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The Nordic Association of Architectural Research

Proceedings Series 2020-1

# **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

## **AND ARCHITECTURE AS A RESOURCE**

*Editors: Minna Chudoba, Ari Hynynen, Magnus Rönn, and Anne Elisabeth Toft*

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# MEDIATING 'TEMPORARY USE' OF URBAN SPACE: ACCOUNTS OF SELECTED PRACTITIONERS

Hella Hernberg

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## ABSTRACT

'Temporary use' of vacant space is becoming increasingly recognized as an approach towards more flexible, experimental, and resource-efficient urban development and as a channel for local initiatives and participation. In recent research, the importance of 'mediators' for temporary use has been identified but not explored in greater detail. The mediation of temporary use can be seen as an emerging approach and practice for architects, designers, or urban planners. This work expands beyond the material or spatial aspects of traditional architects' or planners' work, as it includes more sociopolitical dimensions, such as handling complex relations and collaborations among various actor groups.

This article is based on four qualitative interviews of selected established and experienced temporary use mediators in European cities: Ghent, Bremen, Nantes, and Riga. To elucidate the everyday work, emerging competencies, and challenges found in the emerging area of temporary use mediation, this article presents descriptive accounts of temporary use mediators' work. These accounts identify some relevant contexts and conditions of mediation work as well as illustrate the work and roles of the selected mediators and their relations between main stakeholder groups. In addition, based on a thematic analysis of the interviews, the article discusses three core themes in temporary use mediation: managing and building relationships among actors; bridging conflicts; and disrupting dominant traditions, values, and norms in urban planning and development. Linking these themes to relevant theoretical concepts and discourses, the article further points out potential areas for future research.

## KEYWORDS

Temporary use of space, urban planning, participatory design, mediation

## INTRODUCTION

'Temporary use' (TU) of vacant space is an emerging response to contemporary cities' struggles with climate change, demographic and infrastructural change, economic challenges, and participation. TU is becoming increasingly recognized as a flexible, experimental, resilient, and resource-efficient approach to urban development. Temporary use is understood as a 'temporary activation of vacant or underused land or buildings with no immediate development demand'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it enables the use of spaces that have lost their former function and wait for decisions affecting their future.<sup>2</sup> While the duration of TU can vary from months to several years, it is characterized as an in-between stage in development.<sup>3</sup> As an emerging approach, TU challenges traditional processes in urban planning and development, which have been criticized as too concerned with long-term perspectives and permanence.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as a channel for local initiatives and participation, TU is understood as a valuable way to empower actors that are traditionally excluded from urban planning decisions.<sup>5</sup> For planners, architects, and designers, TU opens up new kinds of work practices and approaches, which expand beyond the material or spatial. These new approaches include more sociopolitical dimensions, such as the 'mediation' of complex relations, collaborations, and competing interests among actors.<sup>6</sup>

In recent research, the importance of 'mediators' in temporary use has been identified but not explored in greater detail.<sup>7</sup> This article starts to address part of this gap by presenting accounts of selected established TU mediators in European cities: 1) Neighbourhood managers in the City of Ghent (Belgium), 2) ZwischenZeitZentrale (ZZZ) Bremen (Germany), 3) SAMOA, Nantes (France), and 4) Free Riga (Latvia). The guiding research questions for this article are: How do practitioners account for their experience of mediating TU? What are some relevant contexts and conditions for their work? How do mediators handle relations and address potential conflicts among different stakeholder groups?

The article is part of my doctoral research, which explores the sociopolitical and material nature of TU mediation as an emerging area for architects/designers, which extends beyond traditional competencies related to the design of physical objects, spaces, or urban plans.<sup>8</sup> TU mediation also has the potential to challenge the traditional power relations and expert roles in urban planning and to open up ways for more adaptable and inclusive processes of development.<sup>9</sup> In order to understand the socially and politically complex dimensions in TU mediation work, some discussions in adjacent

fields, such as participatory design (PD) and sustainability transitions, are relevant. For example, discussions on ‘infrastructuring’ in PD conceptualize the mediatory role of design in an open-ended process of building long-term collaboration among a diversity of actors.<sup>10</sup> The concept of ‘agonism’ in PD further helps to advance an understanding of aspects of disagreement and confrontation within TU.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, recent discussions on intermediaries in sustainability transitions elaborates the bridging role of intermediary actors between emerging and more stabilized actors.<sup>12</sup> Architectural discussions on agency, power, and expertise are also relevant for understanding TU mediator roles within urban planning.<sup>13</sup> These discussions provide a background for the empirical study presented in this article.

### **Methods and Selection**

This article presents descriptive accounts of TU mediators’ work based on four in-depth (one- to two-hour-long) qualitative semi-structured expert interviews<sup>14</sup> with professional practitioners from four European TU mediating organizations. The article further discusses the results of a thematic analysis of the interviews, in which a ‘cutting and sorting’ method was used to identify themes<sup>15</sup> and concludes with potential directions for future research.

Within the context of my doctoral research, TU mediation is pursued through two main methodologies: ‘Research through Design’ (RtD)<sup>16</sup> and qualitative research. The RtD approach is based on my own professional practice focused on mediating temporary use,<sup>17</sup> from which I derive different orientations, materials, accounts of my own practice, and conceptual dimensions. The scope of the qualitative interview study presented in this article has been informed by orientations from my RtD practice and crafted with the aim to understand common and different struggles between mediating practitioners, especially regarding the social and political dimensions.

The written accounts and quotations in this article were presented to the interviewees for possible clarification via email. In addition, the level of anonymity used in this article was discussed with the interviewees at the beginning of their respective interview and confirmed after having read the written accounts.

As mediation of TU is an emerging field, there are not many established professional practitioners in this area. The mediating organizations selected for the study are partners of REFILL, which is a leading network focusing on

such practices in Europe,<sup>18</sup> and in which I have been a local expert and advisor. Through REFILL, I selected key articulate and experienced practitioners who have carried out a number of projects, including failures and successes, over more than five years. The selection comes from cities mainly in Northern Europe, in which there are some inevitable differences and specificities in terms of politics, governance, history, and economic situation. Thus, this study does not rely on a direct comparison of work contexts and conditions. Nevertheless, with the practitioners' experience as the unit of study and analysis, the selection enables some common denominators. Through elaborated qualitative accounts of practitioners, which are accounted for as situated and embodied, the aim is to shed light on the characteristics of their work practices and point out relevant areas for further research.

## ACCOUNTS OF MEDIATORS IN PRACTICE

I met with mediators from four different TU mediating organizations in March 2018 in Ghent, Belgium, where the mediators took part in the final conference of the REFILL EU project.<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging my own role as both practitioner and researcher, I did not attempt neutrality but considered the interviews partly as peer-to-peer conversations. Three of the interviews took place in local cafes and one at the mediators' office. The interviews were conducted in English, which was not the native language of any of the interviewees, nor of myself. All of the interviews followed a similar protocol flexibly (see Appendix 1).

In this section, I present descriptive accounts of how the selected TU mediators experienced their work and roles. The section starts with a short overview describing the different contexts and backgrounds and follows with four individual accounts. In each account, I discuss the mediators' role and main tasks, their relations including formal arrangements and potential conflicts with main stakeholder groups, and the related skills and motivations behind their work.

### Overview

The selection of mediating agencies comes from cities in mainly northern parts of Europe: Ghent (BE), Bremen (DE), Nantes (FR), and Riga (LV). There are some differences and specificities in terms of politics, governance, history, and economic situation, but also contextual similarities. In both Bremen and Nantes, temporary use is related to the loss of traditional industries, namely the closing down of shipyards.<sup>20</sup> Today, both cities already have a rather



long-term experience with temporary use: the city of Bremen employed their first temporary use agency for one district in 2007, followed by the founding of ZZZ as an outsourced temporary use agency for the whole of Bremen in 2009.<sup>21</sup> In Nantes, the history of temporary use dates back to 2003, when the organization SAMOA was founded to be in charge of the urban development of the former port area Île de Nantes.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Ghent has had experience with temporary use for over ten years, and the first TU cases were connected to the urban renewal of former industrial sites.<sup>23</sup> Riga, on the other hand, had been the fastest growing capital of the EU until it suffered a severe economic crisis in 2008, which led to large-scale vacancy and freezing of the property markets. The TU mediating NGO Free Riga was founded in 2013 and has evolved from citizen activism towards an independent professional service for private property owners.

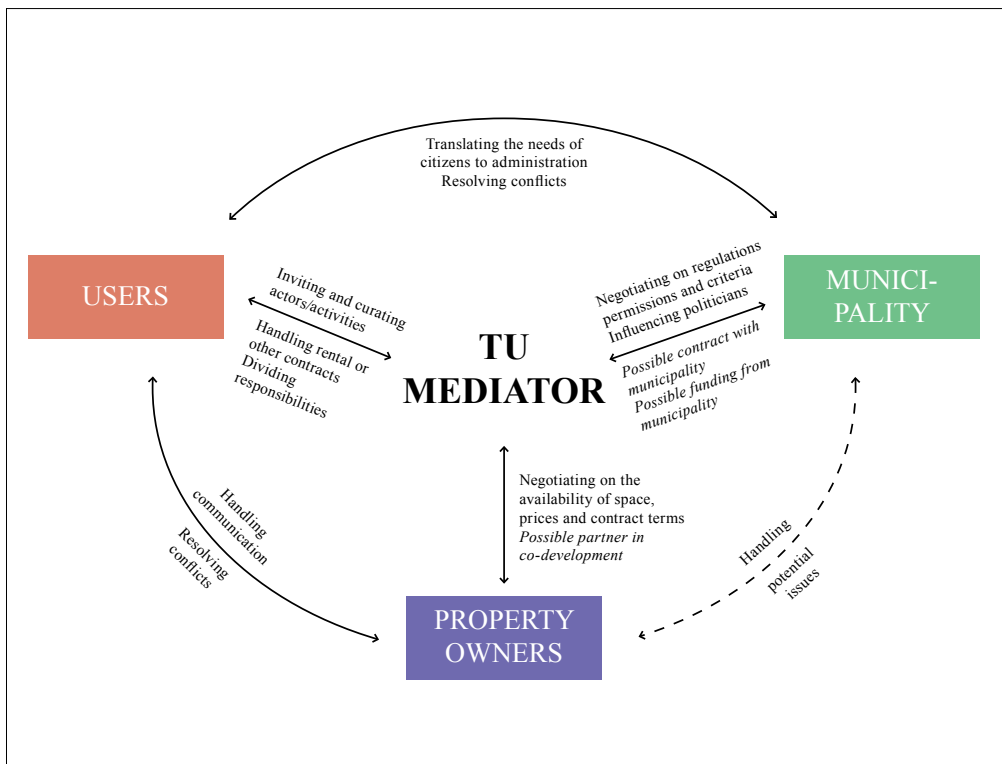


Figure 1. An overview of generic TU mediator tasks and affiliations in relation to the stakeholder groups, based on the four interviews.

As an overview, I have listed some characteristics of the four mediating practices and their contexts in the table below. It is worth mentioning the differences in the mediating agencies' relation to the municipality and related funding: the agencies' positions vary from being located inside a municipal department (Ghent) to having contract and either full (Bremen) or partial (Nantes) funding from the respective municipality, to being an entirely private organization (Riga). As a result, the mediating agencies' roles and relations to the most important stakeholder parties are somewhat different.

Despite contextual differences, there are also commonalities in the selected mediators' work and tasks (see Appendix 2). Their core tasks related to TU mediation consist of handling the relations, collaborations, contracts, responsibilities, and potential conflicts between main stakeholders. The mediators also curate users and facilitate collaboration among them. Despite their varying relations with the municipality, connections to administration and policymakers are important in order to be able to negotiate on various legal, financial, and administration questions regarding temporary use. Figure 1 simplifies and summarizes the generic tasks of the mediators as an overview, while the accounts below reveal more rich details of individual mediators' work.

### **Interview with Two Neighbourhood Managers from Ghent (BE)**

I met with two neighbourhood managers (NMs), who work as civil servants at the municipal Policy Participation Unit in Ghent. The interview took place at their office on the morning of a workday. We were rather tight on time and the meeting took about one hour. One of the interviewees had to leave earlier for another meeting, after which we continued with one neighbourhood manager.

The interviewees work in a team of fifteen neighbourhood managers, who take care of twenty-five different neighbourhoods in Ghent. The Policy Participation unit, which was established in 2003, is placed under the direct responsibility of the mayor, and it has an official mandate on mediation between citizens, other municipal departments, and politicians.<sup>24</sup> Temporary use is linked to their three main activities: information, participation, and co-creation.

### ***Mediator Role and Tasks***

The main task of the NMs, as described by the interviewees, is to know their neighbourhood: to engage in dialogue with the users (residents, businesses, and other organizations) of different neighbourhoods, and to detect needs within the neighbourhood. They further described how it is important to

be reachable and in contact with the citizens in both formal and informal ways: 'We go into the neighbourhood, we participate in initiatives that people organize or other organizations . . . also walks in the neighbourhood, drinks.' According to the interviewees, the temporary use of available vacant spaces is one of their ways to answer the needs discovered, as well as to strengthen the identity of neighbourhoods.

### ***Relations with Users***

According to the interviewees, a vacant building or site may be opened to neighbourhood initiatives to match needs identified in a neighbourhood. If the location is public and central rather than residential, then the initiatives are selected through an open call, based on the proposal's relevance for the neighbourhood or city. Match-making events can also be organized to further support collaboration among potential users.

Our colleague organized this match-making event where everybody who had a proposition, or wanted to do something in *Nest*, could meet up with each other, they could pitch their proposition to each other and to the city. And they also, we also wanted them to, make alliances.

If a TU project is organized in a residential area, the interviewees pointed out that project organizers should come from the same neighbourhood. For citizen initiatives, the vacant space may be offered for free through a 'management contract', where necessary rules, responsibilities, and the intended duration of the TU are stated. The users take care of running costs such as water, heating, or electricity. If the user is a business, then a small rent is charged.

Finding a balance between different desires and treating people fairly was a challenge for the interviewees. For example, they found it essential to avoid unfair competition between temporary users and other businesses and services in the area, while trying to stimulate creativity at the same time.

They [the temporary users] do get some sort of income and that is allowed. But they cannot get rich by receiving a free building from the city. So, it's a difficult balance. Because then you have other bars in the neighbourhood who say, 'How much rent are they paying? Do they have all the licenses?'

In Ghent, the intended ending of a TU project is explicitly agreed on in the beginning, according to the interviewees. However, projects may at times

continue much longer than expected in the beginning, which can sometimes be a challenge. Some temporary users can get tired of continuing a voluntary project that was intended for the short term, while other users may insist on a permanent or long-term contract.

### ***Relations to Owners***

According to the interviewees, temporary use projects in Ghent have been organized in both publicly and privately owned buildings in the city. If the owners are private, then the NMs cannot handle the rental contracts or calls for initiatives, but they can have an advisory role. For example, they can give advice to a private owner and help to communicate with the temporary users to make sure the activities fit the neighbourhood and don't harm the neighbours. In cases where the temporary users were not from the same neighbourhood, the interviewees had experienced conflicts where they had to step in to find a resolution.

My role in that one was to go and talk to the organizers, we got the police involved and other services from the city, [to] not to tell them that they couldn't do it anymore but to explain that they were in a neighbourhood, and they had to take into account the neighbours and the people living there . . . Then I also went to the private owner and said, 'There are some troubles, can you go and talk to those guys?'; and I went to talk to them as well. And then with the police and other services, we put the neighbours together with the organizers, to talk . . . Then we came to some agreements.

### ***Relations to Administration***

While the NMs' relations with citizens are essential, relations to administration also play a big role. The interviewees described complex negotiations within the administration and across municipal departments, for example on the interpretation of regulations in order to adapt spaces for a new use. Their repeated examples of a 'grey zone' indicate particular flexibility towards regulations in Ghent. According to the interviewees, there are strategic goals promoting TU as a creative and experimental activity, which may override certain building regulations. Yet, exemptions to regulations have to be negotiated and explicitly agreed on with the responsible civil servants.

I think we don't have regulations and we sometimes do . . . things so it's in the grey zone. It's the go-between . . .

And then we started looking for other, creative solutions and laws and licenses . . . and a lot of city departments and services came together, and we were thinking about how can we keep them there, in the grey zone. But it is a grey zone. But that is what we want as a city, that people can experiment. If you only go by the strict rules, you cannot do temporary use or things like that.

### ***Skills and Motivations***

Based on the interview, the NMs of Ghent come from diverse backgrounds. The interviewees are from criminology and linguistics, while other NMs are from communication, political sciences, architecture, bioengineering, and so on. 'We have all been cast quite well in our neighbourhoods. This is a fit. It's a great job,' explained one of the interviewees.

The NMs' accounts further revealed a strong experience of their role in between the actors. They described their role as 'brokers,' but also as 'glue' and the 'middle of a sandwich' within the administration and politicians, as well as between users and the municipality.

That is our—my broker role as well to say 'I know the neighbours are complaining, but there are maybe 10 people complaining, there are 200 people not complaining. Let's see what we can do to . . .', so the mediator role in these kinds of projects is important. So, we . . . have our network with citizens in our neighbourhood with the partners, with the organizations, but also within the City of Ghent administration, we need our network of colleagues who we can call . . . And the policymakers [are] also our network. We know all the aldermen, we have to know them and have to be able to contact them.

She feels like a sandwich between the city administration, she feels like she's the middle of a sandwich where you have the citizens and then the city administration and the policymakers and we are in between.

### **Interview with a Founding Member of ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen (GE)**

The meeting with a founding member of ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen (ZZZ) took place in a cafe at one of the temporary use sites in Ghent. The interview took an hour and a half.

The ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen (ZZZ) is a temporary use agency commissioned and funded by the City of Bremen, Germany. The ZZZ was founded in 2009 after a public tender for a city-wide temporary use agency. Its roots are in the architecture collective AAA (Autonomous Architecture Atelier), which was founded in 2006 by three architecture / urban planning students with a passion to organize participatory projects in public space.<sup>25</sup> The interviewee is one of the founders of both AAA and ZZZ.

### ***Mediator Role and Tasks***

According to the interviewee, the ZZZ acts as a mediator renting vacant spaces in Bremen from various owners to temporary users. At the same time, they work in daily contact with the city administration and politicians. The interviewee's account of the ZZZ's work focused on their relation to the users of the temporary space: his essential goals were related to connecting people, finding synergies, and creating 'platforms'. Furthermore, he saw the mediator's role as a 'filter', translating ideas from the users to the administration.

We're the filter of the active people. . . . Our passion is to bring people in new ways together.

We go everywhere and we are everywhere, and people can call us in the night. We are reachable, it's very very important.

### ***Relations with Users***

The interviewee explained that the ZZZ uses various channels to reach out to people of different ages and social groups when a new TU project starts. Open invitations can be sent through various media channels (social media, newspapers, TV), followed by a tour of the site and a workshop to find out about people's ideas. He mentioned different means to connect to the surrounding neighbourhood of a TU site, such as urban walks, workshops, and open door events.

The ZZZ aims, according to the interviewee, to make spaces affordable for diverse groups and to encourage public activities in TU projects. Tools for keeping prices low include renting very small spaces (starting from a copy room of 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>), encouraging users to share spaces, and offering short-term contracts. At first, the temporary users are usually offered three-month rental contracts, which also make the spaces accessible to users who simply want to test their idea and move out, or who don't have the funds to plan for the longer

term. Other users may consolidate, and the TU project itself may last several years. The interviewee pointed out that, after the first formal steps, the mediator should 'give up control' and encourage users to take more responsibility.

### ***Relations to Owners***

The ZZZ rents empty spaces from owners to users at their own risk. As their work is funded by the city, they don't charge a commission from rents, the interviewee explained.

Because if we do so [charge a commission], there's no trust, cause then the people said, 'hey aha, aha, you pay this very low rent and then I must pay, this is . . . huh?' . . . It's equal rights for the users and us, and we're not the broker or the real-estate firm to earn money. Ok, it's a lot of work, but we're paid by the city.

According to the interviewee, the ZZZ's first TU projects were organized in publicly owned spaces. Nine years later, in 2018, half of their owner partners were private and the owners had started taking the initiative to approach ZZZ. However, there have been difficulties in convincing private owners to rent out vacant spaces. Because of the bookkeeping and bank crediting system, keeping spaces unused can be more profitable for owners than renting them below market rents. In order to convince private owners of the potentials of TU, the interviewee had argued for benefits such as enhancing the security of the building, raising the positive media coverage, and getting potential buyers' interest through TU activities.

However, the interviewee explained that collaboration with public property owners is not always simple either.

They gave us space but not so much . . . Yes. Crazy. Because there are many many public spaces empty. But . . . the real estate firm, the outsourced real estate firm . . . said to us, 'Okay, you support squatters.' Then they cut the co-operation. They didn't give us real estate, buildings, or housing. And this is difficult.

### ***Relations to Administration***

The interviewee further described the role of ZZZ as 'informal administration' as they are commissioned by the municipality. He explained that ZZZ is in daily contact with the administration and has monthly meetings with

a steering group, including members of six municipal departments. In the steering group meetings, the ZZZ mediates the ideas and aims of citizens to the administration and politicians, and they discuss potential risks and problems, laws and safety issues. The interviewee further mentioned different kinds of contractual arrangements, which help to enable temporary use within the German bureaucracy and legislation. He explained how working with the administration is not only about understanding real estate, but about 'soft skills'; it's a complex task of navigating among the different aims of six responsible departments as well as politicians.

There are different targets and different aims . . . Every department has different politicians [in] power. . . . And when we want to change something, it's [a] very . . . strange situation, but you cannot do something well if you don't have the helping hands from politics, so . . . it's necessary to have people from politics and also from the administration level.

### ***Skills and Motivations***

The ZZZ consists of a 'diverse team' with different personalities and capabilities. According to the interviewee, this is essential in order to be able to communicate and negotiate with different kinds of stakeholders and the public. While the educational background of the founders of ZZZ is in architecture, urban planning, and cultural studies, the interviewee emphasized that they are 'not normal architects or urban planners.' However, he found traditional architect's skills, such as reading plans, understanding spatial structures, and spaces, necessary. Nevertheless, 'soft skills' required for dealing with the complexity of social situations seemed essential for his work.

The interviewee described his job as 'urban curator', 'dreamer', 'connector', and 'passionful urbanist'. He emphasized that his goal is to bring diversity to the city, open up alternatives for commercially driven urban development, discover people's ideas, and bring people together. He cited 'trust to the people and trust to the owner' as the most important principle in his work. The search for alternatives was clear in how he described what the ZZZ is *not*: they are 'not real-estate brokers', 'not a normal office rental firm', and 'not top-down'.

### **Interview with a Head of Projects at SAMOA, Nantes (FR)**

I met with a 'head of projects' of the urban development agency SAMOA at a cafe in Ghent, in the afternoon between her official meetings in Ghent and



traveling back to France. The meeting was the longest of the four and took almost two hours.

The SAMOA (Société d'Aménagement de la Métropole Ouest Atlantique / West Atlantic Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency) is a 'Local Public Company' in charge of urban planning and development of Île de Nantes, a former industrial harbor site. Samoa works on publicly validated aims with both public and private funding.<sup>26</sup> The interviewee described Samoa's model of urban development as follows: Samoa buys the land, makes plans, and builds infrastructure, and later resells the land or building rights to private constructors. While waiting for permanent development to take place and before reselling the property, Samoa takes the opportunity of time windows of five to ten years and rents available buildings for temporary use.

### ***Mediator Role and Tasks***

The interviewee works as one of six heads of projects at Samoa. She described that she is in charge of construction services, under which temporary use is included, as well as Île de Nantes Expérimentations, which are participatory experiments testing different uses on public spaces. Regarding temporary use, her work involves planning and carrying out renovations to adapt buildings for temporary use, negotiating on regulatory and other issues requiring public validation, taking care of financial balances, organizing the selection process of tenants, and handling rental contracts.

### ***Relations with Users***

The interviewee recalled how TU was initiated at Île de Nantes: In 2003, the newly founded Samoa occupied the empty warehouses of the train manufacturer Alstom as their own office and started seeking others to share the large building. The location had a bad reputation at the time. Thus, Samoa looked for new neighbours through their own networks, mainly within creative fields, and Alstom became a cluster of creative and cultural industries. Later, other TU projects at Île de Nantes were curated as clusters of related fields.

As rental contracts in France are very rigid and there are few options to choose from, the interviewee explained that Samoa's solution was to utilize a 'precarious occupation agreement', which is meant for a maximum twenty-three-month duration.<sup>27</sup> This contract type allows both parties to end the contract 'quickly and safely' without long notice times or fines, which are typical for other French contract types. Thus, this contract allows space for

uncertainty. Despite the twenty-three-month limit, the interviewee mentioned that TU projects had eventually lasted even up to ten years. In some cases, the activities had consolidated at a new location afterward.

The context is that we are not sure what the urbanization is going to be, so during this time of [the] project, we have the opportunity to use those spaces, but it could be for three months, two months, one year, five years, twelve years, we don't know. And the fact that we don't know give[s] us the right to have a derogation of these classical contracts.

The interviewee further described her responsibilities related to citizen participation, which are linked to TU. She is in charge of Île de Nantes Expérimentations, which is a process of co-programming and prototyping new uses for public spaces or vacant buildings together with citizens. Being involved in participation and planning simultaneously has made it important to draw the limits of her and Samoa's responsibilities.

We will again be a little bit clearer on what we are able to do and what not. Naturally, if somebody again speaks about social bonding and so, we won't make like, 'I don't wanna hear that', but we will get the link to the dedicated services to participate [in] it. So we are, more and more, learning that we are kind of just facilitators on lots of things.

### ***Issues of Ownership***

Being the owner of vacant buildings during TU, Samoa can directly benefit from TU and take learning from one project to another. According to the interviewee, TU has enabled Samoa to keep buildings waiting for redevelopment, even with low rents, while not having to worry about squatters or pay for security. However, it has been hard work to keep prices low for TU. She explained that recently their profit expectations from the city had changed, which will put pressure on pricing and may eventually affect the variety of possible user types within TU.

### ***Relations to Administration***

Within fifteen years, Samoa has become, in the interviewee's words, an 'expert on how to occupy old vacant places with the French rules'. Strict building regulations had caused a lot of technical difficulty in her projects, particularly in accessibility and fire security. Therefore, creative problem solving and negotiation skills were essential in handling regulations to enable TU.

The interviewee vividly illustrated various complexities in Samoa's relation to administration and politicians. Regular meetings with *the governance* are held on different levels and different intervals. Public validation is required for both strategic level decisions and small details. She pointed out that Samoa has a political mandate to do things in unorthodox ways, but this approach is not always welcomed in administration.

Often, it's complicated because they [the administration] have the feeling that we are not doing [it] the classical way, and that's true. . . . Sometimes they are attracted to the fact that it's not as usual . . . and sometimes they're just [like], 'No, I just don't care.' . . . And we say, 'But you pay us to make things different and to have a specific ambiance and image on the island' . . . and so it can last years. Yes, no, yes, no, until . . . [we] have a politic[ian] decide it. But do you realize that you have to go to politics to choose the lock of a bike!

Despite the frustration and workload, the interviewee felt that the results had been fruitful: participatory experimentation and temporary use together had contributed to new ways of learning together and making some public services think differently.

Transitional uses are pretexts, often, to . . . both side[s], learning to . . . oblige some services to get into a new way of thinking, and that's probably the most interesting thing in those kinds of projects.

### ***Skills and Motivations***

Two-thirds of Samoa's employees, including the interviewee, are specialized in urban planning and development, and one third in economic development. With experience from various kinds of architectural work, the interviewee seemed proud of her current work but unhappy about the workload. 'It's exhausting. . . . it's a little bit too much for now.'

### **Interview with a Founder of Free Riga (LV)**

The interview with a founding member of Free Riga took place at a cafe in the historical center of Ghent. The interviewee was busy with a work deadline, but we found time for a discussion of almost an hour and a half.

Free Riga is an independent NGO, which offers a 'house guardian' service to owners of vacant properties in the Latvian capital. The interviewee described

how Free Riga had evolved since 2013 from a voluntary project towards a professional 'guardian' service, which is still developing. The start push for Free Riga came in 2013 through the 'Occupy me' campaign, in which stickers were put on empty buildings in order to raise concern for the high vacancy rates before Riga's year as European Capital of Culture.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Mediator Role and Tasks***

The interviewee told me that he had been responsible for framing Free Riga's business model as a 'guardian service' for property owners. He described that Free Riga offers to maintain spaces and reduce costs for property owners, as well as to curate public, socially engaged initiatives that will make the properties more attractive and potentially raise their value. The users are offered affordable space for their initiatives. In return, they take part in small-scale renovation or maintenance work. The interviewee further explained that Free Riga covers different taxes and costs for the owner and also handles communication and contracts between users and owners.

### ***Relations to Users***

The users of Free Riga's spaces are called 'residents'. According to the interviewee, they pay a 'membership fee' instead of 'rent' in order to emphasize the sense of community. The fee equals roughly half of market rents. The interviewee mentioned that the residents are responsible for organizing socially active projects or events in the neighbourhood, but that they may also live or work in the spaces. The residents also take part in small renovations and maintenance work in return for the cheap membership. The interviewee described how Free Riga had gradually learned to draw the limits of their 'guardian' role and to divide responsibilities, which are now explicated in contracts. He pointed out that as guardians, Free Riga aims to 'curate, then step back', gradually encouraging the residents to take more responsibility or even to become guardians themselves.

That was learning from the third phase that . . . more clear responsibilities, that it's less work, less management for guardians, that the community takes part [in] the management, self-manages part of the things that they can do . . . and also that the community selects itself that it kind of fills some roles immediately.

The residents of Free Riga are invited through open calls via social media and Free Riga's other networks. The interviewee described how they had tested

various facilitation methods for the selection process over the years. One of their recent methods, where applicants demo their project ideas together, encourages the applicants to find partners, and thus the community can self-select itself.

An important aspect of mediation, for the interviewee, is to handle communication between the users and owners, who generally don't 'speak the same language'. He also mentioned various experiences of conflict between the owner, user, and other parties. For example, there had been disagreement on suitable activities, or users not taking care of their responsibilities of maintenance work. Some users had experienced troublesome encounters with existing residents of deprived neighbourhoods, and thus mediation was important in order to advocate new activities to existing residents. As a mediator, Free Riga had also developed useful connections with authorities and the police in order to resolve conflicts and problems.

A bus with Swiss activists from Basel, squatter[s], social activists came to [the] opening of this *Pushkin 11, P11* house . . . and then the local Russian inhabitants [were] like, 'Uh, I read what this is [triggered by a rainbow-coloured PACE flag], stay away from my children.' You know, mediating the inhabitants [so] that they understand that it's actually nice, police coming because [the] bus, the Swiss activists' bus, was standing in the middle of . . . this very public field . . . So, police coming, then having to go to municipality to this eastern district commissioner, politically also responsible, [and] explain to him, he says 'Ok very nice what you're doing, we're are letting you go because you have [such] good projects'. He knew me from before.

### ***Relations to Owners***

Free Riga mainly collaborates with private property owners, without public funding. The interviewee explained that in the economic context of Riga, there are smaller-scale property owners who are short of funds and concerned about the costs of vacancy, and thus interested in alternative solutions for their property.

According to the interviewee, a contract with Free Riga offers the property owners significant cost reductions. The owners can get a 90 per cent reduction of property tax through the public benefit status of Free Riga. The interviewee explained that property taxes for 'degraded buildings' have recently become very high in Riga, which has put a lot of pressure on property owners.<sup>29</sup>

Through their experiences in temporary use, the members of Free Riga have become aware of the potential of TU to raise property value. Being concerned that temporary users also should profit from the fruits of their labour, the interviewee has recently been prototyping a 'co-development' deal with some owners.

We are interested in not being just people who gentrify and [the] owner gets millions but share somehow part of this value.

In a co-development contract of five or more years, as explained by the interviewee, Free Riga profiles new activities with the owner and develops ideas for the future, while also earning a share of the increased value. The other option for owners is a 'temporary use' deal, in which the owner gets tax reductions but takes more risk regarding content, as Free Riga selects activities based on their own interest.

### ***Relations to Administration***

Free Riga doesn't have a contract or close relations with the administration, nor do they receive public funding, as do the other mediators in this study. The interviewee explained that in post-Soviet society, 'getting space from public office is cumbersome and slow' and the public sector has 'limited resources to subsidize civic society'. However, he had some fruitful experiences of collaborating with the public administration. For example, he described having 'co-discovered', with the property department's director, the existing policy of tax reductions for properties that are leased for public benefit organizations. This had a significant financial impact on Free Riga.

Based on the interview, the administration context of Latvia and Riga seems looser in terms of regulations as compared to the three other cities in this study. For example, the interviewee explained the technical installations in their buildings:

. . . paying some technician to get water through [the] neighbouring house into this house, through [the] old heating pipe actually . . . State is not controlling so much.

### ***Skills and Motivations***

The professional background of the interviewee is in business and civic activism. He described that Free Riga combines the backgrounds of its

founders in business, art/culture, and facilitation of collaboration. Although their service is directed to property owners, the interviewee proclaimed his passion towards ‘how people can create the city’. He emphasized that the social aim of Free Riga is to provide cheap space that allows more time for people to pursue their passions and meaningful projects with a community. In this way, he wants to contribute to a ‘freer city’.

## COMMON THEMES IN TU MEDIATION WORK

The accounts of four European temporary use mediators presented in the previous section highlighted the interviewees’ experiences of their work and role as mediator, their relations between main stakeholder groups as well as skills and motivations behind their work. This section will further discuss common themes that were derived from a thematic analysis of the interviews.

A thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out by applying a ‘cutting and sorting’ method.<sup>30</sup> In the thematic analysis, relevant parts were selected from the transcripts, cut out, and grouped. Based on keywords from the excerpts, preliminary categories were created. After several rounds of rearranging the categories in relation to each other, twelve subthemes were derived. The subthemes were explained in writing based on the included excerpts and keywords. Finally, the twelve subthemes were regrouped under three main themes.

The three chosen main themes highlight common issues and concerns in TU mediation work, focusing on the sociopolitical dimensions. Based on the analysis, the common tasks, concerns, and issues of the mediation work include managing and building relationships among actors and actor groups as well as bridging conflicts. Furthermore, it is characteristic of TU mediation to challenge and disrupt dominant traditions, values, and norms in urban planning and development. These main themes will be discussed below, with relevant sub-themes marked in italics.

### **TU Mediation as Managing and Building Relationships among Actors**

*Managing relationships* and issues among stakeholders became evident as an important aspect of mediation work based on the interviews. This work included handling contracts, balancing demands, resolving conflicts, negotiating on contradicting interests, and finding compromises among actors and actor groups. For example, the mediator was needed to communicate between parties who didn’t ‘speak the same language’, such as the owner and users

(Riga). Some of the interviewees saw themselves as mediators of citizens' ideas and needs towards policymakers (Bremen, Ghent). Furthermore, many of the interviewees had a role in community building or curating the user community, as well as facilitating collaboration and finding synergies among actors.

Building *trust* was mentioned as essential in mediation work. Many interviewees found it particularly important to build trust towards the temporary users or citizens by giving them some freedom and responsibility within limits (Ghent, Bremen, Riga). Earning trust from stakeholder parties was considered a prerequisite for the mediators' credibility and negotiation power. Conversely, a lack of trust between the owner and mediator had made TU difficult (Bremen).

Some of the interviewees described a feeling of *in-betweenness*, either as a connector of parties or as personally squeezed in between, as was illustrated by the metaphors of 'filter' (Bremen), 'glue', and 'in between the sandwich' (Ghent).

### **TU Mediation as Bridging Conflicts**

The mediators in this study described experiences of *conflicts* as well as contradicting interests or values between stakeholder groups. There is an interesting contradiction about the need for trust mentioned above, within inherently 'agonistic' social conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Conflict situations were mentioned between the temporary users and the residents of the surrounding neighbourhood (Riga, Ghent), between the mediator and the owner (Bremen), between the users and the owner (Riga), and between the mediator and the public administration (Nantes, Bremen). The reasons behind the conflicts were often related to differences in understanding, contradicting views and values, as well as different traditions and cultures of the different parties. Typical were also contradictions between the aims of one group and the limits of existing regulations, policies, or financial arrangements.

In terms of resolving conflicts, several approaches were described, such as putting the conflict parties together to talk (Ghent), a mediator negotiating with the responsible parties (Riga), a mediator balancing the demands of the different parties (Ghent), or long negotiations within the administration (Nantes). Furthermore, it was mentioned that through initial disagreements, the TU approach had in some cases contributed to new learning and understanding among stakeholder parties (Nantes).



### **TU Mediation as Disrupting and Challenging Dominant Traditions, Values, and Norms**

As an emerging and experimental approach, temporary use is understood to challenge traditional longer-term processes<sup>32</sup> and typical power relations in urban planning and development.<sup>33</sup> The TU mediators interviewed in this study illustrated challenges that emerge in practice as a result of introducing unconventional ways of operating and of bringing new actors into a field dominated by rigid frameworks and values of the urban administration and the real-estate business.

In some of the accounts in this study, the TU mediator roles were somewhat identified in relation to TU as an *unconventional or experimental approach* (Nantes, Ghent). This gave the mediator a certain mandate on negotiations on experimental policies or exemptions from regulations. However, the mandate given by politicians was challenged within the existing frameworks of legislation and real-estate business as well as the everyday of municipal administration (Nantes, Bremen). Thus, achieving unconventional solutions required a lot of groundwork and technical understanding along with creativity and negotiation skills.

On a practical level, the mediators' experiences showed how there is often a need to *renegotiate building regulations, economic frameworks, contracts, and policies* in order to enable TU. Some interviewees had been influential in terms of discovering existing policies to benefit TU (Riga), contributing to flexibility regarding regulations (Ghent, Bremen), or finding creative solutions to operate within strict legislation (Nantes). Ghent had a particularly flexible approach to regulations with their agreements on the 'grey zone' and the 'pop-up regulation', allowing exemptions from regulations for three months. While the interviewee from Bremen reported difficulties in matching TU with the traditional business logic of property development, interviewees from Nantes and Riga had developed alternative business strategies in the benefit of TU.

The *temporal uncertainty* of TU brings further challenges and risks. Most interviewees dealt with them by making clear agreements about the intended duration of TU, while leaving room for open-endedness and change. The 'precarious occupation agreement' (Nantes) and the '12-month permission paper' (Bremen) were examples of adapting to the existing legal framework in uncertain conditions. In practice, these tools seemed to be applied loosely with an open ending despite an initially clearly defined timeline.

The interviews further provided examples of how TU can disrupt typical urban planning processes by *giving temporary users more power to influence long-term development*. For example, the co-development model of Free Riga tested how temporary users could become partners with the owner in developing long-term solutions and earning part of the increased property value. In Ghent, the NMs tried to ensure the impact of TU on long-term development so that successful activities would be continued even after TU itself ends.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has elucidated the practice and reality of temporary use mediation work through accounts of selected TU mediators as well as identified themes that reflect common issues and concerns in their work. This qualitative study provides evidence that mediation is necessary for TU processes. As previous research lacks both nuanced practical-level understanding and theoretical conceptualizations of TU mediation work, this article has started approaching this gap through a qualitative study of four TU mediators' work.

Through rich, qualitative accounts, this study has illustrated how TU mediation extends beyond the traditional competence of architects, planners, or real-estate agents. Besides work on spatial, architectural, contractual, or legal matters, the sociopolitical dimensions of the work are complex and fundamental. The complexity of the work is a result of operating between diverse stakeholder groups, which often have contradicting interests, values, and traditions. These complexities also reflect how TU, as an emerging practice, challenges institutional and economic frameworks at the larger scale of urban planning, development, and administration.

The previous section presented three themes derived from a thematic analysis, which highlight common issues and concerns in TU mediation work. Below, I build on those themes to indicate possible avenues for future research, which link the themes to potentially relevant theoretical concepts and discourses.

- **TU Mediation as a New Work Area for Architects, Planners, or Designers**

This study has elucidated the sociopolitical dynamics of relation-building and management among stakeholder groups. They emerge in TU as fundamental and complex, yet they extend beyond the core competencies of architects or planners. In order to understand, arti-

culate, and practise such relationship management, other adjacent fields such as participatory design (PD) and sustainability transitions offer some relevant conceptualizations on the collaborative and dialogic nature of such work<sup>34</sup> and the work of ‘intermediaries’ bridging between actors in situations involving communication problems and different interests or culture.<sup>35</sup> Also relevant for conceptualizing the new role of architects as TU mediators are discussions of agency, power, and expertise in recent architecture discourse.<sup>36</sup>

- **Agonism and Conflict in TU Mediation**

In this study, mediators reported conflicts in TU mediation at the scale of stakeholder relationships. The examples from this study provided evidence that TU has the capacity to open up spaces of contestation and expose ongoing conflicts between competing value systems.<sup>37</sup> Building on ‘agonism’ as discussed in PD<sup>38</sup> and related concepts such as ‘adversarial design’,<sup>39</sup> TU mediation could further develop ways to open up spaces of contestation and to bridge conflicts within urban planning and land use.

- **TU Mediation as Catalyzing Transitions towards More Sustainable Urban Planning and Development**

This study provided practical examples of how TU as an emerging practice can disrupt existing dominant frameworks and traditions within urban planning, development, and administration. There is a need to further understand and support the role of TU mediation in catalyzing these transitions. Recent literature on intermediaries in sustainability transitions provides useful discussions of intermediaries as key catalysts that speed up change towards more sustainable sociotechnical systems by linking emerging and mainstream actors as well as activities, skills, and resources.<sup>40</sup>

Within the emerging area of TU mediation, this article has started addressing a gap in research through descriptive accounts of TU mediation work. In addition, the article has planted seeds for future work with a discussion on themes highlighting core issues and concerns, as well as considerations of future research. Through a better understanding of mediation in TU, it can be possible to influence larger scale transitions in urban planning and land use, thus contributing to more adaptive, resource-efficient, and participatory approaches in urban development.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Interview Guide

#### Research question: What is the role of the mediator?

Q1. Where is the mediator needed? What are the core tasks and capabilities needed?

Q2. What are the limits of the mediator's agency?

Q3. How does the mediator address relations, conflicts, contracts, etc., among different stakeholder groups?

Interview questions:

#### Background questions (20 min.)

About the organization and the mediator role

How did you end up working there? What's your job description?

What are the **tasks, responsibilities** of the mediator?

**Who do you work with?** Who are the main stakeholders?

#### Thematic questions

##### 1. Owners (20 min.)

How do you handle relations between owners and users?

What kind of contracts? Terms, responsibilities, etc.?

How do you motivate owners to open up spaces for temporary use?

Have there been any conflicts or disagreement regarding owners?

##### 2. Users (20 min.)

How do you work with users? Are there any curator activities involved? What kind of support/services do the users need?

Do users take specific responsibilities compared to traditional tenancy agreements?

How do the users benefit from temporary use?

Have there been any conflicts or disagreement?

##### 3. Public sector (authorities) (20 min.)

How is your organization connected to the public sector?

How much regular contact do you have to the administration?

What kind of mandate do you have?

Have you had issues with regulations?

Do you get public funding or other support?

Why does the municipality (not) support temporary use?

## APPENDIX 2

Mediating Organisation	Organization Type	Funding	Ownership of Property for TU	Contracts and Rental Arrangements	Level of Rent	Specific Instruments / Policies	Responsibilities	TU Activity Types	Professional Background
Neighbourhood managers, Ghent	Public sector (Policy participation unit)	Public	Mostly public, some private	'Management contract' or rent, free or low cost	Free or low rent plus running costs	Fund for TU, 'pop-up regulation' for < 3 months	Neighbourhood-level participation, mediating TU	Diverse neighbourhood projects or small business	Diverse
ZZZ Bremen	Private, commissioned by the city	Public	both private and public	Various, rent or 'loan agreement'	Varies	'permission paper' for TU < 12 months	Mediating TU	Diverse: cultural, business, socially responsible	Architecture, Urban planning
SAMOA, Nantes	'Local Public Company'	50% public, 50% private	SAMOA owns the properties	'Precarious occupation agreement'	50–70% of market rent	'Île de Nantes Experimentation'	Urban planning + economic development, mediating TU, participation	Creative and cultural industries, start-ups, media	Architecture, Urban planning, Economy
Free Riga	NGO	Private	Mostly private	'Membership' with users, 'collaboration' or 'co-development' contract with owners	Membership is 50% of market rent + some maintenance work	90% reduction of property tax for public benefit activity	'House guardian', 'co-development'	'Public benefit activities', including art, culture, and neighbourhood projects	Business, Art, Culture

Table 1. An overview of the characteristics and contexts of the mediation practices in this study.

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