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Rules of Temporary Re-use of Dismissed Areas: a Way of Thinking the City of Tomorrow

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This paper discusses the topic of the temporary reuse of unused spaces in urban areas. It particularly focuses on the fact that this practice is not to be considered only when open spaces, abandoned lands or disused areas are available. On the contrary, it should be considered as an operating strategy to be used in order to approach the complex phenomenon of the constructed city, and to give new possibilities for the sustainable development of the city.

The practices of temporary reuse begun and developed as an immediate and informal reaction to the phenomenon of abandoned urban areas and disused buildings in post-industrial cities. After the energy crisis in the seventies, various European cities had to face deep social and economical transformations. The results of these changes were impressed in the urban territory, living a heritage of several and diverse abandoned spaces, which remain unmodified nowadays.

Ex industrial areas, factories, slaughterhouses, schools, offices, railway yards, barracks are some examples of the disused spaces, currently representing, in different scale, one of the hardest challenges for the urban development of the city, which is not expanding anymore but continues to grow. The presence of abandoned spaces in a city is often associated to phenomena of urban segregation, insecurity and social dumping, but it can offer the possibility to explore new uses for this areas and to increase, in a sustainable way, the number of spaces addressed to the community. A closer look at these abandoned sites demonstrates how, in absence of a commercial development, they became experimental areas for temporary repurposing. The most common reutilisations of these areas are usually associated to art, music, pop-culture, cultural associations and small start-ups.

Spaces, time, stakeholders, tools, process and architectures of temporary reuse are the necessary ingredients to temporary revitalize a disused space. The final scope is to create new self-organised services for the developing city, together with the controlled experimentation of new, unthought-of, purposes for these areas. This experimentation can be considered as the starting point for new development projects. This article, however, does not focus on the social activities that are allocated in these spaces, or on the various existing case studies, but on the possibilities for Italy to regain the disadvantage cumulated in comparison to other European countries. This disadvantage is engendered by the complex bureaucracy of the country, which stops any initiative of "alternative" use of disused spaces, by the attention given to the protection of private property (and real estate speculation), by the lack of a culture of repurposing for public and social use of abandoned spaces, and by the lack of an administration oriented towards young population of the city. Good practices of efficient and institutionalised politics for temporary repurposing can be observed in: Amsterdam, Brema, Rotterdam and other Northern European countries. Hoping that temporary reuse will become a common practice in our cities too.

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