisins were carried out by an innovative model of shared governance (Kearns and Padddison 2000). The actors involved were the ‘Aurore’ association, which was responsible for managing emergency accommodation, and two other non-profit associations in charge of managing the area. ‘Plateau Urbain’ – that dealt with the areas dedicated to co-working and start-ups – and ‘Yes We Camp’, which managed the outdoor area and the bar/restaurant. These three main actors in the site’s management were joined by other subjects, creating a broad network of actors (Figure 5). The aims of these subjects were very different from each other. However, their coexistence was integrated into an economy-solidarity model whose network of actors had deliberately tried to flatten power relations in a horizontal logic of space management (Interview, practitioner). Clearly defined rights and duties of the associations using the space were made explicit in the temporary concession contract.

The non-profit associations got to use the premises, thus providing accommodation for people in need and social reintegration programmes and offering affordable offices for small businesses that otherwise would not afford offices/ateliers in the city-centre of Paris.

The city has saved itself the cost for protective measures in preparation for the area’s transformation into the new eco-district and opening up the area to citizenship has been an effective solution to generate consensus on the future long-lasting transformation. Moreover, the project did not involve costs for the municipal administration because it has been essentially self-financed. Its annual budget was just under three million euros and has consisted of income from the bar-restaurant and state subsidies to Aurore association for the temporary shelter for homeless and refugees. The workers who worked inside the Grands Voisins also contributed to the project’s financing through their rents (Interview, practitioner).

Figure 4: The ‘Grands Voisins’ timeline, own processing.
The Grands Voisins has been able to respond to some of the long-standing problems of contemporary Paris, primarily the question of housing and accessible workspaces. However, its flexible urban planning model has also enabled it to respond effectively to the COVID-19 emergency. Indeed, the Grands Voisins’ final report states that during the health crisis, 2500 meals a day were cooked during the lockdown for people in need, and many masks were produced and distributed (Grands Voisins, 2020).

However, the Grands Voisins has also been the tangible expression to an event-driven logic of the city. The area’s spatial attractiveness has been promoted with hundreds of cultural and artistic events, which have brought about 600,000 visitors to the Grands Voisins every year. This space has been included in the most recent Paris tourist guides as one of the hipster Paris’s coolest places (Figures 6 and 7).

This model of temporary use also raises questions about the long-term legacy of the Grands Voisins spirit. The real challenge is to carry into the ‘permanent’ city those answers that the temporary...
The first problem emerged in the transition from the first to the second phase of the project, as a result of the Grands Voisins spaces’ reorganization. Indeed, in the second phase, only three of the old hospital buildings are left standing and continue to serve as shelter. All other buildings have been demolished to make a place for the new housing units under construction. Only 100 of the 600 people initially housed were hosted in the second phase.

The question of the long-term legacy of Grands Voisins has been thus one of the central issues during the last year of its existence (Interview, practitioner). Following exchanges between Aurore association, the municipality of Paris and Paris et Métropole Aménagement, in September 2020, the inclusion of an emergency reception centre in the final transformation project was made official.

3.2. The Transfert project in Nantes: a short-lived creative utopia

Nantes is nowadays internationally recognized as a creative city (Bonnin 2009). During the 1980s, a deep crisis occurred due to the closure of the shipyards, the primary economic source of the area, the city has created a new image of itself (Novarina 2012). Creativity and innovation have been the leitmotif of the city’s transition (Ambrosino, Guillon, and Sagot-Duvaouroux 2016). Over the last two decades, Nantes has become a model of an innovative approach to urban development policies. The manifesto of this creative urbanism is the transformation of the Île de Nantes. This urban regeneration project started in the early 2000s and is still underway on over 350 hectares of former industrial land. In this sense, the role given to cultural actors and temporary use agreements has been crucial in transforming the city. Not by chance, Nantes’ municipality has recognized that public-owned vacant areas are essential to maintain the momentum for creativity (Renard 2000).

Within this framework, the ‘Transfert project – free zone of art and culture’ is inserted. It is settled in the area of the former slaughterhouses of Rezé, in the south of Nantes. In 2015, the old slaughterhouse buildings were demolished, but no transformation project was planned for the area. The 15 hectares of the former abattoirs remained thus a vacant area between Trentemoult, an old village of fishermen, and an area of large commercial sheds. Only a part of the site was already used as a temporary accommodation area for about twenty Roma families.

In 2017, the city of Rezé and Nantes Metropoles planned a huge urban transformation project of 200 hectares of land to be completed by 2030 to accommodate about 8000 new inhabitants. The former slaughterhouses area was part of the project, but the time horizon of the transformation was very long. Thus, in January 2018 the artistic association ‘Pick Up Production’ signed an agreement for the site’s temporary occupation. During the spring of 2018, the Transfert project has been officially launched for its first season, just to September 2018. The aim is to reopen each year, until 2022, for the spring-summer season with a series of artistic and cultural activities for citizens in constant transformation (not by chance the name ‘Transfert’ wants to emphasize the transition process of the area) (Figure 8).
In order to carry out the Transfert project, the area destined to the Roma community has been substantially reduced. However, ‘Pick Up Production’ has succeeded in involving the Roma community right from the start of the project, and especially children, have been frequenters of the artistic activities proposed by the Transfert.

Indeed, in this case, the temporary use project has a clear artistic vocation, and the Transfert project utopian structures were built by architecture collectives and designers linked to Pick Up Production, which is responsible for the management of the site.

The project was conceived by ‘Pick Up Production’ to tell the imaginary story of pioneers discovering a water source in the desert (the abandoned land of the former slaughterhouses) and establishing an ideal and utopian city. Therefore, each season of the project involves changes in the architecture until the moment in which the new transformation will occur (Interview, practitioner).

Besides the association responsible for the project, the Transfert includes a broad involvement of public and private actors (Figure 9). Nantes Metropole, the owner of the area, together with the City of Rezé, have the role of supervisors of the area and partially finance the project. A fundamental role is also that of the private actors – the main ones are a bank and a real estate developer – involved in the project as principal funders. For these private entities, the Transfert project is a way to test citizens’ reactions to the ‘reativation’ of the area and evaluate if the long-term transformation foreseen would be profitable. Not by chance, the Transfert project has been defined by the promoters of the initiative as a ‘sociological experiment’ (Interview, academic).

Like the Grands Voisins, the governance of the Transfert gives considerable autonomy to civil society actors. Every year ‘Pick-up production’ produces a ‘canvas’ for the story and the artistic
and cultural activities to be included in the programme, and then devolves the specific events’ organization to other partner associations.

The common goals of all the actors involved in the project is to transform this marginal and vacant area into a vibrant and inclusive place of culture and art and to become a laboratory of governance, innovation, construction, and artistic creation to question the city of tomorrow (Interview, practitioner).

During the first season of the project, 170,000 people visited the area, turning the Transfert into one of the ‘creative Nantes’ attractions (Transfert website 2018). On the one hand, the Transfert is designed to encourage inclusiveness and culture, on the other hand, it fits perfectly into the dynamics of a scenographic construction of the city, which for Nantes has become a clear urban re-launch strategy. Over the last decades, the positive repercussions of this ‘creative approach’ to the city are evident as the Nantes area has significantly increased its tourist flows and its economy (Morice and Violier 2009). However, it raises questions about this hyper-spectacularisation of the urban that risks watering down this model. Also, as reported on the project website, the Transfert can be privatized for events and private parties: ‘an atypical environment and professional services will allow you to create a unique experience for you and your team!’ (Transfert website 2018). The risk is thus to turn the Transfert project into a ‘Disneyland model’.

Correia (2018) argues that this is a use of the temporary for mercantile purposes since the temporary occupation will last as long as necessary for the real estate valorization of the transformation area. The project’s ultimate goal is spatial development, and its valorization is, therefore, a critical element that shows the double face of temporary urbanism. How much the Transfert project will influence the long-term transformation through its urban test will be the discriminating factor to understand the political will behind this project Figures 10 and 11.
4. Conclusions

Since the 2000s temporary uses have shifted from being an informal practice ‘often scarcely tolerated’ to an urban policy to systematically reactivate vacant or deprived areas. Indeed, temporary use of empty areas has become an instrument of filling the gap (Madanipour 2017), with few resources, and claimed positive results for all parties involved. For municipalities, temporary uses are a tool to revitalize ‘unsexy’ urban areas with creative approaches; for the owners of disused areas a way to protect their property from degradation and possible illegal occupations and very often raise land value; for private investors a way to prefigure scenarios and test people’s reaction; and for civil society free and accessible spaces for social and innovative activities. The ‘broad alliances’ invoked, makes temporary urbanism a desirable strategy to experiment with forms of co-creation and participation within shared governance paradigms (Gerometta, Haussermann, and Longo 2005; Oswalt, Overmeyer, and Misselwitz 2013; Matoga 2019).

The ‘power of temporary use’, as defined by Oswalt, Overmeyer, and Misselwitz (2013), is manifest in its ability to combine very different interests. However, it is precisely this aspect that must be noted. Although these interests can – temporarily – be combined, they remain inevitably separate. This is both a strength and a potentially critical point concerning the use of temporary urbanism in city-making. Thus, to understand the political will and the long-term urban vision beyond temporary urbanism, the crucial point is to understand how far the temporary can affect the ‘long-term city’. Indeed, the positive effects of temporary uses can be identified in their capacity to influence – in the long term – the city-making process. The temporary city should be a testing ground for solutions and answers to contemporary spatial and social issues. For instance, in Paris, the new urban transformation project will include an emergency reception centre thanks to the positive experimentation carried out during the Grands Voisins’ project.

Moreover, as both the case-studies demonstrated, temporary urbanism can bring together a wide variety of actors. This leads to both material and social benefits (e.g. the rehabilitation of a vacant area and the experimentation of new forms of social inclusion). In the case of the Grands Voisins in particular, it is clear that the temporary uses, thanks to their flexible approaches, have responded effectively to social long-standing current issues (e.g. accommodation issue) as well as disruptive and unexpected ones (e.g. the COVID-19 emergency). In particular, we believe that further research related to these matters (especially in post-industrial cities that have to solve the spatial dilemma of urban voids and social issues) would be an interesting strand of research for temporary uses within an institutional dynamic.

On the one hand, temporary uses can partly respond to social issues that do not find convincing answers in the contemporary city. On the other hand, they fit perfectly into the neoliberal paradigm of land valorization, and the controversial dictates of the ‘creative city’ (for an interesting critique of the creative paradigm see Chatterton 2000; D’Ovidio 2016).

Both the Grands Voisins and the Transfert project wink at the creative class and young hipsters; the urban space is spectacularised, and this also makes these spaces great tourist attractions. Temporary uses, as public policy, are therefore inevitably contradictory, and precisely, for this reason, they cannot be considered a priori a panacea or a Trojan horse. Instead, we believe that it might be useful to consider them as inextricably Janus-faced. The two case studies show how temporary institutional uses can simultaneously look towards two different horizons, that of the just city and that of the creative (and often neoliberal) city. The crucial and critical point, once again, is to understand if it is possible to mix these two horizons also in the long-term vision of the city.

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