Temporary Use of Vacant Urban Spaces in Berlin: Three Case Studies in the Former Eastern Inner-city District Friedrichshain

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Abstract Temporary use of vacant urban spaces has received increased attention during the last 20 years, especially in German-speaking countries, as a viable strategy in urban planning to revitalize unused vacant lots and buildings, which result from ongoing structural changes in industrialized countries. Particularly in the eastern inner-city districts of Berlin, a high number of vacant lots and buildings existed after the fall of the Berlin Wall. For many of these spaces, temporary uses, such as art houses, galleries, music clubs, bars, urban gardens, and alternative living spaces, were established during the 1990s and 2000s. From the end of the 1990s, in a particular area along the River Spree in Berlin's former eastern inner-city district Friedrichshain, a high concentration of temporary uses have been observed. The reasons for this concentration have not been studied in detail. Therefore, this study clarifies the reasons for this geographic concentration by examining three case studies of temporary uses, using surveys and interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014. Additionally, this study exemplifies the characteristics of temporary uses in the surveyed area and shows what can be learned from the conflicts regarding temporary uses. The study concludes that temporary uses can be more than an interim utilization of vacant spaces and are a viable long-term alternative for sustainable urban planning in post-growth cities.

Key words temporary use, vacant urban space, inner city, Friedrichshain, Berlin

Introduction

Temporary use of vacant spaces first became a topic of academic research in Europe, especially in German-speaking countries, in the fields of urban planning, architecture, and geography in the middle of the 1990s. This was due to the ongoing structural changes in industrialized countries from manufacturing to information and service-based economies. The first studies about temporary uses were conducted in Swiss cities, such as Aarau, Basel, and Zürich, where abandoned factories and industrial sites were turned into places for various recreational and cultural activities by informal users (Loderer et al. 1996; Klaus 1996). The first comprehensive study of temporary uses was conducted between 2001 and 2003 by the Berlin-based research project Urban Catalyst. It was funded by the European Union and surveyed temporary uses in several European cities to investigate their potential for long-term urban development. Based on this survey, a typology of the various forms of temporary uses and their actors was developed and a new form of urban planning that actively integrates temporary uses into planning processes was proposed (Studio Urban Catalyst 2003; Oswalt et al. 2013).

In general, temporary use is the acquisition of the right to use a vacant house or lot for a short or limited period of time. In German, the word “Zwischennutzung” refers to a use in between other uses and, therefore, could also be translated as an interim use. Because the term temporary use is defined differently throughout the existing literature, this paper follows the definition of Otto (2015: 23), who specifies three main aspects of temporary uses in Berlin, which is the study area of this paper (Figure 1).

First, the temporary use takes place on a vacant property and/or in a vacant building/room. Second, the temporary use is intended to be temporary from the beginning and all involved actors are aware of the limited time frame. Third, the temporary use constitutes a change of usage of the property as compared to the previous and the planned future use.

The users are various individuals or organizations consisting of citizens, artists, or urban entrepreneurs. According to Oswalt et al. (2013: 53), the actors in temporary uses have only limited financial resources but are often creative, socially connected, and show great dedication and willingness to improvise. Temporary uses
initiated by these actors comprise open-air bars, camp-sites, ateliers, galleries and open-air exhibition spaces, flea markets, gardens, music clubs, sports facilities, shops, offices, etc. Prominent examples for temporary uses in Europe are Spitalfields Market in London (cultural activities in unused market halls), area in Basel (socio-cultural activities in a disused freight yard), Park Fiction in Hamburg (a public neighborhood park on a vacant lot), and the Arena Berlin (art, music, sports events, etc. in a former bus depot).

For the users, temporary use can be an attractive, low-cost way to experiment with a new business idea, to start artistic and cultural activities, or to set up nonprofit projects. Centrally located properties can be rented for relatively low prices and initial investment for these sites is often low due to the time-limited character of the venture (Oswalt et al. 2013: 52). For property owners, including municipalities, temporary use of the site can contribute to the reduction of maintenance costs and to the preservation of a property’s value through cultural activities, as long as the planned development cannot be realized. Activities on the property can also prevent damage caused by vandalism or disuse and can contribute to a positive image of the site.

Furthermore, according to Angst et al. (2010: 84), free spaces and temporary uses are an important factor for cultural innovation, as they provide a place for experiments that would not, or would only partially, be employable for economic utilization in a more traditional environment. Moreover, creativity at these places is nurtured by the friction with the existing social and political conditions, and for this reason, the cultural sector requires a foundation that is not directly controllable, which means that informal activities are regarded as the basis for further creative development (Oswalt et al. 2013: 61). Additionally, temporary uses, despite their short-term character, can have a lasting effect on the development of locations, industries, and cultural sectors. This case, temporary use can act as an innovator for already established structures.

The interest in temporary uses has not been limited to academic research. This type of informal use has attracted the attention of the German government as it was confronted with a great amount of urban decline after the German reunification in 1990. Since the beginning of the 2000s, several publications of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs have examined a range of temporary uses throughout the country, at first mainly as part of urban redevelopment programs in the eastern parts of Germany (BBR 2004), and subsequently in the whole country, with an increasing focus on temporary uses as important to the cultural sector and the “creative city” (BMVBS and BBR 2008, 2012). These reports consider temporary use as an urban planning tool for spaces where traditional planning strategies are not, or not yet, viable. Furthermore, in times of reduced public spending, temporary uses are perceived as an inexpensive way to reactivate vacant lots, establish new public spaces, stabilize socially disadvantaged quarters, and promote a positive image of an area, which can lead to further revi-
talization or upgrading.

In these studies, Berlin plays a significant role. It is the city with the most temporary-use properties in Germany (BMVBS and BBR 2008: 9) and was aptly titled the “Capital of temporary uses” (Bodenschatz 2011). The number of temporary uses in the city has continuously increased during the 1990s and the 2000s (Figure 2), together with the research about them. According to a 2004–2006 study conducted in cooperation with Berlin’s Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing, Urban Catalyst identified about 100 temporary uses in this city alone (SenStadt 2007). A more recent study listed a total of 114 city-wide temporary uses for the period between 1990 and 2012, of which 56 were still in operation in 2012 (Otto 2015: 86). Both studies have identified the inner-city districts Mitte and Friedrichshain as preferred locations for temporary uses. In addition, SenStadt (2007) highlighted an area along the River Spree (hereinafter called the Spree) in the Friedrichshain district as having a high concentration of temporary uses in recent years. However, detailed reasons for this geographic concentration were not provided in this study. Furthermore, previous research in German-speaking countries mainly provides a general overview of temporary uses citing singular examples. So far, no comprehensive interview-based research with case studies of temporary uses in a certain geographic area within a city has been undertaken. Such a study can show what makes a certain area attractive for operators of temporary uses.

Therefore, this paper attempts to clarify the reasons for the geographic concentration of temporary uses, which have become a widespread phenomenon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 in Berlin’s inner-city district Friedrichshain, particularly along the River Spree. For this purpose, the first part of this paper examines the historical background that was the prerequisite to Berlin becoming the “capital of temporary uses,” followed by a depiction of the emergence of the first temporary uses in Berlin after the fall of the Wall, and the spatial distribution of temporary uses throughout the city, as well as the different types of temporary uses. The next part consists of a description of the area along the Spree in the Friedrichshain district, followed by case studies of three temporary uses located in this area with information drawn from field surveys and interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014. The case studies provide a detailed analysis of the temporary uses to gain a better understanding of their types, their operators, the kinds of utilized vacant spaces, the problems faced during their existence, and the reasons for establishing the temporary uses in this particular area.

**Emergence of Temporary Use in Berlin**

**Historical background of Berlin**

It is conceivable that Berlin’s historical background significantly contributed to the emergence of temporary uses in the city. After the reunification, numerous vacant lots and buildings existed in Berlin for several reasons. Some of the vacant lots, especially in the eastern inner-city districts, resulted from damage during the Second World War. Many damaged houses were torn down and

![Figure 2. Number of temporary uses in Berlin by year of establishment in the period between 1981 and 2011. Source: Otto (2015: 88).](image-url)
not rebuilt. In addition, the housing policy of East Berlin was concentrated on the construction of new large-scale prefabricated buildings, and therefore, the remaining housing stock in the inner city was neglected. A part of the remaining older buildings in East Berlin, as well as in West Berlin, which were slated for demolition to make room for new construction, often stood empty for long periods of time and fell into decay. When the Wall came down, about 25,000 dwellings in East Berlin were vacant, which is more than twice the number of vacant apartments in West Berlin during the 1980s (Sheridan 2008: 102). Even if damaged or unused buildings were demolished, the building sites often remained empty because planned projects had failed, were insufficiently funded, or faced opposition by citizen movements (Otto 2015: 70).

In 2007, the city had about 1,000 available building plots with a total area of 170 hectares in inner-city districts or on the city’s periphery (SenStadt 2007: 30) (Figure 3).

Furthermore, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), private ownership of property was strongly regulated by law and many properties fell under state control or were dispossessed after the Second World War. After the reunification, dispossessed buildings and land in the districts of former East Berlin were returned to their rightful owners or sold if no owner could be identified. In the Mitte district, for instance, this restitution process was required for about 70% of the land (Krätke and Borst 2000: 154). This process was often complicated and took a long time, sometimes even years, during which buildings often stayed unrenovated and unused (Häußermann and Kapphan 2002: 102).

Moreover, due to the change from a planned economy to a market economy after the reunification, a great number of industries in East Berlin vanished literally overnight, as they were not able to compete under the new economic conditions. Structural changes were not restricted to the eastern parts of the city. The industry in West Berlin had been heavily subsidized by the West German Government during the division and was no longer competitive with the gradual reduction of subsidies (and finally their cessation in 1994) after the reunification, which led to factory closures or relocations away from the city. As a result, between 1991 and 2007, employment in the manufacturing sector decreased in the whole city by 178,000 jobs, to only 86,000 remaining jobs (Krätke 2011: 160), and in 2007, Berlin had over 500 hectares of available space in former industrial sites (SenStadt 2007: 29).

In addition, the expected population growth and development of Berlin into a new service metropolis, as a result of its new status as Germany’s capital and seat of the German government, did not materialize anytime soon. During the first investment boom at the beginning of the 1990s, many office buildings were constructed based on future growth prospects that had been overly optimistic and did not match actual demand. As a result, Berlin had an enormous amount of vacant office space during the 1990s (9.7 percent in 1998) and 2000s (9.5 percent in 2004) (Krätke and Borst 2000: 138, Bulwiengesa 2016: 4). This situation can explain the high number of undeveloped vacant spaces in other parts of the inner city (especially in the Spree area mentioned in the next section); during the 1990s and 2000s, there was no demand for the office spaces that were envisioned in most of the building projects.

Furthermore, due to the financial situation of Berlin, the city’s administration was unable to develop the vacant lots itself. The city’s own financial corporation had actively participated in speculative real estate investments in the eastern parts of Germany at the beginning of the 1990s. When the real estate boom eventually turned into a market crisis in the middle of the 1990s, the city of Berlin was left with a financial burden of roughly 60 billion euros (Krätke 2011: 162). To mitigate the debt burden, publicly owned properties that were no longer needed were sold off to developers for the highest bid. To centrally manage and organize this sales process, a real estate fund (Liegenschaftsfonds Berlin GmbH, LFB) was established by the state of Berlin in 2001. Apart from selling properties, one of the tasks of the LFB from 2004 was to lease unused properties for a reduced rent to short-term projects until a buyer was found (LFB 2013).

For the above-mentioned reasons, a high number of lots and buildings, mainly in the eastern parts of the city, had lost their former function, stood empty, or were not yet available for a new use for a duration of several years after the fall of the Wall. This situation was used by a
wide range of actors, such as urban entrepreneurs, artists, squatters, students, and musicians, who began to utilize the vacant lots and buildings for their own projects.

**Beginnings of temporary use after the fall of the Berlin Wall**

The first, and initially illegal, temporary uses shortly after the fall of the Wall were squats that occurred in vacant houses in the eastern parts of Berlin and that were made possible by the absence of state authority during this transitional time after the collapse of East Germany. In two phases between December 1989 and April 1990 and between May and July 1990, around 70 houses were squatted primarily in the districts Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, with another 50 houses in the Friedrichshain district (Holm and Kuhn 2011: 650). The first phase consisted mainly of cultural squats with one famous example being the Kunsthaus Tacheles (Art House Tacheles) in the Mitte district, a huge ruin slated for demolition by the GDR government that was used as an atelier, gallery, cinema, bar, and club, and which was later legalized (Ikeda 2014). Many other squats of the first phase were relatively quickly legalized into cooperatives as well, whereas the politically motivated squats of the second phase were ended by the authorities through evictions (Holm and Kuhn 2011: 650).

Other temporary uses in the early 1990s were electronic music clubs, such as Tresor, WMF, or E-Werk, that first occupied vacant buildings in the area around Potsdamer Platz, which resembled a vast wasteland after the fall of the Wall. Many of these clubs were interim uses with short-term rental agreements, and some of them even operated without any contract in the beginning and had to frequently change their location when their activities were discovered by the authorities (Krauzick 2007: 44). It was mostly through these electronic music clubs, music festivals such as the Love Parade, and places such as the Kunsthaus Tacheles that the image of a “New Berlin” was shaped during the 1990s (Oswalt et al. 2013: 60). Recent research suggests that the availability of free spaces played an important role for the development of new cultural activities in Berlin after the fall of the Wall (Ikeda 2014). In addition, Shaw (2005: 153) argues that the existence and development of underground and alternative urban cultures, in Berlin and elsewhere, are indissociable from the availability of such vacant or abandoned spaces. Friedrich (2014: 275) points out the tremendous influence that vacant spaces, available for little or no money, had on the development of a new music industry in Berlin after the fall of the Wall in 1989, where the city administration played no role in planning or marketing. This music industry, together with the culture and arts scene of Berlin, has become an important economic factor for the city of Berlin since the 1990s and 2000s. According to the city administration, the image of Berlin generated by club music, culture, and arts attracts not only a great number of tourists, but also new residents and companies (SenWi 2007: 15). Furthermore, a study by the Berlin Tourismus Marketing GmbH found that music clubs rank second behind museums on a list of the most-visited cultural institutions by tourists in Berlin (Rapp 2009: 54).

Studio Urban Catalyst (2003: 8) has pointed out that many temporary uses examined in its study evolved from alternative movements or subcultures and that economically weak cities, such as Berlin or Amsterdam, had a stronger cultural background for temporary uses. Over several decades, Berlin had been an attractive place for all kinds of creative and nonconformist people. Due to its division and the separation from West Germany, male residents of West Berlin were exempt from military conscription, which attracted many young people who had a critical attitude towards the state (Otto 2015: 79). During the 1960s, Berlin had a very active student movement, and from the 1970s a lively subcultural scene was formed in West Berlin, consisting of artists, musicians, students, squatters, and a multitude of social movements. The Kreuzberg district, which directly bordered the Wall, became famous for its counterculture with activists who occupied ruined or abandoned buildings and renovated the buildings themselves to protest against their demolition and the housing policy of the city’s government, the Senate of Berlin (Holm and Kuhn 2011: 646). There was also a subcultural scene in East Berlin. Artists, musicians, students, and political dissidents, who often had difficulty finding an apartment through formal means because of the state-controlled allocation of homes, occupied some of the ruined buildings in the inner city of East Berlin, particularly in Prenzlauer Berg, but also in Mitte and Friedrichshain (Vogt 2005: 171–173). In contrast to the squatters in West Berlin, the occupants in the east mostly tried to legalize their housing situation after moving in and, in some cases, even paid rent without having a rental contract (Grashoff 2010).

Therefore, it can be argued that many of the actors who shaped the new image of Berlin during the 1990s were already active in the city before the fall of the Wall. These existing creative actors, together with newcomers who moved to the city after the fall of the Wall, made use of the abundant vacant urban spaces by establishing music
clubs, bars, galleries, cultural and social projects, and green spaces or urban gardens. For these reasons, temporary use became a common phenomenon in the city during the 1990s and 2000s, particularly in the eastern parts of the inner city, as explained in the next section.

**Geographic location and types of temporary uses**

Figure 4, based on research by Otto (2015), which is the most comprehensive analysis of temporary uses in Berlin to date, shows the spatial distribution of temporary uses throughout the city’s former 23 districts. Of a total of 136 locations, 95 (69.8 percent) were situated in the inner city, specifically in the eastern districts Mitte (34 locations, 25.0 percent) and Friedrichshain (28 locations, 20.6 percent), followed by 12 locations each (8.8 percent) in the eastern inner-city district Prenzlauer Berg and the western inner-city district Tiergarten. In the outer city, there are a total of 41 locations (30.2 percent) with a concentration in the eastern districts Köpenick (8), Lichtenberg (7), and Treptow (6). This concentration in the eastern districts of the city can be seen as a result of a greater availability of vacant spaces after the reunification, as explained earlier. Despite a high availability of vacant lots and buildings in the outer-city districts, only a small number of temporary uses is located there. Figure 4 also shows that even in these outer-city districts, temporary uses appear to be more often located in areas close to the inner city. Another noticeable characteristic is the location near water, as 36 locations (26.5 percent) are situated near a body of water. This spatial distribution of temporary uses shows a preference for locations that are central, and therefore easily accessible, and which have attractive surroundings, such as a river.

Figure 4 also shows the different types of temporary uses for each district. The most frequent type of temporary use is the gastronomical use, with 38 projects (27.9 percent) as bars, music clubs, cafés, or restaurants. Out of these, 34 (89.5 percent) gastronomical uses are located in the inner city and the vast majority (27 projects, 71.1 percent) of them are in the eastern inner city. The second most frequent type of use is as a green space or garden, such as neighborhood gardens, intercultural gardens, and dog runs, totaling 23 projects (16.9 percent). This is the only type of temporary use that is mostly located in the outer city. The third most frequent type of use is the cultural or artistic use with 21 projects (15.4 percent), which are almost exclusively located in the inner city. This use consists of, for example, installation artworks, theater projects, galleries, and exhibitions. Other types of uses are recreational and sports activities with 14 projects (10.3 percent), 14 social projects (10.3 percent), 12 commercial projects (8.8 percent), 12 trailer parks3 (8.8 percent), and 3 projects that do not fit into any of these categories.

**Case Studies Located near the Spree in the Friedrichshain District**

**Spree Riverside**

As shown in the previous chapter, most of Berlin's temporary uses are or were located in the inner city, especially in the eastern districts Mitte and Friedrichshain. Furthermore, many of them are or were situated close to the Spree, with a maximum of 24 in 2007 (Figure 5). Half of these 24, 12, consisted of gastronomical uses and music clubs; the other were seven cultural or artistic uses, two trailer parks, two flea markets, and one green space. 13 of them are located in the Friedrichshain district alone. This area, although administratively called “Spreeaum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg” (Spree River Area Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg), encompasses parts of the eastern districts Friedrichshain, Mitte, and Treptow, and the western district Kreuzberg. The area’s former East-German part was characterized in the 1990s and early 2000s by wide empty spaces, partly as a result of its history as the “death strip” along the Berlin Wall, an area along the border that was almost completely cleared for surveillance purposes. Furthermore, a high number
of large-size industrial, railroad, and harbor sites were located along the riverside, which became defunct for the most part during the 1990s due to a lack of competitiveness under the new market conditions and due to over-capacities in reunified Germany (SenStadt 2007: 29). In its planning concepts from the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Senate of Berlin identified this area as a place appropriate for large-scale leisure, sports, and cultural facilities of city-wide significance due to its vast unused spaces (SenStadt 2001: 25). In addition, the area was described as having favorable conditions for businesses in the fields of media, design, information technology, pharmaceutics, and solar technology (SenStadt 2001: 21). Temporary uses, especially in the fields of culture, media, and music, were already acknowledged as having positive effects on the image of the area. However, for the remaining vacant sites, the only temporary uses that were desired were those that stayed only for a short time and did not interfere with the envisioned long-term development plans (SenStadt 2001: 32).

In the middle of the 1990s, parts of the area were developed mainly with office buildings and a few commercial facilities (Mediaspree 2007). Since 2002, a large part of the area, about 180 hectares, has been actively promoted as a site for large-scale media enterprises in a public-private partnership under the name “Mediaspree” to attract investors. The area quickly confirmed its image as a place for media and music industries with the relocation of the German headquarters of Universal Music in 2002 and MTV in 2004, to newly renovated warehouses at the Osthafen. These two companies were attracted by the vibrant subcultural club and music scene of the city (Bader and Scharenberg 2009). Since then, several smaller media companies have opened offices in nearby buildings.

However, despite the construction of a small number of new office buildings in this area, the focus in the Friedrichshain district was on converting existing industrial buildings into offices. The before-mentioned overabundance of office space in the city had made many of the development plans unnecessary at the time. The first large-scale construction in the Friedrichshain district was an indoor arena for music and sports events that was opened in 2008 (O2 World). Other projects were only realized much later, such as a new office building for a car manufacturer in 2013 and the “East Side Office” in 2016, or are currently under construction. Therefore, many of the existing vacant spaces in the area remained unused during the 1990s and 2000s. At the same time, vacant lots and buildings in other inner-city districts were decreasing or had already vanished. As a result, a high number of temporary uses were established close to the Spree in the
The following section will describe in detail three temporary uses that are or were located in this area. The reasons for choosing these three temporary uses are as follows. In many cases, temporary uses are true to their name as a temporary venture. As mentioned before, out of the 114 projects listed by Otto (2015: 86), about half of them had already vanished by 2012. The three case studies are unique in that they were the only temporary uses in the Spree area and in the Friedrichshain district that had been established in the 1990s and were still in operation at the time of the survey (2013 and 2014). Because of their long existence, these temporary uses were thought to provide sufficient material for a detailed analysis of their histories and of the changes they experienced over the years. Furthermore, as these projects were still in operation at the time of this survey, their operators could be interviewed to clarify, among other things, their reasons for choosing this location.

**RAW-site and its multitude of temporary uses**

RAW, an abbreviation of its German name “Reichsbahnausbesserungswerk” (Imperial Railway Repair Workshop), is located at 99 Revaler Strasse in the Friedrichshain district (number 1 in Figure 5). The railway workshop, located on a property of approximately 72,000 m², was founded in 1867 and remained in operation until 1994 when the then-owner, the railway company Deutsche Bahn, shut it down due to overcapacity of maintenance facilities in reunified Germany. At that time, no further use was intended for the grounds, and they were left to ruin. Only a small part of the property adjacent to the rail tracks was used by a private company, Talgo, for maintenance of night trains. According to the interview with one of the operators of the site (hereinafter referred to as “A”) conducted on April 19, 2013, the other parts of the premises remained closed to the public, and the vast unused area attracted the attention of occasional illegal uses, such as clubs or bars, which were forced to close by the police. Interviewee A, a performance artist and musician who grew up in Berlin, further stated that this location was attractive for users because of its wide area that provided “a sense of freedom (Gefühl von Freiheit)” and sufficient “Space for experimentation (Raum zum Experimentieren, Experimenteller Freiraum)”; and because it was abandoned at the time, it was hoped that it would be available for an affordable price as well. Consequently, representatives of cultural and creative facilities, together with neighborhood residents, held a meeting in June 1998 to explore possibilities of using the vacant lot legally. As a result, the civic group “RAW-tempel e.V.” (RAW) was founded shortly thereafter in July 1998 (RAW-tempel e.V. 2010: 5). Through an introduction by the district administration of Friedrichshain, the first meeting between the property owner—the “Deutsche Bahn Eisenbahn Immobilien” (EIM), a company founded in 1996 to manage the sale of unused properties of the Deutsche Bahn—and the civic group was held in December 1998. The following year, in 1999, permission for temporary use without rent for three years was granted for an area of approximately 6,000 m² and four buildings, with the district acting as the main tenant of the property. However, according to A, RAW had to bear the operational costs and the costs for renovating the buildings. Consequently, temporary use of the RAW-site commenced in 1999 (Figure 6).

In April 2001, the EIM was converted into the company Vivico Real Estate GmbH, which was tasked with developing and selling unused railway properties. As a result, the rental agreement with RAW was canceled prematurely, and a new one would only be granted if the users developed a business plan and renovated the buildings. Vivico’s own development plans for the RAW-site entailed a large-scale commercial construction with a total floor area of about 15,000 m² (Villinger 2002). Despite these plans, Vivico approved a 10-year temporary use grant for the SGL building (letter d in Figure 7) in March 2002, as RAW secured financial support from the EU program Urban II for the renovation of this building. Interviewee A stated that RAW’s business plan, which was necessary to receive funding for the project, consisted of the development of a start-up center for sociocultural and art-related projects. However, excepting the SGL building, Vivico did not approve new temporary use contracts for the other three buildings that had previously been
used by RAW (letter a, b, c in Figure 7), despite attempted mediation by the district administration from 2004 to 2006. In the meantime, other users were attracted to the area and started to establish new businesses on the premises beginning in 2004. At first, a sports hall for skateboarding and BMX riding, a climbing facility, a music club, and an open-air restaurant were established. All of them independently negotiated with the property owner and received temporary use rights for five years.

In 2007, Vivico canceled its development plans and the property was sold to an Icelandic-German investment group. Repeated negotiations between RAW and the new owner led to the execution of a ten-year temporary use contract in 2010. Around this time, some of the unused parts of the property were leased to new businesses, such as an electronic music club, a concert venue, art galleries, and several street food vendors. As of 2014, the RAW-site provided space for more than 60 establishments operated by 36 different groups (Table 1), 17 of which were cultural facilities, 12 were gastronomical establishments, and seven were sports and leisure facilities. Additional uses included three small businesses offering tourist guidance, a photo studio, and a furniture shop (Figure 8). Regarding cultural facilities, the only not-for-profit organization is RAW (number 1 in Figure 7), which functions as an umbrella organization for a wide range of socio-cultural projects, such as a children’s circus, theater, and music school. Other cultural facilities on the premises include music institutions, art galleries, and several ateliers and studios for arts and crafts (Figure 9).

Due to internal conflicts of the property owner, the property was later divided, and the western part, with a size of 52,000 m² where RAW is located, was sold to a German investor in 2015. The new owner has expressed an intention to preserve the existing temporary uses and to develop the property in consultation with the users, neighborhood residents, and district administration. In 2016, several workshops were held where ideas regarding the future development of the site were discussed. The eastern part of the RAW-site was sold to a German real estate agency after the former owner filed for bankruptcy. No development plans for this part of the property have been made public, and the existing temporary uses remain for the time being.

The temporary uses on the RAW-site made an unused and inaccessible vacant space in the inner city available to the public by initiating various social and cultural projects. Beginning with this, more users were attracted and commercial and cultural uses, such as bars, music clubs, and sports facilities, were established on the premises. However, due to frequent changes of the property’s ownership, the temporary uses on the RAW-site often had to negotiate rental contracts while facing an uncertain future. According to A, this was often a complicated and lengthy process, despite support from the district administration. A further stated that due to unsupportive and shortsighted political decisions by the Senate regarding temporary uses and urban development in general,
affordable vacant spaces had become increasingly difficult
to obtain in the 2000s. Nevertheless, many temporary
uses on the site have become firmly established, some of
them existing for more than 15 years, and they appear to
have the possibility to exist even longer.

Music and arts venue Maria

The cultural facility Maria was located at number 2
in Figure 5 from 2002 until 2014 (Figure 10). Maria was
registered as a club and equipped with studios and ate-
liers. The venue hosted various cultural and music-related
events, such as readings, theatrical performances, con-
certs, and club nights. The property measured 8,000 m²,
and the building located on the grounds had been con-

Table 1. Major groups on RAW-site in 2014

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<th>Usage</th>
<th>Founding Year</th>
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<td>Cultural Facility</td>
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Usage:
A: Atelier, showroom
Am: Sports facility
B: Bar
C: Cafe
Ca: Cafe
E: Kitchen studio, wholesale firm
I: Vendor
K: Concert venue
Ki: Cinema
R: Restaurant
S: Studio
T: Theater
W: Craft studio

Note: A Dash means that no information was provided.
Source: Own research. Last updated on October 20, 2014.

Music and arts venue Maria

The cultural facility Maria was located at number 2
in Figure 5 from 2002 until 2014 (Figure 10). Maria was
registered as a club and equipped with studios and ate-
liers. The venue hosted various cultural and music-related
events, such as readings, theatrical performances, con-
certs, and club nights. The property measured 8,000 m²,
and the building located on the grounds had been con-

Figure 8. Furniture shop between ruins on RAW-site. Photo taken by the author in October 2014.

Figure 9. Art gallery with ateliers and café on RAW-site. Photo taken by the author in October 2014.

Figure 10. Music and arts venue Maria (low-rise building in the foreground). Photo taken by the author in November 2013.
structured in 1927 as a garage and repair shop for vehicles used by the city administration. The building had originally been planned as a four-story construction, but it was not completed and was eventually damaged during the Second World War. During the division, the GDR border patrol used the southern part of the building located along the river, while the northern part of the building served as a boat engine factory. However, with unrepaired damage from the Second World War, both the building and land remained unused until 1999. Operator B, who opened Maria at this site in 2002, explained during the interview on November 27, 2013, that sections of the building above the ground floor were demolished when he moved in. He further stated that he found the layout of the building, a wide hall without walls, to be ideal for the use of a club. Before Maria moved in, the cultural group “Deli e.V.” used the building, which was designed to resemble a gallery at that time, as a club for music, art, and architecture between 1999 and 2002.

During the interview with B, who was also the representative of Maria, his personal history showed that he had already been an active participant in other temporary uses in Berlin since the reunification. He was born in 1960 in the West German city of Dillenburg, and began photography-related work in Hamburg in 1984. In the 1980s, B visited West Berlin several times for his work with a West German theatre troupe. He moved to Berlin in September 1990, where from September 1990 until 1993, he operated the club “Ständige Vertretung,” which was located in the basement of “Kunsthaus Tacheles” until its closure in 1995. From 1993 to 1997, B was involved in another cultural venue, the “I.M. Eimer” at 68 Rosenthaler Street, an autonomously organized cultural squatting in Mitte, which was fashioned in the same style as Tacheles.

After that, drawing on his experiences, B and four other artists founded a club they named “Maria am Ostbahnhof” in the former post office O17, next to the railway station Ostbahnhof (number 4 in Figure 5). The O17-building was constructed in the GDR in the 1960s. Its ground area measured 2,189 m² with a floor space of 22,000 m², of which “Maria am Ostbahnhof” used only a very small part of around 800 m² and the rent was approximately 6,000 Deutschmarks. Although the building was obsolete from a technical aspect, it was still in good condition structurally in 1998, according to B. He also explained that one of the reasons for coming to this area was the increasing difficulty of finding affordable vacant spaces in more central districts, such as Mitte, at that time. He explained that most of the properties in Mitte had either been restituted to their previous owners or sold off, and many of the dilapidated buildings had been renovated and were in use again. B also explained that this location was chosen due to its wide area and lack of residential buildings in the neighborhood, which made it well-suited for playing loud music without disturbing others.

As development plans around the Ostbahnhof progressed from 2001, the property owner, Deutsche Post Property Co., demanded that the operators of Maria pay the utility costs for the whole building. As a result, the management of “Maria am Ostbahnhof” did not renew its contract and moved out in November 2001. The building was eventually demolished in 2006. The site remains vacant today and is being used as a parking lot for nearby businesses. Having abandoned operations at the former O17-building, B relocated to number 2 in Figure 5. The owner of this property was the LFB. The property belonged to the Friedrichshain district prior to its transfer to the LFB to manage the sale of the site. B was able to acquire temporary usage rights for these grounds, as no actual plans for development of this site existed at the time. The building on the grounds was only equipped with a sewer connection; thus, fresh water and electricity access had to be installed, and the damaged roof had to be repaired. B and his business partner did all the necessary repair work themselves. For these reasons, the monthly rent was relatively low at €5,000. The rental period was six months and automatically renewed if not cancelled by either side. The city administration’s land-use plan treated the building as being under construction, which meant that notification of any repairs or extensions was unnecessary. According to B, this made the venue suitable for a music club and live music venue where additional construction work was often required and the room layout had to be altered for different events (Figure 11). Furthermore, B explained that, similar to Maria’s first location, there were no direct neighbors or residential buildings. This allowed the club to play loud music without disturbing its surroundings.

Since opening in 1998, Maria has been greatly affected by the Mediaspree project and its changing development plans due to its location in the designated project area. According to B, the construction of a high-rise structure was planned on the O17-site for the latter half of the 2000s. However, the property has remained unused due to failed negotiations between the Deutsche Post Property Co. and a previously interested real estate firm. On property number 2 in Figure 5, the construction of a hotel was planned; however, the plan was not realized due to the
bankruptcy of the ground’s owner, a real estate company. Furthermore, while Maria was located there, operations were suspended twice due to the supposed end of the rental agreement, after a buyer for the property was found in 2010. Because of a delay of construction work, Maria was able to continue its operations (Otto 2015: 115). With the third reopening in 2012, operator B resigned from his position in management because he was no longer willing to work on half-year contracts with uncertain prospects. B explained that a short-term rental agreement had become a less desired option for him once his business had grown sizably and the corresponding additional responsibility for his employees.

Due to a legal dispute between the state of Berlin and Germany over the renovation of the river bank reinforcement, the development of the property could not begin, and the purchase was eventually revoked. For this reason, the venue was able to continue operating at this location. Under different management and with a different name (Magdalena), it continued until 2014, when the property was finally returned by the LFB to the district administration of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, which eventually leased the grounds to the socio-cultural project YAAM, Young African Art Market. The club Magdalena moved to a new location (number 7 in Figure 5), where it holds a 10-year contract on a publicly-owned property until the used building will likely be demolished for the planned extension of the inner-city highway (Kappe 2014).

During the interview, B criticized the treatment of temporary uses by the Berlin Senate. He was under the impression that the authorities used the positive image created by temporary uses to attract investors or developers. This view can be seen as a result of his own experience regarding the unclear communication of the administration about the termination of his rental agreement, which eventually led to B’s resignation from his position as manager. From B’s perspective, there was a lack of support by the Senate for some temporary uses, despite the use for marketing purposes for real estate and large-scale development projects, such as Mediaspree in the Spree area. This policy has been criticized as being counterproductive for the development of a proper long-term creative city policy as interim and small-scale users are forced to leave the inner city, resulting in the loss of the creative image that made the area attractive in the first place (Bader and Bialluch 2009).

**Cultural and youth project YAAM**

YAAM is a cultural facility that was located at number 3 in Figure 5 between 2004 and 2014 (Figure 12). It was registered as a club. The property, with an area of 8,911 m², was in close proximity to the aforementioned cultural space Maria and had direct access to the Spree. On the grounds, one building was constructed between 1919 and 1932 and the other one between 1946 and 1961 (SenaStadt 1992). During the division, the buildings were part of a factory that produced carburetors. After the reunification, production was stopped, and the buildings and the large courtyard of the property remained unused.

YAAM is operated by the not-for-profit association Kult e.V. This association was established in 1994 with the founding goal to provide sports activities and recreational facilities for people with a migration background, especially those of African origin. Therefore, the premises of YAAM were equipped with a basketball court and a field for beach volleyball and soccer, which could be used free of charge during the day. One of the buildings on the premises featured a hall that could be used for concerts or as a club, and it had record studios as well. The other building and several small self-made huts served as cafés or bars to generate revenue for the project. One of the operators (“C”) of YAAM and Kult e.V. emphasized dur-
Temporary Use of Vacant Urban Spaces in Berlin

Figure 13. Arena Berlin. First location of YAAM in 1994. Photo taken by the author in October 2013.

During the interview on December 6, 2013 that their temporary use operated completely without financial support from the public administration, although their activities encompassed social work for which they were highly regarded by the Senate.

C has lived in the former West Berlin district of Kreuzberg in a building that was previously squatted during the first wave of the squatting movement. Since 1993, C has been employed full-time at a welfare institution for young people in the district of Neukölln. Based on his work experience, he thought it was important to establish a recreational facility for youth with a migration background. He and other members of Kult e.V. opened this facility in 1994 at number 6 in Figure 5, a former bus depot of approximately 30,000 m² that was constructed between 1927 and 1928 and is now used for various cultural events under the name “Arena Berlin” (Figure 13). Between 1994 and 1996, YAAM used this site in collaboration with the cultural group Arena. They signed a contract for temporary use of the property with the property owner—the state of Berlin—through the administration of Treptow district. The contract period was initially 90 days. However, when the Arena group acquired its own temporary use contract, YAAM was only able to use a small area on the premises of about 2,500 m². Because of this rivalry with the Arena group, YAAM relocated to number 5 in Figure 5, where a large vacant lot and a vacant building was available. YAAM stayed at this location from 1996 until 1998. The ground area of the property, which had a building that was constructed between 1927 and 1928, measures 9,805 m². YAAM had a renewable three-month contract with the property owner, a real estate firm, for temporary use of the building and land. In 1998, YAAM returned to the Arena (number 6 in Figure 5) because renewing the temporary use contract became impossible due to the planned start of construction work for a shopping mall at number 5 in Figure 5. However, construction did not commence, and the property owner filed for bankruptcy in 2000. The property was sold to another real estate investment company and remained vacant until 2016. During this time, it was occasionally squatted by various groups who used it as a place to live and for cultural events.

Between 1998 and 2004, YAAM organized music and live events on weekends under a temporary use contract with the Arena. Having sought a new site since 1998, YAAM finally relocated to number 3 in Figure 5 in 2004, which until then was used during the summer for open-air events under the name KARMA-Beach. The development plans for the site—part of the Mediaspree project—comprised three office buildings that were never realized due to the overabundance of office spaces in Berlin at the time. YAAM secured a rental agreement with the owners for three months, which was automatically renewed if not cancelled by either side. Rent and operational costs amounted to about 5,000 Euros per month in the summer and about 3,500 Euros per month in the winter. The number of employees increased to around 50 people during high season in the summer. C emphasized that this location was chosen based on the water, as the business concept of YAAM was based on the existence of a beach area for various sport events, as it had been since its inception. The previous locations also had water access. Furthermore, a location in the inner city was cited as another major factor for the operation of YAAM. The area attracts many tourists from nearby sightseeing spots, especially from the adjacent East Side Gallery, an open-air gallery on remaining parts of the Berlin Wall. Additionally, the main clientele of YAAM, young people of African origin, would not go into certain parts of the outer city due to more frequent racial discrimination there.

The property was later sold to a Spanish real estate investor who planned to resell it in 2012 to a private investor, and who, therefore, cancelled the rental agreement with YAAM in October 2012. The users were supposed to leave the premises within 60 days, and only through a petition and the support of the district council was YAAM allowed to stay one more year until the beginning of the planned construction work. Through further negotiations, in 2014, YAAM was able to relocate to number 2 in Figure 5, the former site of the music venue Maria. This property was then returned by the LFB to the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district as it was no longer intended for sale. The district leased the site to YAAM
for the next 10 years, which ended YAAM's existence as a temporary use 20 years after its establishment.

C mentioned that, in the past, negotiations with the various property owners of YAAM's locations made continuation of the project nearly impossible and displacements unavoidable. According to C, this has changed in recent years and differs depending on the property owner. In 1998, negotiations were not available for the location in number 5 in Figure 5. In 2012, the situation appeared to be better as negotiations with the property owner were possible and a satisfying solution for all sides was reached via discussion. C acknowledged that he had both positive and negative experiences with temporary use in general. He found it helpful at the beginning as it was possible to experiment with different concepts without having to make large investments. However, with the growing size and reputation of YAAM, short-term rental contracts became an economic problem because some of its income was financed through sponsors. With a long-term rental contract, YAAM would have been able to secure greater income. Furthermore, moving to another property has always been a financial burden, especially with the sports facilities provided on the grounds.

Conclusion

In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the inner city of Berlin and particularly the districts of former East Berlin were characterized by a high number of vacant lots and buildings due to several reasons. The lengthy restitution process of dispossessed properties led to a prolonged period of time in which vacant buildings and lots remained undeveloped and unused. This situation affected Berlin's inner-city districts greatly, and thus they allowed a variety of users to establish the first temporary uses after the fall of the Berlin Wall, such as music clubs, art houses, galleries, bars, urban gardens, and alternative living spaces. Many of these projects were initiated by participants of Berlin's vibrant subcultures, which included musicians, artists, students, and social activists who were already active during the division in both parts of Berlin and who came together after reunification.

The analysis of the geographic location of temporary uses in Berlin has shown that the highest number of temporary uses is concentrated in the inner-city districts Mitte and Friedrichshain. Compared to Mitte, where many vacant lots were filled with new buildings during the 1990s, Friedrichshain offered large vacant lots and buildings until the end of the 2000s. The Friedrichshain district, particularly a wide area along the Spree, was mainly affected by the closure of factories and railway properties after the fall of the Wall, and it had a large vacant area where the former border was located. Another reason for vacant lots was the general construction boom of office buildings in the inner city in the early 1990s. Because the inflated growth expectations for Berlin never materialized, a high number of development plans for new office spaces, of which the Mediaspree project was one part, remained on hold. This was a fortunate situation for informal users who were looking for an affordable space for temporary use in the inner city. Therefore, the long period with unused lots and buildings and the vanishing vacant spaces in other inner-city districts, such as Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, are two of the main reasons for the establishment of the high number of temporary uses along the Spree in Friedrichshain at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. This was confirmed through the interview with B who explained that it was hard to find an affordable vacant space in other inner-city districts at the end of the 1990s. Also, operator A expressed a similar view about vanishing vacant spaces, which had been abundant during the 1990s but became difficult to obtain in the 2000s.

Interviews with operators have shown that other major factors were important for their location decisions. In addition to being centrally located with a good connection to public transportation, the wide area and low number of residential buildings made the area attractive for temporary uses. For YAAM, centrality of the location played a particularly important role due to its clientele, and water was an important part of its business concept. The wide area with few residential buildings was a major factor for all three projects because they held concerts and other activities that involved noise, which might become a problem in a residential neighborhood. Furthermore, the locations provided abundant space for experimentation at an affordable price.

Apart from clarifying the reasons for the establishment of a high number of temporary uses along the Spree in Berlin's Friedrichshain district, this study also contributes to the growing literature of case studies about temporary uses. In particular, the projects analyzed here demonstrate the wide variety of activities that are encompassed by temporary uses. In the case of RAW, a single location is used by a multitude of individuals and organizations and offers a music school, a theater, a circus, restaurants, bars, urban gardening, sports facilities, ateliers, music clubs, and concert halls. Furthermore, through these activities, a closed and unused property in the inner city was
made accessible to the public. Even the smaller locations, YAAM and Maria, combine several uses in one location. During the day, YAAM is used for sports activities, holds occasional market events, and provides food and drinks; at night, it turns into a music club that generates the necessary revenues to finance its youth and cultural work. In addition to its main function as a music club and concert location, Maria was used for theater and other stage performances, art exhibitions, and music recording. Most importantly, the three case studies exemplify that temporary uses can evolve into sizable businesses that provide a wide range of cultural and social services. Therefore, in addition to their obvious short-term advantages identified in previous studies, temporary uses cannot be ignored as a viable long-term alternative to conventional strategies of urban development.

However, despite their success, all three temporary uses faced various problems that repeatedly threatened their existence. The identified problems and their solutions could provide guidance for finding ways to apply temporary uses in sustainable urban strategies in a post-growth era. In the analyzed cases, the sale of the property on which the temporary use was located required either a renegotiation of the rental agreement (RAW) or a move to another location (Maria and YAAM). Although the district administration of Friedrichshain was a supporter of the RAW-site from the beginning, support for the other two temporary uses appeared to be rather weak. This situation has changed in recent years as seen from the support for YAAM in 2013 and the changed policy of the Senate regarding the sale of public properties, with the termination of the LFB in 2015. This outcome makes clear that there are ways for the administration to support temporary uses, such as by acting as intermediary in the negotiation process for a rental agreement or by providing a publicly-owned property on which the temporary use can continue to operate. What did not exist in the case of Berlin was a consistent strategy to integrate temporary uses into long-term urban planning processes, although temporary uses had been acknowledged by the Senate as an important factor for the city as early as 2001 (SenStadt 2001). At any rate, these three temporary uses have been able to continue their operations for almost two decades or even longer. With the 10-year lease agreement for YAAM, the 10-year lease for Maria’s successor, and a probable future perspective for the RAW-site in cooperation with new owners, the three analyzed projects can be regarded as successful temporary uses that have made the transition to permanent institutions of Berlin’s cultural scene. Together with other successful former temporary uses, such as the urban gardening project Prinzessinnengarten in Kreuzberg or the Holzmarkt in Friedrichshain, temporary uses in Berlin have proven to be a consistent and important factor for Berlin’s cultural and creative industries. Further research might be necessary to show, first, the relationship between temporary uses and the emerging urban policies towards creative cities, and second, the relationship between temporary uses and Berlin’s subcultures before and after the fall of the Wall through the analysis of the personal histories of operators of temporary uses.

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Notes

1. In this paper, the names of Berlin’s districts refer to the former names that were used until 2000. An administrative reform in 2001 merged the former 23 districts of Berlin into 12 greater districts. In this administrative reform, the Friedrichshain district was merged with the neighboring Kreuzberg district to form the new district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. For the analysis of the spatial distribution of temporary uses, the smaller districts provide a more precise picture, particularly in regard to the differences between the eastern and western parts of the city.
2. Most of the temporary uses include multiple activities, and the categorization is, therefore, made on basis of the dominant type of use.
3. A trailer park, in German called “Wagenplatz,” refers to a form of alternative living space that often includes subcultural activities. These subcultural places evolved from the squatting movements during the 1980s.

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