

CIVIC SPACE

THE REAPPROPRIATION OF VACANT BUILDINGS IN FOUR EUROPEAN CITIES

by

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Abstract

In the past years, analyses of urban real estate systems have come to the foreground not only in academic research but also in urban activism. The millennium's real estate crisis made its appearance at diverse segments of the cities across the world, touching housing, office buildings, retail spaces, community venues and public buildings, and strongly affected municipal and national budgets as well as welfare services. While in many countries, the economic crisis culminated in a devastating foreclosure crisis, the corresponding escalation of non-residential property vacancy created possibilities in many European cities for an alternative model of user-generated, community-led urban development processes through the adaptive reuse of empty buildings, spaces or land. In cities where a strong alliance of various actors created the right conditions and assurances, long-lasting structures and opportunities were created. In others, user-generated regeneration projects were instrumentalised and incorporated in institutional or for-profit development processes. Yet in others, in the absence of credible public actors, the non-profit private and civic sectors became guardians of public values, functions and services.

While there has been significant research conducted into the housing crisis (Madden and Marcuse 2016), lending procedures (Fujita 2013), gentrification processes (Lees et al 2010) and foreclosures (Bergdoll and Martin 2012), other foundational institutions of urban life like civic spaces – accessible and affordable community and work spaces produced by squatters, architects, artist collectives or NGOs – have been largely neglected by this research. Most accounts of civic spaces represent particular viewpoints, present best or worst practices and ignore the broader social, legal, professional and discursive context in which these initiatives are rooted. Furthermore, limited to investigating single city cases, much of the existing research fails to recognise the different variations of multi-stakeholder cooperation and the ways these models are transferred between cities and replicated, adopted or fail to be adjusted to local circumstances.

By bringing together resources from urban studies, sociology, planning, policy and architecture as well as my professional and activist work, original action research and footage consisting of over 50 interviews, event documentations and reports, this research aims at bridging this gap. Looking into the processes in which non-institutional actors, inspired by the opportunities offered by abandoned spaces, enter the urban planning, design and development field, and learn how to work with vacant buildings, regulations, restoration procedures, finance and management, this dissertation explores actor networks that have emerged in the past years in four urban regions that reflect the diversity of cooperation frameworks between citizen initiatives, public administrations and the private sector. While Budapest has rigid institutions and isolated civic initiatives, Rome witnesses the unfolding of a parallel welfare infrastructure confronting the public administration, the Dutch cities have created consensual structures to accommodate citizen innovation, and in Berlin, civic spaces established forms of complete autonomy through accessing the ownership of formerly empty buildings.

Juxtaposing these networks in a comparative analysis with the help of the actor-network theory (Latour 2005), the following chapters investigate the cooperations and conflicts that emerge around discourses, interventions, mechanisms and policies related to the reuse of vacant spaces. Addressing the growing debate about the role of public, private and civic actors in the governance of public assets, the dissertation forms the theses that the latitudes of civic initiatives are defined by actor networks that are deeply embedded in social tissues and structures of cooperation and that civic innovation in urban development almost always relies on public resources and facilitating structures, but forming a critical mass, citizen initiatives can bypass existing frameworks and rewrite the rules of cooperation.

Statement

I hereby state that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The dissertation also does not contain any materials previously written or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I hereby also state that a part of the findings presented in Chapter 2 derived from my professional work and research at the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre, conducted together with Judit Schanz and Júlia Oravecz as also indicated in the corresponding references. Similarly, certain elements of Chapter 3 result from the professional work and research at the Rome Municipality, conducted with Daniela Patti, with whom I also co-authored several related papers.

Budapest, 29 November 2016

Levente Polyak

Acknowledgements

This research has been largely influenced by my activist and professional work. In 2004, with a group of theatre and dance professionals and artists, we turned an abandoned industrial building in Budapest into a cultural centre called Tűzraktár for two summers. In 2006, with a group of architects, we began to use a long-time empty warehouse for events of the newly established NGO, the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre. In 2008, with the same organisation, we used temporarily a 6.000 m² office building in the centre of Budapest. These experiences taught me of the importance of access to space in the life of civic initiatives: they created momentum for us and made us visible for a wider public.

I returned to the question of vacant spaces, empty buildings, abandoned properties through the questions of crowdsourcing and crowd mapping. From the late 2000s, I was very curious to explore the possibilities community mapping offered to rethink not only the medium of the map, but also the potentials of citizen knowledge in sparring how urban space is planned, used, managed. In July 2009, a few months after I left my one-year internship at the New York City Department of City Planning, I was listening to the radio programme that became my favourite way to track news related to urban transformation in New York City. An episode of the Uncommon Economic Indicators series of the Brian Lehrer show, a daily programme on WNYC, looked into Halted Developments. The show's host invited all listeners to photograph, report and locate on an online map development projects in their neighbourhood that were stalled by the economic crisis. After this episode, I followed several other crowdsourcing campaigns of the same show and also began to explore other deployments of community mapping, data visualisation and its connection to urban transformation and planning. In summer 2010, I spent a research fellowship at the Paris-based Orange Labs, where I looked into ways data visualisation can inform decision-making about urban planning. In Fall 2011, I continued this investigation as a Research Fellow at the Columbia University's GSAPP and I met many protagonists of the community mapping field. In the meanwhile, I began CEU's PhD programme with the objective of exploring the community mapping movement.

The more deep I got into community mapping, the more focused my interest became. In June 2012 I took a course in Participatory GIS at the ITC in Enschede, the Netherlands. Through an exercise within this course, I realised that the deployments that I found most pertinent, pragmatic and with immediate consequences to urban planning and activism were all related to mapping vacant buildings. In July 2012, I met several protagonists of community mapping and temporary use in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Berlin. When I began to look into initiatives that use community mapping to find vacant spaces, I realised that similar initiatives exist in several countries and they are interconnected: they represent a movement within which knowledge is disseminated, experiences are shared between various cities and good practices are transferred from one place to another.

In 2012, I contributed to the birth of Művelődési Szint, an independent cultural space in Budapest. In the same time, I began to organise a weekly public event, connected to a course I taught at the Budapest University of Technology and the Moholy-Nagy University of Arts, about responses to the problems of vacancy in Budapest, Berlin, Amsterdam and other European cities. Using the time liberated by my suspension at the PhD programme, in December 2012 together with the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre, I launched a campaign for citizen access to vacant spaces. In 2013, we began a cooperation with the Budapest Municipality as well as a 3-year programme to create a mediating organisation between property owners and initiatives looking for space. In the same year, together with Daniela Patti, my co-author in many papers, we initiated an international knowledge exchange project at the Rome Municipality, focusing on temporary use.

In the following years, I spent much of my time focusing on the issue of vacancy and initiatives to reappropriate vacant spaces. Through hundreds of interviews with various actors in the field of urban planning, policy, development and activism, meetings with various municipalities and community organisations, workshops organised in many cities including Budapest, Rome, Amsterdam, Rotterdam

and Berlin, I met many of the people and community groups that are protagonists of this dissertation. I am very thankful to them for their patience, mutual interest and the cooperations that were born from these encounters. Besides them, my work was helped by many groups and individuals. I am particularly grateful to members of the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre's Lakatlan programme, Judit Schanz and Julia Oravecz, who accompanied me in an experiment with many failures and disappointments but also inspiration and successes. The final form of this dissertation bears the marks of valuable comments by my supervisors, Daniel Monterescu and Prem Kumar Rajaram, as well as by Andrea Kirchknopf at the CEU's Center for Academic Writing. Finally, above all, I have to express my gratitude to Daniela Patti, for her intellectual and emotional support, for the long travels and tireless site visits, and discussions about cultural differences within Europe.

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Introduction. Claiming Access to Abandoned Space: The Discourses and Networks of Urban Vacancy

In most European and North American cities, as well as in the overcrowded metropolises of the developing world, one of the most unevenly distributed and scarcely available resources is space. For a long time, the real estate sector has counted among the leading industries in many Western cities, accounting for a significant proportion of their economic growth. As a result of the economic growth of many “developed” and “emerging” economies in the first half of the 2000s and the corresponding explosion of real-estate prices, renting living and working spaces has accounted for an increasing proportion of individual and family incomes as well as community resources, gradually turning urban living into an everyday struggle for housing and community space.

However, in the past decade as a consequence of the latest explosions of the real estate bubbles and the resulting financial meltdowns, a significant surplus in available square meters emerged even in the most dynamic city economies. Although in some cities, like Leipzig, Detroit or even Berlin, mass vacancy was a result of geopolitical restructuring and demographic transition (Oswalt 2005), the 2008 economic crisis made many European and North American cities and regions suffer from the withdrawal of investment, maintenance and economic activities from public and private spaces of various kinds. The never used office buildings of Rotterdam and Berlin, the closed shops of British high streets, the abandoned residential buildings of Riga or Porto, the disaffected movie theatres of Rome, the deserted hotels and suburban housing of Spain (Poiradeau 2013), the derelict hospitals of Naples or the countless halted construction sites across Southern Europe are revelatory about the economic crises, but not only about those. They tell about shrinking cities, the gradual financialisation of entire neighbourhoods, the lack of transparency in urban development and property management, the influence of real estate development companies on the urban transformation and the often irresponsible or hostile policy and planning decisions made in European cities in the past decade, whose consequences are yet to be seen in their complete development. While these marks are reminiscent of the speculative and barely regulated development logic of the pre-crisis era, unable to respond to the changing economic and social needs of cities and urban populations, they remain in force and are slowly but surely disassembling the socio-economic diversity in many European neighbourhoods.

This is not the first time in history that abandonment and vacancy become a central theme in many regions of North America and Europe. The post-industrial transformation unfolding from the 1960s made obvious the obsolescence of certain urban, suburban and rural functions, turning some buildings, building complexes and even building types defunct, and ruining the economic basis of entire regions, from North English and South Belgian industrial towns to the Ruhrgebiet and further to the mono-functional towns of Eastern Europe. The response to the post-war industrial crisis came primarily from national states, regional and local governments, focusing on creating new jobs and facilitating the tertiarisation of the economy. As a side-effect, resulting of significant efforts to give new meaning to abandoned areas, deserted industrial spaces also found new functions, through revitalisation and adaptation to the service economy, mostly as a result of large subsidies and development projects. While the post-industrial transformation unfolded in very different settings than the mass abandonment caused by the most recent economic crisis, it created many models, mostly with the recognition of the architectural values of factories or warehouses and their conversion into museums, cultural or community centres that continue to inspire public administrations, private institutions and citizen initiatives.

The millennium’s real estate crisis, in comparison, emerged in a more heterogeneous manner and made its appearance at diverse property sectors, touching housing, office buildings, retail spaces, community venues and public buildings alike. This time, the shrinkage of unattractive regions and the negligent or speculative management of both publicly and privately owned spaces overlapped with the transformation of public welfare at the urban level, the privatisation of public properties, austerity

measures and the financialisation of real estate stocks. The systematic withdrawal of public administrations from a variety of services, and the gradual limitation of their scope of action as a result of the diminution of public resources in many cities already put significant pressure on local communities to organise themselves, in order to secure the continuity of certain facilities and services and to create new opportunities for community members. In this context, empty buildings were conceived not only as symptoms of structural problems in property development and management, but also as opportunities for an enhanced community access to space – as invitations for action. The opportunities of vacant buildings opening up during the crisis have been quickly recognised by artists, squatters, community initiatives, temporary users, space pioneers, spatial entrepreneurs, city makers and commoners. For non-institutional actors without significant financial resources, properties outside the regular real estate market commonly represent a lower threshold of accessing and more flexibility in using spaces. Furthermore, abandoned buildings also often embody architectural values and memories that are perceived as inspiring and fecundating the activities taking place in them.

Consequently, responses to the challenge of mass vacancy in the 2000s and 2010s have not been limited to actions of the public sector. Against the backdrop of policy experiments and incentive packages of public administrations, the field of occupying, reusing, regenerating, repurposing empty spaces has been constituted by an extended network of actors. Besides the business-as-usual ventures of for-profit constructors, niche investors and actors of the nighttime economy, many non-institutional actors engaged in creating civic spaces by reappropriating vacant buildings, introducing new activities and non-profit models to organise them, and claiming a community role in their closer or wider environment. Civic spaces, at the focus of interest of this dissertation, are produced by these actors – squatters, architects and artist collectives, NGOs, civic initiatives and community-minded developers – with the help of philanthropic foundations, ethical banks and pension funds, and, of course, buildings, online platforms, concepts, toolkits, manifestos, laws and regulations.

As space is a crucial component of community organising, social cohesion and cultural exchange, civic spaces accommodating gatherings and events of socialisation, activities of education, sport or work are key ingredients, “foundational institutions” (Rossi 2013) of the “public city,” that is, a disposition that offers similar opportunities to all social groups. The buildings reclaimed for community functions vary in their profiles from “civic spaces” or “free spaces” through “houses of culture” to “co-working spaces,” and differ from each other in their organisational and management principles, accessibility, financial sustainability and political dimension. Certainly, it is not evident how to define “civic spaces” and to combine empty office buildings turned into incubators, theatres, school buildings, cinemas, gyms, social kitchen in a single framework, and to identify spaces that are situated between public and private, between spaces of living and spaces of work, without losing the critical perspective on the emergence and establishment of these spaces. What links them is that they all address the lack of existing facilities for social activities, welfare services, independent work and cultural exchange; participate at the discourse about reusing vacant spaces for community purposes; acquire skills related to the renovation, management and governance of formerly empty buildings; generate processes of cooperation and conflict with public and private property owners; and share their practices, models and tools through the multifaceted movement of “space pioneers,” “spatial entrepreneurs,” “city makers” or “commoners.”

The engagement of non-institutional and non-profit actors in renovating, operating, managing civic spaces brought participation to a new level: instead of expressing consent or dissent related to a planned development project, or even contributing to the program or design of a new urban area, many initiatives took the initiative in their hands and became developers – urban pioneers, spatial entrepreneurs or city makers – themselves. This process has been described through good practices, rituals of resistance, policy mechanisms, or impacts on the urban environment, but mostly restrained to mono-disciplinary approaches, failing to link testimonies of the protagonists with broader social, economic and political transformations and the analysis of public interventions to tell the story of abandonment and the civic reuse of empty spaces. Second, most academic work is limited to represent a specific viewpoint, describing processes through the viewpoint of civic initiatives or public

administrations and policymakers: so far, no accounts succeeded in outlining the discursive field that would include the variety of actors and their positions in the field of citizen-led urban regeneration, and accentuate the differences of these positions and the exchange and concessions between them. A third limitation of existing studies is their geographical scope: with many studies focusing on Berlin's temporary use period, or Rome's social centres, they do not offer any comparative perspective that could highlight the importance of certain choices and the role of specific local actor networks in the unfolding of spatial reappropriation processes. A fourth shortcoming of existing research is temporal: while there is much written about Berlin's decade of thriving temporary use, these investigations are most often limited to a certain period of time, not aware of the gradual transformation of these practices and their long-term consequences, impact and tendencies that could inform important choices in these processes both from the side of civic initiatives and public administrations.

Fifth, while there has been a growing interest from the side of civic initiatives, public administrations and design professionals in experimenting with the citizen-led reuse of vacant spaces and in replicating some of the models identified as good practices, there has been little analysis done about the possibilities and limitations of knowledge transfer imposed by different contexts, cultures of cooperation and actor-networks. In order to understand better the interaction between initiatives, spatial dispositions, regulations, public administrations and private actors, there is a need to connect evidence-based, empiric inquiry with broader social, economic and political patterns. The approach of this dissertation is to bring together various aspects of anthropology, sociology, urban history, planning, architecture and policy studies; linking individual narratives with global processes, local partnerships with international exchange; and connecting practice with an inquiry of the implications and impacts of practice.

The history of empty buildings is intertwined with the history of urban development and cycles of capitalist investment (Harvey 2010) as well as with the history of urban cultures and subcultures. From the post-industrial transformation of the American Rustbelt or the German Ruhrgebiet, or the inner city "blight" of American or European cities in the 1970s, the shrinkage of certain regions losing their economic base, the demographic decline of Eastern European cities after the Berlin Wall came down or the evaporation of companies from suburban office parks in the late 2000s, vacancy has many reasons (between the restructuring of global economy and changing local patterns of consumption and production of space) and many faces, and many expressions to describe it.

There are important symbolic differences between describing empty buildings as "vacant", "unoccupied", "abandoned" or "deserted". In the "discursive construction of wastelands" (Colomb 2012), the use of these expressions also reflect different concepts of the potential roles, opportunities or dangers of these buildings in the contemporary city. To a certain extent, they also reflect different world views or positions within the discourse around vacancy, departing from different professional, experiential or emotional viewpoints. While "abandonment" or "disuse" refer to a negative experience, the desertion of a formerly functioning and animated space, often related to neglect or the downturn of a neighbourhood or an economic sector, "vacancy" is a more neutral word to describe a situation of an unused space, with no specific mention of any subject, a potential agent of change, or the person or group that left the space behind.

There are also regional differences in how empty spaces are described. The German expression 'Leerstand', together with the Dutch word 'leegstand', for instance, refers to "emptiness" with a more philosophical tone, but has been integrated into the technical vocabulary of planning. In Italian, the growing critical discourse about empty buildings mostly uses the words "abbandonato" or "dismesso", both underlining the negative aspects of abandonment or dismissing of buildings, while the Hungarian expression "lakatlan" translates as "uninhabited", referring to the various activities that could or used to inhabit a space, thus signalling to empty spaces as missed opportunities.

Despite all these differences, the recent widening of the professional and public discourse about vacant spaces, and the convergence of different fields where various actors address empty buildings, also brought about the convergence of the language of vacancy: interestingly, "vacancy" – the preferred

technical expression of the planning language – also gained prominence among artists and activists, especially in the English language, following many publications and events that shaped the discourse: hence the privileged use of this term in the dissertation

The convergence of the language used in the vacancy discourse does not mean that we all mean the same by vacant buildings. Definitions of which buildings, spaces, properties qualify as vacant or abandoned vary according to the context. In urban planning and policy studies, there are many attempts to give exact definitions to the phenomenon:

We use a broader definition of vacant land to include all land that is unused or abandoned for the longer term, including raw dirt, spontaneous vegetation and emergent ecologies, land with recently razed buildings, perimeter agricultural land fallen out of cultivation, brown fields and other contaminated sites, or land that supports long-term, abandoned derelict structures. When no structure exists, one can consider land vacant if the property is not currently used by humans. When a structure sits on the property, some contend that a structure is abandoned, and its lot considered vacant, when it has been unoccupied for 60 days; others use 120 days or longer. (...) Since vacancy is mediated by ownership and developability at any one moment, vacancy is always a temporary condition. (Németh and Lanhorst 2014:145)

The planning literature also distinguishes between “remnant parcels” that have never been developed and “reserve parcels”, lots held by private owners for speculation or future expansion (Northam 1971) Depending on the perspective, vacant buildings are variably seen as “the residual spatial products of contemporary urban planning, (...) useless leftovers of the process of design and use of urban space.” (Tonnelat 2008:293) In other viewpoints, abandoned spaces are seen as an opportunity or resource, “available spaces in-between other more functionally identified places.” (Tonnelat 2008:293) In this dissertation, I bring together these perspectives in a heterogeneous vision of urban abandonment and regeneration, to outline the field in which a diversity of actors compete and collaborate along various concepts, values and convictions.

While some terminologies and approaches to vacancy are rooted in specific cultural fields and historical periods, different disciplines within urban research – ones this dissertation aims to bring together – also address the issue of empty urban spaces in a variety of ways. Traditional planning literature looks into the empirical facts related to vacant properties, identifies their consequences for the urban economy, delinquency and social cohesion and analyses the institutional responses given to vacancy (Dewar and Thomas 2012). Anthropology tends to look into the various cultural practices and identities developed by social groups inhabiting abandoned buildings or urban areas (Tonnelat 2008). The design literature builds on these findings and constructs proposals to better enhance these practices, claiming to act in the interests of a neighbourhood or the entire city (Rietveld 2014). In contrast, many accounts of the sociology literature place practices of occupation, reuse and regeneration of empty spaces into a wider context, identifying the mechanisms of exploitation, instrumentalisation and gentrification, processes that contribute to the growth of social inequality and the accumulation of wealth by a privileged group of urban actors (Peck 2012b).

In the 1920s, Frederick Thrasher from the Chicago School of Sociology identified interstices as “spaces that intervene between one thing and another” and which correspond to “fissures and breaks in the structure of social organisation.” (Thrasher 1927:20) As part of the “zone of transition” defined by the Chicago School, interstitial spaces were “places where young adolescents and adults would be offered a chance to be more creative by turning pieces of discarded junk into resources for their games and sometimes illegal trade”; through allowing these practices, they “offered the youth, caught in the process of acculturation, a place where they could resist both their own family values and the values of the larger American society.” (Tonnelat 2008:292)

Empty buildings or land may give space to bottom-up experimentations of various kinds, accommodating social, cultural or environmental initiatives that otherwise could not afford or arrange places for their activities in a completely controlled urban environment and property market. Thrasher’s expression “interstice” was picked up again in the 2000s by Stéphane Tonnelat, who analysed the existence of in-between spaces as resourceful environments allowing “a temporary

margin of manoeuvre in a process of decay, recycling and renewal" (Tonnelat 2008:291) in the gaps or as by-products of official planning. Other anthropologists of the contemporary city also embraced leftover spaces or "superfluous landscapes" (Nielsen 2002), "indeterminate spaces" (Groth and Corijn, 2005:503) as unprogrammed spaces of liberty: abandoned buildings, empty factories, forgotten underpasses and vacant lots seem to avoid planning and control, appear as spaces without definition, allowing the development of "micro-political activities" (Cupers and Miessen, 2002:123).

In summary, leftover spaces may accommodate various non-mainstream activities and thus can help the evolution of alternative cultures that find their space

in the interstices of the urban form: in the disinvested inner city; in the derelict buildings, de-industrialised sites, under-used docks and railway yards of advanced capitalist economies; in unregulated, unpoliced 'no-man's lands'. Underground clubs have low overheads; empty sheds and warehouses often come at low or no rent; bars and pubs in run-down inner city areas do not charge at the door and the drinks are cheap. The low costs create the social space for interaction and formation, and economic space for experimentation and flexibility. (Shaw 2005:149)

If anthropologists explored the cultural specificities of interstices through investigating spontaneous practices unfolding in them, representatives of the creative sectors picked up many of these ideas to constitute their own hubs or islands of creativity and to construct proposals for neighbourhood- or city-wide actions. In the Eastern part of Germany, for instance, vacancy became a much-discussed topic in the early 2000s and it was addressed by a series of books and research projects, originating from the architectural (Oswalt, Overmeyer and Misselwitz 2013), the artistic (Oswalt 2005) as well as the public spheres (SenStadt 2007).

Some of these investigations, like the "Shrinking Cities" research and exhibition initiated in 2002 by the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, the Bauhaus Stiftung in Dessau and the Archplus journal, saw more in vacancy than simply abandoned buildings or isolated sites of potential. Seen through the optic of the 2008 economic crisis, they were preliminary studies to get ready for a broader crisis, experiments to elaborate methods and instruments to treat the problem of vacant properties and urban areas spreading out all over Europe and North America: proposals to introduce a new urban planning vocabulary and the preparation of the terrain for easing the economic crisis by the means of urbanism (Oswalt, 2005). The discourse of shrinking cities did not stop after this research: with the extension of the problem of mass vacancy to other countries, shrinking has become a topic frequently addressed both by international research networks (Martinez-Fernandez et al 2012) or agendas (Grossmann et al 2013) and programmes of the European Union (Schlappa 2015).

In 2001-2003, the Urban Catalyst research project looked into the typologies of temporary uses in leftover spaces, the various motivations and aims of users, and their different relationships with mainstream economy and the counter-cultural scene. The book resulting from the research not only created a collection of existing practices from various European cities but also offered advice on permissions and rental agreements, thus beginning the formalisation of a new profession, that of the facilitator of temporary uses (Oswalt, Overmeyer and Misselwitz 2013).

Following the first academic accounts of temporary use, public administrations also gradually discovered the phenomenon. Increasingly drawn to the discourse of the "creative city" (Florida 2002), and understanding that cheap rents and the strong agglomeration of cultural activities into "cultural districts" made the city increasingly attractive for newcomers (Bader and Scherenberg 2010), the Berlin Senate also initiated a research in 2005 about temporary uses, and collected hundreds of practices. Looking into the possibilities of providing affordable workspaces was seen by the Senate as a means to support the creative industries (SenStadt 2007). Other important collections of analyses and case studies published in the 2010s investigating modalities of giving new functions to "second hand spaces" (Ziehl et al. 2012) or looked at typologies and mechanisms of the adaptive reuse of dismissed industrial sites (Baum and Christiaanse 2012).

In most other European countries, the discovery of massive vacancy in the building stock was a result of the economic crisis beginning in 2008. When the Dutch landscape architecture firm Rietveld

Landscape – inspired by the Berlin discourse and practices of reusing empty buildings – presented the exhibition “Vacant NL” at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale, in which the agency inventoried about five thousand empty public buildings across the Netherlands, they took position in support of a new architectural paradigm. Instead of serving large-scale demolitions and investments targeting fictional users, the new paradigm gives preference to the reuse of existing buildings and infrastructural elements with helping them to gradually adapt to new functions. According to the new model of architectural interventions, experiments lead to the testing of new functions, where successful uses are fixed in the program and failed ones get ejected from it. This paradigm was embodied by a great variety of bottom-up architecture and planning initiatives to regenerate abandoned buildings and even entire neighbourhoods through innovative architectural interventions and management models (Van’t Klooster, 2013).

These experiments by the creative sector – artists, designers, architects, planners – and the professional discourse they generated led to a widening public debate about the consequences and opportunities of vacancy and also inspired decision-makers in the policy and planning fields. The past decade saw many policy experiments unfolding within public administrations in various cities in Europe. These experiments did not remain isolated from each other: similarly to the bottom-up design and cultural practices to claim vacant spaces that spread across the continent and practically grew into a well-networked social movement, institutional “knowledge transfer networks” within European Union-funded programmes turned the concepts and ideas of a niche movement into a mainstream undertaking to give new meaning to abandoned urban spaces.

In the midst of new design concepts and widely accepted planning instruments, most practitioners failed to go beyond architectural interventions to also influence the regular operations of the property system. (Vanstiphout 2014b). Where anthropologists witnessed the emergence of new cultures, social and cultural activists saw affordable spaces, and designers and planners identified the opportunity of intervention and enhancement, critical social sciences recognised the potential consequences of exploitation, instrumentalisation and gentrification. Social sciences have been traditionally sceptical about official claims of “blight” and cautious of the mass abandonment of buildings, in the context of urban renewal, for instance: what was seen by planners as a decaying neighbourhood, condemned to demolition, was often seen by locals as a well-functioning neighbourhood (Jacobs 1961).

A decade later, the gradual occupation of empty buildings, by artists, filmmakers or other actors of the cultural field was identified by sociologists as the beginning of a gentrification cycle: the emerging attractiveness of the edgy, rough side of cities has also been one of the drivers of gentrification. As protagonists of contemporary culture turned towards industrial buildings in their search for spaces of artistic production and display, the experimental occupations and temporary investments of art and culture to colonise industrial and manufacturing spaces converged with the interests of real estate developers. As Sharon Zukin evocatively described in her 1982 book “Loft Living”, the myth of gentrification about pioneer artists unknowingly, unwittingly exploring and giving value to the uncharted territories of New York’s SoHo neighbourhood is only partly true (Zukin 1982). While the first artists did indeed move into SoHo’s manufacturing buildings because of their exceptional architectural features and opportunities (and low prices), Zukin demonstrates in details how the first lofts converted into studio apartments were realised with attention (and help) from real estate developers: they observed from close the process in which the familiarity and popularity of lofts grew and helped it with the establishment of a new dwelling type through advertisement and standardisation.

In a later cycle of urban transformation, the move of artists from cast-iron manufacturing buildings to larger warehouse spaces in semi-peripheral locations did not only make possible the creation and exhibition of larger artworks and thus the birth of new genres, but also reshaped the standard aesthetics of art galleries, associating the atmosphere of progressive contemporary art to the sight of refurbished industrial and logistic spaces (Molotch and Treskon, 2009). This association later

contributed to a great vague of transforming innumerable industrial and warehouse spaces into spaces of art and culture. These episodes from earlier decades are not disconnected periods of the history of vacant buildings and their reuse by non-profit and non-governmental actors. Instead, they informed, inspired and anticipated many of the visions, aspirations and interventions of today's actors. In the meanwhile, undoubtedly, they also warn today's actors of the systemic dangers of instrumentalisation and gentrification.

While the first cultural activities settling in industrial buildings across North America and Europe were the manifestations of grassroots, underground initiatives and required a lot of effort and official support to get stabilised, larger industrial buildings had quickly become targets of large-scale, high-prestige investments of state and city governments. With the recognition of cultural industries as vital ingredients of urban development, the 1980s and 1990s saw the cultural reuse of a multitude of industrial buildings integrated into broader urban regeneration schemes (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). In these schemes, cultural use began to diverge significantly from the bottom-up initiatives of the previous decades: combined with commercial features and encouraging the development of luxury residences, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris or the Tate Modern in London have become synonymous with government-led efforts to join forces with private investors in revitalising and gentrifying entire neighbourhoods and cities.

Similarly to the appeal of the cultural industries, the "Creative City" hype, based on the recipes of Richard Florida's theory of the "creative class" (Florida 2002) also seduced many city administrations, and prompted public officers to mobilise their spatial resources, including abandoned buildings, to accommodate creative enterprises, for instance, in Amsterdam's breeding places programme, thus instrumentalising them in the sake of the city's wider economic regeneration policy (Peck 2012b).

While the real estate surplus is seen as a natural side-effect by the financial sector, as a temporary condition by developers and property owners, and as a time-bomb by public administrations, it is conceived by many as opportunity to reclaim spaces in the city, for purposes of housing, community activities and experiments with new urban functions. Similarly to the heterogeneity of expressions to describe "abandonment" or "vacancy", there are many ways to narrate the processes in which empty spaces are occupied, reused, regenerated or repurposed. Many of the lengthy, capital-intensive renovation projects by public administrations or private developers, that gave derelict industrial buildings new, established functions have been labelled as "adaptive reuse" (Baum and Christiaanse 2012). Other situations, where the reuse of a vacant space was only planned for a limited period between a building's loss of function and its redevelopment or demolition, brought into the professional language the concept of "temporary use" (SenStadt 2007).

In the nodes of these narratives, there is a variety of actors with different stakes whose cooperation or conflicts help or hinder the unfolding of processes of regenerating empty spaces. Consequently, there are significant differences between the interests, motivations and skills of public administrations, private developers and owners, or design professionals, community activists and cultural producers, that also impacts the inclusiveness, local rootedness or sustainability of the new spaces and activities resulting from their actions.

By looking at a set of cases in various European cities, the following chapters will investigate how the successive conflicts and cooperations of these actors lead to the "settling" of this new field through a shared understanding of the roles and objectives in some urban environments, and how it remains contested in others (Indergaard 2009). Looking into the evolution of the field of reusing vacant buildings in various contexts can also demonstrate how various modalities of cooperation and conflict between stakeholders can create a diversity of processes and outcomes, with different degrees of participation, resilience and durability.

In processes of reappropriating vacant buildings, there are usually many actors in play, even if many of them remain invisible in the narratives of a project's evolution. Community actions that respond to the lack of adequate space for various kinds of social activities ranging from gatherings and

cultural events through education and sport to independent and collective work are frequently assisted by design or planning professionals, or in many cases, activists become professionals themselves with the help of their skills acquired through experimentation. Architects, planners as well as artists and community organisers with experience in reusing and managing buildings are key actors in the networks of knowledge exchange that make adaptive reuse a preferred policy trend and temporary use or collective ownership a social movement. Furthermore, activists with experience or designers with a specific business plan have an important role in creating structures to distribute knowledge as well, within specific cultural, professional or geographical boundaries: they create intermediary organisations and thus contribute to the professionalisation of what once was mere experimentation at the peripheries of existing professions.

Public administrations often facilitate community access to vacant spaces: they see the short-term or long-term reuse of vacant spaces by non-institutional actors as a way to help in the improvement of inadequate services on one hand, and an opportunity for urban regeneration, on the other. Public actors across Europe created many incentives for the re-interpretation of existing urban infrastructure and its reactivation by involving new functions and new actors. Some states introduced tax breaks for owners who allow social or cultural activities in their empty properties (Britain), others establish legal means to requisition long-time vacant residential buildings owned by legal persons or institutions and to convert them into social housing (France). Some municipalities created online maps about the available vacant properties (Amsterdam); others fabricated legal and financial incentives to encourage the temporary use of unrented shops (Vienna). However, public definitions of the “common interest” and consequently the modalities of community access to vacant spaces often manifested a strong contrast with the concepts and requirements of users, thus creating conflicts around projects of development and urban regeneration.

Private owners, developers, as well as specialised companies quickly recognised the great potential of involving citizen initiatives, community groups and other non-institutional actors in their regeneration projects or business models. While the interests of these actors have sometimes overlapped with those of users in a specific phase of the reuse process, these interests often began to diverge in later phases when users felt instrumentalised or exploited for the sake of private profit.

Most of the adaptive reuse and temporary use projects require some kind of funding: due to the limitations of public budgets and the obvious contrast of interest with traditional banks and financial institutions, community initiatives were forced to explore new financing sources, and came to the acquaintance of a network of new financial actors. Philanthropic foundations, ethical banks and sustainable pension funds have become important financiers of community-run property development projects, to the extent that they have gradually been recognised as investors in the public good, when public actors were not willing or capable to play this role.

Besides the broad spectrum of actors, the reuse of vacant buildings also involves a set of non-human actors. As claimed by Bruno Latour and other adherents of the actor-network theory, also things and concepts have the capacity to act or participate in networks (Latour 2005), and that events and innovations can be best explained if we look at “any scientific artifact (a law, a discovery, an invention, a theory, a demonstration) as an actor-network, that is, as a network composed of a set of ties and alliances between human and non-human agents.” (Bockmann and Eyal 2002:312)

The chosen methodological and analytical framework of this dissertation relies on these assumptions. Inspired by the actor-network theory, and starting from the hypothesis that local actor networks play a crucial role in the success or failure of civic initiatives to reuse vacant spaces, this dissertation is focusing on these networks. By giving the voice to many of the actors of these networks, including civic activists, advocates of citizen-led urban regeneration, professional mediators, policymakers and public officers, I aim at outlining local actor networks in play around vacant spaces, identifying their positions and depicting their arguments and agreements.

Interviews are at the core of the analyses. Between 2011 and 2016, besides my engagements in various organisations and projects in the examined four cities, I conducted over 50 interviews with

various protagonists: squatters, architects and artist collectives, NGOs, civic initiatives and community-minded developers, space pioneers, spatial entrepreneurs and city makers, commoners, anti-speculation foundations and municipal officers. While revisiting initiatives several times in the course of the past years, I regularly re-conducted these interviews, to follow the unfolding and evolution of each initiative, together with the transformation of their working conditions and their changing positions in local and international actor-networks.

Besides interviews, the descriptions and analyses of the selected initiatives and cities rely on the study of planning documents, reports, proposals, complaints on one hand, and on observations based on the participation at public and professional events, workshops, participatory processes, project meetings and site visits, on the other. Linking all these sources of information together into a heterogeneous network of visions of vacant buildings contributes to a dynamic understanding of space. Space, seen from a poststructuralist perspective, is “process” (Doel 1999), formed as networks carve out permanences (which are not eternal) from complex and dynamic processes of change, whereas spatial relations are networks of heterogeneity, in which natural and social, human and non-human relations are considered together (Murdoch 2005). Banally, empty buildings – spaces considered as potentially obtainable – have a key role in urban regeneration processes. Rather than passive containers, through their physical features, availability, accessibility and affordances (Gibson 1979), they attract ideas, generate conflicts, invite interventions and incite mobilisations. Looking at buildings as active agents in the processes of regeneration also means the recognition that a building is

not a static object but a moving project, and that even once it has been built, it ages, it is transformed by its users, modified by all of what happens inside and outside, and that it will pass or be renovated, adulterated and transformed beyond recognition. (Latour and Yaneva 2008:80)

Similarly to buildings, maps, platforms, laws and regulations are also artefacts or actor-networks in which a variety of positions, interests, technologies, and pools of knowledge are pulled together and which influence and structure the way other actors act in relation with vacant buildings, tending to maintain and reproduce or question and destabilise the socio-political context or field in which they were created. The different modalities of interaction and cooperation between these human and non-human actors, together with the affordances of a given city's vacant building stock, as well as the opportunities and obstacles generated by the related regulatory system create a specific network in each city: a set of conditions for reusing vacant space and land by non-institutional actors for community purposes. By exploring individual experiences, positions and discourses of key actors in converting, regenerating or reactivating vacant buildings, and by weaving them into heterogeneous tissues of local actor networks around vacancy, the following chapters look into similar processes in four different urban areas: the fight for access to (vacant) space, the professionalisation of organising access to (vacant) spaces, as well as structuring mechanisms, policies and conflicts around instrumentalisation, gentrification and ownership. Citizen initiatives to reuse empty spaces operate within actor networks that are deeply embedded in social tissues and structures of cooperation. Instead of focusing solely on individual cases, this doctoral dissertation starts from initiatives to explore the interactions, connections and conflicts – cooperation networks – of various actors that have emerged in the past years in four European urban regions, Budapest, Rome, the Dutch Randstad and Berlin, that reflect the diversity of cooperation frameworks between citizen initiatives, public administrations and the private sector.

The choice of cities corresponds to four different models of actor networks and the related property regimes that I identified in the course of this research: the isolationist, the confrontative, the consensual and the autonomous models. While Budapest (isolationist) has rigid institutions and destabilised, isolated civic initiatives that seek to establish public functions outside the public sphere, Rome (confrontative) witnesses the unfolding of a parallel welfare infrastructure through confrontations with the public administration, the Dutch cities (consensual) have created smooth structures to accommodate citizen innovation, and in Berlin (autonomous), civic spaces established forms of complete autonomy through accessing the ownership of formerly empty buildings.

The text aims at analysing actor-networks in these cities by exploring paradigmatic initiatives of creating civic spaces, the transformation of cooperation networks and their connections to global processes. While the initiatives, protagonists and spaces presented in the selected cities might appear as unique cases, they are paradigmatic for their local actor network: they all consciously situate themselves in a field of different positions, responding to the opportunities and limitations produced by their local context as well as referring to transnational inspirations, models and tools borrowed from abroad. The individual cases will be investigated keeping in mind that "urban social movements cannot really be understood when considered in isolation, and that they must instead be viewed against the background of general social change," (Holm and Kuhn 2011:654) and avoiding the trap of studies that

focus on internal visions and a perspective concerned with the particular project, analysing its motivations, actors and processes but omitting contextual conditions, comprehensive processes and above all their outcomes in terms of urban politics. (Bernt et al 2013:12)

To consider the new field of urban regeneration involving the reuse of vacant spaces by an extended circle of actors as a transnational, intercontextual movement, we have analysed the various cases by "linking up the local to the global" (Burawoy 2000:2) by combining different levels of analysis. Linking individual cases to a transnational movement is helped by the analytical framework proposed by Jonathan Murdoch. As he suggests, "we should never vacate the local to look for explanations at another scale of analysis; yet neither should we remain trapped in the local." (Murdoch 2005:71) The relations Murdoch places in the centre of his discussion of space signify a continuity of different scales: the model for his geography is ecology where relations exist across a range of scales and heterogeneous topoi. This understanding of space as process and relations echoes Appadurai's concept of locality "as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial." (Appadurai, 1996:178)

To conceive initiatives to reuse vacant buildings as not only connected by professional discourses, activist networks, transnational programs and technological formats, but also linked by shared concepts, convictions, arguments, tools and methodologies, we have to uncover the "macro foundations of a microsociology" and take "the social situation as the point of empirical examination (...) to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures." (Burawoy 1991:271) Similarly, while looking into mainly place-specific and geographically discrete phenomena, we must

account for extra-local influences, pressures and relationalities. This suggests the need for an always more-than-urban understanding of the urban, extending to the analysis of specific hybrid formations in connection, across places and scales. (Peck et al 2013:1096)

The cases to be explored in Budapest, Rome, the Randstad and Berlin correspond to a variety of processes to reuse vacant buildings, in some cases initiated by local governments, policymakers, planners, in others by civic groups, professionals, or cultural activists. In each city, the various initiatives constitute a local field or network, where actors directly interact with each other in forms of cooperation or contestation. At another scale, some of these actors, together with the positions, tools or structures they developed, constitute another field, a "network of networks" in which experiences, concepts, visions travel and get exchanged. According to Inkeles and Smith, not only international organisations and global policy frameworks but also shared notions of "modernity" and "development" act towards a growing uniformity of development goals and towards the establishment of common systems of reference when defining national and regional priorities in policy-making (Inkeles and Smith 1974). If cases are made comparable not only by the networks that connect them, but also by the global causes that brought them to life or the institutional frameworks that produce or finance them, they may be reasonably commensurable. Certainly, the transformation of urban governance and the planning processes, the economic crisis, the changing role and capacities of public administrations and austerity politics are shared characteristics of all the cases presented. And so are the growing need for public functions outside the public sector's control on one hand, and the constant desire to assume uncanny, unfamiliar spaces in the city, pushing further the urban frontiers of appropriation and eventually, instrumentalisation and gentrification.

The considerations above constitute the analytical framework to address processes and urban transformation and the reuse of abandoned spaces that this dissertation focuses on. Through the action research and advocacy projects that I have conducted as part of my PhD studies as well as in the context of the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre in Budapest and Eutropean Association in Rome, I have seen many of the possibilities, dilemmas, initiatives and dangers present in this text, emerge and evolve. This dissertation is an attempt to move these experiences into a wider theoretical context, linking findings from field research with analyses of macro-economical tendencies and policy innovation. Through the investigation of the structural reasons and consequences of vacancy as well as of the various agencies in play when it comes to reactivating vacant spaces, this text has a broader ambition than previous accounts of the reappropriation of vacant spaces: it aims at looking into how speculative urban development produces urban space, and how various actors claim access to the leftover spaces abandoned by public planning and private capital.

Practice has an important role in this research: my implication in civic initiatives of reappropriating vacant buildings in Budapest, my consultancy work with municipalities of Budapest and Rome to establish mechanisms of citizen access to unused public properties, and my coordinating role in international knowledge exchange processes all helped me in understanding better the sometimes contrasting viewpoints of different actors in public-civic cooperation processes and in recognising the often banal but indispensable ingredients of successful initiatives. These experiences gave me a unique access to many situations, discourses, testimonies, events and documents that provide a particular insight into some of the cases, initiatives and dynamisms of local actor networks, making the dissertation's findings and arguments more tangible.

All these activities also brought me to the key questions of providing citizen access to vacant space: What are the professional, economic and political motivations for initiators to turn vacant buildings into civic spaces? Who are the main protagonists of civic spaces and what skills, what networks can they mobilise in their activities? What are the modalities of cooperation between various actors and how does it influence the reuse process? What are the conditions of successful, fair and inclusive reuse of vacant spaces for community activities? What is the role of local actor networks in creating civic spaces and mechanisms to structure community access to space? What are the different models and modalities of governing spaces, what are the roles of the public, private and civic sectors in these governance models and what are the political, legal and policy implications of certain models of property reuse? What influences the transferability of certain models from one place to another?

This dissertation does not aim at creating an in-depth ethnology of spatial reappropriation practices. Nor does it claim to do a thorough analysis of policies of reuse. Instead, it proposes to address vacant spaces as objects of desire and competition, as well as interfaces between various disciplines. By looking into paradigmatic cases of creating civic spaces in the selected cities and telling their stories through interviews with different actors conducted at various recurring occasions, I explore the interactions, connections and conflicts that make the creation of civic spaces possible. Through the cases, I outline how cooperations and conflicts unfold, how do different actors relate to each other, what are the modalities of their cooperation and what are the values reflected in their discourses: I draw the scenes that are created in the interaction, cooperation and conflict of various stakeholders. Through these analyses, I make the points that the latitudes of civic initiatives are defined by actor networks that are deeply embedded in social tissues and structures of cooperation and that civic innovation in urban development almost always relies on public resources and facilitating structures, but forming a critical mass, citizen initiatives can bypass existing frameworks and rewrite the rules of cooperation.

Stressing the structural conditions that shape vacancy and the access to space, this text is an invitation for a journey to explore individual motivations, collective experiences as well as conflicts and modalities of cooperation for reusing vacant space and land by non-institutional actors for community

purposes. The following chapters examine various dimensions the phenomena of vacancy and the role of individual and group agency as well as cooperation networks in turning vacant properties into opportunities in contemporary cities. Chapter 1 looks into the conditions of vacancy, through the analysis of the urban regeneration field's transformation: the reorganisation of public planning; the gradual withdrawal of local governments from urban development; and the effects of the economic crisis and the financialisation of real estate on urban transformation. Chapter 2 explores and situates human and non-human actors of vacancy: empty buildings, public administrations, new professions and activists, actors that will return in each case study in different combinations and relationships. This Chapter also examines the structuring role of mediating actors in the field of reusing vacant buildings: attempts to map vacant properties, as well as initiatives to establish frameworks for recycling empty properties, at levels of policy, planning and grassroots action. Chapters 3 to 6 investigate the fields of reusing vacant buildings in Budapest, Rome, the Dutch Randstad and Berlin, through an analysis of the local political and economic context; the economic crises; the production of vacancy and the transformation of local welfare services and facilities; different positions in the discourse of vacancy; initiatives to reappropriate abandoned spaces, mechanisms and policies to structure citizen access to space and their limitations.

Chapter 7 provides a comparison of the various local cases and actor-networks, and feeds into the closing chapter that draws conclusions from the comparison, highlighting the perspectives of using vacant buildings to empower community groups and creating sustainable and inclusive community spaces.

I. The Conditions of Abandonment: The Transformation of Planning and the Financialisation of Real Estate

Urban development is one of the dominant processes of producing urban space. A “spatially bounded social process,” It takes place in a field with a variety of actors: the state, local governments, private developers, investors, planners, designers, local communities – “with quite different objectives and agendas interact through a particular configuration of interlocking spatial practices.” (Harvey 1989:5) The interplay of these actors’ actions and objections, alliances and conflicts shapes the field of urban development, with concepts and priorities altered with the transformation of the socio-economic context, the rearrangements of the legal and regulatory environment and the changing influence and capacities of each actor.

This chapter looks into the transformation of the urban planning and development fields, with a special attention to a specific segment of that field, property development. While the city is much more than its buildings, the way buildings or large stocks of buildings are bought and sold, redeveloped, abandoned or left in suspension might have a significant impact on a neighbourhood or an entire city. The way buildings are treated and valorised can be at the core of an area’s decline or gentrification; ownership and rental patterns can determine the inclusivity, diversity and resilience of a locality.

Vacant properties have an important role in these processes: they allow owners to change a building’s tenancy, rental price and contract agreement or use, developers to establish an anchor function in a new development zone, local governments to generate social and economic regeneration, or communities to turn their needs into a spatial concept, projected onto a building’s affordances. These actors engage in cooperations or in disputes according to their overlapping or contrasting interests, referring to or questioning underlying agreements, logics of action, systems of knowledge and hegemonic concepts of how urban development, property management and in general, the production of urban space should happen, and what is the desirable role of various actors in these processes.

This chapter aims at outlining these hegemonic concepts or “ideological and operational parameters of urbanisation” (Peck et al 2013:1091), through exploring the transformation of urban planning mechanisms, the changing positions of the state, private and civic actors, and the role of these mechanisms and actors in producing vacant spaces. The objective of the following pages is to draw the silhouette of a changing political economic context from the public sector-dominated state planning through neoliberal urbanism and financialisation to the gradual extension of the domain and multiplication of the mechanisms of urbanisation – a context against which the emergence of new actors in claiming vacant spaces in four European urban areas will be analysed.

I.1. The logic of vacant real estate

Vacant real estate is an important element of all property systems; without available properties, it would be impossible to find apartments, shops, offices to rent. Vacancy, when it is not mass abandonment, can be seen as a natural cyclical phenomenon of the real estate market. However, above a certain rate, vacancy is harmful to many actors of the property system. Owners pay charges after their unrented shops, apartments or offices, while the unused properties are deteriorating, losing their value throughout the process and negatively affecting surrounding properties as well. The commercial activity of a neighbourhood is gradually degraded with the presence of vacant properties that don’t generate any traffic and deprive neighbouring shops from entire groups of potential customers. Boarded-up houses and shops with lowered shutters worsen the public safety of an area, where nobody sees what happens on the street. Abandoned properties create increased risk to public health and increased costs to municipal governments. Furthermore, “vacancy breeds vacancy” (Keeton 2014), as vacant properties can set in motion a downward economic and social spiral in an urban neighbourhood:

When one building stays empty it leads to a decline in both rental value and property value of the surrounding buildings. (...) This negative influence can have a ripple effect as more and more buildings lose tenants and cannot replace them. (Remøy, cited in Keeton 2014)

Besides the spatial contamination effect of vacant properties, it also affects the entire chain of actors involved in financing, constructing and valorising new buildings:

In the short term, it's the owner who has the problem. This is what we thought in 2006. In a longer term, it's the financiers' problem: nowadays we see more and more banks that are calling us and ask us what they can do about their offices, because all their debt is in those buildings. We have to get rid of the mess. It affects the investing climate; vacancy reduces the willingness of especially foreign investors to invest in the city. And where you see properties going down, it's also a socially undesirable situation. When they see that the vacancy problem is under control, investors are coming back. (Oudemans 2014)

If it is in everyone's interest to solve the problem of property vacancy, why isn't there a broad coalition including the public administration, private developers, professionals and the civic sector to address this issue? Vacancy, on one hand, is the product of "weak demand in the local [real] estate market, unclear ownership or exceptionally high construction costs caused by soil contamination and massive old infrastructures" (Hentila and Lindborg 2003:1) and "the significant time lag [that] exists between development intent, planning and the implementation of physical change (often in excess of 5 years)." (Nemeth 2014:145) On the other hand, vacant properties are results of the logic of large-scale real estate development. It would be reasoned to think that planning mechanisms and the real estate market helps demand meet supply and would make vacant spaces available for those in need - and with the means to pay for it. It would also be logical to think that in times of crises, the real estate market would adapt to changing needs and lower prices to meet demand rather than leave assets unused, unprofitable and deteriorating.

However, urban development follows a different logic. As we will see in the coming pages, centralised urban development repeatedly falls into the mistake of misunderstanding demand and underestimating the importance of the "users" inhabiting and reappropriating space. On the other hand, entrepreneurialism-driven project are often developed to attract further investment, betting on spectacular urban ventures and events that do not always provide the promised return on investment, leaving behind structures that no longer correspond to any functions or needs. Analogously, financial arrangements for real estate investment and development treat properties as financial assets, similar to other financial products (Vanstiphout 201a, Self and Bose 2014, de Graaf 2015) instead of spaces that address primary needs like housing or recreational spaces, real estate follows the logic of investment board decisions, asset valuation processes, loan contract restrictions, where the vacancy of properties is often regarded as less of a compromise from the owners' perspective than adaption to new demands and rental formats.

1.2. From central planning to the neoliberal transformation of urban development

Urban planning, for centuries, had been an exclusively top-down process: it "took for granted control over the entire territory, the state as a central building developer, and the existence of welfare state models to achieve good living conditions for all residents." (Oswalt 2006:13) The hegemony of modern and modernist state planning in organising environments according to pre-established and often arbitrary, "rational" principles, and the non-recognition of non-governmental actors in shaping space has often provoked conflicts between represented and experienced spaces. This conflict has been explored by important intellectual traditions.

In *Seeing like a State*, his book on state interventions into local systems of knowledge, for instance, James Scott focuses on the ways the state overwrites indigenous organisations of the territory by imposing a centralised, a-contextual, rationalised mode of organisation upon it. Through looking at processes as the creation of permanent last names, the standardisation of weights and measures, the establishment of cadastral surveys and population registers, the invention of freehold tenure, the standardisation of language and legal discourse, the design of cities, and the organisation of

transportation, among others, Scott highlights the work of an “imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how,” thus contrasting practical knowledge with more formal, deductive, epistemic knowledge (Scott 1998).

Scott argues that state-led initiatives, characterised by modernist aesthetics and techno-scientific ideals, in practice render nature and society legible and controllable through categorisation, mapping and reorganisation. Such projects tend to value the appearance of order, oversimplify social and biophysical complexity, and promote the application of uniform solutions to diverse ecologies, practices or geographies. In Scott’s (too) rigid dichotomy between civil society and state, he posits an essential contradiction between state vision and local knowledges as a common feature of these failures. He distinguishes two types of knowledge, the abstracted and simplified “techne” (associated with state institutional forms, which characteristically neglect local complexities), and the practical and complex “metis”. In planning, the distinction of techne and metis is a pervasive, powerful one.

In a more nuanced and analytical example, in *French Modern. Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, Paul Rabinow studies space and power and knowledge in France from the 1830s through the 1930s, using the viewpoints of anthropology, philosophy, and cultural criticism to examine how modernity was revealed in urban planning, architecture, health and welfare administration, and social legislation. Rabinow looks at different “fields of knowledge (hygienic, statistical, biological, geographic, and social); about forms (architectural and urbanistic); about social technologies of pacification (disciplinary and welfare); about cities as social laboratories (royal, industrial, colonial, and socialist); about new social spaces (liberal disciplinary spaces, agglomerations, and new towns),” to demonstrate how the state’s organization of knowledge and perception is inscribed in everyday life (Rabinow 1995:10).

As it is emphasized in Scott’s categorization of knowledge into techne and metis, the distinction between abstract and lived space, or between representation and experience is a very attractive concept in today’s geography and urban theory. One of the most influential articulations of this opposition is the core idea of Michel de Certeau’s essay *Walking in the City*: in this text de Certeau describes everyday practices of the city as highly different from the logic of the planned city; relying on their “anthropological, poetic and mythic experience of space”, the “ordinary practitioners down below (produce) the migrational, or metaphorical city (that) slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city” (de Certeau 1984:114).

Doreen Massey’s *For Space* continues this intellectual tradition, where the author proposes to open up the political to the challenge of space, by teasing out the mutual imbrications of the spatial and the political. Massey’s vision of geography bears the influence of poststructuralist and political geography as well as the relational thought; her definition of space echoes their considerations of space as open, unfinished and dynamic. In *For Space*, Massey defines space along three main concepts: first, space is the product of interrelations; thus we must recognize space “as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005: 9). Second, space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity; that is space “as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity” (Massey, 2005: 9). Third, space is always under construction; “it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed” (Massey, 2005: 9).

Planning theory and practice could not be immune to the analyses of critical theories of space. Post-structuralist planning theory has been effective in attacking state controlled planning. Arguments for a more inclusive governance model envisioned a planning system where “regions and places were seen not just as passive spaces to be planned or designed by an overriding authority, but as active milieux that influence, and are influenced by the interactions of actors.” (Boelens 2010:32) Including new actors in urban planning and development would not necessarily mean the death of planning institutions but a reorganisation of the welfare state into services that include a market approach and activate members of the civil society (Giddens, 1998). Speaking of Dutch planning, however, Boelens concludes that post-structural planning theories and the entrepreneurial, behavioural or interactive

practical planning proposals “have been less fruitful at promoting effective and/or sustainable practices (...) these alternatives were still formulated within the existing planning framework, from a specific governmental, or at least a government related, view on planning: from the inside-out.” (Boelens 2010:30)

The transformation of urban development, however, did not wait for new planning practices to involve new actors, in particular, those with private interests. The increasing role of capital in the production of space gradually turned urban development into a lucrative enterprise, often with the close cooperation of a central power and private developers and financiers, like in the case of Hausmann’s reconstruction of Paris in the second half of the 19th century. The production of space and urbanisation have become

one of the key ways in which the capital surplus is absorbed. A significant proportion of the total global labour force is employed in building and maintaining the built environment. Large amounts of associated capitals, usually mobilised in the form of long-term loans, are set in motion in the process of urban development. (Harvey 2010:166)

While post-structuralist planning theories attacked centralised planning mechanisms for their inefficiency and fading relevance, with the crises of the 1970s, including deindustrialisation and the growth of unemployment, these mechanisms also came under attack by new coalitions of the state and the market, prompting a radical reorganisation of the way public resources are mobilised and distributed. Through national policies forcing decentralisation and reductions of the welfare state, municipal administrations, traditionally the main clients and managers of major urban works, have gradually lost their leading role in planning and developing cities. This transformation, often described as neoliberalisation, brought along a shift from “distributive policies, welfare considerations, and direct service provision towards more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches.” (Waterhout et al 2013:143)

As a result, the objectives and priorities of spatial planning also changed. In many European countries, planning’s focus

has been narrowed down to concentrate on facilitating economic development and competitive regions. Spatial planning, albeit in different ways, has become framed and moulded within a larger picture of economic growth, de-regulation and reduction of administrative complexity (for instance for acquiring planning permission), a decentralising and re-centralising of power, a shift towards private sector and civil society involvement, and a focus on more efficient, effective, and project-oriented policy delivery. (Waterhout et al 2013:154)

An important dimension of this shift is the “entrepreneurial turn” of urban planning governance, moving from the managerial practices of earlier decades which “primarily focussed on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations” to new ways in which to foster and encourage local development and employment growth.” (Harvey 1989:3) Following this logic, instead of focusing on redistribution and welfare provision, urban governance was increasingly concentrating on attracting “highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into its space.” (Harvey 1989:11)

This had significant consequences for municipal budgets and logics of urban development: turning urbanism into an economic activity, neoliberalism brought about an increasing vulnerability of municipalities to financial markets, and a reliance on constant growth and the increase of land values. With the growing insufficiency of regular tax revenues at carrying out basic tasks, municipal budgets became increasingly dependent on construction:

For staffing libraries and developing cultural programmes, as well as for constructing and maintaining parks, boulevards, pavements and squares, municipalities relied upon revenues from land-development activities, some of which required risky investments. (Vanstiphout 2014a:59)

The risk of these investments lies in their speculative quality, the “inability to predict exactly which package will succeed and which will not, in a world of considerable economic instability and volatility.” (Harvey 1989:11) This logic of development leaves behind, on one hand, many unsuccessful

“ruins”, unsold, unrented and unused spaces, remnant of failed investments. On the other hand, this development logic generates “island urbanism,” a model that

dispenses with any attempt to shape the whole, limiting itself to small, island-like areas for development, planned with increasing perfection and, often enough, later controlled, while the other areas of the city disappear from the sphere of interest and fail to attract attention. (Oswalt 2006:13)

Reliance on investment and construction activities also forced municipal administrations in a new kind of competition: investing in iconic but risky developments was conceived as ways to attract the “creative class” and the financial elite, and prioritised over maintaining crucial infrastructures and social services, contributing to the flexibility of multinational corporations and financial capital, as well as to the precariousness of labor and working conditions (Harvey 1989).

The neoliberal transformation of urban planning and governance, in the meanwhile, also contributed to the extension of the field of actors in urban development, shifting it from a public sector dominated process into a multiplayer process, public-private partnership “dogged by all the difficulties and dangers which attach to speculative as opposed to rationally planned and coordinated development.” (Harvey 1989:7) As new principles of governance dubbed as “new public management” were based on a belief in private actors working for public interest, national and local governments began “privatising and outsourcing former public tasks and services to volunteer organisations, community associations, non-profit corporations, foundations, and private firms.” (Purcell 2009:145) This process supplied “individuals and collectives with the possibility of actively participating in the solution of specific matters and problems,” (Swyngedouw 2005:1998) through the consequent responsabilisation of these individuals and collectives.

This constellation, with public reliance on private and civic developers and service providers, required the formation of “coalition politics:” the task of bringing together “local chamber of commerce, some cabal of local financiers, industrialists and merchants, or some ‘roundtable’ of business leaders and real estate and property developers,” together with “educational and religious institutions, different arms of government (varying from the military to research or administrative establishments), local labour organisations (the building and construction trades in particular) as well as political parties, social movements, and the local state apparatuses.” (Harvey 1989:7)

In summary, the neoliberal form of urban governance, besides the “externalisation of state functions through privatisation and deregulation,” and the “up-scaling of governance” to international organisations, also brings along the “down-scaling of governance to ‘local’ practices and arrangements that create greater local differentiation combined with a desire to incorporate new social actors in the arena of governing.” (Swyngedouw 2005:1998) Therefore, some of the new forms of “governance-beyond-the-state” (Swyngedouw 2005) demonstrate that besides the negative impacts of urban entrepreneurialism on an increasingly vulnerable public domain, it also carries the

potentiality for transformation into a progressive urban corporatism, armed with a keen geopolitical sense of how to build alliances and linkages across space in such a way as to mitigate if not challenge the hegemonic dynamic of capitalist accumulation to dominate the historical geography of social life. (Harvey 1989:16)

1.3. The financialisation of cities

In the context of an increasing pressure on public administrations to become entrepreneurial, financial capital has had a growing role in shaping cities across the world. And cities had an increasing role in the investment of financial capital: with the increasing investment in production in China in the 1980s, intensifying competition began to push prices down and caused a decrease in production profits, “more and more money went into speculation on asset values because that was where the profits were to be had.” (Harvey 2010:29) These assets were primarily found in cities, that were not just

relay stations for a singular, unchanging, world-encompassing neoliberal project, but are better

understood as institutional forcefields positioned within (and continuously transformed through) an always mutating and unevenly developed landscape of regulatory reform, experimentation, circulation, failure, (re)consolidation and crisis. (Peck et al 2013:1093)

Growing investment in urban assets, that is, land and buildings, and the resulting urbanisation depended on financial innovation: the “securitisation and packaging of local mortgages for sale to investors worldwide, and the setting up of new financial institutions to facilitate a secondary mortgage market,” (Harvey 2010:174) led to the erosion of lending standards and „reversed red lining”, turning low-income neighbourhoods into targets for high-risk mortgages (Donald, Glasmeier, Gray and Lobao 2014). In turn, the easier access to mortgages provided by the relatively unrestrained financial markets prompted a boom in constructions in and around European cities, resulting in vast areas of new housing and office units, conceived more as investment opportunities than as places to live or for work. In this perspective, real estate (including housing but also often public buildings, spaces of production and leisure, cultural venues and public spaces) has been gradually transformed from resources addressing private or collective needs into “profitable terrains for capital surplus production and absorption” (Harvey 2012:5).

This process brought along the financialisation of the city, permitting the transformation of real estate into a liquid asset. Essentially it means that governments influence property markets through subsidies to property developers rather than through building housing themselves, and the value of housing can be accumulated and traded in financial markets. It allows controllers of capital flows, applying exchange values rather than use values, to determine what gets built, the scale of projects, where building takes place and how the existing building stock is treated. (Fainstein 2016:1503)

In the financialised city, buildings are “no longer something to use, but to own (with the hope of increased asset-value, rather than use-value, over time).” (de Graaf 2015) When the exchange-value of buildings gains prominence over their use-value, they lose all relationship with actual needs and become acting “similarly to how financial products are being created and sold that have lost any connection with real production or a real economy.” (Vanstiphout 2012:94) Becoming targets of speculation, many former sites of welfare and cultural services (hospitals, schools, parks, theatres, cinemas) become endangered species, calculated as potential buildable square meters instead of potential contributions to life quality. While housing has had

a crucial, and the most visible, part in the process of societal financialisation, other foundational institutions of urban life have been financialised and thus tentatively commodified under neoliberalism: from transport to food and leisure goods. (Rossi 2013:1071)

Similarly, many other urban functions (cultural, social, community and educational spaces - what I call here as civic spaces) lost their conceptual meaning as a “social good, part of the commonalities a society agrees to share or to provide to those with fewer resources: a means to distribute wealth.” (Rolnik 2013:1059) Fed by pension funds, private equity and hedge funds, large sections of the real estate stock (including housing) have become “fictitious commodities,” in a movement which “transformed a ‘sleeping beauty’ — an asset owned by traditional means — into a ‘fantastic ballet’, with assets changing hands through constant and rapid transactions.” (Rolnik 2013:1058)

In a recent article, Reinier de Graaf took Thomas Piketty’s analysis of the evolution of capital in the past centuries and applied it to architecture: if the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed the return of the “primacy of wealth over work in economic benefits” where ownership becomes again an increasingly important part of wealth production, this led to the

built environment and particularly housing [acquiring] a fundamentally new role. From a means to provide shelter, it becomes a means to generate financial returns. (...) The logic of a building no longer primarily reflects its intended use but instead serves mostly to promote a ‘generic’ desirability in economic terms. Judgement of architecture is deferred to the market. The ‘architectural style’ of buildings no longer conveys an ideological choice but a commercial one: architecture is worth whatever others are willing to pay for it. (...) Once discovered as a form of capital, there is no choice for buildings but to operate according to the logic of capital. (de

Graaf 2015)

The financialisation of urban development brings together a variety of actors: investors, local governments, property entrepreneurs, planning and design professionals and financial specialists all have different roles in the development process: while investors bring “decisions over investment from the local to the global level, (...) local governments and property entrepreneurs function to develop and revalue properties, (...) then “securitisation, disintermediation, global banking and ICT allow financial specialists to make calculations based on rate of return without necessarily having any particular knowledge of the location of buildings or infrastructure, local governments and property entrepreneurs function to develop and revalue properties.” (Fainstein 2016:1503)

Seen from a viewpoint of the Actor-Network Theory, Thierry Theurillat describes the interaction of these actors in the following way:

Players in the market finance ‘real estate/urban infrastructure’ asset class (which includes all the various and less liquid investment funds) do have strategies and investment horizons that can range from years to decades, and which are also directly linked to the buildings they hold on behalf of their shareholders. As a corollary, they need intermediary actors, such as developers, municipalities or various real estate investment advisors and professionals to anchor the capital involved more or less effectively in the urban context. These indispensable intermediaries ‘translate’; they anchor the financial criteria of risk, yield and liquidity in urban objects. This translation will vary depending, on the one hand, on the power of the financial players and, on the other, on the ability to play the interdependencies extant within local communities. (Theurillat 2016:1512)

In this distribution of roles, the various actors nurture different visions of buildings: financial investors “keep the properties in Excel spreadsheets and ‘arbitrate’ according to market finance categories (risk, yield, liquidity)” and leave principles of urbanism, affordable housing or local economy completely out of the financial equation. (Theurillat 2016:1514)

This vision, dominant in the financialised city, created a significant challenge for planning and design professions. They have been complicit in this process: the financialisation of urban development also profoundly transformed the practice of urban professionals. If modern architecture and planning were known as disciplines that engaged – sometimes devastatingly – in improving the quality of life in cities and their surroundings, contemporary architecture and planning kept very little of that ambition, losing their determining role in shaping the environment to “financial institutions which bankroll the developers who promote a sophisticated language of metrics targeted at increasing fiscal efficiency.” (Self and Bose 2014:10)

Architecture’s financial turn reduced the role of architects in urban development processes to “enticing investors with ingenious combinations of office storeys guaranteed to generate money for the cultural facility located on the ground floor” (Vanstiphout 2014a:59); or in general, to “performing an endless variation of style” and “inexpensively providing aesthetic form while the building and planning process is relegated to the developer” (Illner 2014:54) and the “definition of the architect is replaced by that of the economist.” (de Graaf 2015)

Under pressure from financial actors, many public bodies also began venturing out in affairs often unrelated to their responsibilities and capacities. Besides deferring “important physical and social infrastructure investments to engage in riskier economic development projects,” (Donald et al. 2014:11) or creating “new opportunities for speculative investments in central-city real estate markets” and constructing “megaprojects intended to attract corporations have greatly affected housing affordability in cities,” (Rolnik 2013:1063) some municipal departments and companies began to perform as if they were financial actors themselves. Dutch housing associations began investing their capital at the stock exchange (see Chapter 5), Berlin’s Bankgesellschaft got involved in speculative real estate investments (see Chapter 6) and the Hungarian National Bank began buying up properties from the market with significant deficit (See Chapter 3). In the town of Narvik in Norway, for instance,

bad investments in securities and derivatives forced the town to cut back on elderly care and the fire department, close several schools and cancel the construction of a new school, child-care

center and nursing home (Aalbers 2013:1085)

The social costs of the financialisation of cities, most tangible in the lack of affordable housing and the cutback of social services, got even more amplified with the 2008 economic crisis. The set of new financial instruments used in turning real estate assets into highly flexible liquidity

spread risk and permitted surplus savings pools easier access to surplus housing demand. It brought aggregate interest rates down, while generating immense fortunes for the financial intermediaries who worked these wonders. But spreading risk does not eliminate risk.

Furthermore, the fact that risk can be spread so widely encourages even riskier local behaviours because the risk can be transferred elsewhere. (Harvey 2010:174)

The economic crisis was a result of spread but accumulated risk, the expansion of subprime and other risky mortgage loans encouraged by national legislations (Rossi 2013:1068) and was in many ways connected to urban development: „the financial crash which found its origins in the property markets [demonstrated that] the built environment is not only incidental to global economic stability, it is instrumental.” (Self & Bose 2014:12) While the crisis was „originated in urban and suburban spaces”, later it became a „state crisis with consequences for cities and subnational scales.” (Donald et al. 2014)

The crisis created more damage than regular stock market or banking crises, because “investments in the built environment are typically credit-based, high-risk and long in the making.” (Harvey 2010:8) The austerity measures introduced after the eruption of the crisis by national governments and European Institutions sought to reduce budget deficits by spending cuts, decreasing labour costs, privatisation, the downsizing local administrations and the reconfiguration of public services. These measures, expanding the impacts of the neoliberal policies already in place hit cities especially hard: with “a prolonged period of slow growth” with a fiscal tax base particularly vulnerable to the effects of financial instability and with many responsibilities rescaled from the central state to local governments, many cities, struggling to pay back their debts, reached the limits of their ability to provide the necessary infrastructures to their residents and found themselves “in a downward spiral from which there seems little prospect of emerging.” (Donald et al. 2014:11)

Austerity measures brought further the neoliberal agenda of urbanisation with more social-state retrenchment and paternalist-penal state expansion, more privatisation and deregulation, more subjection of urban development decisions to market logics, a continued delinking of land-use systems from relays of popular-democratic control and public accountability, more courting of mobile events, investment and elite consumers, and a further subordination of place and territory to speculative strategies of profit-making at the expense of use values, social needs and public goods. (Peck et al. 2013:1092)

Facing declining revenues and not allowed to run deficits, therefore struggling with significantly reduced operative budgets, many municipalities were forced to make “cuts in funding of schools, social services, garbage collection, infrastructure, etc.” (Aalbers 2013:1085) disproportionately impacting „the poor, the young, racialised communities and the elderly leading to the intensification of social-spatial segregation at the neighbourhood, city and inter-city levels.” (Donald et al. 2014:4) The crisis also brought many speculative urban development projects to insolvency, turning buildings and entire complexes obsolete before they were even finished, leading to mass abandonment and vacancy.

1.4. The systemic production of vacancy

The reasons of abandonment and vacancy can be traced back at many phases of the processes of centralised planning, neoliberal urban development and financialisation. The shift from industrial to service economies, the flexibilisation of the workplace, suburban migration, the redlining of certain neighbourhoods by the banking and insurance sectors, and general urban development cycles and crises all contribute to the obsolescence of certain building types, making a lot of space redundant in both the centres and peripheries of cities. In addition, tax policies often encourage speculation and property holding by investors and developers and others encourage abandonment as an alternative to underperformance. And besides all these systemic characteristics, the significant time lag between planning and implementation also leaves many buildings vacant for a long period. (Nemeth 2014)

Urban neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism, as discussed above, by forcing cities to compete with each other through speculative development projects, also brought along the risk of bad investments: “credit-financed shopping malls, sports stadia, and other facets of conspicuous high consumption are high risk projects that can easily fall on bad times and thus exacerbate as the ‘overmallings of America’ only too dramatically illustrates.” (Harvey 1989:13) Besides failed development projects turned into urban skeletons (see cases in Rome in Chapter 4 and Budapest in Chapter 3), in crises, a lot of additional capital gets devalued. Alongside with idle money and “declining asset values in stocks and shares, land, properties, art objects, etc.,” devalued capital exists in the form of “surplus houses, surplus offices and shopping malls, surplus productive capacity and even more surplus labour than before” (Harvey 2010:5) as well as “deserted and abandoned factories; empty office and retail spaces; surplus commodities that cannot be sold.” (Harvey 2010:46)

In the financialised city, completely sub-ordinated to market finance, many developers or asset holders are not interested in renting or selling their properties: they serve as a base to get loans for further developments. The extreme discrepancy between demand and offer makes many speculative urban development projects particularly vulnerable and exposed to global flows and tides of finance. The fact that financial calculation focuses on short term yield, leads inevitably to the obsolescence of certain urban areas which, overrun by finance, become dysfunctional and quickly lose monetary value, like in the case of Spanish ghost towns, where

the reconstitution of financialised capital was so fast that usage value was never even realised; fast successive sales within financial markets ensured that developers and early investors recouped their investment without the question of value for other urban actors ever arising. These homes will probably never be occupied, revealing an immediate obsolescence. In short, in this case, it was hardly necessary for the capital involved to take an actual form in order to be reproduced and accumulated; ‘real’ capital and value proved nothing but pretexts for the reproduction of financial capital. (Theurillat 2016:1513)

The failure of speculative development projects by public administrations and their in-house companies and the resulting wastelands often lead to privatisation: obliged by national laws and financial creditors to keep debts at legal limits, governments and municipalities are often forced to carry out significant budget cuts in social and cultural services, and to proceed with the privatisation of communal assets, including buildings and land. Privatisation usually concerns the most valuable and therefore sellable public assets: giving away at discounted price important revenue streams including land and property, tolling and user fees, and contracted-out service management leaves public administrations and particularly municipalities with “a rump of functions that have failed the profitability test for privatisation, the residualized local public sector will likely face intensifying management and financing problems” (Peck 2012, 648), especially with the widespread loss of property tax revenues. (Tabb 2014, 92)

As a result, austerity regimes added another layer to the vacancy of urban spaces. The reconfiguration of public services and infrastructures in correspondence with austerity measures has an undeniable effect on urban spaces: decreasing municipal budgets in many cities results in the decay or abandonment of important community facilities and public spaces. While the cost to the local government and private owners of “maintaining properties or dismantling them so they are not used by junkies and other non-desirables further inflicts cost on neighbourhoods” (Tabb 2014, 92) as well as on public and private organisations, municipalities have been reluctant to look for forms of cooperation other than privatising properties or out-contracting services to private companies.

Decay and abandonment did not only occur in the public sector: formerly public assets that were privatised to be redeveloped for commercial and residential purposes, have also been abandoned to decay. The unfinished residential complexes of Spain, the emptied and unsold educational complexes in Hungary (see Chapter 3), or the disaffected movie theatres, hospitals and transportation buildings in Rome (see Chapter 4) all witness this process. As a result, many cities are bearing the physical scars of disinvestment, disuse and decline; in vacant and abandoned spaces of private rescission and public retreat.” (Tonkiss 2013:312)

Just like definitions of vacancy, estimations about the scale of vacancy also vary. While very few municipalities or national registers dispose a truly comprehensive and reliable dataset of vacant real estate (see Chapter 2), there are many analyses of vacancy rates that make the phenomenon more tangible in various types of properties. According to Pagano and Bowman, the typical large city in 2000 in the US had “upwards of 15% of land lying vacant or abandoned.” (Pagano and Bowman 2000). In Britain, the non-profit Empty Homes Agency reported more than 3 percent of the total housing stock in England (more than 700,000 homes) empty in 2011 (Levitt 2012). In the Netherlands, different accounts estimate the number of vacant office spaces at 8 million (Oudemans 2014) or 9 million (Heddes and de Zeeuw 2015) square meters across the country, while in the late 1990s, in Berlin alone, the scale of unoccupied office space reached the 1.5 million square meters (Krätke 2004). Certainly, vacancy in housing, land, retail or office space has different consequences and often very different causes. However, structural vacancy, and the continuous or frequent abandonment of large stocks of real estate signal an alarming trend as well as a structural defect of the property system across North America and Europe.

Besides witnessing the gradual instrumentalisation of development projects for goals related to global competition and financial flows, the abstraction of various types of real estate properties into investment assets, and crises resulting from speculation and overdevelopment, the persistence of structural mass vacancy in European cities also demonstrates the incapacity of successive regimes of urban planning and development to tackle the issue of vacancy and shrinkage. As Philip Oswalt wrote before the crisis,

Both models of urban development that based on the classical welfare state and the entrepreneurial model are, for the most part, ill suited for dealing with shrinking cities. Shrinking areas are characterised by both state and private disinvestment. Shrinkage goes hand in hand with radical cuts in financing, especially at the community level, as a result of increasing expenditures and reduced incomes. At the same time, in the context of a drop in demand, an excess of supply, and devaluation of the real-estate market, private investments fail to materialise. The process is exacerbated by the fact that banks are not prepared to lend money to those who are willing to invest, as shrinking areas are viewed as high risks. (Oswalt 2006:13)

1.5. Affected communities and the emergence of new actors in urban development

In the context of the neoliberal transformation and financialisation of urban development, many local and cultural communities witnessed their spatial and economic resources diminishing with the drainage of funding and the withdrawal of institutional support. The reduction of operative budgets forced both state and municipal organisations to accept “significant reductions in welfare benefits and a shifting of responsibility for certain social services to the local level, both of which will have major impacts on the poor and economically vulnerable.” (Donald et al 2014:10) Communities in disadvantaged and deprived neighbourhoods across Europe were particularly affected by austerity measures and the suspension or abandonment of key local services like social care, childcare, education, health and the maintenance of communal spaces and infrastructures; as a response, many of these communities set themselves to create spaces and services on their own. Giving up on expecting help or cooperation from municipalities in some cases, or establishing new frameworks for cooperation with local administrations in others, these initiatives became proactive forces in shaping European cities by creating new community spaces and launching new social services through the establishment of a parallel civic infrastructure.

The emergence of these new community actors trying to fill the gaps of the welfare state or acting in the absence of inclusive urban planning and development mechanisms, is part of the process described by Erik Swyngedouw as “governance-beyond-the-state,” referring to

institutional arrangements of ‘governing’ which give a much greater role in policy-making, administration and implementation to private economic actors on the one hand and to parts of civil society on the other in self-managing what until recently was provided or organised by the national or local state” and to “socially innovative practices in urban governance and territorial

development (...) invariably associated with the emergence of new institutional forms that draw heavily on a greater involvement of individuals or actors from both the economy and civil society (Swyngedouw 2005:1992)

While in many cities in Southern and Eastern Europe that struggled to maintain even some of their most basic infrastructures as the crisis hit national and local economies, community actors set themselves to fill the vacuum left by municipalities and states, many cities in Northwest Europe managed to weather relatively well the recession and “share” their services with communities in more coordinated, contractual forms. Swyngedouw describes this consensual form of governance-beyond-the-state as “horizontal, networked and based on interactive relations between independent and interdependent actors who share a high degree of trust, despite internal conflict and oppositional agendas, within inclusive participatory institutional or organisational associations,” (Swyngedouw 2005:1995) a governance form whose values include “a common purpose, joint action, a framework of shared values, continuous interaction and the wish to achieve collective benefits that cannot be gained by acting independently.” (Swyngedouw 2005:1994)

This description of “a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government” indicating a “renewed relation between state and civil society actors” (Swyngedouw 2005:1998) corresponds to what Thierry Theurillat defines with an optic of the Actor-Network Theory as the “negotiated city” where “urban value depends much more directly, and more exclusively, on more or less complementary interactions between local and non-local actors, users, consumers, public actors, tourists, etc.” (Theurillat 2016:1509)

In the more conflictual context of Southern Europe, the emergence of new actors in urban development translates as “giving a greater complexity and richness to planning, liberating it from the technical and reductive idea of the project that was consolidated in the culture of modernity.” (Cellamare 2011:12) In Cellamare’s reading, while the classical development project “does not correspond anymore to the real conditions in which the urban transformation and planning dynamics are born,” in the emerging modalities of “shared planning,” residents become “protagonists in the construction of their own living space,” stepping beyond traditional means of contestation and participation, and surpassing the authoritative idea of the urban project. (Cellamare 2011:13)

The entrance of non-governmental actors into planning and development processes, either by contractual or conflictual means, has also prompted redefinitions of “public” or “common” interest. Challenging the “business as usual” logic of urban development in which private interests control the development of cities, many communities have claimed their right to the city, that is, “establishing democratic control over the deployment of the surpluses through urbanisation.” (Harvey 2012:23) Common interest has been at the core of these claims. Certainly, common interest is a very fluid term, produced in constantly renegotiated situations and interactions between a changing set of actors. In contexts of growing distrust between public administrations and community groups, the public value of public actions is increasingly questioned, while many public functions are taken over by privately run spaces and services: as the founder of a Budapest-based initiative explained, “private is the new public.” (Bársony 2012, see Chapter 3)

1.6. The democratic deficits of shared governance

As many commentators observed, “new arrangements of governance have created new institutions and empowered new actors, while disempowering others,” (Swyngedouw 2005:1993) resulting in the “rise to prominence of new social actors, the consolidation of the presence of others, the exclusion or diminished power position of groups that were present in earlier forms of government and the continuing exclusion of other social actors who have never been included.” (Swyngedouw 2005:2003)

In this process of empowerment and disempowerment, the new constellations in the governance of urban planning, development and the management of spaces suffer from a democratic deficit, mainly due to the lack of transparency of governance arrangements and the lack of

accountability of new stakeholders entering the urban development arena. As Erik Swyngedouw suggests, in contrast to traditional practices of citizenship and political participation,

network-based forms of governance do not (yet) have codified rules and regulations that shape or define participation and identify the exact domains or arenas of power. (...) While such absence of codification potentially permits and elicits socially innovative forms of organisation and of governing, it also opens up a vast terrain of contestation and potential conflict that revolves around the exercise of (or the capacity to exercise) entitlements and institutional power. (Swyngedouw 2005:1999)

Incontestably, the access to the new forms of participation in the shape of shared governance experiments and cooperative management models is not fully inclusive nor entirely horizontal. As we will see in the coming chapters, the key actors of governance-beyond-the-state, and to a certain extent, of the reappropriation of abandoned urban buildings come from particular professional backgrounds, political milieux and personal networks, with specific skills, interests and capacities of engagement. In this context of eroding political power and increasingly complex relationship between state and civil society, “many individuals and social groups have fully or partially ‘opted-out’ of political participation and have chosen either other forms of political action or plain rejection.” Swyngedouw 2005:2000

However, either through accepting or refusing cooperation with the public sector, many initiatives to reanimate empty urban spaces – as all the cases explored in the following chapters – claim a strong community dimension, a deep engagement with a defined physical area or neighbourhood, and social sustainability in the form of the inclusion of certain (if not all) disadvantaged social groups, often emphasising the contrast with the exclusiveness of market dynamics or public resources.

Swyngedouw’s analysis builds on the assumption that “participation is invariably mediated by power.” (Swyngedouw 2005:1998) This statement brings us to the dilemma that many community initiatives and founders of civic spaces face: is it possible to move “outside” of the power’s mediation? What are the spaces of manoeuvre for civic spaces to create relative independence from political and market forces? Although we have to accept the impossibility of being completely outside of existing power relations, and civic spaces vary greatly in their positions to embrace or reject market dynamics or cooperation with political actors, many attempts to create cooperative ownership structures created relatively autonomous spaces by moving properties off the market through various cooperations between community initiatives and philanthropical financial actors (see Chapter 5 and 6).

Undoubtedly, these civic spaces of relative autonomy, inhabiting properties that had been moved off the speculation market are only islands in the sea of speculative urban development. In many views, the fragmented and “still rather inchoate” nature of the field of citizen-led urban regeneration prevents it from creating a critical mass:

the combined forces of economic austerity and state repression continue to circumscribe and (re)order this terrain, seriously impeding the scale-jumping manoeuvres that would be required among these dispersed sites of protest in order to forge a broader and interurban anti-neoliberal front. (Peck et al 2013:1095)

However, there are many attempts to connect these dispersed sites to a larger tissue of urban self-organisation. Through discourses, policies, cooperation networks or solidarity funds, there are emerging realities across Europe that put an increasing pressure on existing political arrangements and urban policy directions. The following chapters will investigate how the interaction of various actors within specific cities can create contexts of networked cooperation, open room and mechanisms for the development of civic spaces, and how these contexts connect with each other and help upscaling experiments beyond city limits and national borders.

2. The Actors of Vacancy: Buildings, People, Concepts and Structures for the Reappropriation of Abandoned Spaces

Urban development, with the transformation of urban governance described in the previous chapter, has become a field shaped by a great variety of actors. In a similar fashion, the occupation, reuse, regeneration and repurposing of empty buildings in order to create civic spaces in different European cities has also become a process negotiated by an extended “network of actors” (Latour 2005): public administrations and planning commissions, investors and constructors, artists collectives and architects, NGOs and community developers, philanthropic foundations and ethical banks, as well as abandoned buildings, online platforms, concepts, toolkits, manifestos, laws and regulations.

The interaction of these human and non-human actors, shaped by the affordances of a city's empty buildings, the regulatory and procurement system, and the emergence of new concepts and discourses all contribute to the production of specific milieux in which certain ways of reappropriating vacant spaces becomes possible. This chapter looks at some of these actors, investigating their roles, positions as well as their relationships, interferences and conflicts that constitute distinct networks of collaboration and antagonism, specific for each examined city.

In this enumeration of actors, I rely on the cartography outlined by David Harvey when he describes urbanisation (Harvey 1989:6):

The spatially grounded set of social processes that I call urbanisation produce innumerable artifacts - a built form, produced spaces and resource systems of particular qualities organised into a distinctive spatial configuration. Subsequent social action must take account of these artefacts, since so many social processes (such as commuting) become physically channelled by them. Urbanisation also throws up certain institutional arrangements, legal forms, political and administrative systems, hierarchies of power, and the like. These, too, give a 'city' objectified qualities that may dominate daily practices and confine subsequent courses of action. And, finally, the consciousness of urban inhabitants is affected by the environment of experience out of which perceptions, symbolic readings, and aspirations arise. (Harvey 1989:6)

Following Harvey, in this chapter I look at the role of buildings, activists, design professionals, concepts such as temporary use, citymaking and the commons, as well as structures like maps, platforms and policies, in order to draw the contexts in which they operate, interact and get organised into networks. Examining these actors in their interactions can help us recognise in the process of urbanisation a “perpetual tension between form and process, between object and subject, between activity and thing” and “the role and power of objectifications, the capacity of things we create to return to us as so many forms of domination.” (Harvey 1989:6) By all means, these networks cannot be conceived as static: they are in constant transformation, with perpetually changing power relations, where a strong new actor, new economic situation, new regulation, new movement born from a new discourse can significantly alter the networks' dynamics and key positions.

2.1. Buildings as attractors and enablers

Besides the logic of the real estate market, buildings operate in a variety of logics, from design, through psychology to everyday use or political engagement. Looking at buildings as actors of the urban development process requires “to be able to transform the static view of a building into one among many successive freeze-frames that could at last document the continuous flow that a building always is.” (Latour and Yaneva 2008:81) For Latour and Yaneva, this means looking at the “complex ecology” of buildings as networks of actions, taking into account all the constraints that shape a building.

While the dominant discipline to examine buildings – architecture theory – has been substantially limited to addressing the form and meaning of edifices as their key characteristics, social sciences, in Latour and Yaneva's perspective, should be capable of conceiving buildings as contested territories, enlisting the “movements” of a building, its “controversies and performances over time (...),

the way it resists attempts at transformation, allows certain visitors' actions and impedes others, bugs observers, challenges city authorities, and mobilizes different communities of actors." (Latour and Yaneva 2008:86)

Consequently, Latour and Yaneva suggest us to treat buildings as

a moving modulator regulating different intensities of engagement, redirecting users' attention, mixing and putting people together, concentrating flows of actors and distributing them so as to compose a productive force in time-space (...) composed of apertures and closures enabling, impeding and even changing the speed of the free-floating actors, data and resources, links and opinions, which are all in orbit, in a network, and never within static enclosures. (Latour and Yaneva 2008:87)

Buildings are constituted in a variety of action networks and also act as actors in these networks. Buildings play a role in civic spaces both as vehicles of symbolic values or generators of atmospheres that attract, inspire and engage community initiatives, and as enablers of certain kinds of activities. As psychological approaches to architecture theory have shown, one of the key aspects of buildings is their attractiveness: vacant spaces mobilise peculiar sensibilities. In a register seemingly far from the real estate sector but connected with it in many ways, vacant spaces have been an important source of inspiration for art and literature for centuries. The complex relationship contemporary culture has built up toward ruins and unused architectural structures has a lot to do with the search for an own past, and identity:

Trust in future was badly shaken in the wake of the changes of the seventies, causing people to turn back to the past feeling their sense of insecurity. This turn played an important role in the development of the notion of industrial heritage. Mourning the irrevocable closure of the recent past made industrial heritage – at least the part that is still around – valuable, and it gave birth to the pressing need for their preservation. (Németh 2005:32)

The abandoned, the unused, the forgotten do not only appear in our thinking as places of nostalgia and difference but also as possibilities outside planned structures: leftover places and ruins, vacant lots and hidden alleyways unleash the threads of memory and ignite the imagination at the same time. Theories of art and architecture have been regularly returning to the phenomenon of ruins and vacant spaces, as an important counter-current to the all-encompassing planning mechanisms of modernity. There are many definitions to describe the role of derelict, unused building in the emotional geography in today's cities. The architectural theorist Anthony Vidler characterises our relationship with derelict buildings as the "architectural uncanny:"

The contemporary sensibility that sees the uncanny erupt in empty parking lots around abandoned or run-down shopping malls, in the screened trompe l'oeil of simulated space, in, that is, the wasted margins and surface appearances of postindustrial culture, this sensibility has its roots and draws its commonplaces from a long but essentially long modern tradition (Vidler 1992:84).

Vidler thereby highlights a repressed desire behind modern efforts to transform space into a rational, transparent system. This desire yearns for the inscrutable, the obscure that defies any systematisation. This is the desire that finds its objects in abandoned houses, empty factories, vacant lots, and firewalls. These spaces offer the possibility of a different order. The 'invasion of alien presence' in the centre of the city offers novel sights: it turns the usual and familiar into occult and imponderable. Secret always carries the idea of 'unspoiled,' avoiding dominant urban narratives and everyday attention, but "at the end of the twentieth century, secret was positive and it was desired as never before. This desire for secret places relates to perennial fantasies off the map. (...) The traveller seeks the secret hidden spaces of real life, untouched by control and mediation, where the authentic and marvellous still flourish" (Baker 2003:30).

The "architectural uncanny" as the subconscious of modernity is closely connected to the idea of the ruin: Andreas Huyssen calls ruins the "secret classicism of modernity" that consciously or unconsciously prefers fragment, collage and aphorism to the totality heralded by Winckelmann, Goethe and the International Style. (Huyssen 2006) Ruins – with the ideas of catastrophe connected

to them - at the same time carry the "self-criticism" of modernity, the awareness of its "dark side", the system of chronological and spatial doubts – following modernity all the way - that is essentially the fear of nature taking over culture. (Huyssen 2006) Ruins remind us, that "the idea of progress is always already in the state of catastrophe" and that "only when such novel commodities, architectures and confident expressions to the idea of progress fall into ruin and decay does their initial promise reveal its hollowness and its frailty." (Hetherington 2005) The secret desire for the ruined, the derelict, the vacant and the peripheral haunts modern city planning, but it can only come out to the light and become a mass-movement, when the basic elements of enlightenment reveal their own failure, and when convictions and desires on which modern structures are based loose their appeal.

The experience of chronological marginality interlocks with that of geographical peripheries. Abandoned places can be interpreted as documents: the "failed experiments in the history of the city can be discovered in its neglected spaces (...) the urban wastelands generated by the economic recessions of the late 1970s and 1980s are no longer simply about emptiness, nor about their absence of history, their absence of anything going on; they are now haunted by ghosts that say how it might have been, if it had kept its people, its job." (Pile 2001:205)

In the meanwhile, the combination of fear from and attraction to abandoned spaces is at the source of the commodification of urban exploration and the desire to consume the adventure of discovering and inhabiting vacant spaces. Consequentially, the emerging attractiveness of the edgy, rough side of cities has been one of the key drivers of gentrification, pushing further the urban frontier of commercialisation. That makes the experience of time especially important in urban peripheries: "Experiences of the city are at their sharpest at the point of disappearance, already dissipated by the time a story about them can be told." (Pile 2001:205)

Abandoned buildings, empty factories, forgotten underpasses, firewalls and vacant lots that seem to avoid planning and control, appear as spaces without definition, and carry the tension of unsatisfied desires, and unrealised, though realisable plans. Spaces of urban periphery are transitional zones that are often described as interstices (Tonnelat 2008), in-between spaces or non-programmed spaces of liberty. The desire, emotions or collective needs projected into buildings make them vehicles of strong symbolism and transform them into actors in the social quest for space (Latour 2005). But how does a building enable liberty? How can liberty come from a space? In an interview with Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow received the following response to his question about the emancipatory capacities of architecture:

I do not think it is possible to say that something belongs to the order of 'liberation' and something else to 'oppression.' (...) I do not think there is something that is - by nature - absolutely liberating. Freedom is a practice. There may effectively be a number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen or even break them, but none of these projects will - simply by their nature - ensure that people will automatically be released, that it can be established by the project itself. The freedom of men is never assured by the institutions and laws intended to guarantee them. Therefore we can always detour all these laws and institutions. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because freedom is what must be practised. (Rabinow 1998:433)

Space itself cannot be conceived as liberating; however, it can be part of a constellation of actors that creates opportunities for practices that are hardly possible elsewhere. Potentially available space, or buildings without any current function, allow future users to project their ideas, needs, desires into them. In the meanwhile, besides the attraction of vacant spaces for these projections, the material, architectural and contextual characteristics of abandoned buildings act as limiting, conditioning or enabling forces. They are not independent from the contexts in which they are produced: "interstitial spaces are always the by-products of previous processes of urban planning and design that strongly determine the conditions of occupation of these spaces." (Tonnelat 2008:293) Unlike newly designed structures where use is shaped by "a zoning limit, a new fabric, a change in the financing scheme, a citizen's protest, a limit in the resistance of this or that material, a new popular fashion, a new client's concern, a new idea flowing into the studio," (Latour and Yaneva 2008:84) existing buildings, subject to

transformation or adaption, have an additional layer of constraints, the existing physical structure that limits and orients the range of possible uses.

In environmental psychology, “affordance” stands for “possibilities for action provided us by the environment.” (Gibson 1979) The expression was quickly picked up by designers addressing the potentials opened up by vacant buildings. As Erik Rietveld from the landscape architecture firm RAAAF formulates it,

Physical surroundings have something to offer the user: possibilities for action, or ‘affordances’. An affordance is a relation between an aspect of the surroundings and an ability that is available in a socio-cultural practice. Behind closed doors, every vacant building contains a whole landscape of affordances. There is a gamut of unused resources that, with a little good will, could easily be tapped. (Rietveld et al. 2014:89)

The buildings Rietveld – and many designers, activists or community developers – work with, are often unconventional buildings, sometimes with protected heritage status, that “include a great variety of spaces as they were once designed for specific purposes: lighthouses, hospitals, water towers, factories, airports, hangars, offices, rehabilitation centres, fortresses, bunkers, schools, swimming pools and so much more. These unique buildings were constructed in different eras, with function, crafts and the use of materials being time specific. These buildings therefore are non-reproducible.” (Rietveld 2014:33) For Rietveld, the non-reproducibility of these buildings, and the fact that they act as anchors in local social memory, is a key to their “exceptional affordances (...), irreplaceable possibilities for action offered by vacancy [that] will invite all sorts of experimentation from entrepreneurs (or more broadly, initiators) with innovative ideas when they are given access to this reservoir of resources.” (Rietveld 2014:33)

It is also due to their irregularity, their “unique qualities and spatial conditions” that these buildings resist to being “compartmentalised and grouped into homogeneous and standardised categories” (Theurillat 2016:1512), a key technique of the financialised city that transforms buildings into liquid financial assets, depriving them of their physical and spatial characteristics. For Rietveld, the challenge for designers is to see beyond the limits of “the current discussion about ‘empty square meters’” and the “reductive jargon of architects to simply ‘fill up’ the program in square meters.” (Rietveld 2012b:29)

Attractiveness in terms of affordances differs from attractiveness in terms of atmosphere or symbolism. However, both of these qualities play an important role in inviting initiatives to create civic spaces. At a symbolic level, buildings with a strong cultural importance or with a distinct architectural “aura” are more likely to mobilise local communities for their protection or conversion for community use. In the meanwhile, in a more pragmatic register, buildings for use have to be attractive for potential users, that is, in relatively good physical conditions, and in accessible locations. As Oswalt, Overmeyer and Misselwitz note, for instance, temporary users have similar preferences to mainstream renters or developers: “(...) if the investment required to renovate a space is too high, if it lies too far off the beaten track, or if suitable users are unavailable, it will remain unused.” (Oswalt et al 2009:9)

2.2. From activists to architects and spatial entrepreneurs: the making of a profession

Certainly, buildings in themselves are insufficient to create new opportunities for civic initiatives. New affordances can be generated “as a result of people developing new skills or tools, or because the structure of the physical environment or a particular location changes, which is exactly what an architectural intervention does.” (Rietveld et al. 2014:89) Besides the qualities of a building, therefore, its “creative ecology (...), a building’s relationship with a variety of services and knowledge networks” (Rietveld 2014:17) also determines its opportunities. Buildings need a specific set of agencies to be mobilised: social activists, cultural producers, design professionals, economic contributors, together with policymakers creating enabling policies and public officers implementing them.

Depending on the socio-economic and political context, these actor networks enable different constellations for cooperation and conflict, and consequentially, different paths for successful campaigns, interventions and reappropriation processes. These different constellations give a great variety of positions and roles for the different human actors. Due to the variety of these actor networks, relationships to institutions and questions of expertise or citizen control also emerge differently in these contexts. In the same time, civic initiatives, whether run by experts or future users of civic spaces, depending on the constellations of all these forces, take different positions on the ladder of participation: transforming Arnstein's famous classification of citizen participation (Arnstein 1969), we can suggest that civic spaces are created in autonomy, are co-created with political, administrative and economic power or are instrumentalised by them.

As Chapters 3-6 demonstrate, different contexts enable different types of actors to reappropriate vacant spaces, actors who, in turn, shape the context in a way that gives them more space to manoeuvre. Here I don't refer solely to regulations: instead, I aim at describing individual agency as formed by an ensemble of skills acquired through specific local histories, economic conditions and political traditions that materialise in actions. The actors conducting these act in a coordinated way, but their actions carry very individual traits: there are no recipes, cut-and-paste solutions in the making of civic spaces, as in situations of urban regeneration, all cases are different and require different operations, adapted to the very specific circumstances. Reappropriated space bears the traits of these various actors:

The way people deal with where they want to rent a space and how they achieve to come in is very different. From the people who run social projects that work with unemployed people, to an artist who is very flexible. (Brahm 2014)

In Budapest (see Chapter 3), for instance, independent theatre lead the movement for accessible spaces. While artists have had a crucial role in acknowledging the symbolic value of abandoned spaces and experimenting with new uses for empty buildings (see Chapter 1), the specific conditions of the Budapest context – a combination of high visibility, specific skills, loyal public and financial opportunities of the theatre sector – allowed theatre producers to establish more stable and sustainable civic spaces than any other initiatives in the Hungarian capital and beyond. As Júlia Bársony, founder of Műszi explains:

The essence of all this is cooperating with people. The reason why I became the engine of Műszi, is probably due to my 20 years of experience in theatre, from building settings through team work to distributing tasks. This was all motivated by artistic ambitions where practicality was the organising force and never money. (Bársony 2014)

In other contexts, political activists together with cultural associations and neighbourhood organisations play the most important role. In Rome (see details in Chapter 4), besides the occupied theatres and cinema buildings (see Teatro Valle and Cinema America in Chapter 4), the discourse of community access to abandoned spaces is dominated – and motivated – by neighbourhood organisations that claim publicly owned but unused properties as commons. Due to the lack of many significant social services, and building on a strong tradition of building occupations and social cultural centers (centri sociali), the city has become a laboratory of spontaneous take-overs of green-spaces and empty buildings, without any authorisation or contract, in order to create a parallel social infrastructure, sometimes with the compliance of authorities, sometimes confronting them. These initiatives, organised by grassroots political groups, neighbourhood committees or community sport clubs, also serve as catalysts for systemic change and municipal innovation itself, drafting policy proposals and pressing administrators to take steps in order to establish much needed services or spaces.

In Berlin (see Chapter 6), political activism has been at the roots of a gradual professionalisation which maintained a strong political edge. The alternative youth cultures and radical social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in West Berlin, together with the underground electronic music scene of the 1990s constructed the basis and developed the skills for an alternative, innovative and often

confrontative use of abandoned spaces. The temporary use of abandoned sites and buildings across the city by various activists and producers of the underground culture gradually gained recognition as a legitimate “method” for urban regeneration which led to its formalisation and the professionalisation of its protagonists. Growing awareness of the self-destructive tendencies of temporary use provoked many discussions about the need to preserve the city’s creative milieu by stabilising temporary spaces and saving them from instrumentalisation by commercial or political interests: building on their skills acquired during a decade of temporary use experiments, many initiatives attempted to transform temporary uses into permanent uses, turning the initial users from ‘space pioneers’ into ‘spatial entrepreneurs.’” (Buttenberg et al. 2014) This process of professionalisation was accompanied by the development of intermediary structures, including temporary use agencies, housing rights networks and ethical financial organisations, occupying a great diversity of positions within the discourse about how the city should evolve.

In the Dutch cities, (see Chapter 5) the fast reaction of authorities to mass vacancy with the introduction of various policy instruments facilitated the coordination of professional responses to the problem of empty buildings. Through channels of participation opened by local alliances of social activists as well as local administrations, like the Breeding Places program, many cultural producers and former squatters made their way into legal processes of regenerating vacant buildings. Besides these actors originating from local scenes of activism, design and planning professionals also occupied an important role in the extension of urban development: the distinguished status of designers, architects and planners in the Dutch discourse on urbanism gave them a distinct role in establishing new mechanisms in urban development.

In the process of new actors emerging in the field of urban development, and in particular, in the regeneration of empty spaces, it is interesting to examine the role of experts: actors, who – mostly building on their experience of revitalising empty sites, buildings or areas – have established intermediary structures, agencies, consultancies or advocacy organisations to mediate, coordinate, advise or help the reuse of vacant spaces. Where provided the right legal and financial tools, design professionals joined these processes with the ambition of occupying a central role in the actor networks of citizen-led urban regeneration.

Erik Rietveld, for instance, sees design interventions as the essence of revitalising buildings: “A carefully designed and precisely selected intervention sets something in motion, more than the thing itself. We focus on forms of collaboration, between technology, science and interested parties, with the designer occupying a central place, and amassing knowledge.” (Rietveld 2012b: 34) Consequentially, architects or designers who are “masters at making new affordances” help new affordances come into existence. (Rietveld et al. 2014:89)

It is by no means surprising, that architects and urban planners were looking for a new role after their much criticised complicity in the financialisation of architecture. Already before the 2008 economic crisis, many voices warned of the increasing marginalization of architects’ role in urban transformation: Responding to the rise of star architecture’s pure formalism, many theoreticians argued for the “expansion of the architectural field” with a new focus on the idea of the program as a means “to create the basis for an architecture that realistically confronts the present global political, social, and economic reality.” (Vidler 2004) A few years later, many young architecture offices emerged to embody this program:

Architecture will cease to exist if it refuses to engage with the main developments in society and makes no attempt to come up with answers. (...) Design research can be pro-active in developing a critical awareness regarding commissions. This would necessitate the development of parallel routes, offering opportunities for experiment. It would also require thinking more widely, to dare to consider fashion, interior design, architecture, urban design and landscape design as an integrated whole. (van Boxel and Koreman 2007, 36)

Architects’ role in these processes was reduced to “enticing investors with ingenious combinations of office storeys guaranteed to generate money for the cultural facility located on the

ground floor” (Vanstiphout 2014a, 59); or in general, to “performing an endless variation of style” and “inexpensively providing aesthetic form while the building and planning process is relegated to the developer.” (Illner 2014, 54)

The disintegration of the construction industry that saw its profits evaporate in a few months' time, directly affected the architecture profession: a large percentage of design jobs disappeared from the market, a situation made even more painful by the disappearance of public commissions in many cities. It also changed the optic of architects: the devastating effect of the recession on the construction industry made them painfully aware of the unsustainability of previous concepts of funding mechanisms and development processes. Finding themselves in the midst of landscapes of unfinished constructions, vacant complexes and fragmented public spaces, a generation of designers and planners began to think critically about the speculation-based economy and to take into account the limitations of the shrunk market, starting to notice the opportunities of the urban areas neglected by the official planning mechanisms.

As founders of the prominent young Dutch architecture firm space&matter explained, architects were looking for new roles within the “food-chain” of urban development:

2009 wasn't a very good year to start the office; there were very few commissions. Being an architecture and urban design office at the start of the crisis helped us acknowledge that architecture and urban planning have grown apart from society. We framed ourselves a mission: How can we add more relevance to our projects, how can we make our projects more socially and culturally specific? At some point, we thought, 'Why don't we initiate stuff ourselves? We have a lot of ideas, a lot of concepts, maybe it's just a matter of finding the right people who also like our ideas to get them done.' We established space&matter in the office of a real-estate developer whose company was shrinking and therefore had some desks to rent. This co-presence taught us that architects had much less effect on defining the spatial realm than developers: they were laying out the blueprint and asking architects to provide a spatial answer. Looking through the lens of the developer, we realised that if we wanted to add relevance to our projects, if we wanted to go deeper than just providing a spatial answer, we should be the people to frame the answer, to provide the blueprint, the DNA structure of the actual question. (Pool and Haccou 2015)

In many ways, the mass emergence of vacant spaces, failing public development plans and community infrastructures offered new possibilities for the architectural profession. While architects and planners were instrumental in the financialisation of cities and the post-welfare transformation of local administrations, they could also be engines in setting up alternative community services and infrastructures. Design and planning professionals had an ambiguous role in these processes: often stuck in the pre-crisis organisational models, they took time to adapt to the new circumstances and establish new positions in development processes. Recognising the need for self-sustaining, alternative community infrastructures and services on one hand, and the direct social utility of their skills in community-initiated urban projects on the other, architects and planners began supporting community experiments, launching unsolicited projects, building frameworks for the involvement of different social groups and introducing new development models in order to bring sense and life into dysfunctional elements of the built environment.

The restitution of designers' socio-political role required the progressive transformation of the architectural profession itself. In 2007, Michelle Provoost and Wouter Vanstiphout traced the first signs of this transformation by describing a new wave of architects and urban practitioners as the „Ditch School of Urban Design”:

These practices don't wait for a client or a commission—they forge ahead on their own and find other ways to finance the project. (...) These offices, groups, and artists have abandoned the idea of the conventional architects' office or urban planning department and have blurred the boundaries between urban planning, urban design, art, and social work. (...) Their interventions can be physical objects but even then are more importantly tactical manipulations of political landscapes. By succeeding in building something, these groups change the political status quo in such a way that more things become thinkable and doable. (Provoost and Vanstiphout 2007:38)

However, revisiting his article 7 years later, Vanstiphout adjusted his impressions: accommodating originally subversive and community-oriented processes, commercial developers, housing corporations and municipalities instrumentalized

placemaking, urban farming, community architecture, and narrative design as integral parts of their methodology. Again the architects pushed into the role of pill sweeteners, grease on the wheels of much larger deals in which they have hardly any position. (Vanstiphout 2014b:8)

If the political and economic transformation of the past decade profoundly changed the architectural profession, it also raised many questions concerning the positions and roles of architects and designers: how to arrive in a development process early enough to avoid its instrumentalization for distant objectives? How to assure community involvement in controlling not only the built objects but also the destiny of spaces? How to become developers or financiers of community-built projects, in order to reduce their exposure to commercial ambitions? How to “penetrate into mechanisms of power, money, policymaking, and knowledge that actually form the basis for the transformations of our cities and communities?” (Vanstiphout 2014b:8)

Despite the enthusiasm it generated, the emergence of participatory architectural practices and community-built public spaces into the mainstream has been an ambiguous process. On the one hand, community building played an important role in helping bottom-up social and cultural infrastructures unfold and get established, giving efficient answers to the austerity measures, bureaucratic immobility or political pressure of governments and municipalities, providing “local services and spaces that substitute or compensate for absent or inadequate public provision.” (Tonkiss, 2013:318) On the other hand, they have been integrated into private development projects as well as municipal planning schemes, as “cut-price locational boosters”, as “part of a wider ‘neoliberal strategy’ for outsourcing municipal services to (unpaid) private actors, the distance between seedbed and sell-out becomes very tight indeed.” (Tonkiss, 2013:318)

If the political and economic transformation of the past decade changed positions in the architectural profession, it also raised many questions concerning the engagements of architects and designers: how to arrive in a planning and design process early enough to avoid its instrumentalisation? How to assure community involvement in controlling not only the built objects but also the destiny of spaces? How to become developers, of financiers of community-built projects to reduce their submission to external goals?

Facilitating the evolution of a new professional role for architects, designers and planners has been put on the agenda of several institutions. The prestigious Rietveld Academy’s Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, together with the landscape architecture office RAAAF, launched a master program called Vacant NL. The program, described by its initiators as a world first, “aimed at training participants from different disciplines as specialists in the temporary use of vacant buildings and sites.” (Mackic 2012) Besides the Master programme, RAAAF also

compiled the knowledge we have gained (...) in the book Vacancy Studies with the aim to equip designers as well as teachers and students in design education with new insights and tools to carry out this novel design task. Vacancy has become a new professional field of study. (Mackic 2012)

Other architectural institutions decided to focus on another aspect of design possibilities related to vacant buildings. While in his popular handbook “The Art of City-Making”, Charles Landry introduced the concept of “City Making” as not limited to specific professions – “the urban professions and politicians may believe it i theirs, but they are only responsible for a part; (...) because of this fragmentation and the competing rules of different professions and interests we cannot build the cities we love anymore” (Landry 2006:4) – many architectural organisations saw the opportunity for a professional renewal in this concept. The International Architecture Biennale of Rotterdam, for instance, with its edition in 2012 focused on “Making City,” by which it understood the evolving actor network – established through the emergence of new actors and new cooperations led by designers – that fills the gaps of outdated planning mechanisms:

We began by focusing on three intertwined issues: the role of design and of the set of tools of planning; the role of the alliances of actors actively operating in the process of making city; and the role of good governance. (Brugmans et al 2012:10)

The Dutch discourse on “City Making” made the figure of the “City Maker” popular in the early 2010s: evoking a pragmatic figure that does not only talk about the city but also makes it, the expression refers to bottom-up innovators who contribute to the development of the city with their own tools, experimental methods, generally in respect of regulations and laws, but not depending on public support. In support of the discourse, observers began to describe the emergence of City Makers as a movement beyond borders:

Over the past couple of years, the City Makers movement has been taking off. City Makers are people who singlehandedly initiate change in their urban surroundings and are shaping the city in transition. Citizens in different countries and contexts are inspired, either out of dissatisfaction or a strong believe in local social innovation, to take ownership over the livability of their neighbourhoods and cities. This is a shift taking place all across Europe. (Muylaert 2015)

2.3. Concepts for vacancy: from temporary use to the commons

Besides the attraction of vacant spaces to project ideas and desires into them, the material, architectural and contextual characteristics of abandoned buildings and the people and organisations that whose agency mobilises their potentials, concepts and discourses also shape the way urban regeneration is thought about and the reappropriation of empty buildings is undertaken.

One of these concepts is temporary use that in the 2000s became widely acknowledged as an inclusive tool of urban regeneration (see Chapter 2 for details). Definitions of temporary uses converge in seeing them as activities outside the ordinary functioning of real estate markets, highlighting the “intention of the user, developer or planners that the use should be temporary” (Bishop and Williams 2012:5), or “that these distinctions assume that temporary use is secondary or provisional, a stand-in or substitute for the preferred permanent option.” (Németh and Lanhorst 2014:144) Temporary use requires the

rethinking of certain orthodoxies of urban development as usual: in particular the time-scales that inform conventional development models; the understandings of use around which sites are planned and designed; and the ways in which value is realised through the production of urban spaces. (Tonkiss 2013:313)

Temporary uses share many similar traits: they are born in vacant buildings that lost their functions, using the time in-between two regular uses, a period of often unpredictable length before selling or demolishing a building. The idea of the flexible, temporary use of empty properties is to bring together various stakeholders: it can engage an important number of municipal and private actors and property owners, as well as cultural organisations, to elaborate potential uses of existing infrastructure and resources. Ideally, transforming empty properties to allow them adopt new uses offers advantages to all: owners profit with the renovation and preservation of the building, users access affordable work and living spaces, residents enjoy their revitalised neighbourhoods, merchants benefit increasing traffic and sales, and the design professions gain new work opportunities and expanded professional perspectives. And they can also inspire a learning process at administrations, challenged to accommodate innovation from the civic society, and at communities, required to adapt their needs and capacities to available resources. In this sense, temporary use is not limited to marginal, out-of-the-ordinary activities: it contributes to the transformation of planning itself.

However, there are many conditions for successful temporary use projects: besides fair cooperation between civic initiatives, property owners and regulators, temporary use also needs vacant properties that are available for civic use for a period of time. For most of the users, the temporal restriction of use is a serious limitation: nobody can afford to invest money, time and energy into spaces if these investments cannot be secured for a substantial period of time, in a form or another. Temporariness from a professional viewpoint means

from the day that a building becomes vacant till the day that it gets reallocated, renovated or demolished. We do this because in the in-between time you can experiment a lot as there are less regulations, but you can experiment with a program for the definitive use, you can try things out that wouldn't be possible if you reallocated it immediately. Reallocation takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money in Holland, it could take years of municipal meetings, for people to find the right program for a building. In the meanwhile all these buildings stay empty, and a lot of things could happen in them. In Amsterdam, quite many initiatives started out with a program for a building, thinking that it would last 1 or 2 years. But with the crisis this 1 or 2 years now take 5 years. You see that temporary could be from 1 week to 10 years. It's really pity if a building just stays vacant for those 10 years, just because people think temporary use is not the final answer. (Mackic 2012)

The radical idea of temporariness as a strategy aims at turning the disadvantage of temporal limitation into an advantage, by promoting tools for “sequential temporary use: the constant moving from one building to another.” (Mackic 2012) In some interpretations, temporary use should not focus on a given building, but on what is created there:

If you stay too long in one place, you want to stay and invest your energy there. In the 'blank land' of temporary use, however, everything revolves around the development of knowledge, and that must be the focus of the energy. If as a designer you know a place is available, say, for five years, and you are well aware of the fact that you must move on after that, you design, build and work differently. (Bey 2014:172)

However, temporariness carries along the dangers of instrumentalisation for political or commercial goals. With temporary use becoming an integrated element of long-term planning, allowing experimentation with different functions and target groups, before establishing a program for a planned development, it has also become a strategy used by municipalities and commercial developers in order to revitalise a building, a block or an area. Somewhat in the Netherlands (see Chapter 5), but particularly in Berlin (Chapter 6), many critics addressed the way value is created by a civic initiative in a building or an area, and this value is transformed into economic value by the property's owner or political capital by a public administration:

Temporary use is a nice tool to use, although I can totally understand the problems it brings. (...) In Berlin it's a big topic, because we have so many uses that, after years and years of temporary use, they're really successful, and in the end, they should have the possibility to make the project last longer or stay as long as they want. (...) I'm still sure that it is definitely a tool to give young people with nice ideas the possibility to realise them. But if you use it too much - like everything - it can turn into a problem. Because then you have no more durable projects and nobody will invest energy into a project that from the beginning on is just based on this very shaky contract of Zwischennutzung. (Dumpe 2012)

The exploitation of vacancy, has not been limited to architectural experiments. Building on new models of living and working, innovative sections of the real estate sector also discovered the value and potentials of temporariness. With the proliferation of anti-squat companies or property guardians that create significant revenue by “protecting” vacant buildings from squatters by installing there tenants with irregular contracts allowing substandard conditions (see Chapter 5), the bottom-up, social and community aspects disappear from temporary use. Similarly, with pop-up events becoming a popular genre, property management ventures focusing on short term leases invented ways to financially instrumentalise temporary uses, using the commercial value of surprise and community involvement as an economic asset.

Similarly to airbnb at the housing market, the non-housing segment of the real estate market also witnessed the proliferation of short-term rental companies like SQFT that “connects entrepreneurial renters to short-term leases and labor” and “seeks to activate vacant or underutilised spaces by fostering short-term use and commercial activity,” or Spacious that offers off-hours restaurant spaces as co-working offices. Addressing changing patterns of work and socialisation, and aiming at maximising profit and turnover by minimising the unit of rentable space and time, these companies that automatise cooperation between spaces and people through online platforms, might

have a significant – and at occasions, devastating – impact on real estate prices in much-demanded neighbourhoods.

Another key concept in the struggle for empty space is the notion of the commons. This notion, referring to a sphere distinct from the private and public spheres, has enjoyed a true revival throughout the world in the past years. The commons have become a key reference for marginalised (and less marginalised) social groups that had been pushed out of their neighbourhoods or land because of raising prices, property speculation or mass privatisation. The loosening control of public administrations on urban development processes and the degeneration of welfare state policies and services led to an increasing distrust between citizens and the public administration with many social groups losing confidence of publicly managed resources, including spaces and properties.

The notion of the commons began to reemerge in the past decade to address this confidence problem. How to think about public interest and the public sphere when public institutions, in fact, often serve private interests? How to think about the city and urban development bypassing the dichotomy of the private and public spheres?

With “rediscovering” the commons, a shared property ownership and management structure outside the public and private spheres, Elinor Ostrom offered a solution to the aspirations looking for a space where common interest can prevail. In her book *Governing the Commons*, Ostrom evoked the commons as a widespread model in most parts of the world until the 20th century, that began losing ground with the mutual expansion of private and public (state) interests (Ostrom 1990). In a sharp contrast with Garrett Hardin’s claim that the stakeholders of the commons would quickly exhaust their resources (Hardin 1968), Ostrom described an efficient and sustainable model of governing community members’ access to resources.

Ostrom’s arguments have progressively entered the mainstream discourse on primary resources and community interests. Besides being described as “some sort of common pool of resources, understood as a non-commodified means of fulfilling people’s needs” (De Angelis 2003:1), the „commons” have gradually become synonymous with democracy: “to talk about the commons is to say that citizens (or user communities) are the primary stakeholders, over and above investors, and that these community interests are not for sale.” (Bollier 2007:29)

Although the commons are often described as a typology of fundamental rights where „each process of privatisation decided by the political authority expropriates each citizen of their part of the commons” (Mattei 2014:V), they are not given rights: the commons are “necessarily created and sustained by communities i.e. by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form.” (De Angelis 2003)

Mobilised primarily in struggles against privatisation processes, the notion of the “commons” has primarily been connected to basic resources like water and other critical public services:

If state-supplied public goods either decline or become a mere vehicle for private accumulation (as is happening to education), and if the state withdraws from their provision, then there is only one possible response, which is for populations to self-organise to provide their own commons. (Harvey 2012:87)

However, the concept of the “commons” does not exclusively refer to utilities and primary resources: it is construed as

an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood. (Harvey 2012:73)

Accessible and available space is one of the aspects of the physical environment that is crucial for a community’s life. Besides affordable housing and unlimited access to key natural resources, civic spaces – “foundational institutions of urban life” (Rossi 2013) – have been among the major claims of the commons movement: highlighting the large amount of publicly owned but mismanaged public properties, advocates of the right to the city have argued against the privatisation of public real estate stocks as well as for the community-driven and -oriented reuse of vacant properties in many cities.

The fight to protect public assets, and reframe them as commons, has been the strongest in cities with particular constellations of actor networks, ones experiencing a combination of weak economic capacities, significant pressure to privatise their assets, and an active civic society that managed to put the discourse of the commons on the agenda and make this concept visible for the broader society. While Berlin's civic and professional actors had successfully campaigned to change the city's privatisation policy, aiming at shifting the focus of privatisation from the highest bid towards the best concept and thus expected community use, many other cities, like Rome, remained a battleground between public administrations seeking to reduce their budgets by selling properties and outsourcing services, and community groups claiming their right to public services and spaces.

2.4. Structures of cooperation: mapping and governing vacancy

Besides defining how struggles for the commons evolve, actor networks also determine how particular actants can interact with each other; what structures they develop to manage cooperation, and in turn, how these structures shape the actants themselves, in the processes of creating civic spaces. In all the examined cities in Chapter 4-8, two actor networks play a key role in forming interactions: maps or platforms, and policies. Both of these "intermediaries" (Boelens 2010:39) act in order to structure cooperations, through collecting information, informing, connecting, encouraging, regulating – and while they aim at facilitating the multiplication or upscaling of individual experiences, they also intend to become dominant, inevitable actors.

By definition, civic spaces or the community-led reappropriation of abandoned buildings need available vacant space. Systematic responses to vacancy begin with enumeration, with the help of municipal databases or user-generated maps and platforms, all of which inform and structure urban development action. Municipal databases that cover various fields, including data on real estate: in their real estate management systems, municipalities dispose of the cadastral map, the registration number of each property, their geographical location and size, and consequently, the geographical information systems and cartographical tools using all this datasets. However, what municipalities rarely dispose of, is the key to address the problem of vacancy: data on the used and vacant properties. Besides the reluctance of real estate developers and municipalities alike to disclose their vacancy data (fearing that this information may damage their reputations and commercial perspectives), many authorities simply do not have relevant records and thus have no means to inventory their vacant spaces.

There is a diversity of strategies municipalities employ to identify vacant premises: methods vary from collecting information from municipal bodies and partners, through statistical operations to field surveys, but always with serious limitations. This diversity shows how standard municipal routines are often incapable of giving sufficient information that could serve as a basis for policies systematically addressing the problem of vacancy. The inventories based on their official databases, data collections or field visits are often limited in scope, accuracy and actuality, and by no means can be realised without cooperation with the business and civil communities. The inaccessibility or lack of government, municipal and corporate databases makes it difficult to estimate the real proportions of vacant real estate and the potential of their conversion and reuse, delaying the elaboration of related development and management plans as well as policy proposals. The insufficiency of centralised real estate inventories raises the question of the necessity of decentralised surveys.

In many contexts, where citizens or professionals are not satisfied with government or municipal services, bottom-up initiatives take up on tasks corresponding to public responsibility. The survey of a city's available real estate is such a task. Where public databases are not covering all segments of the building stock or do not have updated and accurate information, citizens organise themselves to create datasets and maps on their own. However, the emergence of community-built databases also raises the question of transparency: how to create a database that is accessible and in which both centralised administrative knowledge and disperse citizen knowledge are represented?

The relationship between centralised databases and citizen knowledge, official and community maps is complex. Maps are networks composed of a set of ties and alliances between human and

non-human agents, actor-networks in which a variety of positions, interests, technologies, and pools of knowledge are pulled together and which serve to maintain or transform the socio-political context in which they are created. (Bockman and Eyal 2002) The associations between traditional and emerging actors of cartography – the state and public administrations on one hand, and community groups, online platforms, technological companies and start-ups on the other – are particularly interesting, with the community mapping movement and technological development gradually opening up the field of cartography to a diversity of new actors.

Cartography based on centralised databases had for long been a monopoly of states and governmental agencies that had the right and the power to define the way territories and their actors can be represented. Maps had been “critical tools for the modern state and its agencies in shaping social and moral spaces, and they played a central role in the Western physical and intellectual colonization of territories, peoples and the natural world.” (Cosgrove 2008:155)

The fact that local knowledge and counter-expertise are organised into maps is crucial in making visible alternative visions of the land, highlighting features hidden in official maps and databases:

The power of maps derive in part from their rhetorical weight, most specifically from their ability to abstract complex and fluctuating and socially contingent spatial relationships and make these representations seem inevitable, common-sensical, and commensurate with hegemonic conceptualizations of territorial and property relationships. (Sletto 2009: 148)

Alternative mapping practices in contemporary culture are parts of the emancipatory project that aims to decentralise cartographic power, but also means of sharing information and channelling efforts in a way unmediated by hegemonic media. If first generation geographical information systems contributed to a centralised accumulation of geographical and statistical data, internet-based social networks and open-source initiatives such as the Open Street Map created a multiplicity of frameworks for sharing information. These technological advancements coincided with social movements, non-profit organisations, activists and artists that have increasingly used cartography as a means of visualisation of spatial contrasts, inequalities, unrepresented groups or inefficient services.

In the past years, many new mapping platforms have been created purposefully for citizens and not experts. As Juliana Rotich, founder of the crisis mapping platform Ushahidi, explains:

With many technology deployments, there are people who would rather only engage experts and deploy technology, but we tend to disagree. There is a lot of power in people to self-organise around a specific issue and if they'd like to use technology to self-organise and to figure out things around issues, we totally believe that they should have the capability and the choice to do that. (Rotich 2011)

The success of community maps depends on engagement and the intensity of participation. The factors of community dynamics include the level of engagement from community members, the size of the community, the duration of the mapping deployment, the transparency of the mapping process, the horizontality of the organisation, that is, the interactivity between various members and the community-building dimension of the process, and the clarity of goals, crucial to the success of the deployment:

Our experience is that people want to be part of the solution. If people congregate around an issue, they will, in fact, create a community around that issue. The most successful deployments are the ones where people are congregating around an issue and have a channel for them to participate. In a way, you can just use the platform if you have a critical number of agents who can send you information. Otherwise you have to think about what community you're appealing to. (Rotich 2011)

Vacancy mapping is among the most consequential deployments of community cartography. If governmental or municipal agencies only dispose of a part of the necessary data to launch relevant policies addressing vacancy, initiatives of community mapping are particularly important in this context: they can complement, modify or sometimes overwrite official databases with personal observations and memories, giving a more tangible, more complex picture of the issue of vacant spaces and their impact on local communities.

Both in the case of platforms established by municipalities like Amsterdam's Leegstandsk kaart or user-generated maps of vacancy like Leerstandsmelder operating in German cities, Lakatlan in Budapest or City Hound in Rome, technological tools are actors to mobilise citizens. The role of these maps and platforms is to act as *"a technology enabler, is to provide technology, to make sure that it's available to people, and in some cases we do our best to connect people who should best be working together in a particular context."* (Rotich 2011)

Technological development brought about a new generation of maps, or platforms aiming at connecting various actors in order to facilitate the revitalisation of vacant spaces. These platforms, in formats ranging from websites to mobile apps, attempt to automatise mediation and negotiation process, by creating formats of matchmaking in which human work is minimised. Platforms of automatization like CU-CU in London or What a Space in Milano can accelerate processes of cooperation between property owners and prospective users, but can also just as much contribute to the standardisation and commercialisation of available space. Their success depends on a specific actor-network that includes all the crucial actors. While CU-CU, for instance, that provides temporary rental contracts for NGOs, charity organisations and social entrepreneurs, is building on an established mechanism of temporary use, facilitated by a number of policies and tax incentives in the UK, What a Space is based on the purely market logic of pop-up space rentals, accelerating turnover for property owners. In most cases, automatization is only possible with established rules and mechanisms as well as shared objectives, and therefore does rarely enable inclusive mechanisms of social innovation.

Consequently, in most of the cases of community maps and vacancy platforms, offline action and the person-to-person contribution of key actors are crucial:

Our insistence on partnership, and in particular on-the-ground partnership has become very important because context is everything. Geocontext helps, but the local understanding of the tech landscape, the political landscape, the cultural landscape is extremely important in the success of a deployment. (Rotich 2011)

Besides databases, maps or connecting platforms, enabling environments or actor-networks, that facilitate community access to vacant spaces, require supportive policies. Such policies have been developed in many European cities in the past decades and include a variety of approaches, such as creating transparency in public and private real estate management, mediating between property owners and potential users, designing incentives for the reuse of vacant spaces, relaxing regulations and granting permissions, or providing funding and guarantees for loans. While these policies correspond largely to their specific political, economic, social and cultural contexts, they converge in their attempt to include emerging actors in the governance of urban development and to create a better connection between citizen and community initiatives and unused public and private properties – and, in the same time, creating growth in local economies and property values.

Successful public policies require actor-networks where a large variety of actors engage in the process of policymaking, and in turn, can be mobilised by these policies. On one hand, innovation in municipal policies cannot be created without having overall support and help from various departments and public bodies necessary for implementing plans. In many cities, public officers, although often invisible outside the institutions, have the capacity to entirely block or accelerate cooperation processes. On the other hand, a crucial important element of cooperation is trust between institutions and other actors. As long as the various actors – civic organisations, design studios, development companies and municipal departments – of regeneration projects are not aware of each other's motivations, objectives and ways of working, a cooperation process is very difficult to orchestrate.

There are many dilemmas concerning the modalities of cooperation between institutional and non-institutional actors in urban regeneration and in the creation of civic spaces. For instance, legislators face the dilemma of how to keep the flexibility and informality of civic spaces within institutional frameworks. As Gabor Everraert from the Municipality of Rotterdam explains, if they want

to engage creative energies in urban regeneration processes, municipalities have to learn to listen to their collaborators:

The creative industry doesn't like standardization which is very different from the municipality and so they are hard to keep pace with. They will find their own place before we even know it's a place. Often when we make policy on creativity, it's already outdated. The municipality has to be keep listening in order to be supportive and to do less harm. It's not about the municipality deciding on the direction but instead giving quick access to people or networks to support these projects. (Killing 2014:14)

This attitude also entails that municipalities should not be dominating actors:

The municipality should be taking on a role where they help parties who see the potential in a site or building and assisting with things like building permits or land exploitation. (...) The municipality shouldn't be the front runner but should be supporting from the side, guiding the people doing these projects away from making obvious mistakes. Too much involvement from the municipality means that policy is involved and these projects can do without that. (Killing 2014:14)

Similarly, the success of cooperation also depends on the willingness of NGOs and other actors engaged in bringing communities or civic initiatives in empty spaces. As Emily Berwyn, founder of the London-based Meanwhile Space – a temporary use agency that sets up networks of property owners, prospective users and local authorities interested in creating accessible spaces for entrepreneurs, social initiatives and community groups – emphasises the importance of cooperation with municipalities:

We work with them to help them understand how they could facilitate these kinds of projects, we held many interesting workshops with the different departments, we developed with them Action Plans, looking at how they could maximize the use of the space they have and will have in the coming months in the area, and how they can enable that as a regeneration tool to enhance economic activity. (Berwyn 2015)

Besides many initiatives to facilitate the temporary use of vacant spaces (see earlier in Chapter 2) as well as enabling the creative use of empty buildings (see the Broedplaatsen programme in Chapter 5) the concept of "shared administration," as a way to share public responsibilities and resources with community organisations and citizen groups, has been an important field of policy innovation in the past decade. As the economic crisis and austerity measures forced many municipalities into significant budget cuts and service reductions, this process eventually also made them more open to cooperation: they increasingly recognised that civic participation brings along alternative catalysts, energies and resources into the design and management of urban public spaces. In addition, governments were forced to look for a wide range of partners to reestablish their fading political legitimacy. Furthermore, diminishing resources prompted many public administrations across Europe to outsource services, sometimes in contractual ways, in other cases in more informal, often conflictual circumstances. Seen as a fair model for shared administration, the Bologna Regulation of the Commons – elaborated by the legal laboratory LabGov based at the Luiss University in Rome – offers a legal framework for collaboration between administrations and citizens in using and managing public properties. Similarly, other cities like Athens began to examine how to adjust their regulations to enable the functioning of community organisations, that contribute to crucial services in the city but because of unfit regulations, fall into categories of illegality.

What is common in these initiatives that they all try to rethink regulations and public administration from the viewpoint of users: giving community initiatives space – and resources – for inhabiting the city and to contribute to its cultural offer, economic opportunities and social cohesion. But not all policy innovation aiming at improving citizen access to space is automatically a success. Despite its ratification, the successful, years-long campaign to change the criteria of privatising public properties from the highest offer to the best concept did not achieve the expected results (see Chapter 6). While the negotiation process between citizen initiatives and the local public administration brought all key actors on board, the new privatisation procedure they created could not multiply individual experiences of community-oriented privatisation. This example shows that in policy design, even with all the major stakeholders involved and with successful individual cases taken

as models, participation mechanisms, legal procedures or policy documents themselves become actors that can significantly alter the results of cooperation.

2.5. Policies and practices on the move: the modalities of transfer

While some of the interactions between actors of urban regeneration take place in a “local context,” at the level of a city or a region, many actors – like national regulations and taxation policies, or international capital and financial organisations, instrumental in the neoliberal transformation and the financialisation of the city (see Chapter 1) – act on a variety of levels. Therefore actor-networks of urban regeneration are not limited to the urban scale: they also include a variety of actors from other locations or without any locations. In the same time, many local actors are also participating in non-local, eventually international, actor-networks as they are partially shaped, informed or inspired by international practices or movements. In these sense, the actor-networks presented in Chapter 3-6 are all interconnected and together they constitute trans-local actor-networks or movements.

Among the instruments that connect various actor-networks, mechanisms of policy transfer enable “policies-in-motion across multiple sites (...), regulatory practices and institutions [that] achieve ‘model’ status, and circulate and mutate between places and through distended policy networks.” (Peck et al 2013:1096) There are many policy transfer mechanisms related to various approaches to vacant buildings, temporary uses or civic spaces, that function beyond city or national borders. Some countries have extended policy exchange networks linking their cities: in Germany, the pilot projects supported by Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik, the national urban development policy program, are meant to elaborate models and policies to be transferred later to other German cities as well. The Bremen-based ZwischenZeitZentrale, a pilot project of the Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik, has been a model for temporary use agencies in other German cities, like Stuttgart. National policy exchange is facilitated by a shared language and similarities in the different cities’ cultural and administrative contexts.

A major source of policy exchange at the international level, the Netherlands has been using cultural diplomacy as a channel to export its best practices in architecture and planning. Besides national efforts to internationalise their achievements (and explore new markets for their professionals), there are also international frameworks for knowledge transfer like the European Union-funded Urbact program, linking municipalities and to a less extent, universities, in policy development and implementation networks, including the TUTUR – Temporary Use as a Tool for Urban Regeneration project, involving the city of Rome.

Successful international transfers, however, need to fulfil many conditions. Some practices, for instance, while attractive for some administrations, are uninviting for others. When speaking in an interview about the possibilities of learning from international temporary use practices, Jutta Kleedorfer – the head of Vienna’s MA21 and initiator of Vienna’s temporary use program – explained that her ideas are better received at the City Council when referring to Swiss examples than when alluding to Dutch ones.

As Dorina Pojani and Dominic Stead (2014) describe in their article analyzing urban policy and planning practice transfer mechanisms between the Netherlands and recipient countries, there are several additional challenges in the transfer of ideas and practices. Pojani and Stead cite cultural habits, social setup, language, planning traditions and legislation, and financial resources among the contextual variations that might obstruct policy transfer. Besides contextual constraints, Pojani and Stead write, unrealistic objectives, as well as

the failure to involve political elites in transfer processes and the institutional discontinuity that less stable countries experience have prevented the transfer of Dutch planning policies. (Pojani and Stead 2014: 14)

Diane Stone (2012) also highlights the importance of internal constellations and organizational features in the success of policy transfer:

Factors that are internal to a system such as the power dynamics of political interests and the socio-historical make-up of a polity can be a more powerful determinant of what is adopted more so than external factors. (Stone 2012:485)

The movements or traveling actors, concepts and policies that connect geographically defined actor-networks with each other have a crucial importance in this dissertation. In many cases, they provide the missing links for the reconstruction of local processes or the transformation of a local actor-network. The importance of these actors in the urban development process varies. While “things don’t speak on their own, but always through something or someone else,” (Latour, 2005: 76) it is also “foolish to deny the role and power of objectifications, the capacity of things we create to return to us as so many forms of domination.” (Harvey 1989:6) Besides the human actors I described as activists, professionals, politicians or public officers, non-human entities such as buildings, regulations or concepts are mediated factors of importance that

can therefore rather be proactively classified as intermediaries (who convey meaning without doing anything about it) or preferably as mediators (who convey meaning, but at the same time change, add or adjust something). (Boelens 2010:39)

The importance of actors also changes in time: due to an impact of changing actor constellations, including those of international actors like financial capital or transnational development companies,

the conception of the urban and of “the city” is (...) rendered unstable, not because of any conceptual definitional failing, but precisely because the concept has itself to reflect changing relations between form and process, between activity and thing, between subjects and objects. (Harvey 1989:6)

In the previous pages, I outlined an “inventory” of the key actors that shape the discourses and actions of the cases or local actor-networks that I will present in the following chapters. This inventory is, by no means, an exhausting inventory. Urban development is a field created by the interaction of an infinite number of actors, but to make urban processes comprehensible, we have to reduce this circle to the key actors we examine. Likewise, in the unstable urban condition Harvey refers to, it is important to acknowledge the historic dimension of actor-networks and follow the changing positions of actors in their constantly altered constellations.

The following chapters will explore four different urban areas where the discourse of vacant buildings, the emergence of movements to recover these and the establishment of civic spaces through various cooperations and conflicts between different actors has been an important dimension of urban development. Within the four urban areas, I will introduce different cases or entities that contributed to the transformation of the local actor-network and were in turn shaped by them, and that also had an impact of international actor-networks related to vacancy and civic spaces. Within these cases or actor-networks, I will also explore the changing roles of actors and the changing compositions of their networks, with a particular attention to milestones such as the introduction of specific laws or policies, the emergence of new discourses and actors, or the shift of the political or economic context. The juxtaposition of these urban areas within this dissertation does not mean that they are not fully interconnected: by regularly highlighting their connections, I hope to be able to demonstrate the actor-network related to abandoned buildings and civic spaces, with the circulation of people, groups, concepts, policies and movements at the European scale and beyond.

3. Budapest: Mutations of the Public Sphere and the Pursuit of Independent Spaces

Budapest after the fall of the Berlin Wall has had a complex and contradictory trajectory. While the democratic transition created new institutions for social care and culture, and remodelled old ones, the underground and alternative cultures of the 1990s also inspired significant experimentation in establishing new space for social and cultural exchange. Many of the activities that were constrained to draw back in private spaces before 1990 found a new home in abandoned spaces and newly established venues across the city. Instead of consolidation, the 2000s witnessed an increasing commercialisation of civic spaces, with spatial pioneers rapidly turning spatial entrepreneurs and former cultural venues becoming hotspots of the exploding nightlife tourism.

Adding to the economic pressure, the anti-democratic turn of the 2010 restricted the latitudes of civic initiatives in accessing spaces: establishing a thorough political control over public resources and launching a crusade against non-aligning civic initiatives and NGOs, the new political leadership turned space into a privilege reserved to loyal organisations and individuals, or an asset to trade for various kinds of benefits. In this climate, access to abandoned or underused, non-exposed and often deteriorated spaces became vital for the survival of many independent social, cultural and community initiatives.

The quest for available space was reinforced by the economic and political crisis, in which budget cuts and reformulated priorities of public policies undermined a variety of important social services, community infrastructures of various kinds have been built up, relying upon community capacities or occasionally commercial assets. Paradoxically, in this context, some of these initiatives found their models in the consumption-free environment of the Houses of Culture, founded in the 1960s and 1970s and originally built to educate “the people” but gradually deprived of their cultural mission as well as of their audience during the socio-political changes of the 1990s (Tímár 2007). The ambition of cultural initiatives to establish their own houses of culture, venues that combine cultural production and display with social services, gave birth to a new generation of civic spaces corresponding to what I call the isolationist model. The two cases I present in details in this chapter, the Művelődési Szint and Jurányi Ház are both paradigmatic of these spaces: although the first operates in a privately and the second in a publicly owned building, they both accommodate citizen initiatives that fulfil public functions but ideally with minimal public interference, as independent from commercial and political pressure as possible. Attempts to scale up or multiply these experiences like Eleven Blokk or Lakatlan proved to be rather limited in scope and impact, and justified the reservations of civic initiatives to cooperate with the public sector: the lack of trust, transparency and streamlined procedures within administrations makes each cooperation a continuously negotiated process, with not much space for structured mechanisms to facilitate and accelerate the access to vacant space. With a focus on causes and consequences of these relationships and networks around civil and public actors, this chapter looks into the trajectory of Budapest’s public property stock, through privatisation, corruption, the systemic production of vacancy and commercialisation. Against this backdrop, the following pages explore a couple of paradigmatic initiatives that established social and cultural spaces in formerly abandoned buildings, examining their motivations, cooperation networks, buildings, architectural interventions as well as organisational and economic models. The final part of the chapter investigates attempts to structure and facilitate the community access to vacant space, through various types of mediating organisations, municipal programmes and online platforms, looking into the systemic reasons of their failures and limitations that go well beyond the field of vacant spaces.

3.1. Administrative fragmentation and the production of vacancy in Budapest

In the 1990s and the 2000s, the city’s post-socialist transformation was following a path defined by the first elected City Hall’s liberal economic policy, elaborating the concept of the “Budapest Model” and laying down the foundations of a “liberal city” (Pallai 2003). Corresponding to this vision,

and deriving from the country's new constitution, local municipalities – i.e. districts of the Hungarian capital – received a quasi-autonomous status, thus making impossible any attempts for integrated urban planning for the Budapest metropolitan area. In this administrative decomposition of the decision-maker competencies, the duty of urban rehabilitation belongs to the individual districts and can only slightly be channelled and fostered by the Budapest City Council supporting programs. The liberal city model, while encouraging districts to involve market forces in the management of services and housing, also put them in competition with each other. The limitations of this model surfaced relatively early when it became clear that the administrative fragmentation of the city obstructs any comprehensive development plan, including social policy and heritage protection.

Budapest in the 1990 inherited a deteriorating building stock: when state-owned housing and public buildings, lacking maintenance and missing several cycles of renovation, were handed over to municipalities, it suddenly created a significant burden on them in terms of maintenance and renovation costs. The significant physical deterioration of the inner Pest districts' housing stock went side by side with the setback of the population's social status and every municipality began to elaborate their own models to reverse this tendency. In this process, municipalities were mapping their resources necessary for maintaining their services and balancing their budgets: many of them identified their building stock, mostly perceived as a burden, as an asset to monetise.

One of the main characteristics of the "liberal city" model was the uncritical promotion of privatisation. Budapest witnessed several waves of privatisation: in parallel with massive waves of privatising the country's key economic entities, and fuelled by a quasi unquestioned belief in the market's capacity to manage and redistribute resources in a just and efficient way, formerly state-owned properties, including housing and institutions alike, were privatised or given to municipalities from the early 1990s on. District municipalities, enjoying their relative autonomy, developed their own real estate management processes, different in each district, but consisting mostly of selling their assets to private parties, from retail units through housing and schools, to hotel and hospital complexes, in the hope of filling their budget gaps.

Logically, privatisation was fastest where particular interests and development opportunities were in play. Inner Budapest, and more particularly the 6th and 7th districts became exemplary in their efforts to accelerate privatisation of the municipal housing stock. Using the rhetoric of development and sanitation, the municipalities of these districts undertook the demolition of a significant part of the historical urban tissue, while realising an agenda of enforced gentrification (Polyák 2006). Privatisation witnessed a second wave in the early 2000s when the prospect of accession to the European Union invigorated Hungarian property markets, especially those of the potentially lucrative inner city areas of Budapest.

In the fragmented administrative reality of Budapest, profiting from the lack of established real estate markets and tender procedures, the lengthy process of privatising municipal property stocks was characterised by non-transparent transactions and systemic corruption. In the inner districts of Pest, scandal followed scandal when journalists began to investigate the modalities of privatisation. In the second half of the 2000s, the 7th district became infamous for its mafia-like mechanisms to privatise municipally owned residential buildings: complex transactions that helped the local municipality outsource public property by making it nearly impossible to follow the circulation of money and real estate (Albert 2010). Around the same time, the 6th district was selling off palaces to distinguished clients way under their estimated market price, similarly to the 5th district that found ways to sell off many of its very valuable ground floor properties to entrepreneurs connected to the municipality's leadership.

Investigative journalism was not only capable of outlining the complex network of relationships between different development companies, legal firms and municipal offices that were involved in outsourcing municipal property to private actors through offshore firms, but also revealed the functioning of global mechanisms of real estate speculation where a certain building can be abstracted into a financial asset and change owners about a dozen times within a few days before ending up in the ownership of people close to municipal leaders. In the same time, while journalistic investigations

managed to generate citizen discontent and provoke demolition moratorium in various districts, their impact on the privatisation processes and their protagonists was limited: while the mayor of the 7th district spent two years in pre-trial detention before acquitted, the mayor of the 6th district died before the conclusion of the enquiry, and the mayor of the 5th district never had to face serious investigations for the alleged crimes.

The ambiguous privatisation processes inevitable fuelled speculation: in many areas, insider informations about changing regulations or property sales attracted into the Budapest property market many actors with no experience or intention of developing housing or any other buildings to accommodate services in the city. Speculative privatisation produced resulted in many unfinished development projects. In the 6th and 7th districts, many former social housing premises – buildings from the mid-19th century – were emptied to be demolished and give place to new residential complexes. However, after high-profile protests by heritage organisations and the civil society, a demolition moratorium was issued for the area of the former Jewish District that resulted in the suspension of demolitions of already emptied properties (Polyák 2006). With the 2008 economic crisis eliminating resources for investment, many of these buildings or complexes (like the high-end residential complexes Central Passage and Gozsdu udvar) remained empty for years. After years of vacancy, some of them went through the process of commercialisation and were gradually turned into bars, clubs and restaurants (Lugosi et al. 2010), thus creating a unique attraction for nightlife tourism: a highly commercial form of temporary use, transforming entire neighbourhoods and generating significant local conflicts.

Budapest has suffered more from economic recessions than many other European cities. The long-lasting crisis of 2008 has emptied a significant proportion of the city from its previous functions and use, producing a proliferation of abandoned buildings and spaces across the city. Besides interfering with speculative development projects, the crisis also impeded regular privatisation processes. Many of the school buildings, for instance, that were put on the market in 2007, were not sold and had been unused for years, with rapidly deteriorating physical conditions – similarly to cinemas, theatre buildings or hundreds of retail units. Similarly, government-led large scale development projects like a new government district planned for the derelict railway area behind the Nyugati Station, were discontinued. Within the private sector, the impacts of the crisis were similarly devastating: in 2012, over 30% of office spaces were estimated to be vacant in Budapest alone, adding up to an estimated million square meters of empty space (Kohout 2012).

Besides speculative developments and the economic crisis, another reason of vacancy is physical, structural and formal obsolescence: without adequate renovation or adaptation plans, many building types have become obsolete and are no longer able to respond to contemporary needs. The vacancy of these buildings is the result of a peculiar interaction between social, economic and urban transformation on the one hand, and architectural affordances, on the other. A major part of the building stock was created for a different society. For instance, party headquarters and edifices of mass tourism, lose their purpose in the multi-party system of a capitalist democracy. A slow demise also awaits the network of cultural centres. Other buildings fall into disuse because of structural or functional reasons. Cities themselves change as well: some areas become more valuable, other, formerly representative neighbourhoods – such as the worker's villages – turn into slums (Kovács 2015). In addition, as the architecture historian Dániel Kovács puts it, the lack of proprietary responsibility is also a reason for demise: *"During the communist era, the idea of common property was mostly interpreted as 'not-my-own' – unfortunately, this approach lives along with us."* (Kovács 2015)

Many buildings that can be easily transformed for new functions, have already been reused, party headquarters, for instance, have been generally turned into office buildings or municipal centres. Other buildings and ground floor spaces, however, are victims of demographic changes, transforming consumption patterns and the structural reorganisation of state funding. More and more educational buildings fell out of use, which were formerly used by the children and grandchildren of the Ratkó era – the effects of the 1950-1956 abortion ban and tax on childlessness are still to be seen on Hungary's population pyramid. Furthermore, *"a number of commercial buildings and hotels also stand empty, partly*

on the hands of the state, because of the changing habits and objectives, but this is probably not a particular Eastern European phenomenon. And obviously most of the former military complexes also fell out of use.” (Kovács 2015)

To all these reasons of abandonment, mismanagement adds another layer. Unfit, out-of-context or discontinued development projects produced effects similar to the economic crisis. For instance, in the “Cultural City Centre” program launched in 2009 in the 11th district in Buda, the local government created a rent policy that gave advantage to cultural uses against other kinds of retail. As a result of

the disadvantageous rental agreements, together with the completion of a the neighbouring shopping mall siphoning shoppers off Bartók Béla Avenue, and the expectation that the construction of a new subway line would move much of the traffic underground small shops in the area went bankrupt, moved away or closed their doors. (Mátyási 2015)

Mismanagement gained a new meaning after 2010. Turning the “liberal city” model upside down, the new city leadership, surrendering to the new government, allowed the state takeover of many urban services and created a new urban development model, dominated by public commissions and historical-representative projects (Kovács and Polyák 2015). In parallel with efforts to “clean up” the historical core of Budapest, the government, in cooperation with district and city municipalities, began a spectacular renovation campaign in the capital’s central districts. In the years since 2010, the conservative party’s absolute majority in the parliament as well as in the government enabled the “streamlining” of decision-making processes both in issues of urban development and state investment.

The state takeover of Budapest’s urban development also meant a tighter control over services, and significant budget cuts in the areas of social care and culture, traditionally bastions of left-leaning institutions and organisations. In property management, this turn brought about contradictory processes: the accumulation of prestigious properties by government institutions, with very advantageous prices to government-friendly private vendors, on the one hand, and more discounted privatisation processes to government-friendly buyers, on the other. The lack of transparency within public real estate transactions created administrative mechanisms full of contrasts: uncontrolled and non-accountable behaviour at the highest levels of municipal and state offices, fear to innovate or experiment within mid-level officers, and an irrational public real estate market based more on connections and political hierarchies than on demand or competition.

3.2. Initiatives from alternative culture to commercialisation and tourism

Similarly to many cities, access to space have been a critical element in the cultural and social life of Budapest. Budapest emerged from the decades of communist dictatorship with unsustainable welfare services and highly outdated social and cultural infrastructures. In the last years of the regime, independent culture constituted a parallel sphere, with its infrastructure and public separated from the places and publics of officially supported culture (Polyák 2013a). Sometimes remaining in the realm of the “tolerated” section of culture, but more often delegated in the “prohibited” section and hiding from the eyes of political censorship, independent productions often found refuge in semi-public, semi-invisible spaces at the periphery of the system’s horizon: private apartments have become some of the most important cultural spaces of the city.

In the 1990s, independent culture moved out of private and semi-private spaces and began to explore spaces available for initiatives lacking capital: they played an important role also in re-appropriating the vacant spaces of Budapest and establishing an “underground” cultural infrastructure. Some of the most important cultural spaces of the post-1990 Budapest emerged from this milieu. Trafó, one of the most important cultural venues in Budapest, was the first institution in the city to grew out of an informal cultural space. The electric transformer station situated on the edge of the city’s historical core, built in the style of the industrial art nouveau in 1909, had been abandoned for more than forty years when the French anarchist artist group Resonance discovered it in the early 1990s and transformed it into squat, hosting a variety of cultural events, performances, concerts, and

presentations. After the squat was shut down, it served for years as a storage space for theatre and music groups. In the mid-1990s, using funds remaining from the cancelled 1994 World Exhibition, the Municipality of Budapest bought the building to transform it into a well-equipped contemporary art centre. The Trafó House of Arts opened its doors in 1998 and quickly became an important Central European centre for contemporary theatre, dance, and music.

While the desire of social and cultural actors to avoid instrumentalisation and to create independent spaces in Budapest led to many experiments, many other initiatives had shorter lives. In 2003, a group of young architects and cultural producers initiated Tűzraktár in an abandoned medical equipment factory, in the same street as Trafó. Starting from the idea of a French architecture student, a major inspiration for the initiative, the group rented the 7000 m² building from its owner for a year at a very low rent, promising the owner the valorisation of the building by cultural events and thus increasing visibility. Tűzraktár opened with minimal architectural interventions in June 2004, and it was an immediate success: thousands of people invaded the factory's empty spaces and courtyards during the first days. Tűzraktár's operation had to be suspended due to its popularity: the building and its temporary commercial spaces had suddenly become very attractive, and the cultural function gradually disappeared behind the commercial activities. A part of the group initiating the cultural venue moved on and established another cultural space in a vacant school building, slightly changing the project's name to Tűzraktér.

Another initiative, the KÉK – Kortárs Építészeti Központ (Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre) was born in a similar situation. In 2005, a group of architects, urbanists, journalists and artists, determined to launch a space for discussing architecture and the city, gained access to a former warehouse in the backyard of a museum. The warehouse, in the vicinity of Budapest's relatively central but reasonably infamous Keleti railway station, was in bad shape: unused for decades, still bearing graffiti by the Soviet soldiers using the building after the war; it needed significant improvements to accommodate events and their public. The building was a catalyst in KÉK's story, as

it did not only give form to the organisation but also determined many of its activities, helping the construction of an identity, sometimes against plans. In many senses, KÉK's program was created around the building: if the affordances of the warehouse enabled the organisation of professional events, debates and conferences, they also encouraged the extension of events into parties making visitors wondering about KÉK's real mission. The building's location proved to be just as influential: bringing a new cultural space in a working-class neighbourhood known for its extreme density and low living standards made the area visible for a city-wide audience and inspired thoughts about KÉK's potential roles in urban regeneration. (Polyák 2016)

Two years later, KÉK moved to another location: borrowing the 7-storey, 6000m² downtown office building from free from its open-minded owner; a French developer offered very different possibilities: learning from their lost investment in the previous location, and conscious of their short-term, 6-month contract, KÉK's members did not invest extensively in the building: they opened the premises for the public as a "found space", adapting their events to the building's peculiar, 100-room layout. Although KÉK presence in the downtown offices lasted only a few months, its legacy was long lasting. The experience of using two radically different buildings in distant parts of the city taught KÉK about the importance of space in the life of an organisation, and about the possibilities and obligations brought along by running a space. It also inspired KÉK's members to think about potential multiplications of the experience: how to help civic organisations, cultural initiatives as well as social enterprises experiment in spaces and learn about their spatial needs, capacities and costs, by creating temporary presence in a physical space?

Although accommodating a lively cultural and activist scene, Budapest has little tradition in squatting or in the autonomous management of cultural or social spaces. The relative lack of autonomy made an important part of the city's social and cultural infrastructure highly vulnerable and sensitive to political changes. While the 1990s saw the progressive institutionalisation of informal cultural spaces (Polyák 2014), and municipalities gave some space for cultural and creative groups to manoeuvre in the 2000s, the 2010 right-wing takeover in national and municipal politics resulted in a

series of repressive policies aiming at eliminating the strongholds of the progressive cultural scene as well as establishing new rules in public spaces.

Reinforcing the effects of the 2008 economic crisis, the post-2010 conservative dominance of political, economic and social life provoked the current resurfacing of parallel cultural and social services and infrastructures. The recession prompted successive governments to reorganise their welfare policies and services: the country went through an Excessive Deficit Procedure imposed by the European Union, forcing cuts on state and municipal budgets, and reducing spending on social, cultural and educational services. Besides the budget cuts, an aggressive nationalisation process by the new government elected in 2010 engaged in reorganising the allocation of resources, centralising the funding bodies of social, cultural and educational activities.

While the crisis diminished the opportunities of private funding for cultural and social infrastructures, it also opened political opportunities to centralise power and the capital necessary to monopolise cultural and social funding, as well as architectural operations. As many educational, cultural and social institutions were left impoverished or shut down and many private development projects remain unfinished, centralised, government-led decision-making and the establishment of areas exempt from local regulations helped prestigious developments pop-up in major Hungarian cities and towns, with imposing efficiency.

Besides cuts in public funding and political pressure, commercialisation became the fate of many social and cultural experiments in downtown Budapest. In the mid-2000s, cultural and alternative functions planted into abandoned buildings gave birth to a peculiar style, with pubs, protocol-visits, and fashion-shows; retaining the image of pioneer occupation, while creating established institutions and commercial enterprises (Lugosi et al. 2010). As described earlier in this chapter, vacant buildings in some historical, inner city neighbourhoods were byproducts of unfinished urban development programs, in which derelict historical edifices, mostly functioning as social housing, were evacuated and privatised, waiting to be demolished and replaced by denser and a-contextual, newly-built condominium buildings.

In 2002, one of these properties, a vacant tenement building in the Inner-Erzsébetváros was rented out to a group of graduate students who opened a temporary bar in the structure. The interior design of the bar, based on the recycling of cheap materials, reflected the attraction of the owners and designers, as well as that of the customers, to an aesthetics of abandonment, of temporariness, found in this building before its demolition. Szimpla kert became a huge success in the Budapest alternative scene. In the months following its opening, many cultural producers and bar owners recognised the opportunity of a peculiar moment in the post-socialist urban transformation of Budapest, represented by a neighbourhood with dozens of abandoned buildings, all waiting for demolition.

The period between the eviction, privatisation and redevelopment of these buildings was unexpectedly expanded by the demolition moratorium announced for the Inner-Erzsébetváros area, following local and international protests against the demolitions in the Unesco World Heritage buffer zone (Polyák 2006). The moratorium left many property owners with buildings already evacuated but with no demolition permit: without any feasible alternatives, they followed the example of Szimpla Kert, and rented out their buildings to young entrepreneurs eager to open cafés, bars and clubs in the vacant buildings.

Szimpla Kert opened the way for dozens of “ruin bars”, as the press and the Budapest nightlife started to call the buildings whose facades did hardly reveal any sign of life inside. In the early years, ruin bars created new scenes for the alternative culture: art cinemas, flea markets and a variety of other community activities found their new locations in them. Later on, in the mid-2000s, the alternative profile has been lost and ruin bars became a key attraction for nightlife tourism. Within a few years, ruin bars began to reach also mainstream consumers, and featured in all major tourist guides, became one of the most popular attractions of Budapest.

While certain local municipalities treated ruin bars as unwelcome intruders, frightening the elderly and making 'more noise than the WWII siege of the city', others enhanced the commercialisation of entire neighbourhoods, generating outrage from residents, reclaiming their right to sleep and to clean streets. Interestingly, in the 2005 campaign of Budapest for the 'European Capital of Culture 2010' competition, images of ruin bars were omnipresent: the City Hall borrowed the imagery of an emerging subculture to brand Budapest as a dynamic, creative, innovative capital where all kinds of culture are flourishing (Polyák 2013b).

The key attractiveness of ruin bars was their unconventional aesthetics. Borrowing from the atmosphere of the 1990s underground party culture, unfolding in "found places" like the open-air events held in private gardens at Frankhegy or Törökbálint, and the Cinetrip series organised in thermal baths, ruin bars continued using recycled furniture as well as VJ-ing and repainting, transforming architectural space with an abundance of objects and light projections. With their aesthetics of non-design, which made highly lucrative clubs look like squats, the first generation of ruin bars gave a difficult task to designers: how to emphasise the decay of vacant buildings, or how to make new furnitures look old and used?

If commercialisation of the inner districts open new markets for young designers, it also created a major challenge for young planners and social activists. While the revenues of bars and restaurants mushrooming in the area reached unprecedented levels, their presence created many conflicts. Many residents reclaimed their once calm and peaceful neighbourhood and the accelerated cash-flow has not tickled down to local services and infrastructures or to neighbouring areas with hundreds of shops and dozens of buildings abandoned. In the meanwhile, youth tourism increased in the area to the extent that it became much more profitable to let out apartments for a few nights on airbnb than to long-term tenants. The sharp increase in the expected yield of short-term rental apartments attracted investors and turned an increasing percentage of the local housing stock into investment apartments, contributing to the financialisation of many assets in the neighbourhood. As a consequence, this process also prompted outmigration from the neighbourhood to other areas in the city, further accelerating the gradual disappearance of daytime local shops and services.

While some of the ruin bars engaged in dialogue with local needs – Szimpla organises a weekly farmers' market, accommodates benefit events for social enterprises, provides meeting space for NGOs and helps local music groups unfold their talent – many ruin bars act as cash machines, addressing only their possibly most affluent clientele consisting of young tourists. From the perspective of local, non-profit social and community spaces and services, it creates many dilemmas: when all available space is immediately turned into bars and restaurants, how to maintain spaces of community and solidarity? And how can spaces of consumption contribute to social and cultural infrastructures, how can they create opportunities for local training and employment?

3.3. Public functions in the private spaces of Művelődési Szint

The commercialisation of social and community spaces, together with a growing political pressure on progressive cultural venues made the access to space a decisive challenge for community organisations and the civil society in the 2010s. In 2011, within a few month, the two leading alternative cultural centres operating in formerly vacant, municipally owned properties were shut down. In both the case of Sirály, an experimental activist collective using the long-time vacant space of a former bookshop and running a bar and a theatre there, and of Tűzraktér, turning a long-time empty former school building into an ensemble of artist studios and community spaces, the municipalities referred to the expiration of the rental contract and its violation by the tenant organisations. The municipality also forced Merlin, an independent theatre formerly operating in a publicly owned building planned to be demolished, out.

The evacuations left the bookshop and the theatre building vacant again, and the school building witnessed the municipality-supported conversion of community spaces into a costly restaurant struggling to attract customers, and a municipality-led artist studio house half-abandoned and rapidly losing its creative energies. A wood workshop and artist studio complex, Romház, operating in a

vacant residential building was also expelled by the building's conversion to more profitable, commercial uses. The closing down of these cultural venues and the quick commercialisation of other formerly available vacant spaces left cultural communities uprooted and looking for alternative solutions to establish new collective spaces and to transfer its belongings, equipments and furniture.

The closing down of these cultural venues and the quick commercialisation of other formerly available vacant spaces left an entire cultural community uprooted and looking for alternative solutions to establish new collective spaces and to transfer its belongings, equipments and furniture. As a response to this situation, another theatre and activist group started to negotiate with the private owner of a multi-storey department store about its vacant 3rd floor. *Művelődési Szint* or *Műszi* (Cultural Level) was born from the ambition to revive the tradition of the "house of culture" a community space giving room for a variety of activities, an open-for-all public space where consumption is not required. As Julia Bársony, founder of *Műszi* explains:

In the winter of 2011 all the alternative cultural institutions of Budapest got shut down, those that did not only give space for entertainment but also for creation and artistic work. This is when we also lost our building that we used for 5 years as artist studios and wood workshops. I was teaching a theatre class at the university and we were approaching the end of a seminar, before the rehearsals in December and the performance in January, when we found ourselves on the street. (Bársony 2014)

While searching for available spaces, Julia ran into the vacant third floor of a socialist-style department store, right at one of the busiest squares of Budapest's historical centre. Besides a transportation hub, Blaha Lujza square is also a downtown anchor for the city's most multicultural street, the traditional entry point of peasants and immigrants to Budapest. The obscure, unknown part of a well-known building at this square that brings together the predominantly poor and Roma population of the infamous Outer Józsefváros with the affluent inhabitants of the inner parts of the district, presented a unique opportunity for *Műszi*'s founders:

We found this space when it had already been empty for 6 years. The owner didn't really want to rent it out: it was complicated to adjust the building's infrastructures and provide a staircase to the floor, especially since the rooftop bar occupied all of them. I got in touch with the owner and told him that we would like to use the space for 6 weeks, but we have no money. He told me that we could use it if we cleaned it up. We moved in, cleaned up in 3 days and began to work. (Bársony 2014)

After the preparations in December, the performance took place in January 2012, lasted 5 days and attracted over a thousand spectators. It brought a lot of visibility to the previously unknown 3rd floor of a well-known building: "suddenly everyone discovered this space, everyone felt that something is beginning here." (Bársony 2014) The owner of the building, who liked the group's presence, offered them a rental price. The collective decided to move ahead with renting the space of 2800 m². Realising that they had nothing to lose, they negotiated a progressive rental agreement, starting with only the utility costs for half year, then half-price for another 6 months, then full price.

For the group, to find a privately owned space was crucial to avoid political pressure as they estimated that paradoxically, it was only possible to create an independent public space in a privately owned space:

*From the beginning, we were in a political situation where we decided to go ahead with developing *Műszi* because we don't see the possibility that the theatre we're doing would receive any subventions in the coming years. We had to create the circumstances within which we can work. We wanted to build a theatre for ourselves, and we built it, even if we haven't really been able to harness it. (...) When we came here, we decided to stop applying for grants, in order to avoid supporting the system with paying application fees, and to avoid time-limits as well as accountancy and reporting obligations towards the institutions. In this way, the whole project can develop in its natural pace. (...) It was important to reassure ourselves, because we wanted to create long-term possibilities. For instance, we installed an intercom in order to oblige the authorities to announce their visit. We knew from the beginning that we needed to create an independent and safe place, in all senses. (Bársony 2014)*

Műszi's business model is based on the recognition of the large demand for affordable workspaces both within the fields of art and activism. Looking for tenants, *Műszi* made a call for

applications, where the criteria for selection included the candidates' activity, their willingness to contribute to the community, and their capacity to pay rents. Through the application process, Műszi organisers got familiarised with precise needs of the prospective tenants, and this informed the design of the whole floor. They also established their organisation form consisting of an NGO and a private company, in order to allow more flexibility and space for manoeuvre as well as more protection from eventual accusations by government agencies. The space's structure had continuously evolved throughout the construction, reflecting the changing needs:

We knew that we needed to make as much space available for offices and artist studios as possible. And we also knew that artists and NGO workers needed small spaces as they couldn't afford large ones. In the meanwhile, we also wanted to create spaces for events: for performances, presentations, dance – we were thinking in mobile spaces. (Bársony 2014)

The first task in the construction process was to transform the floor into an inhabitable space, by using what they had at hand, materials and volunteers:

We began by collecting all available materials from the recently closed venues (Tűzraktér, Merlin, Sirály, Gödör, Kossuth Mozi), as well as from a nearby Chinese restaurant. In parallel, we left flyers everywhere announcing that we're looking for furniture, we received many of them. Besides this, we had all the sceneries of Harmadik Hang's theatre pieces, the collection of 8 years' work. And there was a double ceiling, made of wood, covering the entire floor area. We used these to build walls later. (Bársony 2014)

To a large extent, the first phases of the construction work were done by prospective tenants. To motivate the volunteers, Műszi accommodated many of their ideas in the organisation of the new spaces. This is how many originally unplanned services, like the children's room, took shape. The construction was helped by a young architecture collective, Studio Nomad, who were already part of the performance inaugurating the space. In this sense, the performance already anticipated how the space could be used. The relationship between design and construction was not conventional: "they first had to build each structure, to test the chosen material in the given space, and to draw the plans only afterwards as we had no materials to waste nor teams to build according to plans." (Bársony 2014). Műszi's interior organisation was also largely determined by regulations, particularly the requirement of fire safety:

It would have been very expensive to upgrade the space from being a department store's display level: we adapted to this function and use the floor as a continuous space, even if partitioned into smaller volumes. You can dismantle the interiors with a screw-driver, because everything is built like a scenery: none of the walls reach the ceiling. (Bársony 2014)

After month of construction, Műszi opened its doors in September 2012 on 2800 m². In the course of its two years, the financial model of the space, based on renting out artist studios and NGO offices in order to refinance the public space maintenance and its activities, has been established and Műszi began to expand to new floors.

In 2014, Műszi adopted the names of public spaces renamed in the past years: symbolically accommodating public spaces from the pre-2010 era signals an ambition to become a city in the city, a genuine public space. In addition to its public functions, the space also started to offer social services, solidarity rent and short-term shelter for those in need. Műszi's long-term ambition is to become a node in an emerging network of independent cultural and welfare providers:

The next task is to create our social net. Not only to explore the services of Műszi, but also to be able to direct people to the services present in the neighbourhood, to distribute clothes to the homeless, as well as hot tea in wintertime. We envision this as part of an independent social welfare network, as part of an independent reality. (Bársony 2014)

This statement signals the ambition of social service providers and cultural producers to gain independence from the public sector, both in terms of funding and in terms of accountability. Similarly to Műszi, many actors see the real potential of self-organisation and community-led development unfolding in private spaces and premises where political pressure can be avoided: "today it is only possible to create an independent public space in a private space." (Bársony 2012)

The actor-network that created the Művelődési Szint has many interesting features. The use of private spaces for declaredly public functions is one of them. Another one is the presence of theatre professionals and a theatre collective as the organising force of the space. Despite the obvious presence of a few architects in redesigning the space, the decisive logic of the construction process was not so much architectural as theatrical: the cooperation model established in theatre pieces and performances informed the launching of Műszi not only as a cultural venue but also as an indoor public space:

At the core of developing Műszi was the community, and the good cooperation with people. The reason why I became the engine of this process lies probably in my 20 years experience in theatre, from building sceneries, through team work to the distribution of tasks. And all we did was always motivated by artistic ambitions where practical considerations were in the foreground, and never money. (Bársony 2014)

Another trait of Művelődési Szint is the founders' inspiration from and attraction to a model of "houses of culture," accessible without the pressure of consumption, and relying on the contributions of the community:

We wanted to create a community space, not through grants but with a self-sustaining economic basis. This is also related to the redefinition of cultural centres, raising awareness that the members of the community are responsible for the existence, the maintenance and the development of the place, and they can contribute either by volunteering or donating. (Bársony 2014)

In the four years since its opening, Műszi has become a unique civic space. While becoming a major meeting point for the city's teenagers with no budget for consumption at other semi-public locations like cafés or bars, it also hosts many of the NGOs critical of the government's politics and policies, organisations with limited budget and little attractiveness for landlords often pressured by politics. Műszi thus creates a safe space for these organisations and their events. While its refusal to work with any public institutions limits Műszi's latitudes and makes it less programmable, its character as a collection of second-hand materials, community contributions and collectively generated ideas makes it extend beyond its building's limits: its extended network of objects, people, concepts and skills makes Műszi more resilient and responsive to the surrounding urban transformation. Sympathy for the initiative and the safe space it created brings many private and international organisations to Műszi whose help in the form of economic contributions and cooperation networks makes Műszi's mission more visible and its community more stable and more resilient, better prepared for the possible event of moving to another building at some point.

3.4. The case for houses of culture: giving sense to public assets in the Jurányi Ház

Jurányi Ház, another major re-appropriation of an empty building in Budapest, shares some of the features of Műszi. On one hand, it ambitions to revive the tradition of "cultural houses," that is, non-profit venues with the production and reception of culture in the centre point. On the other hand, it is closely connected to the milieu of independent theatre. What clearly distinguishes Jurányi Ház from Műszi, is its willingness to cooperate with a municipality by renting a municipal property and to accept public funding as a major source of revenue for theatre productions. This corresponds to a radically different attitude and trajectory, with practically very similar objectives.

Indirectly, Jurányi Ház owes its existence to some changes in cultural funding in the early 2010s. 2010 brought huge changes to the independent theatre scene when the new Theatre (Performing Arts) Act came into effect. This act is trying to regulate the financing structure, operation, state subsidies and employment structures of all performance venues from stone theatres to creative workshops that no longer operate informally. As a result, a managerial circle was quickly established within the independent theatre scene. This was unprecedented: creative groups used to form around certain artists, but these individuals and workshops could not handle the overwhelming burden of bureaucratic paperwork necessary to even stay alive and be eligible for state subsidies – without which it is extremely difficult to have performances. FÜGE (Függetlenül Együtt – Independently

Together) was founded to act as an umbrella organisation with the goal to provide a management background for the numerous independent creative groups. In the coming years, members of FÜGE began to feel the limits of available space for rehearsal, compromising the work of the companies they helped. Viktória Kulcsár, FÜGE's founder also recognised that a permanent building would add an important dimension to the organisation's work:

I saw that it would be very beneficial to find a roof for this operation because there were tons of things created in the field of independent performance arts but the infrastructure was insufficient. There were not enough available performance and rehearsal spaces. There were more and more performances, and rehearsal slots became scarce at certain venues, such as Trafó, and we did not feel as confident about our shows. It occurred to us then that we should establish a 'production house' type of background where everybody has their own rehearsal space and office, with a large shared storage space, potentially a workshop where we can work on stage sets, maybe a space where we can iron or just store costumes and share them among ourselves. We wanted to establish a base, a home for contemporary performing arts similarly to an office or tenement building. (Kulcsár 2015)

Looking for the right building took years. The search was helped by some models that Kulcsár had in mind, previous attempts to reuse empty buildings for cultural purposes:

I knew that a school building would be ideal. A good example for this is Tűzraktér, which was located in Hegedű utca long before our time. They also took a school building and used it for cultural activities. It was evident there that the gymnasium is an ideal option for a performance space, that the school cafeteria can be used as a café, that classrooms are ideally sized to serve as rehearsal spaces. The only shortcoming of a school building is that there are a lot of spaces that are community areas and not individual units that we could sublet to anybody. (Kulcsár 2015)

Kulcsár asked the Municipality for a list of available properties they would like to repurpose. After excluding many buildings due to their state, size and location, they selected a school building in Buda's Jurányi utca. While they originally wanted a 1500 square metre building where 10-12 groups can have relatively large spaces and they would still have room for communal areas, the building they found was 6700 square metres in central Buda, far from the city's established cultural zones, in a neighbourhood with few cultural attractions but supposedly large demand. Two schools used to function in the building, but it had been vacant since 2009. To fill the building, they invited other NGOs and creative artists as well, everybody who could be connected to the envisioned operations.

While the Municipality disposed of many vacant buildings, having access to one of them was not a simple operation: in the absence of streamlined models or existing good practices of municipality-civil society cooperations, the process required lengthy negotiations about the economic and legal arrangements of the cooperation:

I tried to approach them by showing them why this would be beneficial to the Municipality. I calculated that they are spending between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Forints (approx. 1500-3000 euros) monthly just to have a doorman, to operate the elevators and have the chimneys swept. There were numerous negotiations about the state of the building, our options, our vision about the operation. In the end we got to the point where we could submit an application, because there are tons of vacant properties on the BFVK (Budapest Property Management Ltd.) website, and if somebody makes an offer on one they issue a call for applications. (Kulcsár 2015)

The building's condition, as an important part of its affordances, was a defining feature in the negotiations: buildings that stand empty for a longer period, unused and untempered, usually get so deteriorated in a few years' time that their physical conditions simply make economically unsustainable any attempts to bring them back to life. This one, instead, was in a hopeful shape:

It was in a relatively good state, a portion of its windows were renovated a few years before the schools closed down. The heaters were still in place, which was lucky as we had seen several places in much worse states of disrepair. (...) We received the keys in early July of 2012. This was a Friday, and the following Monday the groups I had signed contracts with were already there. We opened our gates in late October, by then we had completely renovated the whole building of over 6,000 square metres: we laid down a parquet floor, we painted, and we arranged running water, heating. The plumbing was also very worn-down. We undertook the renovations for the whole building, therefore we received a

little discount from the price and we did not have to pay rent until we actually started to operate. (Kulcsár 2015)

With a feasible and economically viable renovation plan, the building could be brought back into life and “put in motion.” The goal of the building's revitalisation was to create a complex with rehearsal rooms, artists studios and offices on one hand, and performance spaces and community venues, on the other. This combination corresponded to what Kulcsár imagined as a modern house of culture that succeeds in “enhancing the community function, both within the house, among the many organisations, and with the public, to show civilian spectators that this is a contemporary community space, a new contemporary cultural centre with new contents.” (Kulcsár 2015)

The adaptive reuse of a former school building for different purposes was based on an interaction between the building's spatial characteristics and affordances and the users' needs and economic possibilities:

The building determined what projects could work here and what couldn't because we did not want to break down walls unless we had to. (...) We mostly adjusted the functions to the characteristics of the space. Initially we had several ideas like creating communal kitchens in certain rooms on every floor. But the demand for studios became so great that we gradually gave up on these ideas. The individual triumphed over the community. But we realised that the corridors are quite wide, so we set up these kitchen boxes there, which demonstrates that there is always a solution. First we adjusted everything to the space, but then we adapted the space to our needs. The school has a pretty good layout. I saw from the beginning that it has the advantage of being very two-faceted: if you enter the building and descend the stairs you will find a large community space, a big cultural complex with a café, a ticket booth, a theatre, a courtyard, a terrace. But if you go up the stairs, you will find an apartment building, and only those who have business there go up. This was also important in terms of security, there is actually a metallic door that separates the people working there and renting studios from the civilian audience. (Kulcsár 2015)

The building's structure and condition also largely determined its potential economic dynamics. Acting as specific combination of physical and economic limitations and possibilities, its economic sustainability required that the necessary investments and projected maintenance costs are in proportion with the planned uses and projected revenues from subletting various parts of the building:

I made a preliminary assessment of expenses: I prepared a calculation to see what utility costs can be expected in a building of this size, I asked for figures from similar, still operating schools as well as theatres and other facilities, I calculated the costs of the doorman service, the daily cleaning. And we had to pay rent, by then I knew that we would only have to pay 30% of the total rent with the municipal subsidies. I added all these expenses and divided the result by the area of useful rentable space, thus all spaces gained a price tag. Another important aspect is that the rent varies according to function. 80% of our expenses are utility bills, therefore it was important to me that somebody renting a storage space and only turning the lights on once a week for moving furniture should pay less than somebody renting a rehearsal space where they regularly use theatre lights. (Kulcsár 2015)

Looking into the success or failure of similar initiatives, it is evident that besides a building with appropriate parameters, or a favourable moment for establishing a facilitating actor network, Kulcsár and FÜGE were key actors in laying the foundations and developing the Jurányi Ház. Practically, they turned into professionals of real estate management from theatre managers, by extending their skills, experience and cooperation networks throughout the process. While their pioneering role is widely acknowledged, Kulcsár and her colleagues play down their role in establishing an economically sustainable, affordable and accessible cultural centre. They consider their model as reproducible, especially following the success of their undertaking:

I definitely think it can be reproduced, and I also see that there is still a great demand that we cannot satisfy. Since December 2012, we have accumulated a waiting list of several hundred groups. Some may have given up since then and are probably not waiting for our response with their bags packed. But there is a constant flow of applications, and not just from performing artists but also filmmakers, independent artists, painters, creative minds from a relatively wide spectrum. This is due to the fact

that the incubator house's message is very positive and draws people in. If somebody started a similar, quality initiative it would certainly be filled up within seconds, before the ink could dry on their contract. But I can also see that this is crazy work. Over the one-year period when we were searching for potential projects my experience was that there are ideas but only a few organisations and individuals have the courage to really commit to realising these ideas. Without such commitment, it is very difficult to do anything, and it cannot be imposed from higher levels. (Kulcsár 2015)

Nevertheless, as the following pages demonstrate, the success of one process and the establishment of a model does not automatically generate a mechanisms, a functional actor network that facilitates the reuse of vacant spaces for all interested parties: instead. Despite its success in overcoming the public logic of property development and inserting in a publicly owned but dismissed building a completely different logic of renovating, inhabiting, managing and subletting space it remains among a large stock of empty buildings and high demand from civic actors a rare experience where personal skills, experiences, connections, partnerships and attitudes for cooperation determine success. And while Jurányi Ház has been established in a public property with the approval and permissions of the city's Real Estate Department, its operational partnerships are solely based on civic-private cooperations and the delivery of public functions within the civic realm. Missing the opportunity to learn from Jurányi Ház, the public sector fails to follow through and adjust its functioning to accommodate to civic innovation and demand for space.

3.5. The limits of structured access: the incomplete cooperation with municipalities

Assuring the repeatability of the Jurányi model, structuring the the cooperation of the public and civic actors and promoting access to vacant spaces in a way that opportunities do not uniquely depend on personal skills and cooperation networks, but on mechanisms that go beyond individual experiences, has been a preoccupation of some organisations in Budapest, similarly to other initiatives across Europe. In the 2010s, the quest of new cultural spaces and infrastructures, the question of vacant lots and empty buildings came to the fore of public discussions.

The lack of adequate institutional endeavours to address the problem of vacancy and the lack of affordable social, cultural and community spaces prompted civic initiatives to develop policy proposals, elaborate mechanisms and establish a corresponding public discourse. While the homeless-rights organisation "Right to the City" has been campaigning for creating access to unoccupied residential buildings, in 2012, the KÉK - Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre expanded the discourse to non-residential properties, advocating the community use of vacant buildings, storefronts as well as vacant lots.

KÉK's experience of operating cultural spaces in abandoned buildings provided important skills, connections and models for this engagement. Its portfolio of cultural events and urban regeneration initiatives also made it a credible actor both for public administrations and citizen initiatives. After launching its first community gardens in 2010, guiding walks to the city's unknown spaces as unused resources, and organising workshops about architectural possibilities in vacant lots and attic spaces, KÉK and its "Lakatlan" (Hungarian for Uninhabited) program began a structured research into the phenomenon of vacancy, to understand the causes, patterns and potentials of empty shops, offices, schools, hotels, department stores, cinemas and theatres all across the city. (Polyák 2016)

On one hand, KÉK aimed at establishing a public debate about the topic: launching an event series in Műszí with designers, planners, sociologists and activists invited from various countries, they made an attempt to present good practices from around Europe to the Budapest audience. In order to engage a wider public and to discuss the phenomenon of abandoned spaces in a structured way, members of the Lakatlan program decided to implement some of the tools and concepts they encountered during their travels to Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Berlin.

One of these tools was community mapping, addressing the lack of accessible data about underused and unused public and private properties. By law, all public entities have to publish a list of their properties on their website; however, these lists are either not published or are hidden in unfindable sub-sites. While KÉK used various legal channels to request corresponding data from

municipalities, the organisation also set itself to develop an online community map, using lessons from other vacancy maps developed by citizen initiatives across Europe. The Lakatlan map, using the open source Ushahidi platform, was launched in December 2012 with significant media attention, including interviews on major TV and radio programs. The map was intended as a tool to create momentum for the topic of vacancy, by crowdsourcing information, engaging participation and generating new partnerships:

Anyone, with or without registering, can upload descriptions, photos, links related to a vacant property, and can indicate it on the map. The maps allows you to filter entries according to, for instance, building types: in this sense the map allows you to understand structural issues underlying vacancy, why in certain neighbourhoods there are many vacant shops, while some areas are full of vacant office buildings, and where the various vacant educational buildings are located. We also intended the map to create a dialogue around certain buildings: the platform enables users to comment on each other's entries and to accumulate information concerning any property. In the meanwhile, we cannot aspire for a completely accurate and up-to-date map of vacant properties in Budapest. Our goal is to highlight the issue, bring visibility to properties with important potentials, and to mobilise local energies to invest in some of the properties. It's a tool that is meant to support our advocacy activities. (Oravecz et al 2015)

Another concept borrowed by KÉK was the concept of a mediating organisation, an agency to promote a lower threshold and accelerated procedures for citizen initiatives in accessing vacant spaces, and to bring together actors from municipalities and the civil society:

In September 2013, with the help of Norway Grants, we began working with civic organisations, social enterprises and cultural initiatives, mapping their spatial needs, organisational means and co-operational capacities, and connecting them with owners of longtime unrented spaces. In this process, we established working groups, comprising municipal officers, real estate professionals and civic organisations: focusing on various sites of potential intervention, from streets concentrating vacant shops to school buildings and large open spaces, we embarked on elaborating frameworks for municipal policies as well as for multi-actor co-operations. More concretely, we help organisations find empty spaces, get in touch with property owners, negotiate affordable prices, draft rental contracts, renovate their premises, create a sustainable organisational plan and communicate their results. (Oravecz et al 2015)

This work led to the Open! Festival, organised for the first time in October 2014 with the Budapest Municipality. The festival opened longtime vacant shops for a dozen initiatives ready to install themselves in a ground-floor space for a month, testing the advantages and disadvantages of physical presence and constant availability. At the end of the month, about a fourth of the initiatives engaged in negotiating a long term contract with their landlord, building on mutual confidence and a growing understanding of each others' positions (Oravecz et al 2015). While this event was considered by many commentators as successful, KÉK's cooperation with the Budapest Municipality on the general modalities of long-term community access to vacant spaces proved to be less fruitful.

By the early 2010s, many district municipalities elaborated their system to allow NGOs and tenants delivering important services to rent spaces for a reduced price. However, the lack of transparency of these local systems, as well as the radical diversity of the regulations of the various district municipalities made the whole system very arbitrary and helping well informed, politically linked tenants rather than public utility organisations. The strict separation in the district regulations between social, cultural and economic uses – neglecting the entire field of social economy – made rental opportunities unattractive for many non-profit initiatives, reluctant to give up important revenue sources (Lipták 2015). Furthermore, in most of the districts, the extreme slowness of the rental processes made it completely unpredictable, and discouraged potential users and temporary users from entering the processes – thus leaving many storefronts and offices abandoned.

Besides the lack of transparency and the inefficiency of the bureaucratic mechanisms, political control also played an important role in deterring civic initiatives from applying to municipalities for spaces at discounted rent. In some of the districts, municipalities adopted regulations that require a yearly revision of contracts. Limiting the rental period to one year, and "evaluating" yearly the work of

the NGOs that were granted public properties below the market level, municipalities established control mechanisms that make civic organisations entirely dependent on often arbitrary decisions by local politicians.

In rare cases, some districts did allow a civic actor to manage some of their spaces: in the 11th district of Budapest, the artist association Eleven Blokk used its good contacts with the municipality to address local public officers for a potential studio space. Péter Mátyási, the organisation's founder first received an art scholarship from the district and then began to teach in one of its schools. With increasing links to the district and a growing understanding of the functioning of its administration, Mátyás first successfully applied for a subsidised studio rent and then moved on to open this possibility also to other artists.

Eleven Blokk's ambition converged with the district's struggle to keep activities in its streets, in a situation where the opening of a nearby shopping mall and the side-effects of the district's Cultural City Centre program resulted in the closing of many shops. Eleven Blokk responded to this challenge by helping artists access affordable studio spaces:

Our goals included representing young artists on an organisational level and providing units for their creative work at favourable conditions. The name refers to the 11th district and to the fact that we operate in a small area that you can walk through within minutes. A map emerged soon, containing properties we thought could be suitable for studios. We had a flagship project involving the below-ground property at 6 Lágymányosi Street, where four painters moved in. When we saw that it still worked one year later, we started looking for further properties in three stages. Today we have six locations. We hope we can reach residents of the area with our activities in the long run, so we closely co-operate with restaurateurs, service providers of the area and the local government. We love the Cultural City Centre concept, but its essence will only come true if it gets close to the locals, and makes their daily life more comfortable and colourful. (Mátyási 2015)

Eleven Blokk's success is based on its close cooperation with the local municipality. By establishing step-by-step a mutual partnership with the municipality, they managed to create a level of trust that made them able to become a sort of an outpost of the public administration, with direct and short communication channels to decision-makers:

The local government has recognised that our activities are important and useful for the district as well because we utilise properties that have been vacant for many years. They acknowledge the importance of our work by renting out the properties at very favourable prices. It is essential that the local administration feels that our partnership is mutual. Eleven Blokk has a rather extensive network of contacts, so if the district is organising an event and is looking for artists for it, we can suggest people who are good in that particular field. This is good for the artists as they receive work, and unburdens the local government. These small gestures are important in conveying how much we appreciate having a suitable space for our creative work. (Mátyási 2015)

While the work of Eleven Blokk was limited to basement spaces that were the least attractive units of the local municipal real estate stock, it still opened unprecedented channels for structured cooperation between a civic association and a municipality. What was a successful cooperation at the local level, remained a missed opportunity at the level of the city.

Within the highly fragmented administrative structure of Budapest, many actors recognised that the system of reduced rental agreements could work in a much more efficient and transparent way if coordinated at the city level; they also recognised that the longer properties stand empty, the larger initial investment they will need to be brought back into the commercial circulation, as well as for temporary use. In 2012, the Budapest Municipality's Planning Department began to publicly speak about the problems and opportunities of vacant properties. The then new head of the Department, Sándor Finta explained in an interview his interest in experimenting with vacant spaces:

I believe that before we launch long-term, large and expensive development projects, we need to bring life into the unused urban spaces and buildings, making life more pleasant at a low cost (...). One of the key problems of Budapest is the emptying of downtown shops, partly caused by the recent proliferation of shopping malls both in the city and in the agglomeration. This process could be reversed if small shops could sell unique products of quality – be it food or products of

the creative industry – that cannot be found in the malls. Of course, this would also require an important number of people with adequate purchasing power. As a first step, we could help young creatives settle down in the areas in need of activity. Starting with a low rent, these initiatives could gain strength over a longer term. Inner city districts could become famous for hosting creative quarters so that both inhabitants and tourists know where to go if they're searching for local brands and products. It is surprising that none of the districts have seriously considered this possibility. (Patti and Polyák 2013:66)

Based on these assumptions, and under growing pressure from the emerging discourse of vacancy initiated by KÉK and other civic organisations, the Budapest Municipality's Planning Department launched a public competition in 2013 to look for ways to valorise empty storefronts. Unhappy with the results of the competition where entries focused too much on the visual appearance of the storefronts, the Department joined forces with KÉK to elaborate a more thorough plan for temporary use. KÉK, a professional NGO, strongly embedded in the cultural, creative and activist communities, but also with direct links to universities, research institutions and the Planning Department, could certainly improve the municipality's outreach to non-governmental actors and could help in the translation between the spatial and administrative resources of the municipality and the needs and skills of social, cultural and creative initiatives.

On the other hand, it could also connect the public administration into international networks, providing good practices, tools and instruments to be potentially adopted by the Budapest Municipality. KÉK, together with the municipalities of Rome and Bremen, prepared a knowledge transfer network funded by the European Union's Urbact programme, with a strong focus on the organisation's Budapest experience. Despite the Budapest Municipality's declared engagement with the theme of reusing vacant spaces, the administration's bureaucratic machine was unable to provide the necessary documents to join the collaboration: this failure made its mark on the municipality's cooperation with civic initiatives and raised serious doubts about the efficiency of the administration to accommodate innovative policy experiments (Patti and Polyák 2016).

In the midst of bureaucratic obstacles, political pressure and fading trust between partners, the ambition to try establishing an efficient framework for the reuse of vacant public properties, and generating a streamlined cooperation process between various public administrations and non-governmental organisations, faced several serious challenges. The programmes TÉR_KÖZ (Hungarian for SPACE_COMMON) and Rögtön Jövök! (Hungarian for Coming Soon!) revealed many aspects of these challenges.

TÉR_KÖZ was a 5 billion HUF funding scheme of the Budapest Municipality, an urban rehabilitation tender for its districts with the aim of improving the quality of urban life and filling unused, underprivileged areas with life. The most important requirement was that applying districts had to develop their projects in cooperation with the local private sector, NGOs, religious and other non-profit organisations, and share with them the tasks of realising and maintaining the projects. The head of the Planning Department, initiator of the programme, saw this mechanism as a way to guarantee participatory planning and shared management of community spaces on one hand, and to reduce maintenance costs on the other: *"This was important to us because it enables investments to be realised in accordance with local needs, and when a community becomes responsible for an area, maintenance issues drop to a minimal level."* (Finta 2015)

The modality of cooperation between public and civic bodies required in the call, however, was open to different interpretations, and there were many ways to bypass the requirement by formally presenting partners but not necessarily including them in the process:

The goal was not to create projects initiated at city management level, but to start initiatives generated by local communities. This caused problem during realisation, however, because each local government interpreted the notions of 'community' and 'community spaces' differently. There was no precedent for such large-scale investments involving local communities, therefore we could mostly show examples from foreign countries to local administrations, and tried directing them towards good solutions during regular consultations. The fundamental problem was that local governments did not

involve NGOs as much as they should have, therefore in some instances the civil parties had to approve, maintain and bring life into projects that were already partly or fully developed. Furthermore, the participants did not have practical experiences in terms of cooperative projects limited by deadlines, financial and legal restrictions, which is something to be taken into account if we were to continue this program. (Finta 2015)

The envisioned governance structure of the process – bringing together civic initiatives, district administrations and the central Budapest Municipality – was not only manipulated by the local municipalities: the list of projects to be funded by the scheme proposed by the jury was altered through a political review before the modified proposal went to vote at the City Council. In the meanwhile, despite many of the stains on the transparency of the process, it certainly brought about some achievements in the form of realised projects and an increased consciousness of the potentials of vacant spaces and public-civic cooperations: the TÉR_KÖZ tender contributed to

raising awareness among the population and politicians on the usability of unrented properties and on the importance of community spaces, and introducing the non-governmental initiatives that maintain these spaces. I am very happy that eventually most local governments recognised the importance of these projects and tried to provide assistance, thus exemplary projects could be created for specific urban problems within the scope of the tender. Such projects as the skateboard and BMX track on a vacant plot below Petőfi bridge, or the Hullám Csónakházak project which fills with programs the forgotten boat-houses of Csepel on the Danube, or Kossuth Square in the 19th district, which was originally going to be a parking plot but through planning and negotiations became a multifunctional space that students from nearby schools can use as a place for sports and meetings during the week, and locals can use as a marketplace on weekends, while parking spaces are also available. (Finta 2015)

Another attempt to facilitate access to vacant spaces, Rögtön Jövök! (Hungarian for "Coming soon!") was conducted in a cooperation between the Municipality of Budapest and KÉK, aiming at handling with a complex approach the issue of long-time vacant, mostly central, ground-floor storefront properties owned by local municipalities, and of encouraging the 'recycling' of these units. Finta saw the programme as a means to begin the reorganisation of the municipality's real estate policy:

The local governments' asset management scheme currently favours long-term market-based utilisation because this is the option provided by the legislation. The aim of Rögtön Jövök! is providing information on and motivating the practice of typically short-term, reduced-rate property utilisation, provisional utilisation between lease periods, or interim use in the practice of district governments. Rögtön Jövök! provides an opportunity to prevent or stop the negative effects of increasing vacancy (depreciating state of buildings, vandalism, decreased sense of public safety, deterioration of public spaces in the area, plummeting real estate prices), and to reintegrate vacant properties into the city's economic life. The utilisation of problematic, long-time unrented properties can only be successfully realised with a new approach. The program first and foremost sensitises local governments to the issues, aims to provide practical solutions to them, and attempts to harmonise the work of all participants. (Finta 2015)

Rögtön Jövök! aimed at improving the coordination between the Budapest Municipality and the autonomous district municipalities in order to create a concise dataset of the publicly and privately owned properties, including the vacant, available ones. While starting to elaborate a long-awaited, and previously non-existing database of the properties owned by Budapest Municipality, the Planning Department also made a call to the district municipalities and private owners to add their properties to the database. The call made little impact: very few district municipalities, and even fewer private owners contributed to the municipal map, indicating a significant lack of trust in the municipality's actions. This failure was repeated in the Municipality's Rögtön Jövök! program, in which district municipalities and private owners were invited to offer their unoccupied properties for short term creative, cultural and social uses, by adding them to a general pool administered by the Budapest Municipality. On the one hand, the low participation to the pool reflected the highly fragmented administrative structure of Budapest where districts have a high level of autonomy and often very

different objectives than the city's central City Hall: only two peripheral districts participated with their most hopeless properties, and even the Budapest Municipality's own Real Estate Department declined to join. Besides the lack of cooperation between districts and the central Budapest Municipality, the legal burdens imposed by national regulations made the task of opening vacant spaces for community uses even more difficult:

The Rőgtön Jövők! tender suffered most from the program's novelty: it handles the issue of vacant properties with provisional solutions and new legal constructs. However, local governments are not prepared for such solutions as the rigid Act CVI of 2007 on State Assets stipulates very strict conditions for renting out vacant properties to market players. Regulations are not flexible enough, therefore they cannot adapt to novel concepts and new demands. The budget of district governments cannot handle rent below a certain amount, thus rates of zero or very low rates cannot be approved in compliance with the law, even if the administration gains more overall through preservation than the losses it incurs due to vacancy. This limits the district governments' capacity to allow activities of potentially great social benefit in their properties. These stringent and often unrealistic financial and legal restrictions clearly need to be rephrased so that the underutilisation of these properties can be dynamically reduced. (Finta 2015)

Another obstacle in the cooperation between the Budapest Municipality and KÉK was the gap between languages, expectations and capacities as well as working methods of the municipality and civic actors. Efforts to reuse a 6000 m² vacant school-building as a creative incubator were halted because the location was estimated to be too big and not central enough by representatives of the creative sector. The temporary use process of a vast green space behind the city's most central railway station came to a standstill because of delays of the soil's pollution test to be delivered by the public owner and because of the public bodies' insistence on standard project documentation formats, incompatible with the community initiative's working process. The professionalism, efficiency and engagement of the partners was constantly questioned on all sides, reflecting a culture of deep suspicion in all cooperations and experiments, despite serious efforts to bring all (civic, municipal, professional) actors to the table. KÉK's proposal for a tax reform similar to those in various European countries was judged to be unrealistic where all taxation-related decisions are made at the national level.

After the failures of the Rőgtön Jövők! program, the cooperation between the Budapest Municipality and KÉK were discontinued. Despite the investment of significant resources in the partnership, reorganisations in the Municipality's structure made cooperation with the public administration even more unpredictable, with lower engagement from the administration's side and lower results to be expected. In the meanwhile, the growing authoritarian tendencies of the Hungarian government and its control over municipal possibilities made many social, cultural and community initiatives increasingly wary of collaborating with the public sector and careful to protect their independence. Therefore it is not surprising that KÉK, after performing more success with private owners within the yearly Open! Festival and being increasingly addressed by initiatives looking for rental opportunities exclusively in private properties, began to shift towards cooperation with private owners and real estate funds, before suspending its Lakatlan program in 2016. With a series of scandals of mismanagement of public real estate portfolios surfacing in the past years, KÉK, together with many other organisations who worked on making public properties more accessible and their management more transparent, had to give up their ambition.

Concluding remarks

The failure of establishing structured mechanisms for citizen initiatives to access vacant spaces in Budapest is symptomatic of the state of the city whose political elite is busy with dismantling the achievements of the past decades in making the city more accessible, sustainable. Anti-cycling measures, the withdrawal of permissions for events in public space, direct assignments in the city's key cultural institutions and the pressure on NGOs are all instruments to push back the civic sphere and the subcultures supposedly related to the "liberal city model" established by the previous

administrations. While inspiration from foreign practices played an important role in the 1990s and 2000s (Trafó was founded with important French and Dutch interventions, Tűzraktár was born from the idea of a French architecture student, KÉK borrowed its office building in 2008 from a French developer, Lakatlan was inspired by Dutch and German practices), the government's nationalist ideology made the implementation of international models less desirable for local municipalities and cracked down on NGOs with support from abroad. Political pressure and extended control over public assets, together with budget cuts in the social, cultural and education fields prompts an increasing number of civic initiatives to withdraw into private spaces and establish a parallel cultural and social infrastructure, often delivering services that were formerly provided by the public sphere.

It is not that the conservative city leadership and the government's municipal proxies excludes all experimentation. On the contrary, innovation in cultural and social services is promoted through disproportional subsidies to selected actors instead of creating an open process of dialogue and cooperation based on citizen knowledge and skills to share the responsibilities and resources in urban management. Corruption at the highest level and the rigidity of legislation at the lowest level draw a regulatory landscape of clientelism in which commissions and assignments are based on personal relationships and political loyalty instead of open mechanisms accessible to many stakeholders.

Above-price property acquisitions by public institutions like the National Bank and the Hungarian Art Academy and under-price real estate privatisation by local municipalities to friendly companies or individuals reveal an increasingly bendable legal and regulatory environment dominated by the particular interests of powerful actors within the public sector, where property prices and designations are neither defined by market logics, nor by social, cultural or community needs.

In the meanwhile, the post-crisis recovery of the real estate market (without bringing along the recovery of the welfare services and infrastructures sacrificed by the government's austerity measures) increased the pressure on available spaces for community activities. The incentives provided by the state to purchase apartments, together with the expanded use of airbnb provoked a boom in residential real estate prices in the mid 2010s, that endangered even the highly lucrative ruin bars that could not compete with the high attractiveness of investment apartments. In the meanwhile, the lack of vision for urban regeneration and community inclusion increased the city's social fragmentation: beyond the profitable islands of real estate investments and nightlife tourism, lies a landscape of poverty and underinvestment, with spaces and entire buildings abandoned for decades, with no apparent hope for their return in use.

The return of the speculative real estate market and the fading trust between public administrations and the civil society marks a missed opportunity that the crisis presented with potentially accessible and affordable spaces across the city. Instead of using the period with the absence of investment capital as an occasion to rethink partnerships and mobilise community energies for opening, running and maintaining spaces, the city's political elite chose to build new barriers between administrations and citizens.

4. Rome: Austerity, Legality and the Commons

Rome in the 1990s witnessed unprecedented welfare cuts and a crisis of social services. Similarly to other Southern European cities, but a decade earlier, this process was closely connected to the neoliberal policies of successive city administrations that led to unequal urban development patterns, and where one-sided, developer-friendly crisis measures failed to provide solutions for social needs or help balance the city budget. With successive economic and political crises and the consequent austerity measures, and with the gradual withdrawal of the Italian state and the Rome Municipality from providing basic community services, many citizen organisations and activist groups set themselves to replace the services dissolving from their communities (Patti and Polyák 2016c). Besides activist responses to the housing crisis, spaces of culture, sport and education, such as cinemas, theatres, sport halls or schools and libraries have been equally taken over by self-organised communities, addressing to the lack of community services sustained by the city administration.

In the follow-up of the 2008 economic crisis, in March 2014, the heavily indebted City of Rome received a bailout from the Italian government, with an agreement forcing the city to follow further austerity measures, cutting budgets in culture, education and social services. However, austerity measures only aggravated the crisis of eroding services in Rome: the past years saw the closure of dozens of cinemas, theatres, schools, libraries and markets, adding to the numbers of unoccupied housing as well as industrial and commercial spaces in peripheral zones.

Public discourse about the city of Rome in the past years has been dominated by debates around the meaning of concepts like “crisis,” “decay,” “corruption,” “legality,” “public interest” and “the commons.” With Europe’s most important squatting scene, including hundreds of housing occupations and social centres, the phenomenon of vacant buildings and their occupation by social and cultural initiatives have been at the centre of these debates. Vacant properties in Rome are the result of factors common to many other cities, such as the economic crisis and demographic changes, but also of the mismanagement of publicly owned real estate portfolios and excessive construction without corresponding demand. For the public sector, publicly owned real estate was not always conceived as important asset:

The public commons are a bit like family jewels, they become useful when one has liquidity problems. This is why in recent years the focus turned towards public properties that were quite much ignored before: it was always there but wasn't considered. (Rollo 2016)

For citizen initiatives and community projects, on the contrary, abandoned buildings have meant opportunities to develop activities, build communities and deliver services for the surrounding neighbourhoods. For many citizen initiatives, occupations reflected their sentiments in relation to the public sector: feeling abandoned by public administrations, they looked elsewhere to create the spaces of a public sphere. The lack of trust between local communities, private actors and public bodies is present in all aspects of public life: prompted by the failure of public services, local associations practically began “to take care of all that they need in a neighbourhood, acting as the replacement of a service centre or a public administration.” (Cellamare 2014: 74) For their critics, the illegal occupation of public properties was the symptom of the decay of “legality” and part of a more general crisis of the social control over public assets.

This chapter looks into this conflict by investigating outlining a field of cooperations and conflict between a variety of actors. After outlining the planning processes that brought about the hegemony of the real estate sector in defining Rome's development plans, the resulting overproduction of various building types and city's vulnerability to the crisis, the degradation of public services, it presents a variety of typologies of civic spaces, all paradigmatic in their position within the field of citizen initiatives reclaiming empty buildings for inclusive spaces. If Scup is characteristic of a relatively small-scale, low-profile occupation that is capable of reinventing itself in a new location when evicted, without losing its community, ExSnia is representative of large, historical social centres established since decades and with a strong position not only in providing important local services like education, sport

or culture but also in local politics and processes of participation and shared administration. Cinema America is a prominent example of a specific social group, in this case youngsters, that manages to attract the sympathy of a neighbourhood, creates important coalitions with other groups, makes plans for legalising its activities and succeeds in establishing its regular presence in a new building. Teatro Valle, in turn, with a more confrontative tone, was one of the initiatives that had a key role in spreading and amplifying the discourse of the commons, thus influencing many discussions and plans for policies of temporary use and the shared governance of vacant spaces. With different outcomes and impacts on their territory, all these initiatives all constitute what I call the confrontative model of reusing vacant spaces. Exploring the different manifestations of this model and emapping positions from occupation and eviction through the discourse of legality and the commons, to regulations, administrative mechanisms and policy proposals, the following pages investigate different actor-networks engaged in the citizen-led re-appropriation of abandoned spaces in the city.

4.1. The expansive logic of planning and the fading public sphere in Rome

Rome's urban development has long been characterised by the strong influence of the construction sector on planning regulations and policies. This dominance has been evolved through various regimes and political systems with a striking continuity in the dominance of developers and the construction industry in urban strategies. In the decades after the 1870s, when Rome became Italy's capital, the city's elite engaged in keeping manufacturing industries away from the city, thus trying to avoid the formation of a large working class in the city. Instead of industries, investments were rather directed into the real estate sector, considered as more secure. (d'Albergo and Moini 2013:4)

In the following decades, the real estate industry gained a hegemonic position over other economic activities in shaping the city and pressuring decision-making. Urban development – responding not only to the needs in housing and office space, but primarily to the (presumed) needs of the entire economy through the construction industry – has gradually turned into an instrument to generate profits both at the sides of the public administration and private actors, and an interface to mediate power relationships between them (d'Albergo and Moini 2013:5). The interweaving interests of the public and private sector have created a “growth coalition” (Molotch 1976) where all the involved parties worked towards urban expansion and the maximal exploitation of land.

Creating continuity with the urban development logic of the Fascist era, post-war urban policies in Italy favoured private benefits and allowed real estate development to create significant profits even without building: the largest financial gains in the industry were made when agricultural land was upgraded into a buildable land (Berdini 2011:18). This process opened unprecedented “land grabbing” and speculation based on land use changes, making private actors interested in reinforcing the urban sprawl evolving around the historical urban tissue of Rome and other Italian cities - the “cementification” of the peninsula. (Erbani 2013:42)

The 1962 zoning plan was a major tool in Rome's expansion: crafted in the boom years of the post-war period and encouraging growth towards the eastern peripheries of the city, the “piano regolatore” allowed for development activities that created in large, badly connected and often underutilised housing and commercial complexes (Erbani 2013). While this mechanism undoubtedly increased the available housing stock, critical for the city's post-war growth, the resulting housing stock did not correspond to actual demand: disposing of a significant surplus of housing and struggling with a severe housing crisis is a specific paradox of the Roman construction industry.

The real estate-centred development of Rome arrived to a new phase in the 1990s. The “Rome Model”, the new urban strategy announced by the centre-left coalition led by mayors Francesco Rutelli (1993-2001) and Walter Veltroni (2001-2008) brought about the neoliberalisation of urban policies. Innovative in its rhetoric, but preserving the city's “conservative patrimonialism” (Tocci 2009), Modello Roma represented “a continuity, even an aggravation, of a conservative urban regime based on neo-municipal capitalism and severe rent speculation.” (Annunziata and Violante 2011:1)

On the one hand, the Rome Model consisted of the spectacularisation of the city, focusing on the “valorisation of the existing historical centre with the promotion of events and new attractive architecture.” (Annunziata and Violante 2011:4). Engaged with instrumentalising culture as a means to increase the Rome’s attractiveness and bring mass tourism and international investments in the city, the municipality promoted the construction of many iconic buildings by star architects. While Renzo Piano’s Auditorium (2002), Santiago Calatrava’s Constitution Bridge (2007) and Zaha Hadid’s Museum of XXI Century Arts (2010) also required large investments from the public administration, some of the spectacular projects like Calatrava’s billion-euro City of Sport, Massimiliano Fuksas’ Cloud Congress Centre and Rem Koolhaas’ City of Youth were never completed and became an important factor in the city’s increasing debt and unfolding bankruptcy. The proliferation of unfinished sport facilities became an important visual argument in the campaign to make Rome leave the competition for the 2024 Olympic Games: a video by Andrea Biagio, that showed athletes imitating sport movements in abandoned halls highlighted the dangers of massive corruption related to the new infrastructures connected to hosting the Olympics Games. (Biagio 2016)

On the other hand, the Rome Model significantly facilitated construction: introducing a developer-led approach called ‘planning by doing’ based on contractual agreements instead of an overall urban vision, the city council, lacking substantial central government financing, triggered a “new form of urban entrepreneurialism where private sector interests were playing a major role in urban development” (Annunziata and Violante 2011:4) and public administrations also became economically interested in promoting growth and building activities.

This flexible regulatory environment attracted an unprecedented volume of financial capital: international investors discovered the investment opportunities of Roman real estate. The decade between 1996-2006 witnessed an intense real estate cycle and a construction boom with residential developments of almost 10 million rooms or 1.25 billion cubic meters (Berdini 2011:12). This growth did not correspond to significant demographic growth: most of the new housing was built to “help international financial capital find places to materialise.” (Berdini 2011:12)

The Rome Model, “based on the effervescence of the housing market and continuous urban growth” brought about the impoverishment of the public administration. In contrast with the model’s promises, massive investment in the Roman property market did not ease the public administration’s growing financial troubles. On the contrary, as a result of the “contractual urbanism” framework, Rome accumulated a debt of 22 billion euros:

The Municipality pays for two decades of uncontrolled expansion in which the administration had to guarantee public services. The city allowed construction everywhere, even in areas without any level of urbanisation. In each case and each new neighbourhood, the Roman public administration had to assure the implementation of essential infrastructure works (roads, street lighting, etc.), carrying the huge burden of the daily management of an immense infrastructure. (Berdini 2014:116)

Rome’s accumulated debt made the city vulnerable to the 2007 crisis. Nevertheless, the Berlusconi government’s 2008 Housing Plan, instead of expanding control over development projects, gave additional favours to developers, hoping to reinvigorate the national economy through redynamising the construction industry. Arguing with the need for social housing, Rome’s Piano Casa provided opportunity for the construction of over 25.000 new dwellings, through permissions for residential development in previously non-residential zones and buildings:

From this moment, the regions began to compete in inventing all sorts of waivers of the planning rules. Abandoned factories located in uninhabitable places can be transformed into more profitable homes. Dilapidated buildings can become hypermarkets. All without rules. (Berdini 2014:106)

For many professionals and intellectuals, as well as for local communities, this was the final blow for the public administration’s ability to “govern the development and transformation of the city” and to “define and support a public interest.” (Cellamare 2014:69) As Berlusconi’s law failed to deliver the desired economic benefits, the city gradually exhausted its resources and arrived to the brink of

bankruptcy: forced to reduce its debt by shutting down services, the municipality began to close public institutions, privatize public assets and to abandon public spaces, leaving behind a vacuum of social and cultural services and infrastructures as well as many vacant buildings and areas.

The austerity measures forced on the Rome municipality after the 2007 crisis were not the first important budget cuts the municipality had to engage with. The Maastricht treaty of 1992, preparing the introduction of the euro as a shared currency imposed strict budgetary rules on member states: a deficit lower than 3% of the GDP, and debt lower than 60% of the GDP. This pressure on public spending forced the Italian state to change its post-war Italian policies. Local municipalities that “previously had the opportunity to be reimbursed from central funds for losses they incurred in public services” were introduced new criteria on financial and fiscal responsibility. (d’Albergo and Moini 2013:9) The draining of municipal budgets made them “hostages to the proposals of urban transformation from which they could obtain private funding to develop services and public works. Thus municipalities survived on bricks.” (Berdini 2011:19)

The 2007 economic crisis brought back many of the austerity measures that Italy has been experimenting with in the previous 20 years: in order to respond to the risks that Italy’s high (127%) debt to GDP rate represented, the country’s public administrations were forced to adapt more severe economic policies aiming at controlling budget deficit and reducing public debt, including tax increases and spending cuts, predominantly in the field of public services. These measures affected local municipalities especially hard: local public capacities have been simultaneously compromised by national legislation targeting public sector employment and the legal constraints of local government expenditures imposed by internal stability pacts. (Bordogna and Neri 2012:16)

The gradual decrease of the transfer of resources from the state to local administrations created significant tensions between the central government and local authorities, where alliance with other cities and regions has become an important strategy to access some of the redistributed resources. Many local municipalities revolted against the disproportionate budget cuts the national government’s Stability Act imposed on them.

4.2. From privatisation to protest: occupations for civic spaces

The stability pacts forced significant privatisation programmes on local administrations. Responding to the financial crisis and the perilous indebtment of public administrations in Italy, the Berlusconi government’s financial law in 2008 brought the theme of privatisation back in the municipal agendas, in particular that of local water utilities, public transportation and waste disposal utilities. Following the fall of the Berlusconi government brought about by news about the uncontrollable debt levels of the Italian state, the „technical government” of Monti continued the privatisation efforts of its predecessor. Similarly to budget cuts, privatisation also placed disproportional burdens on local administrations: as in contrast with the central government’s unsustainably high debt, local government debt was only 6% of the GDP, and local municipalities owned 54% of real estate assets and stock holdings, the privatisation of municipal assets was also meant to help balance the state budget. (Goretti and Landl 2013:18)

Just like other elements of austerity policies, the privatisation of public assets in Rome began long before the 2007 crisis. Complementing the neoliberal recipes of the Rome Model, the Rutelli administration began to privatise publicly owned local companies, in order to liberalise services, and the following Veltroni, Alemanno and Marino administrations continued these efforts. In 2002, a public company was created to manage privatisations: Patrimonio S.p.a. was responsible for the sale of historical buildings from the assets of all municipal departments, including significant heritage complexes. Rome’s privatisation list contained properties of all departments worth an estimated 230 million euros, many of them dismissed transportation deposits, infrastructure hubs or office buildings with no current function and representing significant maintenance costs for the city.

The privatisation plan generated many doubts about the public purpose of the process. Many arguments highlighted that forcing public administrations into very disadvantaged positions to sell out their properties creates a fertile ground for speculation on prices and land use change:

Because the seller is 'forced' to get rid of some assets, the buyer finds he has a handful of good cards that he uses first of all to undervalue the property and then to place 'straightjacket' conditions. The Public Authorities (local and national) are practically forced, in these conditions, to undersell rather than sell. But this is not enough, the buyer's interest, as is obvious, is to transform the acquired property functionally and volumetrically, so the purchase is strictly tied to a change in intended use and an increase in size. (Indovina 2015:116)

The sale was facilitated by a valorisation process, changing the constructability parameters and land use of the property from industrial designation to housing units and parking spaces to make the properties attractive. This change of destination, however, created many debates about Rome's capacity to absorb new housing and parking units, without developing basic infrastructures and social services. Instead of privatisation, many commentators advocated a more sustainable, more efficient use of public properties. As Francesco Ermani suggested in his book about the decline of Rome's public domain:

Why not proceed in another direction, using some of these dismissed places – instead of building highly priced apartments or commercial centres – as facilities and services that are needed in these neighbourhoods (green spaces, libraries, health centres), offices of associations, reserving a part for affordable apartments, social housing? (Ermani 2013:99)

Many instances of the austerity measures and phases of the privatisation process met significant resistance from the part of the city's and the country's population. Conscious of the city's dominant powers interested in real estate speculation, aware of corruption within public administrations and the vast private profits of the privatisation of public assets, and alarmed by the gradual disappearance of public infrastructures and affordable social and cultural services from their neighbourhoods, many activist groups and local associations set themselves to intervene in the processes of privatisation, budget cuts and valorisation or land use change.

The Alemanno administration's attempt to privatise the public shares of Acea, the city's mixed economy water management company was blocked when a national referendum overturned the laws promoting the privatisation of the management of water and other local public utilities. Despite the referendum's result, the question of privatising Acea was regularly brought back to Rome's policy agenda by the continuous pressure of the European Central Bank on Italian governments, requesting „a comprehensive, radical and credible strategy of reforms, including the full liberalisation of local public services and professional services.” (Zacune 2013:11) However, the referendum created an important precedent and gave power to opponents of privatisation also at a more local level.

Among many public infrastructure assets that were part of the privatisation plan, the deposits of Atac, Rome's public transportation company have become a veritable battleground between forces of privatisation and those resisting the plan. The company, accumulating 210 million euros of debt and 179 million euros of deficit in 2011 had been struggling with inefficiency and corruption problems for decades (Ermani 2013:96). In 2004, Atac, in order to reduce its debt, began the sale of its transportation assets in 15 areas, corresponding to an approximate 165.000 m² of industrial heritage, worth of an estimated 400 million euros. Some of these deposits, like San Paolo, was previously proposed for heritage protection and was classified as a building to provide „public services at the city scale” in the city's masterplan.

In June 2011, a group of activists belonging to the „right to housing” movement occupied the San Paolo deposit, and created a public debate about the potential futures of the 10.000 m² complex. With the help of professors and students of the Architecture Faculty Roma Tre, as well as with the support of the district's municipality, the local community envisioned a plan for a future „Museum of Transportation” also rooted in the neighbourhood's life. While the activists were evacuated after four months of occupation, the privatisation process was finally blocked by a decision by the local municipality to reject Atac's plans. As responses to Atac's speculative privatisation plans, similar

processes of protest, occupation and elaboration of alternative plans and neighbourhood services unfolded also in other Atac deposits, particularly at Piazza Ragusa and Piazza Bainsizza. (Erbani 2013) Similarly to these deposits, the privatisation of other assets of Atac also provoked strong reactions from activists and local communities, including the occupation of buildings at various stages of the privatisation process. Some occupations, besides protesting privatisation, addressed explicitly the need for community spaces. These occupations were building on a strong tradition of social centres (*centri sociali*), in which social and cultural activists in the past decades have created a parallel cultural and social infrastructure, sometimes with the compliance of authorities, sometimes confronting them. As a theatre professional explained about the occupation of an abandoned theatre:

To occupy a space, a theatre, a cultural space is above all a way to oppose privatisation with a material and symbolic act at the same time. (...) The history of movements in Italy is a lively and fertile history of occupations, this tool is immediately ready for use because there is a collective experience to draw from. There have been major occupations of universities, factories or land (...), but the direct transmission of knowledge and practices derives from the story of social centres from which some of us come from. (Cirillo 2014:100)

Scup (*Scuola e cultura popolare / Community school and culture*) was created in a building in Rome's San Giovanni area, known for its high residential density and elevated prices. Until 2004, the building at via Nola 5 was owned by the Ministry of Transport and served the archival and renewal of driving licenses. In 2004 the building was moved to the Fund for Public Real Estate (Fip), created by the state with the participation of private companies in order to "establish a process for valorising public properties, rationalising occupied spaces and reducing their operative costs." (Sina 2013:31) In order to make the building accessible to the public administration, the vacant property then was rented back to the National Property Agency for 260.000 euros a year. In 2010, the building was sold to a fictive company for one-third of its estimated value based on prices in the neighbourhood. Research revealed that behind the fictive company, the construction and real estate giant UNIECO was acting. (Scup 2014)

In May 2012, after 10 years of abandonment, the building at via Nola was occupied by a group of sport instructors, youngsters and locals of the San Giovanni area. Their goal was to create a sports and culture centre, accessible to all groups from the neighbourhood and beyond.

Besides protesting privatisation, in order to emphasise its legitimacy, Scup's activists also position themselves in the discourse of Rome's declining welfare services: they "sought to give a concrete, cooperative answer to a general crisis that deprived entire generations of their future" and the space

was restituted to the city by becoming a sports and cultural centre, providing social services for the neighbourhood that the local administrations, because of the past years' indiscriminate budget cuts, have not been able to provide. (Scup 2014)

Besides opening a gym with various sports activities, a library, a study room, a space for theatre rehearsals, seminars and assemblies, a cheap hostel, a photography studio and a playground, and by organising farmers' and artisans' markets,, Scup also engaged in also important education activities:

We organise summer courses for high school students who didn't perform well: we provide a support system for kids to prepare for the September exams. We also have a psychology service room, with 3-4 people who provide psychological care mainly for children and separated families. (Scup 2014)

Scup uses the building as an asset not only for organising events, but also for self-financing activities for the neighbourhood:

We try to establish a mechanism of self-financing that is not perfect as we cannot compete with the system as equals. It is based on the idea that instructors of sport and other subjects receive a small, very affordable fee for their services and they give a percent of this to the management of the building. The same concept applies to the bar and the restaurant, which all contribute to the economy of the building. They also finance the library that keeps all the cultural activities together and the Italian courses for immigrants, that are for free and need to have this autonomy. (Scup 2014)

Scup's position is far from being unique in Rome, with hundreds, if not thousands of occupied spaces. While only around 60-80 people are permanently involved in Scup, they are part of a larger phenomenon:

We are connected to all the similar spaces in Rome, to all the squats or social centres. From a certain point of view, we are also a social centre. We are involved in the struggle of migrants, women rights and many other social issues. We were evicted once, in January 2013, and some parts of the building were walled up. Two weeks later we managed to move back because besides the 60-80 people of Scup, thousands were supporting us. (Scup 2014)

As an illegal occupation, Scup's relationship with the authorities and with legality is ambiguous. While there are some mechanisms that allow occupied spaces to be formalised and legalised, this option is not attractive for Scup, nor for other social centres:

Most squats would move into buildings that already have running water and electricity. We don't pay the running costs. (...) Article 26 allows occupations to be formalised but this is not always well received by the people because it doesn't respond to the same ideology. Formalisation is very much related to fulfilling rules of accounting and taxation: as there are no subsidies for culture, this restricts very much the activities in these buildings. Spaces that comply with Article 26, tend to reduce their cultural and social activities and become clubs, are conformed, otherwise they cannot survive financially. (Scup 2014)

Informality often signifies vulnerability: illegal occupations regularly come under attack with the introduction of new laws or regulations, and with changes in the political establishment. Scup was evicted for the second time in May 2015, as part of the new municipality's campaign of reinforcing legality and rationalising the situation of occupations in the city. Following the eviction, the Scup community moved over to another location within the same district. The local activist magazine San Giovanni Comune called Scup "a cultural presence that resists the speculation of abandoned spaces and returned these spaces to the community. An open, traversable and liveable space: in one word, liberated." (San Giovanni Comune 2016)

The protest against privatisation, a common theme of social movements in Rome, is closely connected to resistance against speculation and unauthorised construction projects by powerful developers. Not far from the various occurrences of Scup, in the eastern Roman district of Pigneto, the CSOA ExSnia squat played a crucial role in saving a green area and a lake from the construction of a supermarket and a parking garage. The area's history is reminiscent of a fairy tale: the lake appeared in 1992 when a developer began the construction of the foundations for a housing complex, involuntarily hitting a previously unknown natural underground water source, thus creating a lake of 10.000 m², just behind the former Snia Viscosa factory. As an activist of the CSOA ExSnia social center described,

Someone arrived with a huge bulldozer. They were digging and they drilled so much that water started to leak. The more they were digging, the more water leaked from the ground, until the place were totally flooded. They started pumping out the water but at that point the earth collapsed and even the bulldozer fell into the water. (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

With pressure from the social centre and local organisations, in 1994 the municipality began the expropriation of the area, with the objective of creating a park around the Lago ExSnia. The area became public in 2004, with the expropriation contract obliging the municipality to begin operations within 10 years, with the risk of losing the area to the previous owner. While local associations and design professional were fighting plans for the construction of various public and private facilities around the lake and organised a number of events and workshops to elaborate plans for the park, the municipality did not move ahead with the procedures necessary to establish the park.

A few weeks before the expropriation contract's deadline, the local Forum Territoriale, with the help of the social centre, organised a gathering to make a strategy for securing the park and putting pressure on the municipality. The association presented their plans and feasibility studies for the park, and organised a demonstrative visit to the City Hall the next day. The association's mission was successful: after 10 years of immobility, now reacting to the pressure of local groups, the City Council

immediately allocated funding for the park and the area was saved from becoming again a private construction site.

In all this, the social centre played a central role: with a non-stop presence in the area and acting as an anchor point for local activists and organisations, the CSOA ExSnia was an important coordinating force in the process. The social centre had been established in the area since the 1990s. Occupying a part of the former viscous factory that shut down after World War II, activists of the social centre managed to create a series of activities for the traditionally left-wing neighbourhood:

This space is a happy island where everyone would like to live in. A very peaceful space with no conflicts, no war. We are a self-managed, self-organised social centre and what we do is mostly related to social issues. We run a variety of activities. There is a kindergarten, and we also have psychological support service for women who were victims of violence. All the activities here are for free, from the language lessons, to the dance and theatre classes. We also have a radio, an orchard, a basketball field, and a space for events, parties, festivals, available for free. (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

Like many other social centres, the CSOA ExSnia is engaged and involved with migrant rights, by offering otherwise non-existent services to help immigrants and their integration:

We have a free language school that doesn't ask for any documents – as many of the people who would come here are undocumented. This allows them to access language courses: language is the first tool for integration. (...) Years ago, there was a revolt in Rosarno, Calabria, by immigrants who were working on the fields and who decided to reject the horrible working conditions close to slavery. We supported them by hosting them here. (...) "We recently established a cricket field because in this neighbourhood many Bangladeshi families live. But besides them, also the kids of people living or working here are learning to play cricket. It's working very well as there are not many cricket fields in Rome, as it's not a traditional sport here. (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

While it remains an illegal occupation, the CSOA ExSnia keeps a strong relationship with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, beyond political activism or particular social values:

We have many people from the neighbourhood who come here regularly and they help us. For example, the little orchard here started by people living here. But you need also to care for the plants. The tomatoes and bamboos planted here began to mix and you couldn't really use any of the products that were cultivated here. Until an old lady from the neighbourhood, Maria, who knew someone from the management committee, came and took over and managed to put everyone at work and explained them how to handle and cut the plants. (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

Furthermore, the social centre also maintains many channels of cooperation with public authorities. Building on the neighbourhood contract – a legal procedure from the 1990s that enabled the joint planning and management of public facilities by citizen organisations and public administrations – the social centre contributed to the rehabilitation of a public park and the establishment of a neighbourhood space, adjacent to the lake saved from construction:

The area next-door is the property of the city council of Rome. Here, with the municipality, we renovated the sheds on the premises that had no walls, no roofs. This space nowadays hosts workshops, a conference room and the museum of the area's historical memory. This factory was the biggest employer of the area at the time: most of the people from the neighbourhood have family members who worked here. The building also has a photovoltaic system that also has a didactic function explaining how renewable energy works. They also have a children space that also functions as a kindergarten in summer. (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

As the examples of Scup and the CSOA ExSnia demonstrate, occupied spaces or social centres, that claim to be outside of regulation and autonomous, are closely connected not only to other social centres but also mediating actors like the local municipalities or energy companies. Although formally illegal, they are not in a black-and-white legal situation. They have many formal and informal channels of cooperations with the public administrations, in the form of tolerance, political support or cooperation. For instance, while Scup used all its energy illegally, the CSOA ExSnia has a special agreement with the Region that supplies them electricity for free, as a recognition of their importance and services: "There is space for informal agreements and acceptance." (CSOA ExSnia 2016)

This shows that actor-networks organised around an abandoned building or site in Rome are highly complex and include many actors whose formal role might be very limited. Through formal or informal processes of cooperation, neighbourhood mobilisation and political pressure, many actors from these social movements have a significant impact on how local urban development unfolds and how empty buildings are rethought. Due to their formal illegality, however, many of occupied spaces find themselves in a constantly negotiated situation that makes them vulnerable on one hand, but also makes them powerful local actor, inevitable in local committees, reunions, neighbourhood councils, on the other.

4.3. Institutions in crisis: the building of parallel services and infrastructures in Rome

Besides critically reducing public holdings in Rome, the privatisation of transport, education and health facilities or of green spaces, also contributes to the increasing crisis of welfare institutions in the city. Austerity measures downloaded to local governments severely impacted Rome. When Ignazio Marino, the centre-left candidate was elected to mayor in 2013, he found a severely indebted city with hidden holes in the municipal budget adding up to an estimated 700 millions of euros. After a series of negotiations with the parliament, Rome was “saved”: the city received a bailout from the Italian government, with an agreement forcing the city to follow further austerity measures, cutting budgets in culture, education and social services.

The bailout called “Salva Roma” and the corresponding agreements on limited public spending aggravated the crisis of social and cultural services already existing in Rome. While the cuts began with the elimination of 15 bus lines in Rome’s peripheral neighbourhoods, it was only one step in the gradual surrender of basic services across the city through the closure of various institutions, dozens of hospitals, cinemas, theatres, schools, libraries and markets. The suppression of many public jobs also resulted in the “abandonment of any urban maintenance action, with consequent worsening of liveability in the city” (Indovina 2015:115) and the degradation of many public spaces and green areas.

For many citizens, the most tangible aspect of the crisis is the degradation of the public domain, against which community groups organise themselves by coming together for regular cleaning actions of public areas in their neighbourhoods. However, for many commentators, the decay of public spaces is only to surface of the problem the city is facing:

The rhetorics of ‘degradation’ and ‘decorum’ seem to have become the only possibilities to discuss the public administration. It’s not difficult to consider how these are two pseudo-concepts that relate to the perception of the city and not its real functioning. On the other hand, it is also clear that making politics in the name of these rhetorics, opposite and complementary, occults the lack of public interventions for the disadvantaged classes and removes all the structural questions of corruption, clientelism, material inequality and criminality. (Raimo 2015)

Structurally, similarly to other cities, austerity in Rome principally affected the most vulnerable social groups in the city through the “deterioration of collective services with increasing phenomena of exclusion of the most needy social strata, thus substantially reversing the actual purposes of those services. (Indovina 2015:115) Besides bringing along the crisis of urban infrastructures like the services related to energy provision, waste management and public transportation, the dissolving of urban welfare is also signalled by the closure of social services and “the elimination of the invisible web that in every city helps the life of many people who have a greater need of assistance.” (Berdini 2014:109)

The limited commitment of the administration in providing social and cultural services has only increased the level of self-organisation present in civil society, which found fertile ground due to the active squatting scene dating back to the 1980s. These active citizens have often initiated processes in abandoned properties, both private and public, in order to respond to local needs. As an official of the Rome Municipality admitted: “*There is an economic crisis and the administration doesn't have the means to manage all the area. Therefore citizens are coming together to take this role. It's a reaction.*” (Rollo 2016)

As demonstrated in the previous pages, some initiatives to occupy vacant buildings aim at blocking speculation and privatisation projects. Others seek to put pressure on administrations to fulfil their role and deliver crucial services. In some instances, civic initiatives have acted as catalysts for municipal innovation itself, pressing administrators to take steps in order to establish much needed services or spaces. In March 2014, local associations in Garbatella, a culturally active neighbourhood south of the historical centre, occupied a former public bath building, demanding its conversion into a cultural centre and a public library baptised Moby Dick. The activists argued for the library, highlighting the vacuum left by the closure of the only public library of the district: "The experience of Moby Dick is a strong sign of breaking with austerity politics. The participation of a wider local community at the bottom-up activation of a building, claiming an active role in the management of public assets and public goods, indicates the welcome return of 'common interest' as principal object of the citizens' attention."

These interventions build on a strong tradition of building occupations and social cultural centres that grew out of Rome's squatting scene in the 1980s. In the following decades this scene has transformed into a large variety of self-organised realities through which activists have created a parallel cultural and social infrastructure, sometimes with the compliance of authorities, sometimes confronting them. As budget cuts and privatisation made a strong impact on Rome's social and cultural services, many elements of an unfolding parallel cultural infrastructure were given birth by institutions shutting down, cultural venues closing and public properties privatised. Theatre classes, film screenings, concerts and workplaces organised in occupied movie theatres, art museums in peripheral industrial complexes, sport and educational activities in vacant school buildings have all been important building blocks of the parallel infrastructure, born in abandoned buildings and responding to local needs.

The „absence and inadequacy of institutions" defending public values (Cellamare 2014:73) and the fact that municipalities have often cooperated with the large developers also turned conflicts around urban development projects into a „direct confrontation between large developers and local mobilisations who gave up their social claims from municipalities" (Cellamare 2014:71) and who created a new public realm through appropriated spaces and services managed in autonomy from public administrations. The fight for adequate services took place in various fields: besides activist responses to the housing crisis, spaces of culture and education, such as cinemas, theatres or schools and libraries have been equally taken over by self-organised communities, addressing the lack of community services sustained by the city administration.

Many commentators saw the administration's role in the evolution of this parallel social infrastructure as purely cynical, using the value created by these initiatives but keeping them in illegality and therefore vulnerability:

In reality, this work is very convenient for the municipality, because while one social centre doesn't do much, there are 50-60 of them in Rome, and they certainly play the role of a substitute in the fields neglected by the municipality. While previous administrations implicitly recognised this role and protected these spaces from police interventions, the current administration cannot understand the importance of a popular gym that does not generate money. For them, a gym that is free cannot work. (Alberti 2015)

The deterioration of public services did not only impact disaffected neighbourhoods and disadvantaged social groups: the lack of spaces for youth has been one of the key motives for occupying abandoned spaces also in more affluent areas of the city. While during fascism, the church was given the role of creating leisure spaces for youngsters, with the gradual disappearance of this role after the war, "many youngsters had nowhere to go to do sports or just to hang out. This is why people started occupying spaces and this became a big movement." (Colangeli 2016)

The initiative of Cinema America Occupato demonstrates this tendency: one of Rome's most visible recent occupations was born from the discontent of a group of high-school students who went to school in Rome's affluent Trastevere neighbourhood and were left with no spaces to meet after school:

After the 2009 Gelmini reform, we all found ourselves with the schools closed in the afternoon, so we had no possibility to meet each other outside the school, there was no space for us youngsters. We tried through the municipality, but they didn't manage to give us any kind of space. We realised that a major part of abandoned buildings were cinema spaces, so we decided to join a struggle already brought forward by the neighbourhood, to save the Cinema America. Therefore we occupied the building and entered. (Croce 2015)

The students' success depended, to a large extent, on cooperation with other initiatives already active in Trastevere. Charming residents with their young age and their sharp discourse, they could build on their support in establishing their presence in the area:

We began to make activities in the neighbourhood. There was already a committee of residents to save the cinema. It wasn't a purely cinematographic discourse. Some residents wanted a cultural space, others loved cinema itself, yet others didn't want speculation in the neighbourhood, many different reasons to bring them together in various associations and committees to defend the cinema. It was a fight that had been going on for years before our arrival. They always supported us and continue to support us, as they understood that we could be the force to block this affair of speculation. At a certain point, the residents themselves asked us: 'why don't you just occupy the cinema, why don't we save this space together?' (Croce 2015)

Occupying a space for them was a tool that the "ragazzi del Cinema America" – as they came to be called – inherited from other social movements in the city. It seemed like an efficient way to bring attention to a problem and to temporarily fulfil their spatial needs:

While we were looking for a space through the institutions, we were always part of the movements of Rome: when we realised that the municipality was very shortsighted, and the neighbourhood really needed a space, we took the responsibility to reopen it. In the beginning, the occupation was symbolic. But as it had a lot of success, and the neighbourhood was happy with what was happening, it was prolonged. The more there was a consensus about the cinema, the more it went on. (Croce 2015)

During the two years of the occupation, the daily use of the movie theatre's space required significant renovation works. In order to have the building running and to avoid any incidents that would result in the immediate eviction of the cinema, the occupants had to fix many parts of the building. In this process, they acquired skills that helped them operate the building in an increasingly efficient and cost-effective way:

We found ourselves in a space that was abandoned for 14 years: it was raining inside, it was used as a warehouse or even a dumpster by the owner, it was completely destroyed. We entered, rolled up our sleeves and began to work on it. This means that we have been transformed into electricians, architects, masons. We had to learn as we had to do everything. Thanks to the donations, we managed to renovate a part of the cinema, make it secure, restore the roof so that it doesn't rain inside: we gave back some of its old shine. This process lasted two years and everyday something else was put in place. People probably didn't realise when another row of chairs was added or an electric panel was repaired: it was continuous work. (Croce 2015)

Faithful to the traditions of occupied spaces, the space was managed through an assembly where, in theory, anyone could participate, within the main lines. Besides using the space, and in coordination with the residents' associations in the neighbourhood, the occupation also aimed at securing the building by granting it a heritage status. In this process, support from the cinema industry played a very important role:

Our support was born from the fact that we tried to send a message different from other cinemas or productions. We began to work with an audience of digital natives who watch films in streaming, on mobile phones or computers and don't go to cinema; while we think that going to cinema is an important moment of aggregation and sociability. Bringing back young people into the movie theatres, we created a new idea of cinema, and this was very interesting for many producers and directors. Knowing that youngsters abandon the movie theatres for streaming, makes them suffer, because for them it's important that we live their films together. This gave us the possibility to unite a part of Italian cinema in our struggle. (Croce 2015)

In July 2014, the minister of culture promised monumental protection for the building that would prohibit any change in the building's use and physical structure. A few months later, however, despite the significant popular and professional support to the cinema's activities, after nearly two years of the occupation, in September 2014, the cinema was evicted. Losing the space highlighted the the building's role in keeping together a community:

Once we were out of the cinema, we managed to create a continuity. It was difficult because we were all linked to the building. Without it, we felt lost. Fortunately, with the help of the nearby empty pastry shop that was offered to us, we managed to create a cultural program that received support from producers, directors and actors alike. Due to this, we could sit down to the table with the Municipality and look for a new space together. (...) Marino promised us a space but didn't keep any of his promises. (Croce 2015)

Nevertheless, the "ragazzi del Cinema America" did not give up on the building that gave their name. Following the eviction, they brought together all their supporters from the neighbourhood and the cinema industry, and made an unprecedented attempt to raise funds to buy the building. In November 2014, the group made an offer to the owner:

We managed to create a consortium of film producers for an offer of 2 and half million euros for the Cinema America building. The owner declined the offer, augmenting the price with an additional 5 million euros, to an impossible sum of 8 million euros. Moreover, we just started the negotiation when the municipality backed out from playing the role of facilitator in the process. (Croce 2015)

In the planning process, the building, while originally a canvas for the group to project their needs and ideas, has become an actor with its specific affordances for not only the planned function but also the project's economic feasibility:

With the help of a university, we tried to create an architectural model that can be economically sustainable but still maintains the original architectural form and structure, maybe with a panoramic terrace that can be used as a bar, or a photovoltaic system for energy and various measures in order to create a business plan and a reality as sustainable as possible. (...) The idea was a multipurpose space open 24/24, with a study room open day and night like in many European cities, with theatre workshops, writing workshops, cinema every night and streaming of the matches of AS Roma: all initiatives and activities to fill the space to make it self-sustaining. We made several business plans, made calculations based on free entry and suggested donations, because in two years, we collected about 200,000 euros without any mandatory entrance fee. This helped us to identify a feasible business plan and to go ahead with it without making a loss. (Croce 2015)

Although the transaction did not take place, it revealed the dynamics of interaction between the building, its owner, the real estate market, planning regulations and neighbourhood associations that altogether defined the economic value of Cinema America:

The municipality doesn't defend movie theatres as they aim at converting them: because they don't see a social or cultural value in cinema buildings, they don't care about maintaining their use either. What's important for them is that the buildings get reused, so that instead of extending the city at the peripheries, there are more functions in the centre. The problem is that it is not true that there is no need for these spaces. (...) Owners see a movie theatre as an available building volume. A volume of the size of the Cinema America in Trastevere is almost invaluable, with a worth well beyond 15 millions of euros. A cinema in Trastevere has a value of zero. The problem is not only that already 42 movie theatres have been reconverted into apartments, but that even a cinema that functions well will never make as much money as an apartment building. This situation does not only hinder the reopening of Cinema America but prompts its closure to build something else. (Croce 2015)

Nevertheless, when the building was recognised as "of cultural interest" by the Ministry of Cultural Goods and received a monument status in November 2014, it also meant protection for the cinema, both concerning the building's physical structure and its use. The constraints imposed on the building by the heritage status suddenly changed its economic possibilities:

The economic value is almost nothing because you cannot change the use nor the physical structure. You need to operate the building as a cinema, but cannot turn it into a multiplex. This means that, seen the demand for single-screen cinemas in the city, the value is almost nothing and therefore it is a

useless volume. The owner has absolutely no intention to manage the building as a cinema. The other option is to keep it abandoned for years, until it collapses, until it reaches a structural condition that he can demolish it. (Croce 2015)

The building's story does not stop here: defending his right to "financialise" the building, that is, to transform it into an apartment building, the owner of Cinema America made an appeal against the heritage designation. In the meanwhile, the cinema's former occupants, using the skills, visibility and personal and professional networks they built up as the "ragazzi del Cinema America," won the competition to operate another vacant movie theatre in the Trastevere neighbourhood, Sala Troisi.

4.4. Teatro Valle and the commons movement

If the building of Cinema America accommodated a youth movement that requested access to "afternoon spaces" and helped in transforming it into an increasingly professionalised group of students who laid claim to a "new idea of cinema," abandoned cultural buildings gave momentum to a series of other movements. Among these, the most important is, without any doubt, the commons movement that entered the mainstream discourse with the occupation of Teatro Valle.

In May 2010, structural cuts in the Ministry of Culture's budget forced the state company running four national theatres in Firenze, Bologna and Rome to cease its activity. As a consequence, the four theatres, including Teatro Valle located in Rome's historical core closed down, warning the city's cultural scene of the possibility of privatising the theatre's building, a protected heritage from 1712. On June 14, 2011, Teatro Valle was occupied by a group of actors, authors, directors and dancers for a three-day protest against cuts to culture:

We felt the urgency of a stronger expression, of more efficient practices to make evident the dissolution of the welfare situation that our country is advancing and that often translates as a lack of investment, like in the case of culture where we arrived to almost zero during the twenty years of Berlusconi's hegemony. (Cirillo 2014:92)

On June 15, the ownership of the theatre was passed from the state to the city. The occupation was prolonged, and by Autumn 2011, Teatro Valle Occupato (the Occupied Valle Theatre) has become an established cultural presence in the city, "a place to share with others to develop one's work, (...) a place of production (...) and a place for life-long learning." (Cirillo 2014:100) Teatro Valle was also accommodating many theatre classes, workshops and performances as well as winning several theatre awards, national and international:

we able to engage with the city, to revive the right to the city or the right to build the city based on the needs and desires, to have places for culture, socialisation and aggregation, places for affections and relations, for games and to lose time. (Cirillo 2014:94)

While the occupants were originally motivated by "reasons related to [their] work and conditions of existence" and therefore "haven't envisaged a battle related to the commons" (Cirillo 2014:89)

the theme of the commons opened up a horizon. We realised right away that raising the issue in terms of commons and commoning has the capacity to bring together very different struggles. (Cirillo 2014:90)

In January 2012, occupants of the theatre launched a committee to raise funds for a foundation to protect Teatro Valle as a Common. With the help of jurist Ugo Mattei, Teatro Valle became one of the centres and battlegrounds of the unfolding discourse on the commons: with the slogan „Like water, like air, let's take culture back", occupants claim culture as a part of the commons, the field of goods that are not private, nor public (in the sense of public administrations) but belong to communities. The juridical work around the Teatro Valle Commons Foundation was the continuation of scholar work on introducing the commons in the Italian civil code, initiated by the Ministry of Justice in 2007. Picking up this discontinued thread, the Constituent of the Commons, promoted by Ugo Mattei, looked at other practices of self-governed and occupied spaces across Italy, aiming at integrating their experiences into a revised law proposal concerning the commons.

Reactions on the Teatro Valle's work were divided: while many voices appraised the theatre's organisers for saving the building and its cultural function as well as for creating a horizontal decision-making model in running the institution, others critiqued the theatre's clientelist structure and abuse of public money in the form of unpaid energy bills of 90.000 euros per year. After negotiations with the Department of Culture and an international call to protect the Teatro Valle Foundation, police evicted Teatro Valle in July 2014, and the occupants were forced to continue their negotiation with the Municipality about the theatre as a common outside the theatre.

Despite the eviction, and the moderate success of rebuilding, reassembling the experience in other spaces, Teatro Valle opened many questions about the commons – and just as many about legality:

Now all parties have to decide if they're really interested in the experiment of the commons. Especially institutions and the politics that preside over them, have to decide if the commons is only a material to be used in empty party slogans or an emerging modality of care and management practiced by the community of citizens, outlined in new paths and instruments of legitimate juridical value. (Cirillo 2014:107)

Building on the work of the Teatro Valle Commons Foundation and other initiatives, the following years saw many attempts to regularise the way publicly owned spaces and public services are managed by community organisations. In February 2014, a network of associations, informal groups, and community organisations "taking care of unused spaces and managing self-organised activities of welfare, education and cultural promotion that should be managed by public institutions" founded the "Patrimonio comune" (heritage as commons) coalition, with the aim of working together for the return of unused public properties into community use:

The attempt was to get the approval of a resolution by the City Hall, that would make a law on the use of public property and also imagine a procedure to use private property. (...) The idea was allocation based on a convention in which the association is committed to providing certain services at the territory where they are located, and therefore have access to a building for 0-20% of the market rent of the property. (Alberti 2015)

Using the experience of its members in occupying and managing spaces, the coalition set itself to establish a participatory model for the efficient management of public real estate assets, also translated into a legal framework. However, the ambition create formal, legally binding mechanisms significantly filtered the participants:

Some people we invited did not participate, basically because they don't believe in regularisation, maybe they occupy a space but don't want the recognition of the municipality because they prefer a situation of tolerance; but they can be constantly blackmailed. (...) The fact that the municipality was not available for real discussion meant that many groups that participated initially have stopped participating, believing that we would not have any results. (Alberti 2015)

Through a series of workshops and consultations, drawing inspiration from the Bologna Regulation of the Commons ((Foster and Iaione 2016) and mechanisms implemented by the municipality of Naples, the coalition drafted a resolution enabling the community use of unused public as well as private real estate, referring to Article 42 of the Constitution, stating the obligations of private owners in maintaining their properties. Drafting the resolution highlighted some of the most important dilemmas concerning the regulation of community access to vacant public properties, by creating

a long discussion on the use of two instruments: the direct allocation and the competition. A part of the group supported direct allocation as a recognition of the work already done by an organisation in a public building; others argued that if direct allocation becomes a rule, it can serve as a municipal tool for clientelism, a source of corruption. The resolution proposes both, mentions both public competitions and control and direct allocation in specific cases. (Alberti 2015)

The discussions also revealed the various positions citizen-run spaces take in their relationship with institutions and other actors:

There is an anarchist-type approach that says: no collaboration with the municipality, we recovered a common good, we have social activities, we don't need recognition, the only thing we need is to avoid eviction. (...) Then there is another approach that asks for recognition but has limited trust in the participatory process. Within this, there are many discussions about direct allocation, permissions, legality. Some people say that if a group manages a public property, it is acceptable in the period of fight to be outside of regulations; but when an occupation becomes stable, it should come into compliance and pay taxes like everyone does. Some of us think this but many social centres don't agree. And they are, from this viewpoint, easy to blackmail. (Alberti 2015)

In Spring 2015, the proposed resolution was brought to the City Council as a citizen initiative collecting over 5000 signatures and thus obliging the City Council to discuss it. In July 2015, the Council dismissed the proposal, rejecting in particular its scheme of bringing privatisations to a halt, its mechanism of designation allowing the direct assignment of spaces to organisations that already invested energy in them, and its proposal to expropriate badly maintained private properties.

After attempts for formalise community access to abandoned public buildings, concerns of “legality” have become a core preoccupation of the Rome Municipality. The 2014 outbreak of the *Mafia Capitale* scandal that revealed mafia involvement in the management of various public services from emergency housing and refugee shelters to waste management and social funds to marginal communities prompted the introduction of an “assessore della legalità,” a mayor-appointed supervisor of all municipal activities. After the resignation of the mayor in October 2015, the administration – temporarily controlled by a government-delegated commissioner – began an unprecedented wave of evictions in early 2016. With hundreds of social spaces receiving eviction letters in the first months of the year (Bix 2016), the vital infrastructure of around 800 social centres, housing occupations, popular gyms and cultural associations came into danger (Ciccarelli 2016). The evictions, based on Article 140 of 2015, triggered a lot of criticism and generated a debate about the importance of legality in regard to accessing space.

For supporters of social centres, the evictions would mean the disappearance of culture, in the absence of proper institutional frameworks and funding:

I don't know what idea of culture do you have for this city if you close the Circolo degli artisti, the Rialto, the Valle, Scup, if you (...) threaten with eviction any occupied theatre or cinema, if you have no money to support any project, if the municipal contributions arrive with years of delay (...) You have replaced art, culture and life with security and legality. (Raimo 2016)

For others, evictions signalled the return of legality, with the possibility to renew culture through the valorisation of public properties:

Someone in Rome, after forty years of laxity and anarchy which brought the capital to become an epicentre of organised crime (...) is trying to enforce the law. It happens because there is a commissioner to administer the city, an individual who doesn't need to ask for votes, grow clientele or trade votes. It must be the reason for culture to go down: while everywhere else in the West, cultural production stands up due to occupations and illegal spaces, doesn't it? Unfortunately for Raimo and his friends, there are some recent decisions to retrieve municipal real estate assets to valorise them – and to use revenues also to finance the miserably under-funded culture – or to assign them not to those who occupy them but those who win a regular call. (Tonelli 2016)

As a response to the evictions and in preparation for the June 2016 elections, many social centres and citizen initiatives came together to draft the Carta di Roma Comune (Charta of the Rome Commons). Sceptical of the public administration truly pursuing the “public interest” after the revelations of the *Mafia Capitale* scandal, in their open letter to the mayoral candidates, the assembly drafting the Charta made a strong critique of the municipality's concept of legality:

“The dogma of the ‘restoration of legality’ produced perverse effects: the widespread destruction of the public domain, its weakening to the advantage of the market, the imposition of competition and the business model as a general rule over all matters concerning the res publica. The commissioner government seems to want to write the founding principles of a new city

model, radicalising the tendencies already in place: the financialisation of the commons, the sale of public assets and the privatisation of public services." (Carta di Roma Comune 2016)

Instead of pursuing this new model, the Chart of the Rome Commons made the case to define the urban commons, their potential use and protection:

The commons are what are commonly used and produced by citizens, but this use needs to preserve the goods, services or spaces as commons, thus enjoyable by everyone. In this sense, we claim the establishment of a common right to use what is common: heritage, essential public services, social spaces, parks and water. The urban commons should not be sold, externalised or managed with invitation to tender. Rome's technical administration is trying to control the actions of the future mayors approving laws and regulations until the last minute before elections. At the contrary we want to start a constituent phase, which tries to take back the control from the bottom over the assets, the services and the city as whole. (Bix 2016)

In April 2016, the Carta di Roma Comune, together with the #RomaNonSiVende (Rome is not for sale) campaign brought to the streets about twenty thousand people to demonstrate against evictions, privatisation and corruption, and managed to put pressure on the municipality and prompt a temporary suspension of the evictions.

4.5. Crafting cooperation: from mapping resources to making policies

The Spring 2016 demonstrations to protect occupied spaces were not without any precedent. The quasi-legalisation of occupied spaces in the 1990s, through the Article 26 of 1995 – allowing the legal recognition of social centres and the concession of controlled rent – was a result of significant public pressure on Rome's Rutelli administration. In reality, as a response to this pressure, successive administrations of the past decades elaborated a series of mechanisms and frameworks to give communities access to public properties and land. In the meanwhile, finding the common language between civic initiatives and the administration, and establishing cooperation processes with all the actors on board have proved to be extremely difficult.

The Rome municipality has been long aware of the problems and opportunities represented by empty buildings and spaces. Shortly before appointed to become the head of Rome's Urban Planning Department, the university professor Giovanni Caudo told in an interview:

Rome would need a plan (...) to reuse and regenerate existing buildings. (...) A plan that enables a pact in favour of the city, with the entrepreneurs of the construction industry oriented towards the transformation of existing real estate and not relying on changing land use. (Erbani 2013:93)

Constrained by the budget cuts dictated by the government and the region, and by the pressure from the construction industry, the Marino administration, elected in April 2013, underlined the importance of reusing the city's vacant real estate stock instead of promoting new constructions. The mayor whose Article 140 later brought to streets thousands of protestors, began his program with calling for the reuse of unused urban spaces. Regeneration as opposed to expansion has also been an important concern of the new mayor's program, as expressed in a communication by the mayor's office:

Thus begins a journey of urban regeneration, that we see as the core of our work. Urban regeneration means to recover unused spaces and to return them to citizens, promoting productive activities in the interest of communities, creating new jobs and improving the neighbourhoods of our city. (Marino 2014)

Recovering unused spaces necessitates an inventory of all public properties and their current status. Although the city of Rome disposed of an efficient database of the properties, what was missing, is

an efficient database of the properties already exists – what is missing is a database about the management of these buildings, who uses them, how much they pay, etc. At this front, the administration was poorly equipped, after outsourcing this service to a private company in the 1990s, and losing touch with the situation. (Rollo 2016)

In 2013, the Rome Municipality set itself to enumerate its own properties by creating an unprecedented database of public properties. This mapping effort was pursued within the Conferenze Urbanistiche (Urbanism Conferences) held in 2014 by the Planning Department, in collaboration with the 15 Districts in order to identify sites where zoning change is necessary. The mapping process revealed the constant presence of abandoned properties sharing a common history: disaffected industrial areas and green spaces, closed schools, cinemas, theatres and marketplaces, many of them shut down because of administrative problems, complicated assignment procedures, and a lack of experiments with new functions and management models.

In parallel with the municipality's efforts to create a cartography of resources, citizen initiatives also began mapping available spaces. Like in many other cities of Europe, with no access to centralised, municipality-managed databases, citizens set themselves to create maps of vacant buildings. Before finding Cinema America, high school students from Trastevere began mapping abandoned spaces at the online blog <http://romabbandonata.org/>,

to understand if there were any possibilities to have a space we could take care of. At the beginning, we started from our knowledge base. Being from various parts of the city, each of us added spaces they knew. Then we were looking at various websites, spoke with many people, and this is how we created this map that is not 100% complete. It cannot be complete as there are each day new abandoned spaces and many of them are hard to know. We launched a blog called Roma Abbandonata (Abandoned Rome) and made it interactive, so that people can add abandoned places they know. The map gradually grows by itself, it is self-managed. We receive many reports and try to update it as much as possible. (Croce 2015)

While the “ragazzi del Cinema America” began mapping spaces for their own needs, other actors developed platforms as tools for facilitating citizen access to vacant spaces. Keen on helping cooperation processes between property owners and initiatives to reuse spaces, the architecture office TSPOON began to develop the platform City Hound (<http://www.tspoon.org/cityhound/>) when they recognised that “because of the crisis, there are many abandoned spaces in the city, and there is an important demand to use them, but no procedures that would allow this to happen.” (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016)

When creating the platform, they explored both maps created by public entities and universities, organisations with important databases, and bottom-up mapping projects with specific focus on green spaces or cinemas. What was missing from these maps, was the step enabling their use:

These two types of maps contain a lot of data but their function is limited to information: they don't explicitly serve urban transformation and support revitalisation activities. To go one step further, we created the platform to connect owners with potential users to facilitate the reuse of vacant spaces. (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016)

In the platform's concept, the architects' specific expertise play an important role to conclude the digital matchmaking procedure:

Through filtering offer and demand, we would like to make the contact between owner and user as automatic as possible, in a way that they are both aware of what is feasible and what is not. And if there is an agreement or mutual interest, we can offer our expertise in the bureaucratic and architectural procedures: how to acquire the permits, how to renovate spaces. In the end, we are architects, and these are our real competences. (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016)

Although there has been a lot of demand from the side of cinema – people looking for vacant spaces to shoot music videos, advertisements or films – and from organisers of various kinds of events “to access spaces that are architecturally special, that fascinate people,” (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016) the platform's potential is limited by its insufficient connection to the public administration. While most of the data for the platform comes from users and mapping campaigns focusing on specific areas of the city, “ideally, this process could be connected to an open database of the Rome Municipality, that would facilitate the identification of public properties.” (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016)

Maps and platforms that mobilise information and engage citizens to provide data remain bare collections of evidence, crowdsourced databases, if they are not connected to any further step,

procedure from administrations' side. When it comes to public properties and uses that require more complex preparations than one-day events, the missing engagement from administrations to rely upon citizen platforms and integrate them into administrative procedures that facilitate citizen access to empty spaces leaves the work of maps and platforms incomplete and without structural consequences. Entities to structure access to spaces, like maps, platforms or policies can only work successfully when the reuse process – the ensemble of actions needed to achieve shared goals within the actor-network – is participated by an optimal constellation of actors that includes administrative mechanisms in place. Otherwise specific actors look for opportunities outside of the cooperation framework:

The city claims spaces for itself illegally, if it cannot legally. The administration should elaborate conditions for legality, instruments and mechanisms that allow the legal use of abandoned spaces. If we want to work legally, we need these instruments. (Glorialanza and Saracino 2016)

Trying to connect with citizen initiatives of mapping, mediating and reusing abandoned spaces, the municipality made several attempts to create mechanisms for citizen access to spaces. One of the experiments to pick up citizen mapping and link it with administrative procedures was through temporary use. Although the city had many good practices in the reuse of abandoned properties, their success usually depended on personal constellations and their formalisation into structured policies or frameworks created significant challenges for the administration. The concept of temporary use, although in use in many other Italian cities, arrived to Rome through an international program, Urbact, that promotes knowledge exchange between European public administrations.

The aim of the Temporary use as a tool for urban regeneration program, led by Rome's Urban Planning Department between 2013-15, was to enable the community reuse of abandoned urban spaces through an active role of the administration as a broker for socially engaged regeneration projects in the city's peripheral neighbourhoods. In the frame of the program, Rome looked into the possibilities of adopting the model of a temporary use agency developed in Bremen. Acknowledging that Rome's many "abandoned green areas and buildings, very often in public property, could be a great opportunity for the redevelopment of the city," the head of the Planning Department declared

a particular interest towards temporary use, because this allows for experimentation, testing new uses for these spaces, with the flexibility of the short timespan in order to improve the strategies for these spaces. (Caputo 2016)

In the course of two years, the municipality experimented with meanwhile uses on various locations, including an abandoned railway infrastructure site, a heavily underused school building and a food market identified by the local district council as a valuable public infrastructure, potentially providing local services at neighbourhood level and fostering economic activities through the metropolitan food production.

Despite thorough analysis of the model's functioning in Bremen and other cities (Patti and Polyák 2015), the Rome administration faced many challenges in the implementation of mechanisms working elsewhere. Despite the ambition of the administration to focus on the existing urban tissue and abandoned spaces, and to reuse them with the involvement of citizens, the practical implementation of these objectives have been difficult to achieve. After decades of widespread corruption at various administrative levels, many real estate management laws (often in contradiction with urban development regulations) intended to make cooperations more transparent gave an insurmountable rigidity to processes. For instance, law regulates the rents of many properties owned by the municipality or public companies: this law does not take into account location nor desired use, and guarantees that many spaces, especially at more peripheral locations, will remain unoccupied, because of the irrationally high rental fees. The undifferentiated level of rents for various uses reduces the possibility of community involvement even in the most simple cases: the rent to organise an outdoor community event at an abandoned piece of land would cost the same as for a commercial fair.

Moreover, there are no streamlined legal frameworks for the municipality to cooperate with citizen initiatives: if a community invested its energy into a parcel or a building, the most efficient way

to bring its mission to the municipality is to put political pressure on the administration. To move beyond voluntary engagements (and the exploitation of citizens' work), to remunerate collaborators' work, the municipality is obliged to launch a public competition, whose evaluation criteria might or might not include the applicant's familiarity and previous engagement with the project. This made the involvement of civic initiatives in the regeneration of vacant spaces highly complicated and time-consuming: *"it was very challenging to fulfil all the requirements of a project even if it was planned only for 90 days, because there are no regulations that foresee temporary use."* (Caputo 2016)

In the reality of public administration, the Planning Department was not alone in experimenting with the allocation of public properties to citizens and community groups: various departments of the Rome Municipality have been competing with each other to come up with progressive policy frameworks for the reuse of vacant land and properties. "Terre Pubbliche" was a competition for the assignment of abandoned public land to young cooperative of farmers, initiated after the occupation of Borghetto San Carlo. The "Delibera per spazi Verdi" was promoted by the Environment Department to assign abandoned green land to neighbourhood associations for playgrounds and gardens. The "Delibera Patrimonio di idee" was promoted by the Real Estate Department to assign public abandoned properties to neighbourhood associations, in order to create spaces for cultural productions, enterprise incubators, co-working and artist ateliers and showrooms in public housing areas. Similarly, the same department launched the call "Patrimonio Bene Comune" offering residual spaces for innovative cultural or entrepreneurial uses. The parallel, uncoordinated emergence of these initiatives are a sign of the incapability of the administration to create an inter-sectorial governance model; nevertheless, as territories do not follow administrative boundaries, what is managed separately by municipal offices, is often intertwined in reality.

Municipalities are by no means monolith structures: they function as actor-networks, with many actors representing different ideas or interests. An attempt to bring together all these actors, involving public officers from various city departments and politicians from various parties materialised in the Rome Administration's efforts to adopt a Regulation of the Commons, based on the Bologna model. Coming together in the Municipality's Casa della Città (House of the City), with the coordination of the Giorgio Arena from Labsus, the organisation that drafted the regulation for Bologna, representatives of the departments of Real estate, Urbanism, Environmental Protection, Superintendency of Cultural Goods, Communication and Participation, Commerce and Sport,

sat down at a table, read the [Bologna] regulation together and then, chapter by chapter, we reflected on how it should be modified to be adapted to the realities of Rome. Then in smaller groups, we went further into details and later we presented the results to the district mayors and representatives of all the major political parties. (Rollo 2016)

Starting from the constitution that states that all public administrations shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens individually or in associations, to carry out activities of general interest on the basis of the subsidiarity principle, the municipality's task was to create instruments for enabling citizens to give services to communities, ways for citizens and the administration to make agreements about how to manage and cure buildings, green spaces and urban squares. An ambition that seems like an objective shared by everyone, has many dilemmas hidden in the details.

A regulation is an actor to coordinate the actions of other actors and, depending on the circumstances of its creation, is shaped by the interests of many of these actors in turn. An efficient regulation – an instrument that connects the interests and ambitions of various actors – has to clarify the objectives of the use of a vacant space, the means to identify available spaces, the tasks of the administration and the citizens, the modalities of communication, participation, decision-making and the governance of spaces, the principles of public competitions, the forms of community profits and benefits, guarantees and procedures of controlling and monitoring. Furthermore, in order to pass the stage of a merely theoretical possibility, a regulation has to give easy instruments to citizens, reaching results in a short time:

We don't want the process - starting from the first step, until the signature of the contract - to take more than 2 or 3 months. It has to be a very friendly instrument. (...) The competitions have to be

easier to access, because the current ones help those already with resources and a strong business plan. (Rollo 2016)

Besides accessibility, the most important dilemma in drafting the regulation is related to occupations. While in the case of empty properties with no pending appeals or occupations, administrations can easily organise competitions with carefully deciding about their exact objectives, handling occupied properties is more complicated:

By definition, occupations are never legal. But there are many kinds of occupations: those who occupy spaces and do their own business are in an illegal occupation. In contrast, those who occupy as a protest and make cultural activities, and thus defend a public property, bring forward a cultural project or work with civil society: their illegality is discussable. At least it was until a few years ago. It has recently changed, as civil society, politics, newspapers, Europe are all asking for more legality and more rigor, and it's more difficult to recognise illegally occupied spaces and make them legal today. Maybe the administration and the occupants can meet, discuss, find a solution, instead of going to court that local associations cannot afford. (Rollo 2016)

Another challenge for the Regulation is coordination with other regulations: once adopted, it will not arrive in a legal vacuum, but in a field already populated by regulations of different kinds:

If you look at cities in Italy where the Regulation of the Commons has been approved, you can see that most of the spaces allocated are green spaces and outdoor urban areas. In Rome, if this regulation were to be enacted, there would be already a scorched earth, with the existing regulation of urban gardens already in place. Someone should try to coordinate all this, together with all the projects of the districts and the regulation of the concession of state properties. We would need to see if the Regulation of the Commons can coexist with other regulations that act along more or less the same arguments. They address the same properties, would like to arrive to more or less the same objectives but with very different tools and procedures. We have to figure out which properties can take one road, that of concessions and competitions, and which ones can take another one. (Rollo 2016)

Concluding remarks

Despite a rhetorical convergence between the Municipality and many citizen initiatives, the regularisation of occupations and the community access to unused public properties failed to materialise to date. The administration's ambition to revitalise abandoned spaces with the involvement of citizens, its efforts to transfer resolutions into practice and put into use the frameworks crafted at the municipal departments has met various obstacles. The practical applications of the theoretical and legal efforts to designate public properties as commons face many challenges: How to translate general visions of urban development into particular projects? How to regularise illegal occupations that contribute to the public good? How to take into account the value created by communities in their adapted spaces, and how to help the community capture this value? How can policy help unique processes without standardising them? How to take into account already invested energies in public competitions? How to introduce flexibility in administrations without losing transparency? How can a municipality share responsibilities and resources with community organisations without simply outsourcing public services?

Certainly, the Regulation of the Commons cannot provide solutions for all the conflicts that have emerged around vacant buildings, abandoned spaces and unused public properties in the past decades. If well-written, it can create a balance between contrasting ambitions and provide a shared field for negotiation between all actors, as the fragmented nature of Rome's actor-network around vacant spaces seems to be one of the key sources of conflict, resulting in the model that I call "confrontative," with initiatives establishing a parallel social and cultural infrastructure outside official and legal frameworks, and putting pressure on municipalities to adjust their policies and mechanisms of accessing vacant space to civic demand

A regulation that aims at pleasing all actors faces important challenges. The municipality, in its approach to vacant spaces and occupations, is under pressure by the press, state institutions and international organisations on one hand, and local communities, activists and socio-cultural initiatives

on the other. In the same time, regulations exist in the context of other regulations: their efficiency and relevance depend on their interaction with other laws and their space of manoeuvre is therefore significantly limited by them.

The process of drafting the Regulation of the Commons in Roma was discontinued in November 2015: while further meetings with citizen organisations were scheduled for that month, with the mayor's sudden resignation the whole administration fell, leaving open discussions about the commons and the future of occupied spaces. Events in the following months made it clear that the Regulation can only function in a context of shared objectives. The eviction of Corto Circuito in an East Roman suburb that desperately lacks services made many residents angry with the freshly elected municipality; the municipality responded by stating that it was not informed of the eviction and added:

The inheritance from Rutelli's famous "false law" and its cancellation later is heavy. But no political force wanted to take the bull by the horns, starting with distinguishing the good intentions of many social initiatives literally abandoned to their fate from the purely speculative situations. (Denicolò 2016)

In another situation, the intended participatory process around the planned reopening of Cinema Aquila in another Eastern Roman neighbourhood also highlighted the incapacity of the district administration to manage a cooperation process. Aiming at opening the cinema temporarily before the publication of a public competition for the building's long-term allocation and engaging in detailed discussions with various local organisations concerning the cinema's programming, the ambition of the freshly elected local leaders was blocked partly in the name of "legality" by opinion leaders, partly in the name of "security" by the political opposition and technical officers of the administration.

These situations show the limited influence in negotiating spaces not only of citizen initiatives and community organisations but also of politicians, elected representatives and public officers in the face of many hidden actors that can define processes: technical offices, offices to grant permissions, building degradation, electricity cuts, failures of a building's security system. In a context with deep distrust between actors and an experience of decades of corruption, there are many hidden actors in the actor-network that can block procedures, delay decisions, create tensions between collaborators. Responding to challenges of community access to abandoned spaces will require a meaningful dialogue between administrations and citizen initiatives, the joint redefinition of concepts like "legality," "security" and "the commons" as well as a stronger instruments to organise a shared governance of common resources.

5. Randstad: Enabling Administrations and the Professionalisation of Access to Space

Citizen initiatives as well as public institutions and private ventures in the Netherlands have been at the forefront of exploring – and exploiting – the opportunities of vacant spaces. Long established as a centre of innovation in most design-, architecture- and planning-related disciplines, with trend-setting schools and institutions, as well as with committed national and urban policies to enhance and export formats and products of spatial development, Dutch cities have been at the forefront of many spatial experiments in response to the challenges of water management, new towns or vacancy.

In a context where “inter-sectorial” communication is relatively seamless – ideas born in the cultural, activist or design fields are quickly picked up and recuperated by the private or public sector – it is particularly interesting to explore the diversity of approaches developed by various agents of urban regeneration and city making. Dutch cities are home to a great variety of bottom-up architecture and planning initiatives to regenerate abandoned buildings and even entire neighbourhoods through innovative architectural interventions and management models (Van’t Klooster 2013), surveyed and examined by municipal administrations and government offices who often intend to insert them into their local and national development strategies.

In the meanwhile, this interconnectedness between civic activities and public policies, the encouraging accommodation and close scrutiny of civic initiatives by public owners and institutions often results in their gradual incorporation in regular planning processes. While this leads to predictable procedures and streamlined mechanisms to access space for initiatives to reappropriate space, by entering these mechanisms, many of them lose the possibility to think outside the existing framework and continuously reestablished planning frameworks.

The density of the Dutch urban network – where many people commute daily between cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague – make it a unique tissue with a high degree of exchange where ideas, concepts, policies and actual practices travel smoothly from one urban centre to another. Despite all the differences between the respective cities, their physical and procedural interconnectedness inspires the optic of the following pages, looking at the Randstad as one continuous urban tissue, with case studies from various parts of this urban region.

This chapter looks into paradigmatic responses to the vacancy of urban real estate in this urban region that correspond to different positions in relation to autonomy, legality, conflict or cooperation with administrations, economic sustainability, short term or long term tenancies, or ownership: from independent spaces and the squatting movement through temporary uses to policies and mediating organisations. While there are countless initiatives and successful civic spaces in Dutch cities, this chapter is limited to a handful of them: it seeks to explore and analyse paradigmatic cases that represent a strong position or typical arrangements in the debate and practice of reusing vacant spaces. The landscape architecture firm RAAAF with its key role in disseminating the vacancy discourse and promoting the radically utopian notion of “sequential temporariness” (Rietveld 2014); the Zomerhofquartier and its unsuccessful attempt to capture a part of the value created by its intervention; the Breeding Places policy with its effects of instrumentalising creative energies for property development; the anti-squat companies operating in the gaps of vacancy and housing regulations; ANNA with its smooth model for temporary use; and SKAR with its ambition to create stability through the ownership of buildings are all such cases.

Through a series of interviews with protagonists of these cases and testimonies from actors ranging from architects, cultural activists and public officers, the following chapters examine how the failures of urban planning led to the economic crisis and financialisation of urban real estate; how squatting as an answer to housing shortage has been gradually transformed by legal pressure, public policies and the skills acquired by squatters into “spatial entrepreneurship”; how an architecture firm inflated the initially professional discourse of vacancy and made the concept of temporary use popular

among design professionals, educational institutions, public institutions and the private sector; what kinds of public and private mechanisms were created to facilitate and accelerate the access to vacant space; and how the limitations of temporary use made initiatives look for more long-term perspectives and how. Furthermore, the chapter explores the various debates and arguments opened up by the crisis, and the emerging competition for vacant space, looking into the role of various actors, civic and professional initiatives, municipalities and mediating organisations, in reusing or creating access to empty buildings.

5.1. Urban planning and the production of vacancy in the Netherlands

While spatial planning has been one of the core Dutch expertise exported worldwide – with assertive urban renewal plans in various areas of the Netherlands –, the modernist ideal of planning, informed by ambitions of spatial engineering and of a highly efficient functional organisation of urban spaces and dynamisms, has met many obstacles in the past decades.

Before the 1990s property boom, Dutch cities were in crisis. Amsterdam, for instance, experienced in the 1980s “a declining population, large-scale unemployment, a sky-rocketing number of people on welfare, growing crime rates associated with drug dealing, and cutbacks in the public infrastructure.” (Terhorst and van de Ven 2003: 95) The troubles of the urban areas were “exacerbated by the Netherlands’ adoption of a corporatist style of neoliberal governance, based on the principles of labor-market flexibility, privatization and attenuated welfare-state reforms.” (Peck 2012:465) Cities, however, were in the centre of the Dutch economic recovery of the 1990s, which was characterised by increasing property values, growing service and consumption economies, flexibilised job markets and gentrification, that also brought with it a new appreciation of (exploitable segments) of urban culture. (Peck 2012) The growing attractiveness of Dutch cities, and Amsterdam in particular, besides contributing to a drastic increase in land values and property prices, also brought along the transformation of the country’s real estate landscape, opening the way for the financialisation of residential and commercial properties alike. Paul Oudeman, the Amsterdam Municipality’s former “office space intermediary” describes 1990s office development as a process in which speculative investment replaces demand as a main drive of urban development:

In the 1990s, we saw commercial real estate becoming a real asset, more and more a financial product. It was very interesting for investors to put their money into offices. About 10-15 years ago, as the economy was booming, a lot of cheap debt came into the Dutch market, especially from Germany. The demand for assets was so huge that we started building more and more. A lot of areas across the city were turned into office areas. But this demand didn't come from the users of offices. It came from the financial markets that needed good offices to put their money in. It was a booming economy with long-term rental contracts, 10-15 years and with growing companies, carrying almost no risk. The supply of cheap foreign equity and loans, together with very ambitious local authorities - because we allowed people to build offices - brought us into the situation that we had just too many square meters of offices. When offices become an asset, there is no owner-user relationship anymore, it's just a pension fund, for instance, that owns the building and rents it out to people to use it. (Oudeman 2014)

The economic crisis that had a strong impact on real estate sectors worldwide, had a particularly devastating effect in the Netherlands: the speculative market – in which supply outpaced demand, resulting in unhealthy rates of non-occupancy already before the crisis – collapsed, together with corporate and government demand for office spaces. (Brugmans et al 2012:21) As a consequence, the number of working architects halved, developers and builders went bankrupt and municipalities got stuck with land they couldn't sell. (Oosterman 2015) From the beginning of the 2010s, there was a growing consensus among actors of spatial development that the traditional way of building and making cities, entailing land development, the business model of “housing associations, property developers, municipalities and builders, acquiring, recompensing, preparing the site, selling on” (Hajer 2015:65) will not work any longer.” (Hajer 2015:65)

Among the first actors engaged in this transformation, city municipalities in the early 2010s began to look for new ways to develop and regenerate urban land. An important part of this process

was the recognition of actors of small-scale development projects who were previously invisible for the public administrations and were therefore not considered as significant partners in urban development. As an adviser to the Amsterdam municipality explained in 2012, a moment of shared enthusiasm in new urban alliances:

In the Netherlands, the spatial planning and real estate management always happened with parties with much capital. Since 2008 it's over. We have to find new partners and they will be smaller and less rich. We have to say goodbye to old systems and to old ways of working. We earned a lot of money by selling ground and everyone had the idea that real estate would always rise in price. But from that situation of scarcity and high prices now we shift into a situation of surplus, and the only capital we have is people in the city. The shift is from money-triggered development to people-triggered development, with new concerns such as energy, water, and the climate crisis. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

People-triggered urban projects requires downsizing development. As a response to the waning of development projects, and in order to re-dynamise their real estate market and to reduce their financial burdens, many municipalities began experimenting with selling small plots of land to private home builders, to people willing to invest in their own house, supposing that

If the banks were no longer in a position to lend big lumps to big institutions, maybe private savings could be activated. It proved a great success. And it also proved some other things along the way, like that people are willing and capable to take things in their own hands. (Oosterman 2015:3) The new ideas emerging within public administrations as well as professionals – suggesting to decentralise planning schemes and take into account small actors – were a response to the public policy and private development failures unveiled by the crisis. One of the most visible consequences of the dominant mechanisms and their lack of resilience facing a crisis situation was the mass vacancy of buildings of various types: office buildings, ground floor commercial spaces, public buildings and housing. Certainly, there is a variety of causalities behind the vacancy situation of different types of real estate. While commercial vacancies have more to do with changing customer habits (e-commerce) than with overproduction, the problems of the housing market have a variety of sources, including inflated prices, stimulated by tax credits for mortgages, and the difficulty to get a loan from the bank. (Heddes and de Zeeuw 2015:47)

However, the overall perception of vacancy was that the crisis resulted in the weakening of traditional development actors and in investments evaporating from the real estate sector, leading to mass vacancy at all areas of the real estate landscape:

We always dealt with a limited number of parties such as the housing corporations and project developers. They have no investment power anymore and we have to go outside of this circle. For the next 10 years, nothing is going to happen. The banks don't put money anymore in real estate or housing or city development, so we have a lot of emptiness, a lot of wastelands, and a lot of empty offices. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

Office space vacancy has been a returning problem in the Netherlands for over 20 years. The vacancy of office spaces has many reasons. One of the major causes of vacancy is that office buildings become quickly obsolete: when new office buildings are built, they had a strong competitive advantage compared to older buildings, making their situation hopeless. Older office buildings are costly to renovate and make compatible with contemporary requirements like flexible workspaces and open spaces needed by companies today. In the same time, governments eager to reduce spending introduced the “new working” model in which

people are more flexible and forced to work from home more, therefore they need less space. It's a cycle: every now and then, they're reorganising the administration and it's shocking to see how many square meters become available. (de Boer 2015)

Another cause of vacancy is that companies come and go and their needs change rapidly. While in the late 1990s, the new IT industry filled many of the vacant office spaces, the burst of the IT bubble in 2001 increased the vacancy rate again. With the arrival of the economic crisis in 2008, many companies went bankrupt, closed their offices or left the city for cheaper locations (Keeton 2014). In addition, another reason for the decreasing demand for office space is the restructuring of work: with

the emergence of a more flexible way of work, companies needed less and less space per employee, and working spaces have shrank from around 25 to 15 square metres (Priemus 2011:4). The overproduction of offices was a result of

some perverse stimuli in play. If you look at office building production, it can be characterised as a hog cycle market: when prices are low and investment rates cheap, offices are being produced in stock, awaiting future clients. When the clients show up and prices start rising, more offices are produced and so on. That is, until the bubble bursts. It is a speculative game in which the last in the line, usually the investor, gets stuck with unsellable or unprintable office space. But this continued for as long as there was money in it for the developer and municipality. (Heddes and de Zeeuw 2015:47)

Public administrations realised the dangers of overproduction relatively early. In 2003, Amsterdam, for instance, already had a stock of 6.5 million square meters of office space, and had another 3.5 million in the plans for the following two decades. As Paul Oudeman explains, municipal officers

were looking at the figures, and recognised that something was going wrong. The total stock was about 6.5 million square meters and we had another 3.5 million square meters still in the plans for the next 20 years. So we started to reduce the office space in our plans, introduced building permit restrictions to allow no new office buildings, and brought back planned office spaces from 3.5 million to less than a half million square meters for the next 10 years. At that time we also recognised that some parts of the office areas will never be used as offices anymore, especially mono-functional office areas in the outskirts of the city, that had been vacant for about 5 years and everybody agreed that nobody is going to use them as offices anymore. (Oudeman 2014)

Besides overproduction, the financialisation of property assets of large, often publicly owned or public interest housing corporations also largely contributed to mass vacancy. In the years leading up to the financial crisis, a group of not-for-profit developers moved away from their core task in providing affordable housing towards other products with a higher return. They were also pushed by the government to experiment, to get more return, which then could be invested somewhere else. However, in the course of the crisis, the housing corporations' speculative investments into financial derivatives began to turn back against them: the biggest not-for-profit Dutch housing developer Vestia had to be saved from bankruptcy by other housing corporations, thus imposing a significant financial burden on the most important real estate owners of the Netherlands. With additional obligations from the crisis-ridden state to contribute to the public budget, the investment budget of these developers suddenly began to wither away. As a consequence, housing corporations had to focus on keeping the healthy parts of their real estate portfolios (including housing and office buildings) running, and could not sustain other parts of the portfolio, buildings that suddenly fell out of their scope and became toxic assets for them (Neelen 2016).

There are conflicting accounts about the scale of office space vacancy in the Netherlands: while most opinions agree on giving the Netherlands the leading position in Europe in terms of office vacancy rate, the amount of vacant office spaces is estimated to amount to 6.5 million (Priemus 2011:4), 7.5 million (Keeton 2014), 8 million (Oudeman 2014) or 9 million (Heddes and de Zeeuw 2015:47) square meters across the country. There are also claims of a lot of hidden vacancy that could add up to altogether 16 millions of square meters (Oudeman 2014). Major Dutch cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam have their fair share of this, with an estimated 1.3 million (Oudeman 2014) and 800.000 square meters, respectively. However, the vacancy problem is very unevenly distributed: while Central Amsterdam, for instance, has a healthy 4-6% vacancy rate, in some peri-urban areas that were built in the 1980s and 1990s, vacancy can reach 70%, creating completely abandoned zones with no serious perspectives of recovery (Oudeman 2014). According to a study by the Delft University, for an approximate 400-800.000 of this stock it is virtually impossible to find a tenant, because of their obsolete spatial organisation or disadvantageous location (Geraedts and van der Voordt 2003).

Facing the chronic problem of mass office vacancy, as the working population in the Netherlands forecasted to decline in 2011-2040 (Priemus 2011:4), many proposed solutions were articulated in the public and professional discourses. The transformation of office buildings into (student) housing and renting them out on the basis of temporary or long-term tenancy agreements (Priemus 2011:4) has initially met a lot of scepticism from the property owners' side that had to be overcome.

In 2009, when the crisis really came in, they all got very angry, blaming the municipality that we let people build too many offices. They tried to survive but had many bankruptcies. Since 2012, everybody was getting easy again, they started to revalue, started to experiment, taking transformation as a serious option. 5 years ago everybody thought it was impossible to make houses out of offices: complicated financially, in terms of the area and also architecturally. But then some people started calculating and looking at what was possible, how we can make it cheap. It turned out to be quite simple to adapt office buildings into student housing, or short-stay apartments, for instance. And nowadays they even talk about demolition and starting it all over again. (Oudemans 2014)

A few years into the crisis, the conversion of offices into housing has become a favoured response, even if it is accompanied by a "downward valuation of real estate, which is probably grossly overvalued in the books of the investors," (Priemus 2011:4) causing the value of offices "go down at least 50, maybe 60, probably 70, and in many cases 80 or 90%." (Oudemans 2014)

Besides the millions of square meters of vacant office space, another focus of attention in the discourse of vacancy was created by the public properties that became vacant because of significant government budget cuts and the very long and complicated privatisation processes. In 2010 Fons Asselbergs, a former Government Adviser on Cultural Heritage, estimated that in each of the hundred medium-sized Dutch municipalities, between 50 and 80 public and government buildings are unoccupied. This amounts to thousands of vacant buildings, without including the approximately one thousand unused military buildings and the hundreds of government-owned abandoned sites. Arna Mackic, former member of the Rietveld Landscape architecture firm explained, "the statistics make it clear that this vacancy is increasing rapidly: one farm per day, two churches a week, and one convent a month." (Mackic 2012) As the Dutch Pavilion of the 2010 Venice Biennale of Architecture showcased in the form of a provocative exhibition, there were thousands of vacant public properties scattered around in the country, including

unique vacant buildings dating from the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries that include churches, convents, airports, palaces, prisons, water towers, lighthouses, fortresses and bunkers. We wanted to research what new possibilities could be available for these 10,000 vacant public and government buildings in the Netherlands. (Mackic 2012)

After the first years of the economic crisis, vacant office spaces and public buildings were gradually recognised – or rediscovered – as vital for citizen initiatives, cultural and social projects seeking available and affordable space. In the light of more radical voices that called for a mechanism in which "office buildings should be handed over for free to those that have a nice idea for their reuse," (Heddes and de Zeeuw 2015:47) vacant locations began to be seen by the architectural scene as "blank spots", a "world of unexplored possibilities" where "architects, landscape architects, philosophers, industrial designers, fashion designers and scientists" can join and work on assignments together (Bey 2014:171). In particular, the architectural discourse emphasised the experimental potential of vacancy:

Testing things in practice is essential for the further development of new horizons and 'what if' scenarios. Urban vacancy is perfectly suited to this: it is immediately available and relatively cheap space where one usually does not bother others. These sites can accommodate a multi-disciplinary working community that addresses a precisely formulated issue for a specific period of time. This way, buildings that would otherwise have been empty provide space for the development of knowledge and entrepreneurship. (Bey 2014:171)

5.2. From squatting to spatial entrepreneurialism

Needless to say, the value and opportunities of vacant spaces were discovered long before the designers moved it into the centre of the architectural discourse in the 2010s. Decades before the current rediscovery of abandoned buildings, the Netherlands accommodated a thriving squatting scene that grew out of a counter movement questioning post-war life standards and modernistic values (Topalovic et al 2003). Besides the legitimacy it gained from the extreme scarcity of housing, squatting was largely facilitated by legislation: the Dutch Supreme Court in 1914 ruled that forced entry to an unoccupied dwelling was not a criminal offence, followed by a ruling in 1971 that an unoccupied dwelling is, by definition, not being used by the owner (Priemus 2011:1). This set a precedent to protect squatters against evictions, prompting the government to make several attempts to submit an Anti-Squat Bill to the Parliament throughout the 1970s (Priemus 2011:1). They succeeded in 1981 with the Vacant Property Act that stated that squatting was a criminal offence only if the building in question had been vacant for less than six months, a time limit later extended to one year (Priemus 2011:2).

Gaining a relatively legitimate position after decades of heavy clashes between squatters and the police, the squatting movement reached maturity by establishing support structures to provide assistance to a nationwide network of occupied buildings and initiatives. While squatting became a key element of Amsterdam's cultural life, the movement also experienced growing divisions between political squatters and those who saw vacant buildings as affordable living spaces. In the 1980s, the less confrontational strands of the squatting scene gained hegemony in the movement, and gradually entered into negotiation and cooperation with municipalities and the church, effectively taking part in city planning and providing local services (Pruijt 2013).

In the late 2000s, there were many legislative attempts to support a general ban on squatting: following a 2007 initiative, and against the position of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the 'Squatting and Vacant Property' bill was passed in June 2010 and came into force in October 2010 (Priemus 2011:3) as a clear case of a decline of tolerant public policy and a shift towards increased criminalisation. (Pruijt 2013:114) While the law succeeded in criminalising squatting, it never managed to properly regulate vacancy, thus leaving the legislation one-sided.

In its campaign against the law, the squatter movement revealed not only its various faces and the large scale of its network, but also demonstrated its influence on cultural institutions, music venues, social centres and tenant organisations. Squats were at the origin of "free cultural spaces" (De Vrije Ruimte) movement that counted around 125 self-organised spaces in Amsterdam in 1985, of which there were only 68 left in 2001, and 27 in 2014, most of them outside of the centre and at relatively isolated locations (Jansen 2015). Squats were also the basis of the IJ Industrial Buildings Guild (Gilde van Werkgebouwen), a network of 18 dockland premises represent the users who squatted the buildings from 1978 and setting up an alternative waterfront vision for Amsterdam, fighting the AWF (Amsterdam Waterfront Finance group) which initiated an ambitious plan for re-development of the IJ-Embankments (Topalovic et al 2003). The Guild's work in consolidating the position of the buildings and their culture anticipated a new, financially conscious and independent approach to using vacant buildings, highlighting the economic relevance of self-managed buildings and activities:

The Guild's buildings have achieved nothing short of an economic miracle over the last 15 years. When they first moved in, many of the original users had been unemployed for many years. 80% of the users of these premises have eventually become financially independent within a period of five to ten years. (Topalovic et al 2003)

Similarly, the examples of Post CS and Trouw, temporarily used vacant buildings, underlined the importance of finding new economic value in a period of deep economic crisis. Temporary lease has become a key instrument for many initiatives rooted in the squatting scene, in order to legally access vacant spaces. In the case of the Westergasfabriek, in Amsterdam, temporary uses organised by the cultural activist Liesbeth Jansen in the former gas factory allowed the testing of new, long-term functions for the area.

5.3. Temporary use and the role of architects

The Netherlands was one of the first countries in Europe where mass vacancy was identified as a development problem at a national scale, and where the revitalisation of vacant properties has been declared as a core component of the national architectural strategy. The discourse about vacancy entered the mainstream with the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale exhibition “Vacant NL - Where Architecture Meets Ideas” in which the Dutch landscape architecture firm Rietveld Landscape (later RAAAF) called on the Dutch government to “make use of the enormous potential of inspiring, temporarily unoccupied buildings dating from the seventeenth to twenty-first centuries for innovation in the creative knowledge economy.” (Rietveld 2012a:341)

With the exhibition, the architects addressed the Dutch government’s ambition to attain a position among the top five knowledge economies of the world, and highlighted the spatial dimensions of this ambition:

A transition to a knowledge economy of that kind calls not only for excellent research, education and nurturing of talent, but also for specific spatial conditions. Partly due to a one-sided focus on traditional economic parameters, so far little attention has been paid to the spatial conditions required for innovation. (Rietveld 2012a:341)

Besides attracting interest worldwide, the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, the “Dutch Atlas of Vacancy” exploded in the national architectural discourse like a bomb, and offered a strong new orientation to the country’s architecture policies: instead of new developments, architects should focus on abandoned buildings, working in an already built environment, with renovation and reallocation, and with an increased focus on the intersections of interior design and landscape architecture. Vacant NL also signalled a new challenge for architects: to create their own commissions and to come up with the right questions themselves, instead of waiting for commissions or entering competitions. This message was particularly loud in a moment of crisis when many architects

have lost their jobs, students of design and architecture are graduating without any employment prospects, many freelancers have used up their savings, and the government is executing unprecedented spending cuts. (Rietveld 2012a:342)

Looking into ways to invest in innovation at a time of scarce resources, Rietveld identified vacant buildings as key resources that cost a lot of public money to maintain vacant while by opening them up with the help of more flexible regulations, they could “accommodate the next generation of innovators” (Rietveld 2012a:342) and could help the country attracting young people. To highlight the dimension of the vacancy phenomenon, the Rietvelds turned to cartography, using the “cartographic method known as ‘direct mapping.’” (van de Wiel and Zoeteman 2014:137) The material outcome of the initiative, the Dutch Atlas of Vacancy does not only pinpoint vacancy, it also wants to show the possibilities. The Atlas highlights each building’s potentials in terms of infrastructure, facilities, the specific conditions of the building, the institutional and cultural environment, and the technical constraints and zoning regulations:

Besides mapping them, we also tried to show what the possibilities of these buildings are, not what they were in the past but what the possibilities for new use are. We found out in what kind of environment they are standing, what distances they have to a knowledge institute or to a building material shop, how high the buildings are, how many square meters they have. For uses, these are all important information. We also indicated all the conditions of use: for example, can you make fire in the building? Do you have electricity? How much noise can you make? (Mackic 2012)

In this sense, the Atlas is not simply documentation, but an agent of change: although the Rietvelds are “not trying to link people to spaces,” (Mackic 2012) they conceived the map to invite initiatives “to come up with ideas for vacant buildings. It is quite hard because if you want to do something with a vacant building, you have to be a good organiser, a program-maker, bounded to the spot and it takes a lot of organisation.” (Mackic 2012) For Rietveld, abandoned buildings offer what is necessary for

innovation: access to spaces of experimentation and production, and in particular, access to inspiring spaces. In contrast with the discourse on empty office buildings, the buildings mapped by the Atlas of Vacancy are unique: they were constructed in different eras, with different functions and materials. The Atlas of Vacancy underlines the particularity of each building: "Thanks to this diversity, the vacant properties provide exceptional 'affordances.'" (Rietveld 2014:33)

The physical affordances of buildings are not the sole factors that determine their opportunities. Rietveld proposes to look at them as actors in networks that link various other actors and help them unfold their potentials:

In addition to the qualities of a building itself, the 'creative ecology' to a large extent also determines the opportunities for a particular type of use. This varies from one building to another and concerns, for example, a building's relationship with a variety of services and knowledge networks: its proximity to universities and companies, the presence - or absence - of people and so on. (Rietveld 2014:17)

Consequently, buildings themselves are not enough to fulfil their potentials: they need the agency and cooperation of other actors to be transformed into re-appropriated, and potentially, civic spaces. This coalition of actors, for Rietveld, is organised around designers:

A carefully designed and precisely selected intervention sets something in motion, more than the thing itself. We focus on forms of collaboration, between technology, science and interested parties, with the designer occupying a central place, and amassing knowledge. And that knowledge has to be translated to smart design interventions, which in their turn need design craft. (Rietveld 2012b: 34)

In the discourse of Vacant NL and the work of Rietveld Landscape, temporariness has a central role. For Rietveld and his colleagues, vacancy is a temporary condition in the perpetual transformation of cities, and therefore projected uses also have to be temporary, adapting to the time interval between two uses:

If you think of the potentials empty buildings have and if you know how many people in the city can use a place like this, the possibilities are endless. There are plans for many of them, but they take so much time, that between the moment they became vacant and now, nothing happened. Wasted years in top locations. Vacant NL was an attempt to find a new form of use for these buildings, to use the time in between. (Mackic 2012)

The Rietvelds' embracing of temporary use comes from a pragmatic perspective. For them, the value of temporariness is that it is often more simple to obtain permissions for a building's short term use, than for the long-term. Therefore, short term uses, besides offering indications for long term possibilities, also allow experimentation with unconventional programmes and might generate more innovation both in the use of the spaces and the accommodated activities:

Temporary use means from the day that a building becomes vacant till the day that it gets reallocated, renovated or demolished. We do this because in the in-between time you can experiment a lot as there are less regulations, but you can experiment with a program for the definitive use, you can try things out that wouldn't be possible if you reallocated it immediately. Reallocation takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money in Holland, it could take years of municipal meetings, for people to find the right program for a building. In the meanwhile all these buildings stay empty, and a lot of things could happen in them. In Amsterdam, quite many initiatives started out with a program for a building, thinking that it would last 1 or 2 years. But with the crisis this 1 or 2 years now take 5 years. You see that temporary could be from 1 week to 10 years. It's really pity if a building just stays vacant for those 10 years, just because people think temporary use is not the final answer. (Mackic 2012)

Temporary use, while much criticised by the Vrije Ruimte movement for its gentrifying impact and systematised precariousness, is seen uncritically by Rietveld. The interim and experimental reuse of buildings, on one hand, offers "valuable insights into the long-term potential of a location" (Rietveld 2012a:344). On the other hand, the large number of vacant buildings make possible what the Rietvelds call "sequential temporariness," that is, the "rapid moving from building to building in the sea of vacancy." (Rietveld 2014:17)

Translating the considerably utopian vision of “sequential temporariness” into practice needs cooperation between various actors, coordination and a clear distribution of roles among them. For the Rietvelds, as taught in the Studio Vacant NL, a specific Master programme established at Amsterdam’s Sandberg Institute “to train designers, craftsmen, legal specialists and scientists to become specialists in temporary usage,” (Rietveld 2012a:345), the role of coordination is assigned to architects, who have developed a new relationship with buildings in the past years:

The situation completely changed: program is not looking for buildings anymore, but existing buildings are looking for a program. The question totally turned around. If architects really want to make a relevant contribution to facing those societal problems, they have to enter into alliances with researchers, specialists and other parties, as architects don't know everything, you have to find the knowledge in other professions. Architecture integrates knowledge from all these different disciplines by using a broad set of design skills. The role of the architect in these projects is to use all the knowledge on vacancy and also from other disciplines, to be a mediator that finds all the different parties and brings them together. (Mackic 2012)

Besides educational establishments, other professional institutions like the International Architecture Biennale of Rotterdam (IABR) also set themselves to promote the role of architects in the new circumstances of urban development. By experimenting with new cooperations in urban development and by bringing attention to architects’ interventions like the Schieblock, an empty Central Rotterdam office building revitalised through the incremental strategy of the architecture office Zones Urbaines Sensibles, the IABR positioned architects in the core of new processes of making city:

We began by focusing on three intertwined issues: the role of design and of the set of tools of planning; the role of the alliances of actors actively operating in the process of making city; and the role of good governance. (Brugmans et al 2012:10)

5.4. From temporariness to permanence

In contrast with the theory of temporariness promoted by Vacant NL and the strength of the discourse and educational activities of RAAAF, not everyone sees temporariness as an advantage. Departing with the concept of meanwhile use, many initiatives move on to operate with longer term ambitions. Beyond the vagueness of the term “temporary” that can refer to a range of intervals from a day to 10 years, the need to go beyond temporariness and the corresponding precariousness is connected to the commitment to create links with a neighbourhood and its communities.

The gradual revitalisation of an abandoned office complex in the Zomerhofkwartier, Central Rotterdam by Stipo, a company of urban planners, is exemplary of this shift from temporary tenure towards permanence. The Zomerhofkwartier is a former inner city business area in Rotterdam, right next to the Central Station at the border of the WWII bombardment area: most of the buildings there were built in the decades after the war. In the past decades, the area gradually became an abandoned zone, with a high vacancy rate and about 12.000 square meters empty space, with blank ground floors and safety problems: “People didn’t dare to cycle through.” (Karssenbergh 2015)

In the past decades, the city of Rotterdam and housing corporations bought up many properties across the city with the plan of demolitions and large renewal projects – “the Rotterdam mentality of building after the war.” (Karssenbergh 2015) Constrained by the economic crisis and public pressure on housing corporations to sell their assets, these companies often ended up with many empty properties they were incapable of selling. During this process, however, housing corporations generally are not supportive of temporary uses: “they don’t want to allow temporary uses in the meanwhile, because they think that these will bring down the values of the properties.” (Karssenbergh 2015)

Most of the buildings in the Zomerhofkwartier and the surrounding neighbourhood were bought by Havensteder, a public housing corporation that owns about 50.000 homes in Rotterdam. Initially, they wanted to transform some of the buildings into housing and demolish others. With the arrival of the economic crisis, this plan was suspended. For Stipo, the lack of plans and the abandoned

buildings were a possibility: "The crisis for us provided a great opportunity to reinvent what should be happening in this area." (Karssenbergh 2015) Without much other choice, Havensteder was relatively open for experimentation:

In 2013, they decided to start with a process called slow urbanism. It means that they would not invest for 10 years but they would also not sell the area for 10 years. They gave space for flexibility and meanwhile strategies for 10 years. They asked for market price: it's a poor area, outside the city centre, but they are not allowed to lose money on this district: the national government doesn't allow housing corporations that are subsidised by the government to lose money. They were open to any kind of contract: 1 month, 3 month, 5 years, anything. They were also ready to invest but only if there is a direct profit. For the rest they said: 'let's see what happens, let's see what comes from the area itself.' (Laven 2015)

This flexibility allowed Stipo to gradually fill up the building with tenants of various kinds. Being "in networks of young entrepreneurs, creators, makers, for instance, who were really frustrated that they couldn't get in spaces for start-ups," (Karssenbergh 2015), they aimed at creating a space where tenants cooperate with each other and connect with the neighbourhood:

We were very selective about who can rent here. People have to pitch in order to get a space in the buildings: all the tenants are allowed to say 'yes' or 'no' when somebody wants to rent a space in our building. That also brings an ownership situation. We said "no" to half of the candidates, which sounds like a crazy idea in Rotterdam, full of vacant offices. But we wanted to create a community, not only a renter here and a renter there. The area quickly became known. For instance, we got an upcoming artists' platform here, and on their opening night they had 2000 people standing in the ZoHo streets. From that moment we didn't have to do a lot of marketing anymore. It all developed slowly and organically, following our shared vision but without any master plan or design. After a year all the 12,000 square meters were full. We never anticipated this; it went much faster than we thought. (Karssenbergh 2015)

The Zomerhofkwartier's (or ZoHo's) tenants range from various initiatives from the neighbourhood and from across the city, small businesses, designers, NGOs, local organisations or social entrepreneurs like Frank:

Frank found out that Rotterdam owns 3000 sheep because it's cheaper to maintain green areas with sheep than with electric equipments. If you have sheep, you have to shave them and you have wool. But as the city didn't know how to use the wool, they threw it away. Frank asked the city to give him the wool – he decided to rent a very cheap space and invite unemployed people from the neighbourhood and train them to make felt out of wool, which designers would turn into hip iPhone cases to be sold at high prices. This generates money to support the whole process. (Karssenbergh 2015)

Instead of a typical developer or real estate manager that rents out a building to a single tenant or to separate individual tenants, Stipo itself is one of the tenants and grants a sense of ownership to all tenants through the buildings' governance structure:

The special thing about the ZoHo area is that all the companies who come there, they feel that they are owners of the place. So we can say that ZoHo has 200 owners, and it's true. We like to think of this area as a place with 100 investors, rather than one central investor: it's a networked idea. They also teach each other how to improve their business. It's kind of a self-organising thing. The downside of the self-organisational working method is that you can never know if it will still be a success next year as you can't really control the situation. (Laven 2015)

The Zomerhofkwartier experiment's success in reusing a formerly abandoned area by creating new services, new economic activities and local employment possibilities depends on the cooperation with various actors. In addition, with all its public events, exhibitions, educational programmes, ZoHo has also become an important venue for the neighbourhood's inhabitants and beyond. Besides the openness of the public housing corporation owning the building complex, the municipality also plays an important role in the process. Their support is mostly measurable by the flexibility with which they accommodated some of the irregular uses, functions and coexistences of the area. The city decided to

go along with Havensteder's positive strategy, making "yes" the standard answer to all requests from Stipo's side:

In one of the buildings, we use the ground floor, that used to be a garage, for an industrial space now. Officially it is not allowed, you have to prove that the garage is not needed. But since nobody was in the building to park their car in the garage space, they allowed it. Similarly, there are way too many parking spaces in the area and we changed some of those into parks. The city allowed us to do it. We basically tried to accommodate all the functions that add something to the area. We don't really look at if it's officially allowed, like if housing is allowed next to a business shop, although, of course, we look at safety. The city and the national government go along with that. You follow the soul of the rules, you don't do anything stupid, but you just kind of bend the rules a little bit to do things that everybody thinks that make sense. (Laven 2015)

To get the municipality in a supportive position, it was important for Stipo to understand how to engage municipal officers in the process. In the first half year of transforming the Zomerhofkwartier, Stipo did not look for any contact with the municipality, in order to avoid beginning negotiations too early. They knew that proving the operation's success would make it easier for the municipality to get involved in the process:

Municipalities are big organisations. They have at least two faces. There is the progressive face of the people working for the city on the strategic level, and they think meanwhile use is a fantastic way to improve the city. But on the other hand, there are also the people, who are equally important, who are concerned about the financial systems, the regulations. There is always a big discussion between those two groups. What makes a municipality work is if they can somehow with one voice, if they can combine the strategic, financial and regulatory aspects. (Laven 2015)

Stipo sees its role larger than managing a few buildings: speaking the language of both bottom-up initiatives and top-down investors or public administrations, the organisation's member see themselves as city makers, representatives of a new profession that acts when traditional developers, the government and housing corporations have no money anymore. This new profession gains space in a context where traditional urban development, dominant in the decades after the war and based on building houses in greenfield areas, is no longer a feasible strategy:

Reinventing areas like ZoHo, you cannot work like this anymore. It's so networked: so split up into different property owners and existing parties already there that you're not dealing with 5 people but with a 100 people. Because it's so networked, there is no one party to have the role big enough to be the leader of change. This is why many of these areas remain untouched. We need a new role, what we call the "public developer", the role we decided to take: the person who takes the initiative, who manages to mobilise the network and start actual change, combining different interests in the area. (Karssenbergh 2015)

The temporary use of these spaces is a way to open them up for various activities and to experiment with new uses without more radical, long-term engagements. In the meanwhile, temporariness is also a serious limitation in an organisation's use of a building. Temporary use does not only represent precariousness in terms of investments in a space, its surroundings and the neighbouring community: it might also drive up the building's value and consequently make the tenant's position more vulnerable.

When Stipo finished renting out all the parts of the 3000 m² building they also use for their workspaces, they began considering to buy the building. They discovered that they should have done this two years earlier. The value of the property is not only calculated by the amount of rent that it collects (the rule is that a building's value equals 6 times the annual rent of the building). If there are more renters in the building, the building becomes more expensive. But there is a double effect: as the building is more full, this multiplier goes up as well, and it becomes 8 or 9 times the value of the annual rent. As many owners bought their properties for high prices during the real estate boom, and had these prices in their books, they would insist on selling prices comparable to the original ones, but no longer corresponding to the realistic market value.

The problem of “temporary use dismissing its children” (Kil 2013), that is, tenants driving up the value of a building that benefits disproportionately the property owner at the expense of the current and future tenants – and indirectly the neighbourhood – is a classical dilemma of gentrification. Members of Stipo understand that they missed their opportunity of value capture when they did not conceive the limits of tenants’ share in the value increase:

“We should have said two years ago, ‘ok, we will do this, but we will measure the value of the property and we will measure it again 3 years from now, and let’s agree that we split the value gain in half-half.’ This is one of the mistakes we made.” (Karssenbergh 2015)

Stipo’s recognition of its failure to capture a part of the monetary value is a typical experience of many initiatives that unwillingly contribute to the re-valorisation of their building and have no control over the property’s destiny. While they appreciate the openness and flexibility of their arrangements and recognise the visibility they gained from this experiment and the values they created locally, Stipo’s members hope that with more awareness of the problem of value capture they can help themselves in future ventures and others in negotiating better conditions for their tenancy. In the same time, this arrangement is perfectly useful for the public owner: receiving a regular rent for their properties and seeing their properties increase in value, they perfectly manage to instrumentalise the creative energies to benefit their real estate portfolio.

5.5. Structuring reuse: policies and municipal mechanisms of cooperation

Stipo is not alone in relying on the flexibility of the public administrations and other public bodies. Although the discourse of vacancy and the reuse of empty buildings focuses on individual innovation, entrepreneurialism and public benefit, public agency is a key element of efficient and successful cooperation networks. When architects see themselves as “a ‘cultivating machine’ that accompanies users from place to place” or an “intermediary between unused spaces and possible end users” (van de Wiel and Zoeteman 2014: 124), they – and their interdisciplinary collaborators – cannot act efficiently without facilitating mechanisms and favourable policies. Much of the innovation related to reusing vacant spaces within the civic and private sectors, including initiatives with explicit political positions and claims of autonomy, is based on access granted to public properties and therefore relies on the flexibility and openness for dialogue of the public sector:

To support innovation – and to remove the burden of protecting, maintaining and paying for empty properties – Dutch administrations both at the national and municipal level elaborated several ways to help citizen access to vacant spaces: creating a transparent overview of a city’s real estate situation, mediating between owners and users, introducing taxes, tax breaks and incentives, funding, granting permissions are all instruments crucial for creating networks of cooperation. In the meanwhile, these instruments are constantly negotiated and reshaped together with other actors. As Gabor Everraert, project leader at the Rotterdam Municipality explains,

the municipality should be taking on a role where they help parties who see the potential in a site or building and assisting with things like building permits or land exploitation. (...) The municipality shouldn’t be the front runner but should be supporting from the side, guiding the people doing these projects away from making obvious mistakes. Too much involvement from the municipality means that policy is involved and these projects can do without that. (Killing 2014:14)

Streamlining the cooperation between public administration and civic initiatives enables experimentation beyond standard regulations, corresponding to the ambitions of “a government that says it wants to try out non-regulated zones in which there is a maximum scope for innovation.” (Rietveld 2012a:342) For instance, to allow projects like Breakland project proposed for the Zeeburgereiland, or De Ceudel (a new neighbourhood built from unused boats) in North Amsterdam, the Amsterdam Municipality “loosened the initially prescriptive planning conditions on the site and instead said just that the site must be ‘safe, clean and healthy’. This meant that the municipality had to undergo a mental shift and give up some of their power.” (Killing 2014:24) In the same time, giving up control and leaving behind a “risk-averse behaviour” also means that “the responsibility could

be left to the users themselves, who usually come up with ingenious solutions to these often very practical problems." (Rietveld 2014:37)

Similarly to Amsterdam, Rotterdam also disposes of tools to facilitate access to vacant spaces:

On one hand, less regulations or lower level regulations apply for temporary use than to long-term use. Many regulations can be 'suspended,' only the safety rules apply. On the other hand, you can make exemptions from the zoning rules for 5 years, and you can extend it for 10 years - or you can withdraw the exemption if it is abused. In the meanwhile, you have to balance advantages on the market. If you support temporary uses too much, it's not fair with competitors. You have to aim at helping initiatives gradually leave the supported phase and enter the market. We hope that they grow that they can make a step towards a new space where they can pay more rent and stabilise. (Bouman 2016)

Establishing flexibility and modalities of cooperation with non-conventional urban development actors is not only due to innovation within the municipal framework: instead, it is a result of a learning process that relies on the pressure and possibilities created by the economic crisis and strong local professional networks, and includes both knowledge transfer from other cities and translation from local experiences and bottom-up initiatives:

In the beginning, creative people just came to us with ideas. They checked the zoning, thought about the possibilities and we negotiated with them about their ideas. Later we learned from Katendrecht and ZoHo, and now we put up a sign when we have vacancy and wait for ideas. (...) When we decided to try temporary use in Rotterdam areas, we looked at how temporary use is done in Berlin and other cities. By now every city does that. And we also learned a lot from architecture offices and initiatives that came from bottom-up projects. (...) For us it's very comfortable in Rotterdam, because Rotterdam is full of architects. When we have an area we want to develop, we organise neighbourhood meetings, and there are always many people with ideas what to do there. (Bouman 2016)

The municipality's role in cooperating with non-conventional and non-institutional actors shifted from one accepting proposals to one actively inviting ideas and offering buildings for civic reuse: "The policy is that when a building becomes empty, they call organisations to take care of the buildings' temporary use." (de Boer 2015)

Another element of public-civic cooperation is the transparency of public and private real estate stocks. In the past decades, there have been many attempts to register vacancy in Dutch cities. The 1981 Leegstandswet (Vacancy Law) aimed at both fighting squatting and regulating vacancy: it introduced rules that enabled cities to requisition abandoned buildings and in the meanwhile, it criminalised squatting in registered buildings. However, the vacancy register was never created and the law missed its main objectives. (Pruijt 2013:1120)

In 2011, already deep in the economic crisis, the Municipality of Amsterdam published an interactive online map of municipality-owned vacant lots, "wastelands", inviting citizens to realise their ideas, with an indication of contact persons for each parcel. By 2013, the municipal initiative helped citizens create more than 80 temporary use projects, ranging from playgrounds, parks and gardens to catering facilities, BMX tracks or incubator spaces. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

While most of the initiatives operate in publicly owned buildings or properties of public corporations, there have been significant attempts by the public sector and civic initiatives to involve also private properties in the reuse mechanisms. Although since the 2011 adoption of the Vacant Property by-law, office property owners must notify municipalities about their vacant property, city officials had more difficulties in including private properties on publicly accessible maps:

We have a map of empty office buildings that we call the discussion map because the owners of the offices got angry and they wanted to sue us if we published it as a map of vacancy. So we called it the discussion map. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

The Amsterdam vacant property map was finally published online four years later, in May 2016 (Leegstandskarta 2016). The difficulty to deal with private property owners was also recognised at the users' side. The rules of real estate management make it unappealing for owners to make use of their properties for a lower rent, even temporarily: "we have all the empty office buildings, but their owners

don't want to rent them out temporarily or for lower rent, because it would make the value of those buildings go down.” (Mackic 2012) While renting out empty buildings for artists, creatives, small companies or civic initiatives *“can be attractive because the building doesn't deteriorate, it is maintained, and [tenants] pay a contribution towards the costs so the owner earns money,”* (Wieringa 2015) the logic of bookkeeping and tax regulations also hinder access to vacant buildings for tenants outside the regular market:

When you have 10 buildings, and rent out 8 of them, you can calculate the remaining 2 vacant buildings as a negative income. You can deduct them from your fiscal income. This is why private owners rarely give buildings away for free or for low rents. They don't want the value of their buildings to be downgraded. (Wieringa 2015)

In this context, public pressure on private properties can significantly change the lack of translation between oversupply of office spaces, on the owners' side, and demand for space on the civil society and creative community side. A by-law of the already mentioned 2010 Squatting and Vacancy Act creates a framework for this public pressure: the law allows municipalities to adopt the Vacant Property by-law that forces owners to register vacant properties and enter a consultation process with the municipal executive within 3 months after the property went empty. After the consultation, the executive can declare the property suitable or unsuitable for use. If the suitable property remains vacant for a minimum of 12 months, the municipal executive may nominate a user to the owner, who is obliged to offer an agreement that is “reasonable according to objective criteria” to the nominated natural or legal person within 3 months, or offer an agreement to another tenant.

While many commentators saw the Vacant Property by-law as an inappropriate intervention into the rights of private ownership – and the cities of Utrecht and The Hague, for instance, decided not to implement the by-law –, other arguments claimed that the rights of ownership must be weighed against the public interest in “preventing nuisance, blight, urban decay and the decline in value of neighbouring properties” on one hand, and against the fact that “space is a scarce resource in the Netherlands and structural vacancy is therefore unacceptable.” (Mees-Bolle 2011)

The city of Amsterdam decided to implement the by-law that contributed to an existing effort to *“seduce the owners of the offices to do something, to create solutions to use them.”* (Hoogendoorn 2012) Since 2007, the city helps investors who want to redevelop vacant buildings. In 2009, the municipality decided to employ a civil servant who could completely focus on transforming offices into residential uses, hotels or other functions. The city's office space intermediary, as the new position is called, works on restoring *“the balance, a healthy office market and the good investment climate. We want to make the city competitive by focusing much more on the demand of users than on the demand of financial products.”* (Oudeman 2014) Creating a position within an administration that aims at engaging private owners is also an experiment in the governance of urban development that traditionally focuses on new buildings and turning greenfield areas into new parts of the city. Transformation needs a different strategy and it needs civil servants who think along the process:

It's not a linear strategy, because uncertainties are so great that it's more a search for windows of opportunities, there is no planning system or one-way route to a solution. It's a matter of experiments. It's a way of seducing structures to move out of their comfort zones. If you call it a pilot or temporary project, it isn't a threat for the system as a whole. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

Besides negotiating with individual owners, the office space intermediary also has the task to connect different worlds and translate their aims, needs, offers and conditions to each other. Transforming a building type to accommodate another function requires bringing together the real estate market dealing with the office spaces, and the noncommercial market dealing with social housing and other types of real estate, who *“don't speak each others' language, they don't use the same spreadsheet, they have different ways of working and living.”* (Oudeman 2014) According to Paul Oudeman, Amsterdam's office space intermediary between 2009 and 2014, urban transformation requires going from one market into another market, from one network to another one:

For transformation, you need people with knowledge of all the different markets. For instance, most of the office buildings that are vacant are larger than 10,000 square meters. While there is a lot of demand for smaller spaces by creative start-ups, the match is very difficult. (Oudeman 2014)

The need to combine all these policy elements in one “package” by systematising, legalising and controlling access to available spaces and to support cultural and creative activities in the city gave birth to the Amsterdam Municipality’s Breeding Places (Broedplaatsen) programme, an initiative “for people who work in the creative economy and we try to help them to find some cheap room.” (Hoogendoorn 2012) The programme was instigated by protests in 1998 by tenants of combined housing and working premises (run-down warehouses) along the IJ River to be demolished by an urban renewal project. The protesters’ request for alternative locations prompted the City Council to ask the Mayor to give proposals for alternative locations for affordable combined housing and working spaces, with the main argument that squatters, artists, creative people always bring innovation in town: social innovation, cultural innovation and also economic innovation. (Hoogendoorn 2012) As a response to this initiative, the Amsterdam Municipality launched the Breeding Places programme (Topalovic et al 2003).

In the middle of economic growth, the municipality committed 45 million euros for the first decade of a programme to “facilitate the adaptive reuse of dozens of temporarily under-utilised buildings, as a means of accommodating a wide range of artistic and cultural activities, including creative-industry startups.” (Peck 2012:468) In its one and half decade of existence, the Breeding Places programme transformed many vacant buildings into cultural and creative workspaces – incubators – with cooperation of many organisations like Urban Resort, with strong roots in and many skills acquired from the squatting movements. Besides direct financial aid and advice in the development and renovation process, Bureau Broedplaatsen has also played an important role in finding credit or grants to cover the commercially non-viable components of property development and subsidising rents for “low-income occupants, pursuing artistically innovative — but often economically marginal — activities.” (Peck 2012:468)

The Breeding Places programme creates an interesting intersection between urban development policy and cultural and creative policies. As it cannot entirely block the further development of publicly owned land or properties, the Breeding Places programme operates on a temporary basis, providing affordable spaces for a limited time period:

Apart from the development of subsidy per m² rentable floor space for creatives (annual input) and the production (annual output), the duration of the result is also of great importance. To maximise opportunities in the Amsterdam real-estate market, temporary creative incubators are a logical solution. Many temporary creative incubators are available for three to ten years. This leads to a truly dynamic city. If no new creative incubators are introduced, the total surface area available as creative incubators will of course shrink. The continued introduction of new creative incubators is therefore necessary to maintain the total surface area. (Bureau Broedplaatsen 2016:6)

This temporariness is praised by those, usually in the design fields, who see the real value in the act of appropriating space and who envision a dynamic city where tenants at the end of their rental period can always move on to the next available space – given that there will be available spaces with the same conditions as before. As the renowned designer and educator Jurgen Bey explains,

It is necessary to place much greater emphasis on ‘temporariness’ when vacant buildings are reused in the interim. Many people think that once they have a foot in the door somewhere they also have the right to appropriate the site for an unlimited length of time. Instead, it should be seen as a sort of ‘subscription’ to space: when the agreed period for use has lapsed, it simply comes to an end at this location. The working community is then either shut down or it enters a new phase. A clear time span and, above all, the move that follows, create the desired dynamic in a city. This idea of sequential temporariness is crucial. (Bey 2014:171)

In some cases, however, the instability corresponding to temporary uses has gradually become a source of conflict. At the northern coast of the river IJ, in an industrial area of Amsterdam, an artist group won a public competition for a 10-year use of a large, abandoned, publicly owned shipbuilding

hall with their “City as Framework” (Stad als Casco) concept, also supported by the Breeding Places programme. The artist group, with roots in the squatting movement and assembling within the legal form of the Kinetisch Noord association, elaborated a concept to turn the former shipyard into a site for experimental art, culture and enterprise by installing a great variety of individual studios and workspaces inside the shipbuilding hall, thus creating a small town within the building. While the NDSM Werf, as the complex became known worldwide, was recognised as a great success in creating a legal, and quasi-autonomous cultural space with very low construction and maintenance costs due to its extraordinary architectural solutions, it has never reached immunity against the tides and currents of the real estate market. With the post-crisis return of a favourable investment climate, the public administration began to put pressure on Kinetisch Noord, by expressing the need for new housing in the NDSM area (Tuin 2016). Although the argument can be sustained by the urgent need for housing in Amsterdam, it is highly questionable whether the return of speculative, investment-led housing development does anything to mitigate pressure on the housing market. The vulnerability of the NDSM Werf and of the presence of cultural initiatives in the area reflects the criticism that “cultural breeding places can replace some of the functions of free cultural places, but can never be as spontaneous and independent from urban policies.” (Jansen 2015)

Although there is a wide-spread consensus about the importance of the Breeding Places programme, its critics often highlight its gentrifying effect: the way Breeding Places instrumentalise their tenants’ efforts in creating value in the property that can be better redeveloped when the tenancy period is over. For Peck (2012), the Breeding Places programme serves as a “marker of authenticity in Amsterdam’s branding efforts,” (Peck 2012:476) “retrospectively absorbed” into Amsterdam’s creative-cities policy (Peck 2012:474) even if “their political origins and the interests of their ‘constituents’ lie outside this instrumentalizing frame.” (Peck 2012:469) On the other hand, the increasing success and popularity of breeding place policies also opened the possibility to access vacant buildings for a wider public:

Due to the fashion of the ‘creative city’ concept, it became very attractive to have a breeding place policy. What was once avant-garde is now happening on a much greater scale: it’s not about squatters and youngsters anymore. (Hoogendoorn 2012)

While the municipality’s role is limited to financing and facilitating the cultural and creative reuse of vacant properties, some observers accuse the Breeding Places program that it facilitated the process in which “the squatters’ movement has been drawn inexorably into the delivery of cultural–social services, and into the ambit of the local state, in a manner that complies with the culturally-driven development strategies increasingly favoured by the municipality.” (Peck 2012:468)

Blurring distinctions between the “pure artist and the creative entrepreneur,” (Peck 2012:469) the Breeding Places programme is seen by many critics as a subsidy to gentrification, utilised in the service of urban policies driven by economic growth (Jansen 2015) and “capitalising on local selling points, by way of a feel-good message, in city marketing campaigns; and yoking cultural spending more closely to economic-development objectives.” (Peck 2012:472)

Furthermore, for Peck, “the program represents a selective appropriation of the independent spirit of the Free Space movement, borrowing progressive legitimacy for an increasingly business-oriented model of creative urban growth.” (Peck 2012:469) Experiencing the fragility of the highly successful and internationally acclaimed NDSM Werf, and the precariousness imposed on tenants by temporary use contracts generated many questions about the importance of “free” – spontaneous and self-organised spaces for the resilience of the city. Not trusting entirely the public administration’s long term vision, even if it saved “some living and workspaces for artists (...) from the pressure of mounting ground prices and urban developments,” (Jansen 2015) advocates of De Vrije Ruimte movement call for a process in which experiences of an experimental phase can be used in the long-term, organisationally and financially sound establishment of free spaces, instead of temporary investments. In this vision, however, the public sector is not able to protect and empower the cultural initiatives that make the city so vibrant and attractive: free spaces have to defend themselves, and

the only guarantee for survival is full ownership of the place, when the degree of cultural freedom is determined by the ownership itself. In all other forms, dependence on political and market developments stay eminent. (Jansen 2015)

5.6 Mediating access to space

The role of intermediary is not played only by public servants. As early as in the 1990s, private intermediary companies began to work in the niche market of vacant buildings. As successive versions of the Vacancy Law and the Squatting and Vacancy Act made property owners interested in some kind of “controlled occupation” of their premises, the eagerness of private and public property owners to avoid having their buildings squatted brought to life the anti-squat companies. Anti-squat agencies, like Camelot, founded in 1993 and now operating in several countries, temporarily manage vacant buildings by moving in “anti-squatters,” tenants with short-term contracts and almost no rights: in exchange for cheap accommodation where they often pay only utility costs, tenants have virtually no privacy and they can be evicted with only fourteen days notice (Priemus 2011:3). At the introduction of the 2010 Squatting and Vacant Property bill, housing activist groups warned that the law will be an additional boost to anti-squat companies that can offer their services to municipalities and housing corporations who “all of sudden – because of the new law – had ‘do something about vacancy in our municipality’ on their to-do-list.” (Bond Precaire Woonvormen 2014)

Not only housing rights activists protest anti-squat companies: their critique also arrives from the creative industries. While anti-squat agencies operate with the sole aim of securing empty buildings by putting “*three students in a building of 3.000 square meters that doesn't do anything for the neighbourhood, for the city,*” (Karssenbergh 2015) the same buildings “*could often be put to good temporary use from the moment they become vacant until they are renovated, redeveloped or demolished. In short, we advocate a more societally relevant way of dealing with these public – and often unique – buildings.*” (Mackic 2012)

Besides the corporate businesses like Camelot that organise short term leases in empty properties, there are also other organisations that mediate between vacant spaces and tenants. Streamlined cooperation processes established by the municipality – including fast reaction and flexibility from the side of municipal officers – enabled the creation of many initiatives that work on refilling vacant buildings with tenants looking for affordable space. If there seems to be a thin line between definitions of anti-squat and temporary use, the impact of these various initiatives on the tenants, the neighbourhood and the city could not be more different:

We're one of the few parties who do it differently, we try to communicate with the owners, find out what the developments are, and also try to help organisations that are more vulnerable and maybe more hassle to have as tenants but who really add value to a building and a neighbourhood. ANNA Real Estate & Culture is basically an anti-squat company, but instead of minimising the use in a building, we are maximising it, in a legal way. (de Boer 2015)

When Willemijn de Boer, founder of ANNA began to rent the ex-Europol building from the Dutch government in 2010, she did not know that she would still be in the building five years later. The 14.000 m² complex includes a former school building built in 1935, adapted to the police organisation's needs, and a modern office wing attached to it in the 1990s. The government selling the building knew it would be a long procedure – “*they knew that they had to change the designation with the city and it would take a while*” (de Boer 2015) – and they “*didn't want the building to get in a worse state. They feel responsible for the building, it's a common good, we all pay for it with our tax money, so they want to maintain it in a good state and also want it to be there for the neighbourhood.*” (de Boer 2015)

Situated at the edge of The Hague's international district, and located between highways, office buildings and a prosperous residential neighbourhood, it is the first time the former police station is open to the neighbourhood with its well-kept garden is accessible from the street. In a neighbourhood with affluent inhabitants including many ex-politicians and lawyers, it was important for the

government to have a temporary use in the building *“that is not too active in the neighbourhood but with open doors, so if they wanted to they could still see what was happening. We organise open days when we invite the whole neighbourhood to come and visit the building.”* (de Boer 2015)

The building is in temporary use: while waiting to be sold, it is rented to ANNA with a one-month moving out notice: *“they always want to have the option that another government agency can use it.”* (de Boer 2015) In turn, ANNA gives space to individuals, organisations or companies who rent affordable offices, showcases or studios in the building. ANNA's contract with the government limits their use of the building to 50 tenants – they have a waiting list of about 100-150 organisations that shows the high need for affordable working spaces. The tenants are typically artists, musicians, designers, architects and cultural producers, flexible enough to pack and move to the next building when they have to. Taking risk paid them back: selling the building proved to be more complicated than planned, and many of them have been enjoying the advantages of low rents for years, enabled to concentrate on their work. ANNA's rental model is precarious but creates a way to open spaces for social groups that could never afford market prices:

For instance with students who need an atelier or a working space, we give them a contract where we say, ‘you can borrow this space from us for very cheap, 150 euros a month, including the use, the gas, electricity, everything. But you have to move out as soon as the owner finds a new tenant or a buyer for the building.’ Sometimes it happens within two months, but sometimes it takes 5-6-7 years before they find a new purpose for the building. Thus we can accommodate creative groups in the city but also various social groups. If you have the money, then the risk of moving out can be a reason not to choose this format. For others, it's perfect. But increasingly, we are trying to find ways to see how temporary functions can somehow become more permanent or make better use of the energy that has been built up in a temporary time frame, for instance by relocating initiatives that thrive by temporary use. (de Boer 2015)

The building's public owner also benefits from the situation: while accommodating temporary users is much cheaper than hiring a security company to protect the building, ANNA keeps the building tempered and tidy, and the building contributes to the cultural vibe of the city:

We unburden the owners: we make sure that the maintenance is done, the heating system works, we open the door, clean up, and the owner doesn't have to come to the building anymore. We're also cheap security because it's occupied; it's also cheaper insurance for the owner than when it's empty. We add value: it's better for the property and the area if a building is used, also makes it easier to rent it out again or to redevelop it. Some owners don't really care but most of them do. (de Boer 2015)

ANNA now operates 10 buildings in different Dutch cities, each between 14,000 and 4,000 square meters. As the example of the Ex-Europol building shows, ANNA relies mostly on public buildings: they use mostly buildings owned by the government and housing corporations, out of the 15 buildings they have had, only 2 are private. Governments and municipalities *“feel responsibility to do something more with them than just leaving them empty. They are also more realistic about the possibilities of selling them, so that combination makes it a good market for us.”* (de Boer 2015)

Besides the rental fees, ANNA's work is covered by revenues from events and business meetings: *“corporations really like to organise events in what they call ‘empty buildings.’”* (de Boer 2015) ANNA is a typical matchmaking organisation that – in parallel with many other similar organisations across European cities – recognised a niche in the real estate market, that of temporarily empty buildings, and tries to use them to create advantages on all sides. By consciously programming buildings and *“seeing what happens in an area or in the city, we try to see how we can accommodate groups that have problems finding space.”* (de Boer 2015)

ANNA's limitations lie in the same conditions that represent its strengths. The short term contracts, while providing a low threshold of access, flexible regulations and eventually can be prolonged into years, also inhibit the development of communities around a building and substantial links to its neighbourhood. While ANNA's rental contracts operate in precarious spaces, other mediating organisations look into long-term use as a way to protect tenants and certain activities in

the city. SKAR, the Foundation for Art Accommodation Rotterdam was established in 1987 to address the necessity of workspaces for artists, responding to a policy created by the local government to take care of them. At the time, all cultural and educational buildings were the property of the government. At a certain moment, the city created separate commissions to manage its properties, and some buildings didn't belong to any commissions, in particular, the old school buildings where artists were working. The city created SKAR in order to take care of those buildings that didn't belong to any other supervising bodies.

Since the late 1980s, SKAR works on creating the right conditions for artists of all disciplines, by offering them affordable and adequate workspace. Managing both permanent and temporary spaces, SKAR enables cooperation between visual and performance artists by bringing them together in specific work and production areas. Working closely with the Urban Development department and mediating between the municipality, private owners and artists seeking space, SKAR manages almost half of the permanent communal workspaces for artists in Rotterdam, among them many formerly vacant buildings. Public help is essential in SKAR's work, not only through the access to empty buildings but also in forms of guarantees:

Until a few years ago, the local government used to give us guarantees and this enabled us to work with a special bank that gave us loans with lower interest rates than other banks. This way we could buy 11 buildings, out of the 26 we use. We pay off these loans in 10 or 20 years, depending on the building. The deal with the bank also included arrangements that when one building's loan was paid off, we began to pay higher loan for the others, to balance our costs. We do all the maintenance and everything with the rent artists pay. As SKAR is non-profit, all profit has to be turned back into the studios. (Wieringa 2015)

For most of the buildings SKAR rents from the local government, they have contracts for 10 years: "We use most of the spaces on a long-term basis because we think artists really do need a place where they can work for a longer time without risking to leave on a short notice." (Wieringa 2015) This arrangement also benefits the city as SKAR keeps their buildings in good conditions: "they cannot maintain their buildings for a lower price." (Wieringa 2015) SKAR also has temporary spaces, but they only rent them if they can use them for at least a year:

We have agreements with the local government that we keep buildings in a certain shape and they come and control it. We make every studio fireproof and bring them water and electricity. So there are many costs to make the building comply with all regulations: the last building we opened needed an investment of 200,000 euros to make it ready. This is also a problem when we have to leave a building, moving into a new one is very costly. Moreover, when we have to leave a building and rent another one, the rent is almost always higher. This is why we try to buy them. (Wieringa 2015)

SKAR currently manages 26 buildings in and around the centre of Rotterdam, with around 300 artist studios accommodating mainly traditional artists but also architects, product designers, musicians. Out of the 26 buildings, 23 are old school buildings, 11 owned by SKAR, 12 rented from the government, all transformed to respond to specific needs: "Dancers, for instance, need high ceilings; school buildings from the 19th century are perfect for this, they have 5 meters high ceilings." (Wieringa 2015) In the same time, SKAR has a waiting list of about 300 people or organisations that are ready to move in whenever space is liberated. Some artists grow out of the studios rented from SKAR. For instance, Mothership, an artist organisation have become very known after being commissioned to paint the interior of the new Rotterdam Markthall: "They're now growing too big for this studio but this is normal: it's good that they go on and find a more suitable and maybe also more expensive space, thus making this studio available for others." (Wieringa 2015)

SKAR works with a fixed square meter price (about 50 euros per square meter for one year) in all the buildings they manage, both in the centre of Rotterdam and in the periphery: "It means that it is more difficult to find people for more peripheral buildings. But we think that every place can be suitable, we try to keep every studio in good shape and we believe that everyone should pay the same price." (Wieringa 2015) The prices can be so low because all the maintenance is done by SKAR: they fix broken windows, toilets, renovate roofs, and paint walls. For each building, SKAR has a 5-year

maintenance plan that allows them to address urgent repairs and to delay certain maintenance works in order to spread the costs over years.

For accessing empty buildings that the government or other owners left behind, SKAR is in a competition with other actors in the field and other uses. It happens, that when a 10-year contract is over, the government wants a building back: in Rotterdam, old school buildings are increasingly popular with young families and the government's policy shifts towards selling out school buildings to these families for housing. While city officials want to provide space for artists, they "*often see the buildings we rent from them as vacant spaces.*" (Wieringa 2015) Besides future residents or converted school buildings, SKAR also has to compete for space with anti-squat companies who "*don't care about how a building can be used to make a neighbourhood nicer or more attractive*" and with initiatives that focus on representatives of the creative industries: "*for traditional artists, it's much more difficult. We have to make the local government aware of this problem.*" (Wieringa 2015)

Despite its ambitions to create stability for artists, SKAR's limitations are connected to its close relationship to the public sector. As a foundation dependent on the Rotterdam Municipality, its resilience and growth is subject to public policies favourable for artists without adhering to logics of instrumentalisation or incorporation into existing development plans. To succeed in securing spaces for artists in Rotterdam, SKAR needs to find the right channels to convey its message about the importance of artists in the city to the municipality and needs to establish itself as an asset holder much more reliable than many of the city's speculating entities.

Concluding remarks

Compared to many other regions, Dutch cities reacted quickly to the economic crisis and the mass vacancy of public and private assets resulting from it. Through the media of activist interventions, exhibitions, academic research and professional events like the architecture biennales of Venice and Rotterdam, a vast public discourse was built up that prepared the field for new cooperation networks including a diversity of stakeholders. While the combined architectural and municipal discourse of the crisis and vacancy empowered the non-institutional actors and helped them enter the expanded actor-network of urban planning and development, it also attempted to put architects at the core of the reappropriation process, as part of the profession's quest for new roles after the downgrading of architects' importance during the process of the financialisation of design and urban development. This created not only a competition among different disciplines, actors and activities for available space, but also utopian and highly problematic concepts such as the "sequential temporariness" proposed by the landscape architecture firm RAAAF. With their advanced communication skills, many of the initiatives to reappropriate vacant spaces with professional, design-, architecture- or planning-related backgrounds connect well with international networks of knowledge exchange: while Berlin-born concepts of temporary use clearly inspire both architects and public administrations, the City Maker movement mainly promoted through Amsterdam- and Rotterdam-based organisations and Dutch embassies across Europe is instrumental in the cultural export of Dutch expertise.

The public acknowledgment of the problems and opportunities of mass vacancy led to the establishment of national and municipal policies in response to vacancy. The responsiveness of public administrations to the needs of various groups in need of space created what I identify here as the "consensual model" of cooperation between public and civic actors in the reuse of vacant public assets. This implies streamlined mechanisms for accessing vacant spaces, flexibility from the part of public owners and regulatory offices and negotiated positions regarding the conditions of tenancy. While the consensual model facilitates, accelerates and supports the citizen-led reappropriation of vacant buildings, it also closes initiatives in a pre-defined logic of urban development that builds on revalorisation of dismissed properties and underused areas. Although this arrangement provides many benefits for people or organisations in need of space, like a lower threshold to access empty space, it also carries the danger of instrumentalisation of creative energies for increasing property values.

Streamlined processes, funding and accommodating flexibility in regulations helped in the creation of many institutional, municipality-led mechanisms like the Breeding Places program, but also contributed to the professionalisation of reusing abandoned spaces and mediating between public owners and potential users. The professionalisation of re-appropriating vacant buildings and the creation of civic spaces, on one hand, contributed to the emergence of mediating organisations like temporary use agencies. On the other hand, many dismissed municipal and private assets were handed over to anti-squat companies that engage in securing vacant buildings by short-term, precarious contracts with minimised use and activities in the managed spaces.

While anti-squat agencies focus entirely on the security service provided to property owners, municipal programs and temporary use agencies try to create advantages on both the owners' and the users' sides, by accommodating certain activities in a building, potentially also creating value in a neighbourhood. The access created by these latter is often seen as not entirely inclusive: in many cases, priority is given to representatives of the creative industries, making the situation of traditional artists and social initiatives more complicated, leading to the growing precariousness of the economically least competitive actors.

While the discourse of creativity, city making and spatial entrepreneurship puts individual and group achievements in the focus, most of the initiatives put in the limelight of architectural events and the city making discourse rely on public assets, resources and policies: the public administration, as an inevitable actor, is actively present in all constellations of vacant space reuse processes. In turn, many initiatives, although given the credits for certain accomplishments in urban regeneration, are conceived and instrumentalised as elements of larger scale urban transformation processes. Lacking mechanisms to fully capture the – social and real estate – value created by activities in vacant buildings, many initiatives look for paths towards private or cooperative ownership or remain dependent on changing public policies and economic trends.

6. Berlin: Autonomy Through Ownership

Berlin's specific history had a strong impact on its relationship with its urban spaces, and in particular, with vacant spaces. The post-war partitioning of the city, divided by the Wall from 1961 until 1989, restructured the urban tissue to a large extent, by creating new centralities and eliminating old ones: the Wall turned many relatively central areas like parts of Mitte and Kreuzberg into "urban periphery" (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:83). In the meanwhile, the symbolic competition between the Western and Eastern parts of the city also created many distorted dynamisms in their evolution.

For many commentators, the period following the fall of the Wall marked a return to the "normal", Western path of urban development bringing about the neoliberalisation of urban politics and planning (Cochrane and Jonas 1999, Brenner 2002). Many analysts of Berlin's urban processes in the following years found an important reference in the theory of neoliberal urbanisation, describing the city's post-1990 policy shift as a

commitment to large-scale, investor-friendly projects at the expense of local organisational structures and needs in order to create locational advantages for the city in the international competition to attract investors; advancing privatisation and commercialisation to the disadvantage of the broader public good; and, overall, the increasingly one-dimensional orientation of planning and land utilisation toward economic targets. (Dohnke 2013:261)

This explanation, however, met with significant criticism from other researchers, who found the theoretical framework of neoliberal urbanisation somewhat simplifying and limiting. Latham (2006) argued that reducing Berlin's complex transformation to "a process of 'neoliberalisation' – to see it in some way as part of some global trend towards such market forms of regulation – adds little to our understanding of the process." (Latham 2006:378) This argument has also been echoed by Bernt, Grell and Holm (Bernt et al 2013), who also highlighted the importance of taking into account the "specific political position and development of Berlin and the resulting conflicts", instead of analysing and discussing "gentrification processes, the restructuring of welfare and of planning instruments, or the tourist boom of late (...) against a model of urban development concepts as established in international research." (Bernt et al 2013:11)

Berlin's specific history and its unique reunification process did indeed create exceptional phenomena in many aspects of urban life - and particularly when claiming community access to urban spaces. This chapter looks into some of the historical singularities of Berlin, some of the policy and planning choices after the fall of the Wall, the municipality-driven speculative constructive boom that indebted the city for a decade, and conditions of the city's economic transformation that led to massive vacancies in the Berlin property market, opening up new opportunities for citizen involvement in the reuse of vacant spaces. After outlining the economic and political context of the production vacancy, the second part of this chapter explores the proliferation and institutionalisation of temporary use, together with the doubts emerging concerning its long-term impact and instrumentalisation for branding larger development projects. By presenting Coopolis, a mediating organisation that helps initiatives access affordable ground-floor spaces I show how a neighbourhood scale mechanism can be creating through an including founding programme. In turn, by analysing the process in which artists renting spaces at ExRotaprint gained shared ownership of their building, I outline the paradigm-making new financial model involving anti-speculation foundations and inspiring many other initiatives in Berlin and abroad. ExRotaprint, together with many initiatives that followed its example, constitute the "autonomous" model of reappropriating vacant spaces, a model whose potential to be upscaled or multiplied raised many issues related to democracy, accountability and public interest.

6.1. Berlin's careless real estate boom and the production of vacancy

In 1991, the German Parliament decided to relocate the seat of the Federal government to Berlin. In the meanwhile, Berlin's new political elite began to identify Berlin's development strategy that could lead the city to become a "Service Metropolis:" as part of this strategy, the government declared

that the city would need 11 million square meters of office space (Krätke 2004:522). The government's move to Berlin and the Service Metropolis strategy, together with the 'gold rush' of developers identifying unique investment opportunities in Berlin (Uffer 2013:155) opened several waves of speculative real estate development in the new capital that resulted in an overproduction of office and commercial space, partly due to a special subsidy regulation and favourable tax write-off scheme introduced by the German state for real estate investment in East Germany (Krätke 2004:522). As a result, Berlin witnessed the construction of nearly 7 million square meters of new office space between 1990 and 1998 – many of which remained vacant for years if not decades (Krätke 2004:522).

In order to facilitate and accelerate the city's real estate boom, the Berlin Senate created in 1994 a state-owned company, Bankgesellschaft Berlin, with the task of creating the conditions for real estate development in the region. In line with the city's strategy to attract as much real estate investment as possible, the regulations also imposed state-guaranteed profit for the investors. Despite significant investment in properties, however, the real estate boom was not followed by the relocation of major companies. Consequently, the city's economic growth remained low in the 1990s, and unemployment remained higher than in other German states. As a result, Berlin "nearly faced bankruptcy in 2001 and had to make severe cuts in public expenditure to tackle its large debt, which amounted to approximately 60 billion euro in 2010." (Colomb 2012:132)

The Bankgesellschaft was deeply involved in the real estate speculation process that shook Berlin in the 1990s: while it made many bad investments in properties in East Germany, it also had to pay billions of euros to private investors covering the securities of failed investments. The Bankgesellschaft was rescued by a bailout from the Berlin Senate, calling for an "extreme budgetary emergency (...) which for many years has been used to justify the retreat of the local state from a range of tasks and funding programs (e.g. the funding of social housing and self-help construction projects)." (Bernt et al 2013:17) The failed policies to support real estate development and the corresponding tax write off and investment security schemes resulted in a large municipal debt and significant pressure on the public budgets: the Bankgesellschaft's activities left the city with a financial burden of 30-35 billion euros (about twice the city's yearly budget of the time), which obviously represented a very high social cost (Krätke 2004:525).

Using neoliberalism as a framework of interpretation, Berlin's financial and economic crisis, unfolding in the mid- and late 1990s, led to "austerity urbanism" (Peck 2012). In order to consolidate the public budget, the Berlin Senate imposed cuts in social expenditure and public services, including also financial support to the city's local cultural scenes. (Krätke 2004:525) In addition, to cash in on its assets, Berlin opened a large-scale privatisation process by selling out both its companies and properties. Through this process, Berlin's financial crisis led to a welfare crisis, a situation with many vacant buildings and gradually eroding public services.

Vacancy in Berlin is a result of many factors specific to Berlin: the bombings of WWII demolished many buildings and consequently generated many vacant lots, and the Wall – partly running through the middle of the city – preserved large strips of unbuilt land that persisted long after the Wall came down. Furthermore, the radical political and economic reorganisation of the 1990s turned obsolete many productive facilities both in West and East Berlin, leaving behind large zones of disaffected infrastructure and industry, as well as many residential buildings abandoned by their former inhabitants who moved to West Germany in hope of better working opportunities. As a result of these processes, after the Fall of the Wall, parts of both East and West Berlin were "characterised by massive vacancy of commercial and residential buildings" (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:83)

All these factors, together with the dilemma of how to reuse the city's "problematic heritage" and the slow restitution of land and property in the former Communist areas all contributed to a situation in which "Berlin has a significantly larger stock of empty, disused, or vacant sites than other European national capitals or large cities, for example, London or Paris." (Colomb 2012:133)

Berlin's speculative building boom in the 1990s did not reach all parts of the city: even relatively central areas remained unbuilt or abandoned. In the meanwhile, the large-scale real estate speculation generated a large number of newly built office spaces that had never been absorbed entirely. From 1993 on, Berlin's real estate boom turned into a "real estate market crisis with large quantities of unoccupied new office space and a quite strong decrease of rents for new office space" where "the scale of unoccupied office space in Berlin reached the 1.5 million square meters in 1998, and only fell slightly in the following years." (Krätke 2004:522-524)

Following the fall of the Wall, the city's restructuring also brought along the shifting of its centres of gravity: many formerly peripheral areas like parts of Mitte, Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg suddenly became central and made the massive amount of vacant buildings and land more visible, as anomalies of Berlin's urban development. Due to the spectacular magnitude of vacant spaces in Berlin (and other East German cities), the abandoned buildings and land gradually crossed the threshold of public attention, and the discourse on vacancy progressively gained room not only in professional discussions but also in broader debates about the city's cultural scene and future urban transformation.

In the first half of the 2000s, vacancy became a much-discussed topic in Berlin, addressed by a series of books and research projects, originating from the architectural (Cupers and Miessen 2002), the artistic (Oswalt 2005) as well as the public sector (SenStadt 2007).. Seen through the optic of the 2008 economic crisis, they were preliminary studies to get ready for a broader crisis, experiments to elaborate methods and instruments to treat the problem of vacant properties and urban areas spreading out all over Europe and North America: proposals to introduce a new urban planning vocabulary, the preparation of the terrain for easing the economic crisis by the means of urbanism (Oswalt, 2005).

6.2. From squatting to temporary use: initiatives and mediating organisations

The academic and public discourse about mass vacancy in Berlin did not only enumerate the causes and consequences of empty buildings and land, but also catalogued bottom-up responses to the situation. Vacant spaces across the city of Berlin proved to be a fertile ground for social and cultural experimentation. While the Berlin government's strategy to turn the city into a service metropolis failed, it is, ironically, precisely deindustrialisation that has turned Berlin into a node of creativity and cultural production." (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:76)

The informal reappropriation of empty sites along the Spree, abandoned transportation infrastructure, or disaffected industrial, cultural or residential edifices was building on a significant tradition in Berlin: the alternative youth cultures and radical social movements of the 1970s and 1980s Kreuzberg, as well as the underground electronic music scene of the 1990s constructed the basis and developed the skills for an alternative, innovative and often confrontative use of abandoned spaces. In many ways, the high number of vacant spaces in the city has become an important cultural and social factor for the city: "the existence and development of underground and alternative urban cultures, in Berlin and elsewhere, has been indissociable from the availability of such vacant or abandoned spaces." (Colomb 2012:135)

Squatting in many ways anticipated the spatial experiments of Berlin in the decades following the Fall of the Wall: Bader and Scherenberg argue that "the free space that urban movements fought for in the 1980s and 1990s facilitated the development of a lively subculture." (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:76) In addition, squats had a crucial role in advocating "cautious urban renewal" with a focus on preserving both the existing building stock and the social structures, and on citizen participation in planning: squatted houses were "a kind of experimental laboratory" in which new instruments of urban renewal were trialled." (Holm and Kuhn 2011:653)

In the 1980s, there were many attempts to legalise squats: while some of the occupied spaces had been consolidated, the squatter movement also had a significant influence on urban policies in West Berlin: they "developed at moments of transition between various models of urban renewal, and they contributed in greatly varying degrees to these processes of transformation." (Holm and Kuhn

2011:645). In the same time, the official acceptance of some of the “cautious urban renewal” principles marked the squatter movement’s gradual institutionalisation (Holm and Kuhn 2011:654), their shift “from protest to programme” (Mayer 2009:15) and its professionalisation, through the establishment of intermediary structures within the movement to help new initiatives enter spaces.

After the fall of the Wall, with the complete political and socio-economic restructuring of the city, Berlin witnessed the diversification of squatting activities: “In addition to squats that focused on squatting as an alternative housing strategy, some squats quickly became established as centres for exhibitions and other events (entrepreneurial squatting), while other squats had the goal of actively preventing existing demolition plans (conservational squatting).” (Holm and Kuhn 2011:650)

In the 1990s, despite the speculative development boom in Central Berlin, the city’s “urban landscape has remained filled with a large amount of ‘voids’ and disused sites.” (Colomb 2012:131) In this context, besides squatting, another type of informal use of space emerged in the city:

Especially in the southeast along the Spree River (Districts Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg), an increasing number of people took over vacant lots and buildings for a variety of temporary purposes, most prominently for clubs, but also other types of self-organised uses (social, cultural and commercial). Contrary to the time between 1989 and 1990, when these spaces were squatted, now the vacant lots and buildings were taken over with legal, but short-term contracts. (Heyden 2008:39)

The use of abandoned land was also facilitated by the unclear ownership status of many vacant areas and buildings, and the slow reassignment of ownership after the fall of the Wall. This “lack of regulatory interference” also helped the creation of a creative scene, often rooted in illegal squats. (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:84) According to many accounts of the transformation of Berlin’s urban and social landscape, vacant spaces helped the emergence of a new cultural scene: the techno scene of the early 1990s “would simply have had no playground without the closure of East Berlin’s industrial businesses,” neither would have start-ups or commercial and temporary uses in the low-income neighbourhoods of Wedding or Neukölln. (Bernt et al 2013:16)

In the first period of their appearance, the temporary beach bars, community gardens, theatres and clubs mushrooming in the city’s abandoned areas were neglected by politics and the public administration: “they were perceived as irrelevant, marginal, or not economically useful in the dominant language of place marketing and interurban competition.” (Colomb 2012: 132) Later on, however, these initiatives became increasingly visible to a broader public, helping to popularise of a new term: the notion of “Zwischennutzung” (German for “temporary use”) refers to the great variety of practices that began to unfold in Berlin’s vacant spaces that were – temporarily – left out of the city’s planning and development mechanisms.

Although initially a spontaneous reaction to Berlin’s exceptional real estate situation, “temporary use” was quickly picked up by academics and design professionals, before being ultimately discovered by the public administration. While the first theorisations of temporary use were based on experiments by artists, architects and activists in Berlin in the 1990s and 2000s, these experiences generated more structured approaches and invited new actors (municipal departments, architecture offices, development agencies and commercial enterprises) to engage with temporary use projects. Following the development of the temporary use discourse and Berlin’s spectacular transformation and emergence as a cultural capital, the bottom-up tactic of temporary use has been transformed into an urban regeneration strategy, giving municipalities, real estate owners and developers the opportunity to engage creative energies and community support in revitalising or advertising their properties.

Temporary use gradually gained an increasing recognition in official urban planning circles: the acknowledgement that shrinking regions have to adapt to shorter building cycles, made many planners think that temporary use will pave the way for a broader transformation of the planning profession and consequently, of how public administrations regulate development and manage properties: will

temporary use alter planning in times of crisis? (Oswalt, Overmeyer and Misselwitz 2013) As Stefanie Raab, founder of the Neukölln-based temporary use agency Coopolis explains:

For us, meanwhile use has become the fourth dimension of a participative town development process. It is important to go on with these strategies, because at the moment all over Europe we need more participative and process-orientated town development. And they're best when they use the experience and the knowledge of the people who live there in these areas. (Raab 2015)

However, early on, doubts began to surface, if temporary use can bring along a structural, long-term change in the way planning mechanisms work or it is “to remain nothing more than gap-fillers until market demand permits a return to regulated urban planning.” (Misselwitz et al. 2007:104)

Following the first academic accounts of temporary use, public administrations also gradually discovered the phenomenon. Increasingly drawn to the discourse of the “creative city” (Florida 2002), and understanding that cheap rents and the strong agglomeration of cultural activities into “cultural districts” made the city increasingly attractive for newcomers (Bader and Scherenberg 2010), the Berlin Senate also initiated a research in 2005 about temporary uses, and collected hundreds of practices. Looking into the possibilities of providing affordable workspaces was seen by the Senate as a means to support the creative industries (SenStadt 2007).

Temporary uses were increasingly formalised as temporary users became more and more professionalised. In contrast with the alternative scene of the 1970-80s in West-Berlin, “underground culture in East Berlin’s inner-city districts was from its beginnings around 1990 in part entrepreneurially oriented; the contradiction between commercial and non-commercial was rarely as present as it used to be in the earlier Punk and Independent movement.” (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:79) Despite the fact that many of the temporary initiatives in the city lacked a political goal or did not choose to explicitly resist the status quo, they were “in a very real sense about creating an eclectic, alternative urbanity. Taken together this is a quite remarkable vitality – especially for a city so obviously in a state of on-going economic crisis.” (Latham 2006:379)

The establishment of supporting structures from the side of public administrations also facilitated the emergence of intermediary services between owners, users and authorities, where temporary users began to “capitalise” on their experience in reusing abandoned spaces in order to help other initiatives. Following the growing interest in how vacant spaces create opportunities for both creative industries and socio-cultural initiatives by the Berlin Senate and the Federal Government, the Federal Urban Policy program Soziale Stadt (German for “Social City”) began to back programs of temporary use, integrated into tasks of the existing Quartiersmanagement service or helping the establishment of new intermediary structures. The Federal State’s financial support was complemented by the local state’s help with vacant properties: the tasks of the Liegenschaftsfonds (Berlin’s Real estate management company) were expanded to include the provision of space for non-profit, community-oriented temporary use in the case of properties with no serious potential buyer. The Berlin State had several reasons to support such programs: “the (free) maintenance of public property and the avoidance of decay and vandalism; their contribution to economic development; and their contribution to social objectives through the creation of new, publicly accessible open spaces at little or no costs for the public purse.” (Colomb 2012:140)

Initiated by Stefanie Raab, Coopolis began to work in 2005 under the name “Zwischennutzungsagentur” (German for “Temporary Use Agency”) in the Northern part of the Berlin district of Neukölln. The area – Berlin’s poorest district – faced significant challenges after the fall of the Berlin Wall. After 1989, the better earning households began to move away from the area and the poorest families remained there, in an increasingly segregated situation. With the shutting down of subsidised industrial production in the district, many – originally Turkish and Greek – workers lost their jobs, and their families (125 in 1000 households in the area) became dependent on public finance. The residents’ declining purchasing power caused the closure of many shops in the area, especially small shops of 50-200 m² on the ground floors, resulting in a 50% of vacancy in side streets and a 20-year phase with practically no investment in the neighbourhood.

When Stefanie Raab launched the agency in Neukölln, she was attracted to the neighbourhood by its potentials:

We saw in this area not only problems because our point of view on every neighbourhood is a potential-oriented view. And in this area we have a very huge diversity of many-many people from 130 different nations and this is really a potential. And we had a second potential and it was these very nice empty shops. (Raab 2015)

In Raab's account, the empty shops have been important actors, or vehicles of potential in the neighbourhood:

These shop structures are very important social links to the streets. So if you would make them all to dwellings to housing you wouldn't have any social life on the streets. So it was very important out of social reasons for the neighbourhood to find functions that led people socially interact in these areas. (Raab 2015)

Understanding the potentials of these vacant spaces, Coopolis began a close cooperation with the private owners of the vacant shops in the area, developing a socially integrated area strategy based on matching unused resources with unsatisfied demand for space. Using the motto "unused land and buildings cost money, unused ideas also" (Raab 2015), Raab's goal was to create an inclusive urban regeneration process with particular attention to the local social tissue: in order to create meaningful local partnerships, she had to create links both with local property owners and members of the local community as well. This required many personal discussions, first of all, with local initiatives and small companies:

They came from a social direction, for instance people who wanted to teach pupils after school, so that they can have better results, or social initiatives from the neighbourhood. But also a lot of artists lived in this area because rent was low also for housing. And we asked them: 'Wouldn't it be interesting to go with your work from your sleeping room to the street rooms?' And they said 'Yes, but we can't afford it' and we tried to find ways that they can afford it. And the whole time, every time when we opened a shop we invited the neighbours to come in to the shop and see what is happening, and to negotiate the whole process, and to say what we want to do next on this area and so on. So it was the whole time a very intensive participation process that didn't end on writing up the ideas from the neighbours, but it ended on realising the ideas for and with the neighbourhood. (Raab 2015)

In turn, to establish the legitimacy of the temporary use agency in the eyes of property owners, Raab had to find the right arguments (to engage them and overcome their mistrust, by making them recognise how useful this project can be also for their own wealth:

If you have an owner who imagines 10 euro/m² rent, we tell him, that this is a very poor district here, there will be no activity that can bring so much money. So you have to talk to him, so that he can also feel that his goals are unrealistic, because the only reason for emptiness is that there is no market for a product, so you have to create a market and bring someone who creates this product as well as someone who needs this product. (Raab 2013)

Opening up owners to lower their prices or accept unusual tenants also requires mediation work: preparing users to elaborate strong concepts and helping owners and users understand the language of one another:

You have two processes that you have to manage: you have to prepare the user and the property owner for one another. After this, you have a first get-to-know moment, where we have 5 or 6 or 10 properties, after another, and a group of 'marriageable' owners and users – whose concepts are so good that you can present them to an owner, because an owner always expects a well conceptualised economic project. And the user only sees his creative idea, so you have to prepare them for one another so that they talk a more similar language and can understand one another. So we are the transporters between them. And this is the secret of 'Zwischennutzungsagentur', this is how it functions. (Raab 2013)

This mediation process is by no means automatic: Raab's work is based on an extensive knowledge of local actors and spaces. Regularly walking around in the neighbourhood and taking pictures and notes, Coopolis feeds their findings into a self-developed database of empty spaces and

initiatives in search for space. But the database cannot be separated from local presence and a locally rooted process of communication:

Advice and experience in a special area – this is very important, you always have to be very local. If we have projects in different places, we always have a project manager for each one of them, so that the contact between the owners and the users is enriched by the local knowledge of this person. In fifty percent of the cases, neither the users nor the owners know what they need in the beginning. So we have an open door once a week, a consultation process with the users and also the owners of the real estates. If the owners knew what they wanted with it, it wouldn't be empty. You have to find it out and give them advice. (Raab 2013)

Paradoxically, the more Coopolis entered the process of helping tenants enter vacant spaces and establish their initiatives or businesses there, the more “temporary use” as a concept lost its significance for them. While also organising very short-term opportunities for special events or festivals, more than 90% of the accommodated initiatives want to stay in their space beyond the duration of a temporary use contract:

They invested much energy in renovating these places and they were really fixed on developing their business plans to stay there. Unexpectedly we did a real improvement process that was more than meanwhile use. We started to make a network between all the new users to teach them, to make them more competent for all these economic things, so that they could really realise their wishes to stay there. And now they are established there at this place so much that Neukölln now is well-known all over Europe as one of the most attractive and creative spaces at the moment. (Raab 2015)

In the same time, while trying to assure the long term tenancy of social and cultural initiatives in the neighbourhood, Raab also acknowledges the radical transformation of the neighbourhood and the dangers associated with it:

For us in March 2008 it was really a very nice experience that our town magazine wrote 'Neukölln rocked' because before it was always the no-go area, the ghetto. So this project strengthens the local economy and gives breath and fresh air and new ideas for site development of the space. Today you have to see it also critically, because the gentrification doesn't stop for such an area when the laws to limit rents are not good enough at the moment to help all people stay here. (Raab 2015)

6.3. Consolidating temporary use: autonomy through ownership

The experience of Coopolis shows how, with time, temporary use raises questions about its own purposes and consequences: characterised by “inherent tensions between their temporary nature and the potential search for perennity (...) and between their search for alternative cultural forms of ‘insurgent urbanism’ and their inherent tendency to pave the way for profit-oriented urban redevelopment processes” (Colomb 2012:147), temporary use has rapidly become a somewhat criticised strategy in urban development, with a dubious effect on planning practices. Concerns about the limitation of temporary use as “exceptional bottom-up situations” were also connected to a growing unease with regard to the

relationship between the numerous experiments in temporary urban appropriation and a city development that is increasingly oriented toward capital. In terms of concrete planning, how do the (sub)cultures of ‘between-use’ affect the general planning and building culture? To what extent is this not becoming or already is a part of the neoliberal project, (...) which is trying to ‘integrate’ the (sub)culture of the so-called urban pioneers into their agenda. (Heyden 2008:33)

From the early 2000s onward, with the creative industries increasingly becoming the “new leitmotif for urban development” (Bader and Scherenberg 2010:77), temporary use has been, indeed, incorporated both into urban development strategies by real estate developers and the city administration, and into the official city marketing discourse: as a result of changing cultural consumption practices and shifting policy focus, “new images and narratives began to be integrated into Berlin’s official promotional discourse—including sites, places, activities, and people which had been left out of the promotional imagery of the 1990s.” (Colomb 2012: 132)

"Valued as a 'means to an end' rather than as alternatives to dominant (capitalist) forms of urban development" (Colomb 2012:143), the instrumentalisation of temporary use for the creative city agenda (Peck 2005) and larger scale development purposes did not only create many unintended and uncontrollable consequences for bottom-up initiatives such as gentrification and the extension of traditional developer apparatus to this new urban frontier. It has also "put pressure on the very existence and experimental nature of 'temporary uses' and 'interim spaces' (...) by raising investors' interest in previously neglected areas." (Colomb 2012:131-133)

The mainstreaming of practices of reusing abandoned spaces corresponds to the process of mainstreaming of subcultures in general, described by Pierre Bourdieu as a search for "distinction" from the traditional bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1979). Consequently, similarly to the protagonists of many gentrification stories, "subject to hopeful research and generous funding, [temporary users] now risk to become the victims of their own success." (Kil 2013) In the meanwhile, the city's strategy to instrumentalise temporary uses and the growing real estate pressure did not only impact the formerly abandoned areas, but also the city's entire creative milieu: "the development of creative milieus and the attraction of creative people is a matter of transitory phases, which are open to experiments, rather than something taking place in cities that are at the peak of economic prosperity." (Bader and Scherenberg 2010)

The self-destructive tendencies of temporary use, and more generally, the growing tension between the use value and commercial value of Berlin's urban spaces provoked many discussions among the city's professional and cultural public. Addressing the need to preserve the city's creative milieu, together with the temporary spaces that accommodate and catalyse it, and using the skills acquired during the interim conversion of abandoned spaces, many initiatives attempted to transform temporary uses into permanent uses, "often accompanied by a transformation of the activity into a proper business" (Colomb 2012:144), turning the initial users from 'space pioneers' into 'spatial entrepreneurs.'" (Buttenberg et al. 2014)

The ambition to stabilise Berlin's creative spaces was accompanied by calls for new professional roles for designers and cultural producers as well. Addressing "an emerging group of young Berlin architects who predominantly seem to engage in co-operations with these (sub)cultural producers developing temporary 1:1 projects, rather than challenging themselves in long-term commitments and larger-scale developments," Mathias Heyden, for instance, called architects to "challenge trends and (...) engage [themselves] beyond the 1:1 event-based projects, while still considering these fieldworks as precious sources of experience to be taken into long term commitments and larger scale co-operations" (Heyden 2008:40), and to "make local-spatial commitments in a world in which time moves with speed and people change places at such a fast rate" (Heyden 2008:34)

A new way for long-term spatial commitments and for the stabilisation of independent creative and social spaces was opened by an initiative by two artists to save the Rotaprint industrial complex in the predominantly working-class neighbourhood of Wedding, in Northern Berlin. The Rotaprint shaped the area significantly: the factory had been present for 80 years, it hired the compound's architect, rebuilt the compound after the destructions of World War 2 and gave employment to many of families in the area. The factory produced small printing machines and it was part of West Berlin's heavily subsidised industry during the Cold War, that immediately collapsed after the Fall of the Wall.

When two artists, Daniela Brahm and Les Schliesser began to rent a studio space in the Rotaprint complex in 2000, the compound was in the middle of a wasteland, following the demolition of all the adjacent production halls: "*there was wildlife growing, it was such a romantic visual from this street over there seeing this wasteland.*" (Brahm 2014)

The building had an important role in the artists' choice: "*I saw this late modernist building, and I was like 'I want to move in.'*" (Brahm 2014) The Rotaprint compound became a listed monument in 1991: the decision infuriated the city administration owning the compound as it prevented it from demolishing the building. The compound includes a bare concrete "brutalist" tower on the corner that turns out to be simply unfinished. The architect wanted to have two more stories and then a final

façade, but that never happened, and the building was listed unfinished: *"We like the idea of something being very good when unfinished. We always use this kind of interpretation also for the way we work with ExRotaprint."* (Brahm 2014) The strong symbolism of building also plays an important role in the ExRotaprint project:

The energy that comes from this kind of visual of the architecture always gives energy to the project, to communicate it. Since Wedding is not completely out of focus anymore, so people now wander around here, and everybody takes a photograph of this corner. And it's been published a lot now, it became known. (Brahm 2014)

However, besides its visual attractiveness, the compound is a framework that enables the activities taking place inside: *"These are the two things, to have architecture on one hand, and to see what it's for. This project is about using space, and what the outcome is. That as many people as possible profit from the space."* (Brahm 2014)

The building was public property: it belonged to the Berlin state that rented it out for short term uses for artists, manufacturers and other activities, mostly from the neighbourhood. In 2004, the city's real estate policy changed: selling off properties in order to balance the municipal budget became the priority, and the city created a new in-house company, the Liegenschaftsfonds (German for Property Funds), to orchestrate the privatisation process. The activities of the Liegenschaftsfonds, selling out public properties, was seen with an increasing criticism that saw an irreversible damage happening to the city: *"The Liegenschaftsfonds is a bit of a buzzword in Berlin because everybody was talking about this ugly Liegenschaftsfonds that had this task of filling empty pockets and sold away so much ground that you would never get back for that money."* (Brahm 2014)

The Rotaprint complex was no exception from this plan: the buildings were separated from the adjacent wastelands and these latter were put up for sale. The neighbouring parcels were sold to Lidl to open a supermarket. Brahm and Schliesser were alarmed by the neighbourhood's transformation: *"We were up here, and saw this development, which was kind of a warning shot for us. We thought: 'We have better ideas.'" (Brahm 2014)* As a response to the threat of losing the building, the artists tried to form a group on the compound: the approached other tenants with the idea of making a project together:

All this really grew on only one thing: that we were furious that things didn't work out in a good way, we just saw it like the city has no ideas, they just don't care, they've never been here... We didn't plan to make a big project, which now has changed our lives, it wasn't the plan, it was just step by step, we saw we had to do something. (Brahm 2014)

In 2005, Brahm and Schliesser, together with a group of tenants of the compound, founded the ExRotaprint association: *"We felt the spirit of Rotaprint is still here, that's why we named it ExRotaprint. It's also in honour of it, because they left something really nice."* (Brahm 2014) The association (as a legal form) allowed the tenants not only to "write a concept of the way one might develop this area with the local people, completely from the perspective of the people who were already renters here" (Brahm 2014) but also to begin negotiations with the Liegenschaftsfonds about buying the property. The Liegenschaftsfonds calculated a price of 2.4 million euros for the compound, which the association found too high, considering the bad shape of the building. The key challenge for the tenants was to make themselves seen as legitimate partners: *"To be taken seriously was a very hard thing."* (Brahm 2014)

The tenants had many discussions about how to participate in the bid, how to deal with the property and how to address issues of ownership. Some tenants offered to bring in friends who have money, to help buying the compound: *"That was a big warning to us because whoever brings the money in decides in the end."* (Brahm 2014) The most important conflicts were generated when the idea of profit entered the discussions:

The idea of generating money with a big project like this, just the fantasy of profit was a bomb, it was the most difficult...the fantasy of individual profit, the idea that 'Maybe I am once in my life at the right

spot and we can make a good deal here, and then I have my pension, my workshop is my pension' was almost destroying the group before it really worked. (Brahm 2014)

The group needed an overall solution for all the compound, avoiding that tenants only focus on their own individual spaces. This solution also had to include the renovation of some of the buildings:

There was a kind of pragmatism suddenly rising in the group: 'Hm, buying... Owning it then... But the renovations... We need 25 or 30 years to pay it back... But then I'm old, maybe my business will not exist anymore...' So somehow just the realities of money also changed this perspective, and people said... 'Okay, our profit is [the ability] to stay here and have low rents.' Full stop, that's it. We stay here, we are not pushed out, we can decide on everything, that's also very important, and we can decide in a way to keep the rents low, which is a huge profit for all the people that are here. And this was a really tough process to get to this idea. (Brahm 2014)

To proceed with the acquisition process, the tenants founded a non-profit company, also including the tenants' association as a partner. The establishment of the non-profit company also helped to solve the debates around individual profit.

The privatisation policy foresaw making the bidding processes quick *"before the renters get really organised."* (Brahm 2014) After the association's first meeting with the Liegenschaftsfonds, they realised that they had only six weeks to make a bid for the compound, before the auction: *"We always said 'You need a person in charge of alternative projects' that are a little different from normal investors. The only very different thing is that we need a little bit more time."* (Brahm 2014)

The tenants decided to make a symbolic bid of one euro, to be part of the game. ExRotaprint was the only bidder, but the Liegenschaftsfonds did not sell the compound for one euro. In the following discussions, the Liegenschaftsfonds offered a heritable building right (Erbbaurecht) contract that gave a new direction to the negotiations. In the meanwhile, however, the Liegenschaftsfonds began to arrange a deal with an Icelandic investor who was preparing to buy many public properties in Berlin at once - the Rotaprint compound was part of the package.

As the Icelandic investor suddenly withdrew from the negotiations, the Liegenschaftsfonds proposed ExRotaprint to give another offer for the compound. Knowing that the Icelandic investor's offer for the compound (as part of a larger package) was – the very low – 600.000 euros, ExRotaprint offered the same amount. Under significant political and media pressure, the Liegenschaftsfonds accepted the tenants' bid. 600.000 euros for the 10.000 m² compound was way cheaper than ExRotaprint expected: it also meant that while the planned mortgage contract had to be negotiated, the spectre of individual profit began to haunt the group again. *"The cheaper you buy it the higher is the risk of future speculation."* (Brahm 2014)

In order to avoid the possibility of speculation, ExRotaprint brought in two foundations whose core mission is to prevent speculation with land. Both the German Stiftung trias and the Swiss Stiftung Edith Maryon are engaged in taking land off the market in a way that it cannot be sold again. It also includes *"liberating"* the land by gradually freeing it from debt. The foundations usually work with heritable building right (Erbbaurecht) contracts of 99 years, allowing them to prevent the sale of the land or radical changes in the land use, but enabling their partners to develop long-term projects on the land, corresponding to the initially agreed, socially and environmentally responsible goals. The barrier these foundations represented to selling the compound and making profit from it was exactly the kind of limitation the ExRotaprint members were looking for.

For us it was interesting because it's a kind of... circulating money... Our money, we pay it back to foundations now that have no other goal than to prevent real estate speculation at another place again, so they make money with the existing heritable building right contracts to work further. (Brahm 2014)

When ExRotaprint began to negotiate with Stiftung trias, the foundation was still very small: it could not afford the 600.000 euros purchase price. They brought in the Maryon Foundation, disposing of a larger capital, and together they bought the ExRotaprint compound for 600.000 euros. According to the agreement, ExRotaprint pays a yearly 5.5% interest rate of the purchase price, a sum that does not threaten the existence of the project but which creates a revenue for the foundations that they

can later reinvest in other initiatives that are preparing to purchase their land. In the final setup, secured for decades, the foundations own the land and ExRotaprint owns the buildings, and renovates them accordingly:

With this construction the ground is separated from the buildings. The plot's now owned by the foundations and we own the buildings. So we can decide everything, what ExRotaprint should be, who finances the renovation of the buildings, and we decide who should rent there and we put up the whole thing. So we are in an ownership-similar situation. But the only thing we can never do, we can never sell ExRotaprint to anybody. (Schliesser 2016)

Besides paying the yearly rate to the foundations, ExRotaprint is also responsible for the gradual renovation of the buildings, a very significant cost. In order to manage this, ExRotaprint took a mortgage of 2.3 million euros (with 4% interest) in 2009, to cover the total renovation costs estimated to reach 3.2-3.3 million euros, the rest of which is to be paid from the compound's revenues. The mortgage was also taken from a very specific financial actor; a Swiss pension trust called CoOpera Sammelstiftung PUK, specialised on sustainable real estate projects that work local or social or cultural, to give mortgages: with rules prohibiting them from putting their money on the stock market, they have to work with existing projects. Coopera's unusual profile gave ExRotaprint a lot of space to manoeuvre:

There are no time limits or extra fees. And there are no risk calculations because they don't see our kind of project as a risk like a normal bank would. For a normal bank we would have been a high-risk project. CoOpera met us and said 'For us meeting you and seeing your will to get this project through is the greatest guarantee.' That's completely different. (Brahm 2014)

ExRotaprint's unique organisational structure and financial model allows it to operate almost completely independently from the real estate market, and without significant pressure from the mortgage payments: all rates and conditions are established to secure the good functioning of the compound. Without pressing financial burdens, ExRotaprint can accommodate a real variety of tenants:

We don't want to be a happy island of the creative class, we want to make something that makes sense here. If you have space you should do something for the people that directly shape the area. So we knew from the beginning that we're going to have social projects, and normal labour... Workspaces, production places that give jobs to people, that have some regularity, in a street where regularity is missing a lot. The whole compound is a mixture: one third arts and culture, one third social projects, and one third production or businesses. (...) We want people to work here, we don't want representation, we want production here. (Brahm 2014)

Heterogeneity and the social mission is at the core of ExRotaprint. Besides cultural workers and manufacturing entrepreneurs, a third of the buildings' surface accommodates social initiatives: the compound includes a big school which teaches German to migrants, a school for drop-out teenagers who left school before finishing, often with criminal record, and social outreach organisation which works with unemployed, "so there are designers and unemployed and there are migrants and crafts and small factories and this comes together in a really heterogeneous picture." (Schliesser 2016) Many of the tenants would not necessarily have another choice of location: "The school is a good example: it's a thing that a typical real estate investor would never take or try to avoid. Because of course these kids are quite tough, and you also have to moderate a bit." (Brahm 2014)

The continuous respect of the compound's diversity principles is assured by the founding documents of the ExRotaprint association and non-profit company, as well as by the contracts they have with the foundations and the pension fund:

We wrote down in our preamble that we rent out to work, art and community in equal parts, it's in our heritable building right, so future generations also have to fulfil it. Whatever it will look like then, whatever social projects will be about in 30 years. Now it's unemployment and German classes, I don't know what it will be then. Contracts build the framework also for the future. We can do anything within this framework, and there are so many possibilities in it, but we are non-profit. We have heritable building right, we can't sell the ground, the foundations own it and they'll never agree. And we have a mixed,

heterogeneous structure here on the compound. For us it was interesting to lose the fear of this kind of contracts, or really to see it as a media to shape and design a project in the very long run. And the heritable building right is for 99 years, you can't really imagine. And it could even be extended then. (Brahm 2014)

The compound's diversity corresponds to its rental policy: instead of following a regular investor's logic, the calculation of the renovation costs, for instance, is based on the tenants' needs and the capacities of self-building. Diversity can only be maintained if expenses are kept low, and there is no profit made on the owners' side,

because the goal is to have low rents, because in Berlin the rents are rising now a lot, in the past five years it has changed, our peace and freedom of space in Berlin also comes to an end, it's normalising, it's becoming a normal capital. And we are already on the lower end of the rent. We didn't expect it: in 2007 when we took over, it was more or less average what we were asking for in terms of rents, and now it's already a really good deal for people. It's a proof of how far you can come with money, when you make it locally. There is a lot of capital, a lot of wealth created here, but not on the owners' side but on the users' side. (Brahm 2014)

6.4. Controlling privatisation: from mapping to bidding with the best concept

ExRotaprint's strategy to turn privatisation into an advantage for a civic space has proven highly inspiring for many initiatives across the city as they were facing similar threats from the side of the city's real estate policy and large institutional investors and developers. The city's policy of prioritising privatisation was rooted in Berlin's banking scandal where Berlin accumulated a large amount of debt: the bailout of the Bankgesellschaft costed the city over 30 billion euros (Bernt et al 2013:127). Therefore, Berlin's policy priority from the mid-1990s on was to keep a balanced budget. On one hand, this fiscal policy had a heavy impact on the city's welfare services: the public budget cuts made a significant pressure on wages in the public sector and reduced the resources of many public facilities like schools, hospitals and kindergartens. This also meant the Berlin was facing a situation that many cities only encountered years later: "The transition to 'austerity urbanism' in Berlin did not have to wait for a global financial crisis." (Bernt et al 2013:17) On the other hand, fiscal austerity also implied a major privatisation campaign: under pressure for balancing its budgets, the public administration had begun to look into ways to discharge the disaffected real estate stock, including housing and facilities, industrial areas and unbuilt land in various parts of the city, through large scale sales, "as a conveniently quick means of reducing deficits and downsizing government within an urban politics framed by crisis." (Beveridge and Naumann 2013:190)

In 2001, the Berlin Senate established the city's Liegenschaftsfonds (German for Real estate Fund), a private company owned by the Land of Berlin, dedicated to sell publicly owned sites and properties that have lost their functions. Like in many cities during times of financial crisis, the privatisation of public assets proved to be an uneven and opaque process, where the "new forms of cooperation occur in an 'institutional void' where rules are mostly hidden from the public" and where "bypassing building and planning laws, these [so-called urban development] contracts allowed for investor-friendly agreements, including the allocation of public subsidies" and have "largely remained unknown to the public." (Dohnke 2013: 262) The government's strategy to sell properties for the highest bid and en bloc gave significant advantages to institutional investors over tenants and cooperatives: large investors could both provide the necessary equity for en bloc purchases and negotiate discount prices for individual units, bought in "packages" (Uffer 2013:157). These advantages also meant that "urban politics and policy-making centred on social equity has increasingly retreated to the background." (Dohnke 2013: 262)

The privatisation process was facilitated by the global financial markets. The stock market crash of 2000 and the growing distrust in the previously favoured IT stocks pushed investors towards the supposedly safe real estate market. In the same time, interest rates were substantially reduced by the central banks who wanted to prevent a recession (Uffer 2013:157). The cheap capital that flooded

international markets found an easy way into real estate, and in particular, into Berlin real estate. This created a new situation in the city: while in the 1990s, investment in Berlin properties was mainly coming from German investment firms, they were joined in the early 2000s by large international firms (Uffer 2013:159). The presence of cheap money prompted investors into real estate development projects that corresponded to no real demand. This speculative real estate boom had a strong impact on the city and its spaces.

Many initiatives recognised this impact and began to mobilise the public opinion against privatisation, or in certain cases, for more controlled privatisation. While the community-led purchase of the ExRotaprint compound was a key factor in revealing the possibilities of alternative finance, many people were simply alarmed by the lack of transparency in the privatisation process. The online platform Open Berlin was founded in order to give more transparency to the privatisation process, improving the visibility of public properties and generating ideas for the community-led reuse of these buildings. The platform, launched by Berlin architect Johannes Dumpe deals with the increasing scarcity of affordable spaces and the gentrifying character of temporary use at the level of the entire city. Together with other platforms like the Berlin version of Hamburg-based Leerstandsmelder, a crowdsourced map indicating vacancy across the city, Open Berlin contributes to an eco-system of information that aims at securing land from speculation, installing a public control over land transactions and making property policy more transparent by addressing the questions “*what properties are there, what vacancies will have to be discussed for future sales, or what has been sold in recent years?*” (Dumpe 2012)

As many other initiatives in the city, Open Berlin was directly inspired by EXRotaprint’s privatisation process:

About three and a half years ago, people behind the ExRotaprint were able to buy their building - it was very difficult as mostly the highest bidder can make a deal with the city. They were able to convince the right people with their concept. We started thinking how would it be possible for other people to also realise projects like this. If you cannot go on the regular way, you don't have the money but have a nice idea, maybe you don't have a big investor behind you, but you're convinced that your project will be the right one at the right time for the city. Then we started to analyse this project and a half year later we developed the project to make it also possible elsewhere. This is why we made Open Berlin. (Dumpe 2012)

The platform Open Berlin tries to accompany and accelerate similar initiatives by bringing together “*people and empty spaces, helping people to build up independent projects and giving them the possibility of using spaces for their projects. It also offers a public stage to communicate their initiatives with a larger audience.*” (Dumpe 2012) By creating an interface to share knowledge between already realised projects and initiatives, the platform’s ambition is to support sustainable development with the highest possible social, cultural, environmental and financial value to the city and to restore a welfare-oriented management of public land by the permanent securing of the free spaces as public property to prevent speculative exploitation. For this process, a necessary condition is the availability of public property data. Open Berlin uses publicly obtainable data and enriches it with the contribution of various experts:

You see on the website of the property fund that there are only current vacancies, usually around 20, 30 properties. The sales of recent years are summarised in something like an annual review but they only ever show a handful and you get the impression that they're not those properties with politically sensitive issues. For this reason we have developed a website together on which we collaborated with other experts to gather what we know about properties that have been sold in recent years. (Dumpe 2012)

The platform combines official and crowdsourced informations. On one hand, through contributions by experts, residents and initiatives, the platform’s map function helps users recognise patterns in vacancy:

If you have a look at the empty spaces you can realise pretty quickly that a big part of empty buildings is in the eastern part of the city. Additionally, about two thirds of the buildings the city is selling are in the

East: it will have a big impact in the next ten or twenty years on those areas, and it can also have a positive impact if the city keeps them and tries to use the potentials of the area. (Dumpe 2012)

On the other hand, the platform serves as a collection of relevant urban planning informations and suggestions. Besides the online “pooling together” of information, ideas and support from the community, the organisation also promoted offline events, gatherings, discussions and visits to potential development sites, thus mobilising and connecting groups also in the streets. To bring focus on some potential cases, the platform was launched with six pilot sites:

We selected a six properties, and we said we'll go there and prepare the information available to us from the property fund, from our research, and start talking to the people. We said okay, the city says that these are real estate properties for which it has no public use anymore - that is, they aren't needed locally anymore and therefore they can probably be divested to investors. And in an attempt to verify this attitude we gathered some visions, six stops that will reappear on our website - and these are real conversations with individual people in the street, sometimes over long periods of time, and not just ticking off some data on a list. And so we tried to find out what the local people really need and what their relationship with the property in question is. (Dumpe 2012)

While focusing on individual sites, the platform, with its city-wide features, also aims at bringing together fragmented ambitions of Berlin, a city “so much scattered or divided into lots of small initiatives who hardly work together.” (Dumpe 2016) For the founders of the platform, connecting these groups with different local interests and engagements could empower the individual initiatives and also structure their needs:

The problem at hand, according to our work, is that these groups often don't pursue the same goals or often lack coordination, a higher sort of platform, board or panel - a structure of a higher order that could help and led them a stronger voice, one that would not just give off the impression of self-serving interests of the individuals involved, but of a fundamental intention to use certain buildings in a certain way. (Dumpe 2012)

The “structure of a higher order” mentioned by Dumpe hints at a broader vision of urban development that includes a different use for empty buildings. In Berlin whose strongest brand is a specific culture of alternative projects, clubs and bars that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s and found ways to realise their ideas without any capital, the access to vacant buildings by community initiatives is “the main reason why young people come to Berlin; because it's changing so much and because you're able to do things here which maybe are impossible at the moment in other cities.” (Dumpe 2012) In Open Berlin's perspective, “it is through empty buildings that the city can be changed and how further development can be accommodated.” (Dumpe 2012) This recognition, the vision of a city with accessible spaces and the alliances built around the platform helps Dumpe and his partners in putting pressure on the city's real estate fund, transforming their vision into policy recommendations that may find their ways to decision-makers:

When we talk to them, we realise that there is a lot of people also within the Liegenschaftsfonds, who would like a change, who would like to have a different role in Berlin, to connect more with people who have the right concept and not only the most money. But it's not possible for them as nobody knows at the moment how to change the main focus. Before it was clear that the highest bid gets the properties and there was no question about it. We're in an interesting moment to see how the city will define itself in the next years. Politically it's already written down that the Liegenschaftsfonds should change its behaviour, but still there is no idea how to do it. The Liegenschaftsfonds is waiting for new instructions how to execute this change. (Dumpe 2012)

Open Berlin's position in this discussion is clear. When addressing the issue of ownership, Open Berlin advocates for replacing privatisations with long-term land leases, thus preserving the public ownership of land, allowing for long-term planning both for the public owner and private or civic initiatives:

This is why it is such a bad decision to sell public property for a single payment. While a property could bring money to the city for over a hundred years, with long term rental agreements. Long term lease,

Erbaurecht was a tool often used by the city. Berlin is searching for quick money at the moment and they don't want to wait long. (Dumpe 2012)

Four years later, in 2016, Open Berlin is still in use. While “no specific projects were built because of the website,” (Dumpe 2016) the platform helped many initiatives to learn from each other. Although it did not accomplish the automation of matchmaking between available land and initiatives, besides bringing focus to certain sites of the city, it also contributed with data and structured information to the discussion about the city's real estate policy.

One of the key forums of this discussion was the initiative Stadt Neudenken. Stadt Neudenken was founded in 2011 in order to channel the voices of citizen initiatives and founders of civic spaces into a public discussion about the Berlin's real estate policy. Grounding the initiative was motivated by the lack of participation in issues of public real estate management, as founder Florian Schmidt explained in a 2012 lecture:

when it comes to assets, it's over with fun and games, there's no more civic participation. (...) In other cases and other amendments to certain acts or new regulatory requirements like in education and other matters, stakeholders from civil society are always sitting at the table (...) and it is our opinion that this dialogue should also be enabled for issues of real estate policy, just like it has been done for other areas.” (Schmidt 2012)

Stadt Neudenken functioned as a roundtable organised once in every one or two months, bringing together actors with very different positions, from representatives of civic society and the cultural fields to politicians. The goal of the meetings was to come up with a manifesto or position paper to shape the city's new real estate policy and a sort of a “real estate board or panel, that could be a body consisting of stakeholders from civil society that possesses the expertise and perhaps even indicate the spectrum of different existing interests in real estate properties.” (Schmidt 2012) The main focus of the roundtable was to develop an alternative to the regular privatisation process where the highest bid wins the tender. While acknowledging the role of tenders for the highest bid as a method deliberately designed to protect Berlin from backroom deals and favouritism, participants of the roundtable also recognise that

In reality, however, it's a little more complicated, with some stakeholders having access to more information, information from various sources. So it's not just about the money but there are certain other procedural methods - such as direct contracting - where political pressure can influence the awarding of such direct contracts.” (Schmidt 2012)

Besides doubts about the transparency of regular privatisation tenders, another point brought up by the roundtable was the fact that

each urban space has its own needs and that there are certain local initiatives where ideas are developed - exceptionally many of them in Berlin - and that some of these ideas for a city and for the development of properties, also in other areas such as neighbourhood management where this is also happening, could really be created with the help of local people. What this means is that decisions that are made based on certain criteria should be preceded by intense discussions with other citizens in order to see what the local needs are and what ideas are there locally. And then it's a multi-stage process, firstly to reach certain criteria and then to put out an invitation to tender for a property, whether it's for long-term lease or for sale, and then the applicants or bidders would have to introduce themselves and make public what they want. At the moment, the policy at the property fund is shrouded in secrecy, that is, as long as it's only about making money, it doesn't really matter who gets the property in the end.” (Schmidt 2012)

Based on these considerations, on November 3, 2011, the Stadt Neudenken initiative issued a position paper and founding manifesto (Stadt Neudenken 2011). The manifesto, calling for an immediate moratorium on public property sales, also created a list of recommendations for property management, with ideas “about what we thought Berlin should become in terms of Liegenschaftspolitik.” (Dumpe 2016) In the same period, the City Council had also been working on its Neue Liegenschaftspolitik, following the approval of its need by the city council in 2010 and the governing coalition in 2011. While Ulrich Nussbaum, the city's financial senator, who was under

pressure because of the unpopularity of the privatisation process, quit his office within a few weeks after the publication of Stadt Neudenken's manifesto, he also came up with the idea of a "Neue Liegenschaftspolitik" as his last move before departure. While the details of this policy and its new system of criteria were never fully presented, it created a confusion in the public opinion

because lots of politicians, the public and the media had the feeling that we have already this new policy. Afterwards, when a new finance senator was appointed, when we came up with this demand of changing the Liegenschaftspolitik, everybody said 'we have this already' because Nussbaum already prepared it. (Dumpe 2016)

In the core of the new Real Estate Policy proposed by Stadt Neudenken was a different set of criteria for privatisation bids: a "concept method" that gave priority to the "best concept" instead of the highest bid. In practice, the concept method did not really work and it was only tried at a couple of locations (Dumpe 2016). The first, informal concept-based process was organised at the Blumengrossmarkt, an area that was originally the starting point for the while Stadt Neudenken project. As a result of the concept-based competition, the area was divided into 6 parcels, and each received different architectural-development proposals. A few years later, two of the spaces are already running, another one is being finished and three remain construction sites. The first concept-based privatisation process was not without conflicts: instead of being an established institutional procedure, it was mainly orchestrated through political pressure on the Liegenschaftsfonds by Stadt Neudenken and local politicians: it was successful but created many adversaries in the effort to systematise the process.

The second concept-based tender, the first one officially orchestrated by the Liegenschaftsfonds proved to be counterproductive. Organised for the sale of a former police station building in Lichtenberg, the tender's participation threshold was too high for small initiatives: they needed reference projects of over a million euros to take part in the contest, and a lot of costly paperwork. As a result of the process, a public housing company won the bid and got the building. Those losing the bid included a small initiative that had already worked in the building for years and tried to buy it: after negotiations with the district, the mayor, they nearly managed to purchase the building before the Liegenschaftsfonds appeared with the idea of the concept-based tender (Dumpe 2016).

The new tender methodology was elaborated by the Liegenschaftsfonds, based on the ideas proposed by Stadt Neudenken, but not following them in all the details. Despite the similarity of the concept and the pressure they put on politicians, Stadt Neudenken members were not convinced that their concepts were channeled directly into the approved procedures and had the desired impact on privatisation processes:

None of the demands we had were in the official papers of the Liegenschaftsfonds that came out with similar documents in the same time. Lot of things that are written in the Neue Liegenschaftspolitik are good to read, but in the end, if you look at what was realised, there were not that many good practices or models. There is nearly none. All the good practices, in which small initiatives bought a building or a land through privatisation processes, like the ExRotaprint or Holzmarkt, happened outside the Liegenschaftsfonds' concept method. These were all initiatives or people who worked hard on political contacts to get what they wanted. It was never easy, and there was no mechanism to facilitate this. (Dumpe 2016)

In reality, the Liegenschaftsfonds has never developed a regular system for the concept method because from site to site they had different starting points. Despite the original intentions to open privatisation procedures to non-institutional actors, the Liegenschaftsfonds developed a ranking system still based on reference projects, liability which makes it hard for smaller projects to take part. In addition, the criteria system was never presented in a transparent manner:

Nobody knows how to points were given to the people. We knew initiatives but they were not allowed to talk about the procedure otherwise they would have been banned from the process. Nobody could understand how somebody exactly could get a building. They never clarified the criteria. (Dumpe 2016)

After publishing the manifesto, the Stadt Neudenken roundtable has lost its momentum. While in a Berlin where prices have gone up and abandoned land has been mostly built in, vacancy is no longer a key issue, the discussion of mass vacancy seems to move East, to smaller towns in the former GDR. As there were less and less sites suitable for the concept-based tender, the roundtable abandoned its work on competitions and started to work more on the political system, on specific sites: it began to focus on how problems can be solved at some specific sites. This focus on particular sites, however, has proved less interesting for many actors that were active in the roundtable before:

At this point, many people stopped coming to the roundtable because we no longer worked on political issues at the city scale. Some people also had the feeling that it's more like a lobbying board because some people sitting there had some influence. (Dumpe 2016)

This brings up the question of governance: what would be the structure of the real estate board envisioned by Stadt Neudenken, a shared structure of governance with the representation of various interests? The latest undertaking of Stadt Neudenken might provide responses to this question. The organisation, together with many other initiatives, began to look into the possibilities of the Haus der Statistik, a 60.000 m² building complex at Alexanderplatz, in the very centre of Berlin. In contrast with other sites that require competition for space between small initiatives, the scale of this federal state-owned building is so large that it might involve all initiatives interested in the building. It also represents an important topic, that is, the absence of affordable space in Berlin's centre: it is a symbolic issue to bring back initiatives in the centre of the city. As the building is too big for any civic actor to buy it, the cooperative established by the participating initiatives expects the City of Berlin to buy the building and then establish a governance structure that would include public and civic actors alike.

6.5. Shared ownership, a model to multiply?

As the examples of Open Berlin and the Stadt Neudenken initiatives demonstrate, the experience of ExRotaprint in creating autonomy through a shared ownership model inspired many discussions in the city about the model's potential scalability. While ExRotaprint opened new perspectives for civic spaces, they were not the first citizen initiative in Berlin to access ownership of a building. The building of K77, a former squat in Berlin's Prenzlauerberg district was bought in a similar ownership scheme: the parcel is owned by the foundation Umverteilung! Stiftung für eine solidarische Welt (Redistribution! Foundation for a World of Solidarity) while a number of associations own the buildings and rent the land with a 50-year lease contract, the revenue of which is returned into socio-political projects. (Heyden 2008:35) Privatisation by community initiatives is unthinkable without access to capital: this gives a key role to anti-speculation foundations in these processes. In close cooperation with each other, these foundations create a network of solidarity funds where they all pursue public benefits outside the public sphere, often through moving properties off-speculation like Stiftung trias or Maryon.

Stiftung trias was founded in 2002, when many cooperative housing projects had financial difficulties: the foundation aimed at helping them. Trias did not have a big founder like regular foundations but a couple of professionals, former bankers and umbrella organisations. The founders established trias to collect and share knowledge about co-housing projects and to create a solidarity fund in which each project helps the creation of a new one. In the meanwhile, they also realised that property speculation became an important issue for many people, also property owners who contacted trias to look into possibilities of moving their properties off-speculation. This resulted in many donations of land and buildings, that all contribute to the foundation's ability to support further projects.

Usually, foundations work with revenues; anti-speculation foundations also work with their assets. They invest their revenues in land: they usually purchase properties with local groups determined to renovate and revive a building. The work of trias is conceived as an antidote to the financialisation of real estate markets, as trias-founder Rolf Novy-Huy explains,

when we buy properties, our goal is to secure spaces of freedom, because the prices are getting higher, international capital looks for good investments and finds it in real estate. So they buy everything they can get, and there will be not much left for initiatives. On top of that, municipalities – not only in Germany – are running out of money, and with their budget cuts, they can't or don't want to provide space for artists, social initiatives and people with low income. (Novy-Huy 2016b)

Working with trias is an act of solidarity: while it theoretically possible for many initiatives to get a bank loan for 2%, trias asks a land lease fee of 4%. It is therefore a choice of certain initiatives to join the trias network and continue to pay a land lease fee even after their bank loans are all paid back. For Novy-Huy, it is an idealistic step: “not only we help projects but projects also help us by building up a structure for the next project. With each project that comes into the foundation, we are getting stronger and we can do more.” (Novy-Huy 2016b)

When an initiative decides to work with trias, and trias estimates that the initiative's business plan to buy and run the building is feasible, a 6-24 months purchasing process begins: trias joins crucial situations, participates at meetings with municipalities, mayors, banks, it helps initiatives with their economic plan, financial sheet, legal form and financial instruments. Trias adjusts its land-lease fee to the abilities of the initiative, in order to make the beginning easier. At the end of this process, usually trias buys only the land and the project buys the building.

Similarly to the case of K77, the foundation uses long-term land lease contracts, a legal form well known not only in Germany but also in Britain, the Netherlands and Italy, although in the latter countries it is used much less. The land lease contract based on “Heritable building right” or “Erbbaurecht,” on one hand, brings revenue into the foundation in form of the land-lease fee. On the other hand, the contract “can also include a preamble about what you want to achieve at the compound,” (Brahm 2014) defining the possible uses of the land of building, and it cannot be changed without an agreement with the foundation:

We feel that we have to protect the original ideas of the people who helped building up these projects, and all the money and effort and work and knowledge that they put into them. So we are 'the watchdog' for the idealistic aims. (Novy-Huy 2016a)

The relationship between trias and the initiatives it supports is very close: in the watchdog role, the foundation regularly checks if the initiatives keep the functions agreed on in the contract. As the foundation's workers visit initiatives at least once a year, with an increasing number of supported projects, it becomes a more and more important duty. To be able to scope with this workload, trias is planning to establish a regional network, to be able to keep its personal relationships with all initiatives.

A key dilemma of trias is its relationship with the public sphere. An increasing number of municipalities asks trias to help them with a land lease contract to secure their buildings for centuries to be available for low-rent tenants only. This demand reveals the incapacities of public administrations to secure properties for really long term social use,

because in Germany one can erect a building and designate it for low-income tenants or people who can only pay, let's say, 5-6 euros per m2 for rent, and then one gets very interesting loans. But after twenty years this contract is over and then one can raise the rent up to market level. And for this mayor, this was not satisfying because twenty years are not long enough. She asked if we could do it in a different way, for a hundred years instead of twenty. We began to think about the land lease contract together. So we are on our way to become consultants also for the public sector. (...) The problem is that people working in municipalities often don't have the right understanding of civic groups and I sometimes describe them as cold partners because they don't think in the same way. (Novy-Huy 2016b)

The scale and potential of anti-speculation organisations is exponentially growing: Trias Foundation increased its initial capital a hundred times: deserved by its visibility and the co-housing community's confidence in the foundation, many people and organisations donated and invested in the foundation's projects. Due to this and the growing revenues from land-lease fees, the capital of trias grew from the initial 70.000 to 7.5 million euros in less than 15 years. Despite the generally low

interest rates, compared to which the 4% land-lease fee Trias asks can be considered high, many initiatives address the foundation. Expansion also raises issues of public accountability: what makes trias or other foundations that take over public services and safeguard public functions, legitimate representatives of public values? While other solidarity funds, like the cooperative housing ownership network Mietshäuser Syndikat, are very grassroots, basic democratic organisation, trias is considered by many initiatives in a more neutral, entrepreneurial context, expecting the foundation to “do the job for them, to be a service institution for them.” (Novy-Huy 2016b) But trias is not neutral and in the process of expansion, it needs

a more democratic structure. We already think about what happens if, let's say, a project in Berlin fails, goes bankrupt. Who decides what would happen in the future on that building site: only we, the Stiftung trias in Hattingen, or is it a matter of the Berlin projects as well. In the next years, we will have to take up this question and found a form of organisation to ask the neighbourhood projects, experts we know, and people even from the municipality, if they have ideas how to reactivate a building or land after a failed project. They should make decisions with us. I think we must go this way otherwise people won't accept the question of commons in connection with trias. (Novy-Huy 2016b)

Similarly to Stadt Neudenken's concept of a real estate board, the ideal arrangement of trias also suggests a shared governance structure where different actors can participate in the decision-making. Questions of accountability and governance also bring along new roles for civic initiatives:

I used to think that the most important is that buildings remain public, but now I have learned that public or solidarity forms of enterprise are not necessarily alone guarantee the representation of civil society interests. (Dumpe 2012)

Concluding remarks

This chapter outlined Berlin's specific history and unique reunification process that also created particular opportunities for squatters, space pioneers and entrepreneurs. As with the fall of the Wall, many formerly peripheral, abandoned areas became accessible and much of East Berlin's industry evaporated with the economic transition, a lot of buildings lost their functions or became suddenly attractive for cultural initiatives due to their newly central location.

For initiatives that often acquired their renovation and building management skills in West Berlin's squatting movement and the former East's alternative clubbing scene, the lack of regulatory interference opened many opportunities for the temporary use of abandoned land and vacant buildings. The 1990s witnessed many spatial experiments, first by spontaneous events and short-term uses, later picked up by professionals and also recognised by the municipality as initiatives potentially contributing to the city's creative scene. The self-destructive nature of provisional arrangements began to be publicly discussed in the late 2000s when private development companies started to utilise the tool of temporary use to brand new real estate projects.

In the meanwhile, when the speculative overdevelopment of office buildings in the 1990s turned into a real estate crisis, it left massive debts in the public budget of the city, forcing the administration to cut back services and privatise many of its assets. While privatisation was seen by many civic initiatives as short-sighted and damaging for the city's services and affordability, it unexpectedly also created opportunities for civic spaces. In an unprecedented manner, in the late 2000s, several citizen initiatives managed to purchase the buildings they used, with the help of various alternative finance organisations, in particular, with the contribution of anti-speculation foundations. These initiatives constituted the "autonomous" model of reappropriating vacant spaces, with the community-led privatisation of public properties with the help of alternative finance, thus turning their back to the public sphere considered as no longer a legitimate representative of public interests,

In the meanwhile, other initiatives looked for new principles and methods for “good privatisation” where public participation and the values generated locally would be in the centre of privatisation processes. However, individually negotiated agreements that worked in distinct situations and actor-networks, and that operated outside established frameworks of participation, proved to be

difficult to multiply or upscale through specifically designed procedures and policies, thus raising the question of scalability of particular public-civic cooperations. In addition, the growth of alternative finance and solidarity networks, however, raises many questions about the governance and coordination of various roles played by civic, private and public actors in providing public services and safeguarding public facilities and values.

7. Community Access to Vacant Spaces: Comparing Models and Elements of a Movement

Although they represent a variety of situations, actors, buildings, conflicts and cooperations, civic spaces in Budapest, Rome, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Berlin address many similar issues. While these civic spaces – re-appropriated vacant buildings – range from various kinds of community spaces and cultural venues to sports and health facilities, event spaces or workspaces, they are all responses to an omnipresent need for space to provide services to communities. If civic spaces refer to a great diversity of short-term and long-term uses as well as various constellations of tenancy or ownership, they are all created in the cooperation and conflicts of various institutional and non-institutional, human and non-human actors. Therefore, seen in a wider perspective, the dilemmas of vacancy and civic spaces are questions of governance of spatial assets and urban transformation.

The previous chapters look into similar processes in four different urban areas: the fight for access to (vacant) space, the professionalisation of organising access to (vacant) spaces, structuring mechanisms and policies as well as conflicts around instrumentalisation, gentrification and ownership. With all the similarities and differences of these processes, the parallels and contrasts of the initiatives outlines, can we conceive civic spaces or the re-appropriation of vacant buildings as elements of a wider movement to gain community access to space?

In his foundational book on urban social movements, *The City and the Grassroots*, Manuel Castells explores a number of cases in which different forms of social movements take place in cities across the globe. In arguing for a comparative method, he justifies this juxtaposition with emphasising that they all contribute to a general process of urban change, thus their fate is linked:

How do structurally defined actors produce and reproduce cities through their conflicts, domination, alliances, and compromises? How do spatial forms, economic functions, political institutions, and cultural meaning combine themselves in a process of urbanisation that we view as an outcome of social struggles and social bargaining? How do class, sex, race, ethnic origins, cultural traditions, and geographical location, contribute to the formation of the social actors that intervene in the urban scene? How does such a pattern of relationships vary in different historical contexts? (...) How far are the fates of cities and societies linked in the process of historical development? (...) How do contemporary urban movements contribute to the formation of new historical actors, and, therefore, to the general process of social change? (Castells 1983:xix)

Castells' use of cases is based on the assumption that they are independent from each other in their progress; their relationship is mostly relevant only from the viewpoint of theory. Castells addresses the ambiguity of this structure of argument:

Yet how accurate can be a demonstration based upon a limited number of case studies? In fact it is because our purpose is to further the process of theory-building that the case-study approach appears to be the best. Case studies have always been praised because they permit in-depth analysis, but blamed because of their singularity, disallowing any extrapolation of the findings. Nevertheless, we should remember that, from a historical point of view, all social situations are unique, and so are the findings of empirical research. (Castells 1983:xx)

Castells goes on by pointing out the significance of case studies from the viewpoint of theory:

The general value of any observation depends on the purpose of its use. (...) If we want to elaborate a theory of urban social movements on the basis of historical experience, we must observe unique situations in which a particular phenomenon, considered by our theory to be crucial, is amplified. (...) While case studies cannot provide a systematic verification of established propositions, they are invaluable in the pathbreaking efforts of generating new theories. (Castells 1983:xx)

Castells' logic only makes use of one aspect of case studies; in his effort to focus on similarities of independent cases, he disregards the importance of currents, as links between events and situations taking place in movements considered as separate. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that in a

variety of research fields, cases are neither isolated, nor immune to currents. They are nodes of networks of events, often fed by seemingly independent historical developments and events, but informed by each other in their responses to these events. To go beyond comparison in research also means to look at the relationships between movements in their actions, arguments, and means of mobilisation as well as in the situations they respond to.

Subsequently, if we consider the re-appropriation of vacant buildings as segments of a social movement, it is important to look not only at how these initiatives are embedded in local situations, but also at the connections of these segments and the extent to which they serve as interfaces of social and cultural currents responding to global constellations of urban transformation. This chapter looks into these connections, the similarities and differences of processes of reuse in the four urban regions, the various actor-networks and modalities of cooperation and conflict around practices and mechanisms of re-appropriating vacant buildings. Furthermore, the following pages also aim at identifying various interpretation and perspectives of the common framework within which these processes take place.

7.1. The changing role of the public sector and its services

The emergence of civic spaces, socially engaged, culturally active and locally connected, but wittingly not managed by public administrations or entities, are partially a consequence of the public sector's withdrawal from many areas and the vacuum left behind by declining public services. The gradual disengagement by the public sector in various societal challenges, successive waves of privatisation and the increasing financialisation of public real estate stocks are common traits between all the discussed cities and consequently, of urban development processes taking place in them.

The 1990s, while welcoming the liberalisation of the property market in Budapest and Berlin, witnessed the creation of flexible regulatory environments in Rome and the Randstad, stimulating investment into properties and generating a construction boom in all these cities. In parallel, the arrival of cheap debt capital helped turning real estate into a financial product, taking over the lead in urban development from planning instruments and visions in these cities. The 1990s in all four regions were characterised by waves of privatisation and the establishment of a private development- and ownership-driven model of urban development with speculative real estate booms and public administrations economically interested in promoting growth and construction.

Privatisation and private sector-led urban development did not ease the public sector's financial pains in any of the four areas. While it expected to relieve its economic hardships through selling off its property assets, Budapest, together with the entire country, went into a deep recession in the mid-1990s and was also badly hit by the 2008 economic crisis that unfolded just after one of the city's largest construction booms. In the 2010s, in the process of restructuring priorities of state and municipal spending, a large part of public budgets was channeled into prestigious and large-scale development projects that failed to act as investments and created additional burdens to the city's economy. Through a different set of actions, the uncontrolled expansion of the Rome Model, encouraging growth without actual demand and investing in "starchitects" and their iconic buildings, also failed to generate new revenue sources for the public administration and brought Rome to the brink of insolvency, to be bailed out by the government. While Budapest and Rome accumulated debts that made their situation even more vulnerable after the outbreak of the crisis, the failed speculative investments of Berlin's Bankgesellschaft in the 1990s and Dutch housing corporation Vestia in the 2000s left tremendous debts in public budgets that would define the administrations' fiscal policy for years.

While the four regions all suffered from linking the financial health of public administrations to encouraged construction booms and privatisation processes, the economic crisis, political restructuring and austerity policies prompted local administrations in all the examined cities to redefine their social services and infrastructures. By the 2010s, Rome had already been through more than a decade of economic recession and political crisis, with collapsing basic services like waste-management and

public transportation, and many social and community amenities provided by community groups in occupied garages, school buildings, theatres or industrial spaces. In Budapest, the political shift of the 2010s and the corresponding reset of budgetary priorities and redrawing of ideological lines left many educational, cultural and social institutions impoverished and shut down, including crucial anti-poverty, integration and drug prevention programmes that were embraced by the civic sector and gradually moved into privately managed civic spaces. While the ideological crackdown witnessed in Budapest was foreign to Italian, Dutch or German cities, Berlin had its own experience of near-bankruptcy in the early 2000s and long-lasting austerity measures, as Dutch cities had their share of self-imposed austerity and the radical reduction of cultural and social budgets as well as of services outsourced to the private and civic sectors.

These evolutions inevitably generated important discussions about the role of the public sector in the “public city:” can and should governments and municipalities remain the central actors of the welfare, cultural and education system, continuing to manage the spaces and services that traditionally belonged to the public domain? Could public administrations, often overwhelmed by their core tasks, bureaucratic procedures or political dependence, and limited in their skills, capacities and networks use better their left over assets, and manage better the spaces that accommodate crucial services? Or can civic actors or communities better fulfil this task based on their flexibility, local knowledge, resource-efficiency and persistence? Or does the involvement of civic actors in providing public services is just another way of privatising services and dismantling the public domain and its welfare services? Are civic spaces a competition for public spaces or an extension to them? And which actors and actions represent best the “public interest” shaped and reinterpreted in the continuous negotiation between various positions and sets of priorities? How can the values and skills of the public and civic spheres complement each other in meaningful cooperations?

These dilemmas are embedded in many of the discourses related to vacant spaces and their reappropriation. The ethos of the new figures operating in the field abandoned by the public sphere is telling: the “spatial pioneer” that explores uncharted territories and finds opportunities in areas abandoned by both the public and the private actors, the “spatial entrepreneur” that turns space into an economic asset through an unconventional use, or the “city maker” that emerges as a new kind of urban developer, private in its non-standard choices and public in its claimed responsibilities; they all seem to be individual figures that operate at the margins of mainstream urban processes and on the ruins of failed public and private action. As the narrative of spatial pioneers and entrepreneurs and city makers tells us, these figures are capable of turning crisis into renaissance, disaster into opportunity, waste into resource: they are there to fix the problems the public sphere could not solve and the private sphere did not engage with. However, as the cases of Budapest, Rome, the Randstad and Berlin show, the contribution of the public sphere to these activities is crucial and largely defines the success of these initiatives. This contribution might range from tolerance to accommodation, from support to shared governance.

European municipalities responded to this challenge in a variety of ways. Some cities like Athens examine how to adjust their regulations to enable the functioning of community organisations, others, like Rijeka open many of their spaces for community initiatives, free of charge, but limited in their function. Some cities like Ghent create platforms to attract alternative finance for community initiatives, yet others create new legal frameworks to share public duties with community organisations in contractual ways, like Bologna with the Regulation of the Commons.

Access to space is a very important aspect of the public-civic cooperation: all situations where people gather in their bodily realities, requires space. Although it may not be the main objective, space-making is a tool to create a framework within which a community can function, or within which certain services can be shared and distributed (Patti and Polyak 2016b). Among the cities explored in the previous chapters, we see many variations for the spatial dimension of the public-civic relationship’s transformation. With an isolationist attitude, many social and cultural initiatives providing crucial services in Budapest withdrew into private spaces perceived as safer than politically pressured public properties. In a more confrontative spirit, many initiatives and spaces in Rome claiming a key

role in a local community and solidarity economy prefer to stay outside of regulations and thus avoid all kinds of compromises. In a more collaborative tone, Dutch municipalities experiment with sharing responsibilities and resources related to specific services with civic groups. Finally, in Berlin, with a more autonomous disposition, private foundations and solidarity funds began to take the role of public administrations in protecting public services operating in civic spaces and assuring their long-term sustainability.

These differences are rooted in distinct cultures of cooperation as well as varying levels of trust between public administrations and civic initiatives. While in many cities, more confrontative forms of claiming spaces like occupations have been tamed and channeled into compromising but functioning mechanisms of cooperation, in others, continuous confrontation makes cooperation seem like a concession, yet in others, communities choose to eliminate their dependence from the public sector through establishing new forms of ownership, or go invisible in a parallel infrastructure of civic spaces, hidden from authorities and operating in mainly private spaces. In the following pages, I will look into these differences through some of the cases explored in the previous chapters.

7.2. Four models of public-civic cooperation and conflict

Investment-led urban development, the pursue of iconic architecture and the creative city, and the financialisation of real estate stocks on one hand, and historical events like the German reunification or the perspective of Hungary's accession to the European Union on the other, created a speculative market that supported the overproduction of certain types of spaces in cities across Europe. With successive economic crises, these markets repeatedly collapsed, together with public, private and investor demand for the newly built spaces. The crises left behind millions of square meters of vacant office buildings in Berlin, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, entire stocks of unsold apartments in Rome or large areas of unfinished constructions in Budapest.

In parallel, national and EU regulations on public debts forced all administrations to privatise their assets, and limited their space to experiment with alternative real estate management policies and reduced their spending on social and cultural services. Many of the parallel welfare systems and infrastructures discussed above were born from the vacuum left behind by the public sector and the opportunities opened up by the crises. They found an imminent resource in dismissed spaces, suspended, forgotten or abandoned by public or private developers: vacant spaces potentially turned into an asset, converted into civic spaces where missing services can be delivered. They also turned energies aggregated during protests against privatisation and careless development projects into proposals to develop new spaces and services.

In order to investigate the phenomenon of vacancy in Europe and community initiatives to turn empty buildings into civic spaces, I selected four urban regions that operate with different modalities of cooperation between public administrations and the civic sphere in the process of opening up and establishing these spaces. Based on these modalities, I established four models and I looked at cases that are paradigmatic of these models and define a diversity positions occupied in them.

In Budapest, successive waves of privatisation and the fragmentation of the city's administrative structure created a system characterised by power games and competition between various administrative levels, space turned into a privilege or a tradable asset and fading trust between public administrations and private and civic actors. The resulting system of urban development and real estate management, highly opaque and dysfunctional, together with the economic crisis, produced paralysed administrations, reluctant to innovate or experiment, and a high quantity of unfinished projects and systematically vacant spaces, rarely accessible for non-market or non-governmental actors. After many spatial initiatives in the exploratory decade of the 1990s, and the commercialisation of many initiatives in the 2000s, civic initiatives in the 2010s faced the state takeover of cultural spaces and social services, severe budget cuts and corrupted privatisation and re-nationalisation processes. This situation prompted many community groups and citizen initiatives to create a parallel social

infrastructure that is organised by communities, funded by private individuals and organisations, and operates separately from state institutions and municipal bodies, preferably in independent spaces.

If among the presented cases, Tűzraktár was conquered by commercialisation, KÉK fell victim of conflicts with the public sector; in the 2010s I saw the emergence of many initiatives that were looking to isolate themselves from any public influence: for many organisations, it is safer to operate in private spaces than publicly owned spaces, even taken into account the fragility of short-term market contracts. The Művelődési Szint is paradigmatic of this *isolationist model*, the systemic refusal of any kind of cooperation with the public sector; a quite common demand from the side of NGOs or initiatives working in the social field. In other cases, initiatives with a more cultural and less political profile like the Jurányi Ház are ready to rent public properties as long as their professional and cultural activities are not compromised by this: in contrast with the public administration's property management offices, they are capable of developing management models for vacant buildings, but these models are much more dependent on individual and organisational capacities than on government facilitation or structured mechanisms for accessing space. Despite a cooperation that is fruitful for both the public and civic sectors, the latter are all critical about the way public administrations function and eventual cooperations unfold.

Another feature of the Budapest scene of reappropriating vacant buildings is the aim of reestablishing the model of cultural houses: it is a somewhat naive, nostalgic vision of cultural institutions that are not based on consumption, that is, they are immune to commercialisation that focus on education combined with cultural production. It is a model that is based on the total lack of trust between all sectors: between NGOs, the private sector and the public sector; and even between various branches of the government, that is, the Budapest Municipality and the national government, or the Budapest Municipality and the district municipalities. Where cooperation is rarely structural but depends on cooperation between individuals who belong to certain sectors or organisations.

In Rome, the growing hegemony of private sector-led "planning by doing" development projects, benefiting mainly private developers and investors, together with the decades-long political and economic crisis created an increasing amount of distrust between public administrations and citizen initiatives. Protests against the privatisation of public properties have often turned into illegal occupations, just like initiatives to provide missing local services in unprivileged neighbourhoods. While some social centres refuse all kinds of cooperation with the public administration and are interested in maintaining illegal occupations that they consider legitimate, other initiatives are aiming at creating legal situations and they put pressure on public administrations.

These occupations rarely operate in isolation: they are organised in city-wide networks and while constituting a self-organised civic realm of public services, they also reclaim policies on the side of the public administration. Among the initiatives presented in Chapter 4, the pressure by Moby Dick, Scup, Cinema America and Teatro Valle on the Rome municipality to stop privatising public assets and to start creating local services like libraries, sports centres, spaces for youth and a participatory theatre institution exemplifies well what I call the *confrontative model* of creating civic spaces. Despite their illegal nature, to a certain extent, these civic spaces depend on the tolerance of the public administration, often implying an indirect support by certain political parties or working groups.

Other initiatives like the ExSnia establish decades-long presence in a neighbourhood, and due to their power to quickly mobilise thousands of people for instant demonstrations and their participation in neighbourhood committees, they create a constant pressure on local administrations, become inevitable actors in certain areas and actively contribute to policy-making at the level of the district and the city. In Rome, many regulations that came into effect were initiated by community groups that were often more organised and engaged than administrations to pursue the composition of regulations. While there are no established channels for citizen initiatives to be brought into legislations, many proposals have found their ways to become effective regulations. Despite their often illegal situation, this impact makes civic initiatives in Rome way more influential than their counterparts

in Budapest who rather seek isolation and relative autonomy without much interference with mainstream politics.

In the Netherlands, in a context of failed urban development programs based on real estate speculation, the gradually de-radicalising squatting movement played an important role in urban planning processes, both by protesting development projects and by offering alternative development mechanisms for the creation of civic spaces. In this milieu of spatial experimentation, citizen and artist initiatives were pioneers in organising working and community spaces for themselves, first in the context of the squatting movement, later with temporary rental contracts. With the recognition of the importance of creative industries in the city economy and urban transformation, and with policies to “outsource” services both to private and to community actors, the disposal of spaces became connected to various service deliveries: administrations opened up their spaces to citizen initiatives, experimenting with new logics and cooperations of development.

Spaces created through the Breeding Places program, the temporarily used buildings of Post CS and Trouw, or the “sequential vacancy” envisioned by RAAAF, the revitalised office buildings of Rotterdam’s ZoHo district are all participants in what I call the *consensual model* of civic spaces. In this model, although there is a strong accent on the skills and innovation of individual initiatives, the modalities of public-civic cooperation are largely defined by public administrations: innovative in following and flexible in enabling citizen initiatives, the public sector continuously reshapes the rules and regulations according to the needs of civic spaces, allowing initiatives to act legally also where they push the boundaries of legality.

While this is a great model for cooperation, it also has many limitations: depoliticising the majority of civic initiatives, the consensual model limits them in moving outside the frameworks established by the public administration. While this constellation facilitates the professionalisation of certain actors by acquiring a new set of skills that are also valued on the market, it also creates a dependence on public cooperation and also limits the power of the initiatives to capture the value created in civic spaces, as witnessed in many situations where rising land values make the maintenance and sustainability of civic spaces under pressure increasingly difficult. It also makes many of the “good practices” produced in Dutch cities difficult to transfer in other contexts where the public-civic relationship is more conflictual.

In Berlin, the radical restructuring of the city after the fall of the Wall turned formerly peripheral areas into central locations, with no plans and visions. In parallel, the future capital of Germany suffered from many gaps in its institutional landscape. Building on the legacy and skills first of West-Berlin squatting movements and later of East-Berlin music clubs and cultural enterprises, many of these abandoned parcels and buildings were temporarily reused by artists, activists, cultural producers and clubs in a semi-spontaneous manner: regulations here were following needs and practices with a significant delay.

Similarly to the Randstad, West Berlin’s squatting movement played an important role in shaping urban development policies from the 1980s on. In contrast with the consensual model of Dutch cities, however, where conflicts were finally channeled into attractive mechanisms of access to space, the lack of regulatory interference (Bader and Scherenberg 2010) and the spatial opportunities opening up in the 1990s made Berlin initiatives more experimental and more independent, especially with the Berlin administration slow and reluctant to engage and frame these experiments. With temporary contracts becoming a genre and proliferating in certain areas of the city, it was also in Berlin where the contradictions of temporary use came first to the surface, generating significant discussions about its social utility and dangers. This is also where communities and civic initiatives first became aware of the limitations of tenancy agreements and the dangers of being pushed out of their spaces by processes of privatisation, and therefore looked into possibilities to become owners of their spaces.

The framework of cooperative ownership, imported from the cooperative housing movement and first implemented in a non-housing context at the ExRotaprint, became an important component of Berlin’s *autonomous model* that offered responses to dilemmas of gentrification, speculation and

precariousness. Born with ExRotaprint successfully purchasing its compounds, the model of divided ownership has been since then replicated by many other organisations, and has become an inspiration for initiatives aiming at changing the general policies of privatisation.

The success of implementing this model of autonomy through cooperative ownership depends on many specific factors. ExRotaprint's enterprise was made possible by the perfect constellation of low real estate prices, relatively transparent public real estate management and stable legal environment, high purchasing power and the existence of alternative financing structures. This constellation is so specific and probably unique for the German capital and some other German cities that experiments to export the model in other countries and cities might face many difficulties.

As we can notice through the examples of the different cities, the various models are rooted in different cultures of cooperation. The quality and intensity of cooperation networks play a crucial role in the achievements of initiatives to create civic spaces that are always embedded and largely defined by the networks of cooperation and conflict between various actors. This dependence on cooperations becomes most tangible when practices and models are transferred from one context to another. In many contexts, like in Budapest or Rome, the lack of capacity or sensibility from public administrations makes many citizen initiatives isolated and limited in their scope. On the other hand, an all-encompassing regulatory framework, created by the public administration and based on the expected rational choices of various actors, like in Dutch cities, carries the risk of instrumentalising civic initiatives and not leaving any space for them to act outside of pre-established frameworks of cooperation. In Berlin, in turn, the dialectic of citizen pressure and experimentation and the public acceptance and recognition creates a more politicised but also more open-ended situation with less streamlined processes but with a variety of values in dialogue and many different visions for public-civic cooperation.

7.3. Networks for structured mechanisms of reappropriation

While individual initiatives might create stable and resilient civic spaces with the help of their personal connections and specific skills, upscaling or multiplying the achievements of these initiatives needs many actors and relationships of cooperation to be in place. Functioning reuse mechanisms rely on many components: physical conditions, concepts, transparency, regulations, funding and trust, elements that structure and organise the way people interact with each other around vacant spaces.

First, banally, there is a need for well-kept spaces. While in the Netherlands and Berlin, public owners are required to keep their property maintained and tempered also when they are not used, similar requirements are rarely respected in Rome and Budapest. This is not a marginal difference: the costs of recovering an empty building are multiplied when significant investments are needed for making a space useable and this also strongly impacts the threshold of access. For instance, empty school buildings in Budapest, after being unused for a few years and with their heating systems frozen several times, usually need hundreds of thousands of euros to be functioning also during the heating season. Each day of abandonment therefore adds to the costs of recovery. On the other hand, well-kept spaces are faster to access when an agreement is made: long renovation processes may create tensions among the partners and drain resources like in the case of many civic spaces in Budapest. Similarly, initiatives using public money for renovation might also face absurd restrictions on spending and procurement, like in the case of Rome, where each ingredient of a renovation has to be chosen from a variety of offers.

Second, reuse processes need skilled initiatives that are capable of negotiating with owners, generating popular support or a targeted audience, taking on renovation processes, elaborating an economic plan and assure continuous physical presence. The existence of these skills are not obvious and they come from different milieus in different contexts. In cities with a history of squatting, like West Berlin, Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Rome, produce generations of activists as well as cultural and creative producers with skills in managing spaces and redeveloping abandoned locations. In other cities, like Budapest, the historic lack of any tolerance towards squatting leaves activists with no tools:

here many civic spaces grow out of the theatre scene or of commercial venues, although the shifting and blurry boundaries between commercial and cultural uses usually benefits the former.

It is also quite revealing to see what are the professional competences behind civic spaces in various cities. While in Dutch cities and Berlin, the key actors conceiving, mapping, discussing, establishing, operating and mediating civic spaces are mainly artists, musicians and architects, in Rome social and cultural activists, and in Budapest, theatre professionals have a more important role in these processes: in the context of Northern and North-Western European cities, spatial innovation comes mainly from professional opportunities, in the context of Eastern and Southern European cities, from direct, personal and collective needs for space, as the limitations of cooperation networks here impede the creation of streamlined mechanisms enabling replicable processes.

The variety of backgrounds of individuals and groups leading spatial reappropriation processes in each city's civic scene also implies different names for their roles and spaces. The expressions "civic city" and "house of culture" in Budapest, the emphasis on the "commons" in Rome, the character of the "cit maker" in the Netherlands and the figures of "spatial pioneer" and "spatial entrepreneur" in Berlin are all embedded in different social realities, have different political positions in these realities and different visions of civic spaces, sometimes with concealed economic apparatuses (Rome) at other occasions with an emphasised economic role (Randstad). There are also important evolutions taking place in the profile of civic spaces and their protagonists: while parts of Berlin's club culture and their spaces evolved into socially responsible, multi-functional community facilities (see the student housing and public space planned as part of the Holzmarkt regeneration), Budapest's thriving nightlife venues predominantly remain highly commercialised and conflicted, their social responsibility limited to accommodating certain kinds of events in less frequented time periods.

Third, the creation of civic spaces is facilitated by a clear vision for real estate development from the side of public administrations, and by the corresponding public policies. If a public administration aims at making use of its real estate and at discouraging private owners to leave their properties vacant, it requires a proper understanding of the real estate situation, that is, a relatively precise overview of occupancy of both private and public properties. Some cities, like Amsterdam, by coordinating their departments' figures, created combined databases of public properties, and elaborated ways to enumerate also private properties. Although Amsterdam initially had many troubles creating a map that also included private properties, as the municipality was threatened with legal action for displaying private information, the city finally managed to publish an interactive online map that helps prospective tenants find rentable spaces and owners to make visible their available properties.

In other cities, information is limited even on public properties, or spread across different databases belonging to various departments, and practically inaccessible for citizens and potential users. In Budapest, for instance, the fragmented administrative structure and the districts' lack of willingness to publish data about their properties despite being obliged to makes the city's public real estate stock virtually impossible to oversee. Similarly opaque conditions in Berlin prompted the creation of the Leerstandsmelder map, collecting data from citizens to create an overview of vacancy in the city, helping to conceive the scale and structural characteristics of the problem and create a dialogue about public real estate management. In a similar fashion, the Lakatlan Budapest map, modelled after Leerstandsmelder, brought together citizen contributions to highlight the scope of vacancy in the city. In another optic, the Roma Abandonnata map, collecting mainly empty cinema buildings, can be seen as a public diary of a group of youngsters looking for a space for afternoon activities, somewhat similarly to the Atlas of Vacancy of RAAAF that was created to shock and to be exhibited in the first place.

While encyclopaedic maps with the ambition of a complete overview of a city's vacant real estate stock usually fail to become useful beyond their rhetorical force, situational surveys connected to a concrete area or specific quest deliver more results. The key to the success of such survey is the clarity of vision behind the inventory process, where all stakeholders see the importance and

objective of mapping vacant properties. As Jutta Kleedorfer, head of the Vienna municipality's temporary and multiple use program "Einfach-Mehrfach" explains: "It has to be the interest of both sides, and then the inventory is not systematic but is based on the contributions of the interested parties." (Kleedorfer 2012)

Crowdsourced and public data also served as a basis for matchmaking platforms that operate with varying success. While the Zo!City platform engaged in connecting property owners with users in a specific area of Amsterdam undergoing a thorough regeneration process, other platforms failed in their ambition of matchmaking, either because of the absence of sufficient information, like in the case of the Budapest Municipality's Rőgtön Jövök map that had a short life and failed to collect data from more than a few districts, or because of the absence of any connected procedures from the side of owners or municipalities that would motivate users to engage with the platform, like in the case of City Hound in Rome. Comparing the maps and platforms launched in Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome and Budapest strengthens the conclusion that similarly to mechanisms of reusing vacant spaces, the automation of matchmaking between owners and users only works in contexts with already existing procedures and functioning partnerships in place: digital platforms can serve as extensions, accelerators and multipliers of already existing procedures, but cannot create them in the first place.

Fourth, mechanisms to enable the creation of civic spaces largely depend on supportive programs and regulations. Without legal frameworks, it is difficult to create replicable experiences: cities with a very vital activist scene and squatting culture but without the legal frameworks to regularise the collective use of vacant buildings, like Rome, struggle to establish transparent and legally and economically stable civic spaces. In the past decade, public administrations in Europe have addressed the issue of vacancy from two sides. On one hand, they elaborated various tools to help or force owners reuse their vacant properties: from legal and financial assistance, through matchmaking to taxes, tax breaks and incentives, taxes and requisition orders. On the other hand, they also developed ways to help initiatives access space: by ways of creating a transparent overview of a city's real estate situation, mediating between owners and users, funding, granting permissions – and by creating structures or mechanisms that combine all this.

Key to these mechanisms is flexibility from the regulators' side. In their description of temporary use, that we can also apply for the reuse of vacant spaces by civic initiatives, Bishop and Williams call it "a manifestation of a more dynamic, flexible and adaptive urbanism, where the city is becoming more responsive to new needs, demands and preferences of its users." (Bishop and Williams 2012:42) This responsiveness requires more flexible regulations and permission procedures, as besides the lack of information and addressable owners, the other main obstacle for the civic use of vacant spaces is complex bureaucratic structures and inflexible regulations. Legal obstacles based on strong categories like the impossibility to lease spaces for short term (Budapest), the obligation to run public competitions for all minor expenses (Rome), the requirement of full-scale security measures for short-time users and exclusive zoning or the mandatory separation of social and economic uses are all part of "traditional regulatory and planning systems that are based on the perceived primacy of stable and certain environments for investment as well as the avoidance of conflicting land uses" (Nemeth 2014:146) that hinder the establishment of civic use processes.

Undoubtedly, flexibility is a highly contradictory term that has radically changed its meanings and supporters in the past decades. While in the 1960s and 1970s social movements were reclaiming more flexibility from the side of institutions in the conception of the lived city as opposed to the planned city, more opportunities for different ways of life, the gradual deregulation and financialisation of urban development and planning changed the perception of flexibility from a way to liberation to a means of precariousness. In actor-networks lacking transparency and meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships, flexibility in regulations often serves large real estate players that understand loopholes better and are more competitive in economies of scale.

In Budapest, government-sponsored development projects granted "nationally significant" status, often with funding and contractual details classified for years, are exempt from planning regulations

and public overview and can therefore enjoy accelerated procedures with little transparency. The contrast could not be bigger with smaller-scale, citizen-initiated regeneration processes. Extremely slow response from municipalities to civic requests deter many initiatives from applying for or renting publicly owned spaces: because of the lack of established channels of communication and interest from the side of public officials, simply to get the keys and visit a property might take months if not years. The fragmentation of city's administrative structure does not help either: mechanisms to access public properties differ in each district and make orientation for initiatives in need of space very difficult. In addition, national laws make it impossible to rent long-time abandoned public properties for free or a symbolic fee, even when they have been abandoned for years and generate significant deficits for municipal budgets.

In Rome, besides unclear ownership conditions in some cases, the various regulations that apply for different property typologies belonging to different public owners makes it very puzzling for community initiatives to find their way to the selected spaces. Until recently (Caputo 2015) there were no comprehensive guidelines for citizens to access publicly owned spaces, despite the existence of many separate mechanisms. Additionally, the selective application of laws of legality, direct allocation and competition based on the nature of political support or pressure on civic spaces makes citizen initiatives very vulnerable and dependent on political approval. While the Rome Municipality in the 1990s created channels to regularise occupied spaces, the fragility of quasi-legal social centres is regularly revealed by new bills by administrations hostile to leftist movements and non-market arrangements. The inaccessibility of publicly owned spaces is just heightened by the rigid pricing rules of public owners: general rental fees apply for all properties owned by public housing companies that makes ground floor spaces in peripheral areas cost the same as in central neighbourhoods. Inevitably, this leads to the systemic and chronic vacancy of shops and non-residential spaces of many areas outside Rome's historic core.

In contrast with the rigid regulations of Budapest and Rome, civic initiatives in both Berlin and Dutch cities benefited from temporarily suspended or overlooked rules. While in the past decades, Berlin and the Netherlands have all prohibited squatting, they also created frameworks to legalise many of the occupied spaces. While civic initiatives in Rome are stuck in their quasi-legal status that is not approved by everyone and that remains under significant pressure by the press and right-wing parties, and Budapest projects remain completely dependent on the goodwill of public or private owners, clear frameworks in Berlin, Amsterdam or Rotterdam allowed initiatives to gain strength, develop resilience and experiment with new economic and organisational models towards higher levels of autonomy. Experimentation in both contexts has been facilitated by flexible or absent administrations: the lack of regulatory interference (Bader and Scherenberg 2010) in 1990s Berlin and the adaptability of Dutch planning regulations both proved stimulating of temporary and long-term civic uses of vacant spaces. In the Netherlands, fast reaction and realistic ideas of the time needed to sell a building helped projects like those arranged by ANNA; suspending certain regulations and zoning laws made possible the transformation of the Zomerhofkwartier's office buildings in Rotterdam and many similar projects across the country.

However, while the methods, the actors and the aesthetics of spatial experimentation seem similar in Berlin and Dutch cities, there are crucial differences in their actor-networks: while the Berlin experiences of temporary use unfolded spontaneously in the 1990s and were almost overlooked by the administration that began to adjust its regulations as well as embrace and promote spatial experimentation only a decade later. In contrast with this relatively free, unstructured experimental space left flourishing by a distracted public administration in the midst of a radical restructuring, Dutch municipalities apprehended spatial initiatives from the beginning, and gradually incorporated many them into development processes informed by the creative city theory (Peck 2012b), also learning from experiments in other cities, including Berlin. Temporary use has become a tool in the institutional toolbox to help the transformation of larger areas:

Many of these projects were made possible by the crisis. What we definitely learned from them is the importance of temporary use in the first phase, when you revitalise an area, for branding, making it visible, bringing people to an area to see the changes with their own eyes. (Bouman 2016)

While opening opportunities to many civic initiatives whose opportunities were narrowed by the criminalisation of squatting, shorter and longer term mechanisms for the reuse of vacant buildings, like the Breeding Places programme, could not guarantee long-term stability for civic spaces. With the post-crisis return of the construction industry and financial capital, even initiatives with international visibility, like the NDSM Werf, were endangered by new development plans. Distinctively, Berlin spatial pioneers who acquired skills during various experimentations with temporary use without much institutional supervision, developed their scene in a more autonomous way, outside of official frameworks. While temporary use in Berlin has also been picked up by developers and the municipality to support new branding strategies, the politicised nature of the spatial pioneer scene helped initiatives both in mobilising protests to protect them from large-scale development projects like the Media Spree and in developing economically more sound and secure models of tenancy based on long-term rental contracts or cooperative ownership arrangements like in the case of ExRotaprint. On the other hand, structuring citizen access to ownership, as attempted by the StadtNeuDenken initiative with a new concept for privatisations can also prove counter-productive: establishing frameworks in the place of experimental initiatives might escape the will of its own initiators and create new bureaucratic boundaries in the creation of civic spaces.

While administrative flexibility played an important role in spatial experimentations in both Berlin and Dutch cities, the fact that Berlin initiatives established continuity between temporary uses and long term tenancies, and managed to use their skills to turn their experiences into long-term presence, changed their status and contribute to a more resilient, more stable scene of civic spaces. In the Dutch context, while administrative flexibility lowers the threshold of accessing spaces, the same flexibility also makes civic spaces relatively precarious, and subject to real estate speculation and missing value capture from the side of civic initiatives. In contrast, the complete lack of regulatory flexibility makes it very difficult for civic initiatives to access publicly or privately owned vacant spaces in a legal manner. In the same time, applying principles of flexibility in contexts like Budapest or Rome, both devastated by speculation, opaque public real estate management and corruption scandals, could prove disastrous: hence the never-ending discussion among Rome activists about the dilemmas of direct allocation or competition.

Fifth, the civic reuse of vacant buildings needs funding, at least at the level of initial investment in renovating spaces that had often been abandoned for years if not decades. Although very few municipalities have capacities to subsidise or invest in civic spaces, there are many ways in which public administrations or private owners can help the financial demarche of civic reuse projects. In Budapest, the establishment of the Művelődési Szint was only possible with a gradually introduced rent, from 0% in the first six months, through 50% during the second six months, to 100% after one year. A few kilometres away, Jurányi Ház benefited both from not paying rent during the months of renovation and a cheap loan from a private sponsor that could cover the renovation. But in Budapest, none of the civic spaces received direct contribution for the renovation of their building, neither from public, nor from private owners and they still have to pay a significant rent that puts a continuous economic pressure on them.

In other contexts with more strategic significance granted to civic spaces, municipalities and private actors play a more active role in helping initiatives establish their project. In the redevelopment of the Schieblock building, a long time vacant office building in Central Rotterdam, the Municipality used its creative industries fund to give a loan of 200.000 euros to Codum developers, for renovation, to be paid back in 5 years. The loan was crucial in the building's regeneration: no bank would have taken the risk that the 3-5-year rental contract represented. Through renting offices and spaces for hotels, bars and educational spaces, the Schieblock paid back the initial investment in 3 years, and has received prestigious architecture awards for the building's transformation. Similarly, the Amsterdam Municipality's creative industries fund was used to help the administration's Bureau Broedplaatsen

transform vacant buildings, like the Volkskrant into incubator spaces, with the cooperation of creative producers and developers like Urban Resort, an organisation transforming vacant buildings into workspaces. Besides direct financial aid and advice in the development process, Bureau Broedplaatsen also plays an important role in finding credit or grants to cover the commercially non-viable components of property development.

For other initiatives, it is important to create clear rules of financial independence that guarantee the economic sustainability of the regular operation of the spaces themselves. For instance, the Berlin-based temporary use agency Coopolis

took government subsidies to organise the change process. No government subsidies were used for rents or investments into the spaces themselves: the goal was, from the beginning on, to moderate self bearing deals between real estate owner and vendor so that they are independent from subsidies.
(Raab 2012:189)

The collective Stad in de Maak calculated the maintenance costs of vacant buildings in a Central Rotterdam neighbourhood and asked housing corporation Havensteder that instead of spending an approx. 60.000 euros on the maintenance of six buildings for 8-10 years, they could give the collective the 60.000 euros in advance, together with the buildings, and they would take care of the properties, maintain them and make them generate collective profit (Neelen 2016). In this set-up, subsidies do not represent an additional burden on public budgets, but inevitable costs are reoriented from maintenance into investment. This arrangement necessitates transparent public budgets: the same proposal in Budapest by the Lakatlan program was dismissed, as public expenses related to maintenance or simply the running costs of vacant public properties are spent mostly unobserved as no political decision is needed to approve them. A Central Budapest district can without any difficulties spend millions of euros a year in running costs, and face political conflicts when discussion the possibility of investing a few thousands of euros in renovating a building.

In contrast with Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Berlin, where the fields of civic initiatives, social enterprises and creative industries overlap in many areas, Rome and Budapest share a more strict separation between non-profit organisations and the social economy, where the former should ideally not engage with any kind of economic activities. This separation puts in difficulty many NGOs that without the capacity to generate revenues, become completely dependent on public subsidies and, correspondingly, political support (Lipták 2015). In Rome, existing mechanisms for the civic maintenance of public spaces even puts initiatives in an economically demanding position where they have to pay for electricity and water while maintaining public green spaces for free. The dominant public-civic cooperation, based on the volunteering of citizens, is rejected by many citizen initiatives. As an activist of Teatro Valle Occupato explains, it is important to “find within the struggles devices capable of rejecting the risk of volunteering that does not belong to our political culture because it does nothing but reproduce existing forms of assistentialism. (Cirillo 2014:102)

Additionally, the question if civic organisations using public properties should be capable of running economic activities to support their programme has been dividing opinions in the elaboration of the city's commons regulations. In other contexts, where despite the open-mindedness of public administrations to provide affordable spaces to community organisations, their inability of generating revenue from the spaces makes them stuck in buildings with no perspective of investment in better equipments, heating or other amenities (Lukanovic 2016).

Sixth, structuring mechanisms to enable civic spaces needs procedures to give legitimacy to non-institutional actors. This legitimacy, in turn, requires a certain level of mutual trust and recognition. As long as the various actors – civic organisations, design studios, development companies and municipal departments – of regeneration projects are not aware of each other's motivations, objectives and ways of working, a cooperation process is very difficult to orchestrate: trust between these actors is crucial for multiplying or upscaling successful initiatives. Creating structures of mediation between property owners, potential users and administrations requires the systemic recognition of the skills, capacities, motivations and needs of civic actors, and occasionally, their taste. If municipalities want to

revitalise their high streets, keep youth in town and engage the creative energies in urban regeneration processes, as Gabor Everraert from the Rotterdam Municipality notes, they have to learn to listen:

The creative industry doesn't like standardisation which is very different from the municipality and so they are hard to keep pace with. They will find their own place before we even know it's a place. Often when we make policy on creativity, it's already outdated. The municipality has to be keep listening in order to be supportive and to do less harm. It's not about the municipality deciding on the direction but instead giving quick access to people or networks to support these projects. (Killing 2014:14)

The translation between the values, tastes, requirements and offers of public administrations and civic initiatives is often carried out by intermediary organisations. Agencies of temporary or long term civic use act as mediators: as a "support mechanism (...) that connects temporary occupancies to those who need them" (Berwyn 2012:143), they construct links between owners and potential users, build networks, identify resources both on the owners' and the users' side. They can be a private initiative like in the case of the Dutch ANNA, Berlin's Coopolis, or Leipzig's HausHalten; or initiated from within the municipality, but operate outside of it, like London's Meanwhile Space, Rotterdam's SKAR or Bremen's ZwischenZeitZentrale: independent enough from municipalities but cooperating and exchanging information with them, without being decelerated by the administrations' cumbersome bureaucracy. The key to the success of these intermediate organisations is their recognition in playing a role that cannot be replaced by municipal officers or private owners and traditional real estate agencies. As a Bremen city official describes his cooperation with the city's temporary use agency, this latter makes the link between buildings owned by the administration and the potential users:

they know the projects and the buildings, they act as translators between the administration's bureaucracy and people who have a different language. It's very good to have an institution between the customers and the administration. (...) Previously we had a normal, conservative agency, that didn't work. ZZZ comes from the creative scene, they are from the scene, and this is the main factor for success. (Stührenberg 2014)

Replicating good practices, that is, establishing mechanisms that help initiatives go through civic reuse processes with the lowest possible thresholds, becomes difficult if like in Budapest, each initiative has to struggle to be recognised as a legitimate actor, or like in Rome, participatory processes have to face constant accusations related to their transparency and openness, as it happened with the community initiative aiming at reopening Cinema Aquila. In these contexts, where particular actor-networks are not capable of creating mutually accepted and respected, relatively neutral frameworks, personal connections dominate and overwrite regulations. Personal connections are crucial in Budapest, for instance, where the work of Eleven Blokk, an association that finds studio spaces for artists, largely depends on the founders' knowledge of local decision-makers. Similarly, the public-civic cooperation "Rögtön jövök!" between the Lakatlan programme and the Budapest Municipality was also only possible because of the existing personal ties and trust between the municipality's planning department and KÉK. When seemingly neutral programmes are created, like in the case of TÉR_KÖZ in Budapest, they are often derailed by the emergence of pseudo-civic partners and political overhaul.

Besides the inclusion of non-institutional actors in cooperation networks, legitimacy and trust are also in play within administrations themselves. Creating transparency in public and private real estate management, mediating between property owners and potential users, designing incentives for the reuse of vacant spaces, relaxing regulations and granting permissions, providing funding or guarantees for loans: these are the key elements of policies for enabling civic spaces. However, real innovation in municipal policies cannot be created without having overall support and help from various departments and public bodies necessary for implementing plans.

In Budapest, where the city's fragmented administrative structure brings districts, the central Budapest municipality and various government agencies in competition, the complexity of the political landscape makes it exceptionally difficult for civic organisations to navigate through regulations and establish themselves as legitimate actors in cooperation processes. Similarly, government pressure and

competing departments within the Rome Municipality that develop their own parallel vacant space policy turn processes to access publicly owned buildings into lengthy, bureaucratic and inconsistent procedures. While Dutch municipalities operate in close coordination with housing corporations, and work together with various departments along a shared vision of urban development, the larger and heavier Berlin Municipality often experiences stark contrasts between the interests of different departments. When the Department of Culture invites a private organisation (Stiftung Maryon) to buy and preserve for cultural uses a property that the Department of Real Estate is obliged to sell, it signals the birth of a complex governance structure where the cooperation of public, private and civic organisations is necessary to overcome the public administrations' limits to protect public facilities and services.

7.4. From temporariness to ownership and shared administration

When it comes to citizen initiatives reappropriating vacant spaces, many concepts in play, such as temporariness or flexibility prove to be complex, contradictory ideas. As seen above, regulatory flexibility is not a value in itself, but should be seen as a situational tool that is necessary at some phases of urban regeneration and that can turn harmful in others. Regulations of access to and use of space therefore have to be conceived as part of a constantly negotiated set of interactions between actors in a changing framework that might or might not favour spatial innovation by civic initiatives. In the end, as regulations are reinforced by public officers, flexible regulations need flexible administrations. As Bishop and Williams suggest in the context of temporary uses, "existing zoning and planning frameworks by themselves are not necessarily a hindrance to the development of temporary uses, but it is the conservatism and (lack of) capacity of professional advisors and city governments to take them up." (Bishop and Williams 2012:43) It means that in order to facilitate the creation and stabilisation of civic spaces that deliver important public services, administrations that enact regulations and therefore structure the interactions within an actor-network, need to have a constant overview of urban regeneration processes and have to adjust their policies and rules according to transformations of the real estate market, ideally in a shared governance system with the participation of a balanced actor-network.

Similarly to regulatory flexibility, temporariness can be a helpful or menacing tool for citizen initiatives and civic spaces. Although it cannot give an answer to all urban ills, many commentators see temporary use as a precursor of a more inclusive planning system, where civic initiatives are invited to take part in the regeneration process, create value and benefit from an interim situation. Temporary use practices can act as platforms where spatial needs and resources are matched, where bottom-up initiatives meet public development strategies of administrations, forced by the decline of urban economies to rethink their development processes. In the same time, temporary use is often criticised for accelerating gentrification and for instrumentalising the presence of cultural activists and creative producers in raising the value of properties and neighbourhoods: this is why many spatial pioneers and spatial entrepreneurs moved on from the notion of temporary use to the broader issues of access to space and to common resources in general.

However, similarly to regulatory flexibility, temporary use is a situational tool that can help some actors in a situation and might menace them in another. While it is easy to blame temporary use for gentrification as examples of Berlin and Holland demonstrate, other cities like Rome or Budapest could benefit from streamlined mechanisms to temporary use. As Jurányi Ház-founder Viktória Kulcsár explains, while clear conditions are crucial for the centre's work, ownership would be too binding for an organisation that depends on many circumstances:

Obviously nobody invests fifty million Forints into a building if they feel like they don't have a written contract and they can be evicted at any moment. I have seen bad examples around me in terms of cultural venues and local governments. I felt that we should rather pay more money rather than be subject to eviction on a whim. In this sense I do not think it is a disadvantage that we are not owners, although in my opinion many tasks, such as maintenance, should be the responsibility of the owners. (Kulcsár 2015)

If conceived as part of sustainable urban development, temporary use needs to provide appropriate assurance to both owners and users by careful rental agreements and value capture frameworks, taking into account users' investments in the properties both in terms of financial and energy resources. With the right assurances and framework, temporary use can create an important learning phase, empowering users and equipping them for more substantial space takeovers. As Stad in de Maak-member Marc Neelen explains:

we see this current temporary use of buildings – because we don't own them, we'll have to give them back after a while to the owner – as a sort of a training condition or a training moment for what's yet to come. The next step for us is to go beyond this temporary exploitation of vacant properties. (Neelen 2016)

Neelen's pursuit to go beyond temporariness and embrace longer-term uses reflects an ambition that has surfaced in the past years among initiatives exposed to short-term tenancy contracts and those who seek for more autonomy in the spaces they manage. In this quest, the emergence of new, community-based property development models, where the contribution of new, responsible financial actors like Stiftung Maryon or trias enable citizens and artists groups in accessing to the ownership of their buildings, has been game-changer. For initiatives like ExRotaprint in Berlin, who managed to purchase the buildings they were operating in, the management and maintenance skills acquired in temporary use prove to be extremely useful in these processes.

In 2009, by purchasing the 10.000 Rotaprint complex in Berlin, ExRotaprint opened a new way for civic initiatives. The economic crisis, driving prices down, draining financial capital necessary for real estate developers and investors to participate in the Berlin privatisation process and urging the Berlin Liegenschaftsfonds to get rid of its properties helped the artists in buying the compound. But by the time the ExRotaprint model became internationally known and started to inspire citizen initiatives all across Europe, the possibilities in the real estate market opened by the crisis began to close. With the end of the crisis, at least concerning the availability of financial capital, real estate markets began to return to their pre-crisis dynamisms. While this recovery signalled the end of a missed opportunity in Budapest and Rome to exploit weaker demand and lower prices to build a more accessible property system, the return of investment capital brought about a housing crisis in Berlin and a return to the classic, investor-driven development mechanisms in Dutch cities. In Amsterdam, witnessing a 248% of growth in total foreign investment in property between 2013 and 2014 (Sassen 2016), pressure on real estate made the situation of many civic spaces unstable. With less need for city makers who invested their energies during the crisis when vacant buildings were mushrooming, the much hailed crisis-time extended governance that included citizen initiatives as legitimate players in planning and development processes was partially dropped.

Although the real estate market's return to normal endangered many civic initiatives, many of them were equipped with tools and skills that enabled them to make the next step towards stability. The end of the crisis in Dutch cities and the Berlin real estate boom brought up the question of autonomy and ownership even stronger: how can initiatives without much capital move beyond the vulnerability of short-term tenancies and changing prices? In contrast with the ethos of urban living in Berlin or Dutch cities in the last decades of the 20th century, where renting enjoyed higher popularity, many initiatives found the answer in ownership or very long-term leasehold, but excluding private profit.

While in the Anglo-Saxon context, and spreading to the continent through Belgium and France, the format of Community Land Trusts have been instrumental in helping residents create inclusive economic ecosystems and sustainable development models, in German cities, the legal form of heritable building right became widely used by community-led development projects. Heritable Building Right (Erbbaurecht in German) is a form of transferable and heritable long-term lease, popular in Germany, that allows the right-holder to build or develop the land. Generally granted for 30-99 years, the heritable building right makes development possible without buying the land that would require the upfront payment of large sums. This framework makes it possible to separate the ownership of a building and the land underneath. Although the legal form of Heritable Building Right

exists in other countries including Italy and the Netherlands, it is rarely used outside Germany and Switzerland. It is a preferred choice of ethical investors, municipalities, churches and local communities, creating revenue through the annual lease but keeping the ownership of the land with a designated use. It is also the format used by anti-speculation foundations like Maryon and trias that operate through ever-growing solidarity fund networks where the revenue from leasehold fees is used for purchasing further properties for civic initiatives.

Although following the example of ExRotaprint, many civic initiatives across Europe began to contemplate cooperation with anti-speculation foundations in order to buy their buildings, the model cannot simply be implemented anywhere: its adaptability depends on the ideas combination of low real estate prices, relatively transparent public real estate management and stable legal environment and high purchasing power. In addition, scaling up the work of the foundations Maryon and trias, by extending their solidarity fund networks to an international level might threaten the very principles of the foundations: the personal connection with and overview of supported initiatives. Furthermore, the intervention of these foundations in privatisation processes by the invitation of various public administrations in Germany raises additional dilemmas: what are the accountability criteria for private organisations like Maryon or trias that act in defence of public values, services and non-marketable spaces but operate outside of democratic processes and public rules of transparency? What gives their legitimacy as safeguards of civic spaces against private and public pressure? What makes their properties civic spaces and how can they, in cooperation with other actors, ensure the long-term sustainability of public values and spaces?

For principles of accountability, the extension of the public realm towards speculation-free spaces provided by private-civic cooperations should be joined by, but not overwhelmed by public administrations. If regulations of public-civic cooperations in the context of traditionally strong public administrations like the Bologna Regulation of the Commons have been limited to right of use and have not yet created applicable shared ownership models, shared administration, as a way to share public responsibilities and resources with community organisations and citizen groups, may prove to be an important model in creating community ownership over local assets and keeping profits benefit local residents and services, for more resilient neighbourhoods and more autonomous civic spaces.

7.5. From local cooperation networks to international movements

In the past decades, citizen initiatives recognised the opportunities of empty spaces and began to claim and reappropriate them in many cities in more or less the same time. The parallel materialisation of civic spaces operating in formerly vacant spaces is partly due to structural transformations of urban economies, the economic crisis and changing models of governance. In the meanwhile, civic spaces and their initiators also began to get in touch with one another, learning from each others' successes and failures and establish international networks of exchange and cooperation, infrastructures for emerging movements.

Upscaling or multiplying experiences of solidarity fund networks and shared governance structures needs a better understanding of how ideas travel and how local cooperation networks are connected into international movements. While citizen initiatives to reuse empty spaces operate within actor networks that are deeply embedded in social tissues and structures of cooperation, they are also parts of international networks of exchange and transfer. Differences between local cooperation networks undoubtedly limit the impact of international exchange and knowledge transfer. However, there are many connections not only public administrations and policies, but also between citizen groups that inspire international and inter-city cooperations on one hand, and new local initiatives on the other. At the most evident level, there are many international networks that address local struggles for citizen rights. As an activist of Rome's Teatro Valle Occupato explains, movements of the early 2010s were highly inspiring for the Roman movement for available and accessible spaces:

We should not forget the international context, the Arab Spring, No Cuts by British students, Spain, the US... these struggles express the desire to not be represented and hence a critique of

the system of political representation, accompanied by attempts to hint at processes of direct democracy not as an abstract statement of principles, but as a way to challenge the material conditions of life and initiatives (for instance, privatisation) that are designed to make it more difficult and precarious. (...) When they occupied squares in Spain and the conflicts began in North Africa, we felt that these struggles spoke a common language. The collective intelligence learns quickly, reworks and circulates analogous answers, similar practices because it faces forms of subtractions and attacks similar in terms of rights and resources. (Cirillo 2014: 99)

Besides drawing inspiration from protest movements from around the world and creating emotional connections with them, international networks also serve for more pragmatic exchange and learning possibilities, for instance, when it comes to structural and daily challenges of civic spaces:

We would like to develop international communications: we are continuously seeking infrastructures and institutional models that are similar, with whom we could create joint projects, find out what we could do that would benefit both or several organisations or even the creative artists or workshops. (Kulcsár 2015)

Many initiatives feel empowered by the existence of similar spaces and organisations elsewhere: it provides them not only with additional know-how but also with the sentiment that they are part of a larger movement, a momentum of transformation in urban development. As Hans Karssenberg of ZoHo, Rotterdam explains,

we see that what we tell about ZoHo, you can find also in other cities in Europe. It's good to know that it's not just an incident, it's not something we invented, but it's happening everywhere. We should slowly start to consider this the new way of urban development. (Karssenberg 2015)

While civic spaces create their networks in order to join wider debates about the access to space and the role of citizen initiatives in urban transformation, they also access new ideas, concepts and models that can help them reestablish their position in local cooperation networks. In parallel, partly as a result of the pressure by citizen groups to access spaces, partly due to their own ambition to up regularly upgrade their practices, municipalities also participate in transnational networks. While not all cities participate in specific programs of exchange like the EU-funded URBACT programme that brought the idea of temporary use to Rome, they often have their own networks of exchange. As an officer of Rotterdam explains the inspirations of his Municipality in establishing frameworks for temporary use:

When we decided to try temporary use in Rotterdam areas, we looked at how temporary use is done in Berlin and other cities. By now every city does that. And we also learned a lot from architecture offices and initiatives that came from bottom-up projects. (Bouman 2016)

Municipal, citizen and academic networks all contribute to the spreading of ideas: while citizen initiatives are faster in creating networks and due to their hands-on approach and better rootedness in their territory, have a more direct impact on the potential implementation of borrowed models, universities, research centres and administrations have often more resources to create and maintain their networks. The ensemble of these influences create those notions, concepts and models like temporary use, civic space or the commons, that constitute the building blocks of new movements for a better citizen access to space.

Similarly to traveling policies and concepts of community action or citizen initiatives are also distributed through international actor-networks by means of manifestos, books, events, people or movements. Movements are by definition dynamic processes, where group action develops from the recognition of insufficiencies in society's functioning and from the definition of common objectives and means to achieve them. Movements are commonly informed by social and intellectual currents whose circulation consists of linking individuals and groups in communities of convictions. In the course of the evolution of movements, communication between participants or constituent groups is crucial in the coordination of action; this communication implies that ideas, motivations, objectives, forms of actions, and social relations be constantly negotiated, and thus transformed during the process.

For instance, community mapping initiatives, temporary use projects, community-run civic spaces or regulations of the commons are not isolated cases; on the contrary, they are often inspired by each

other, and their methods shared, borrowed or copied in order to launch other local processes. They are often defined or self-defined as segments of a wide-scale movement, where shared concepts, convictions, arguments, methods, techniques and technologies tend to link them, turning them into a network of similar situations, events and actions. These similarities are further enforced by international organisations, funding institutions, cooperations or policy transfer projects. Furthermore, the homogenising force of technology or European spatial policies also enhances the formation of horizontal actor-networks at the international scale.

One of the key questions raised by civic spaces within international actor-networks is the dilemma of scales. How to scale up the experiment of citizen initiatives, community-run spaces, their experience in managing the commons, from the scale of a theatre building to larger complexes, services or the entire city? How to create a governance model in which public properties are managed in cooperation with community organisations and citizen groups? The dilemma of scale has been at the core of the commons discussion. As Ostrom's case studies were limited to groups of maximum 15000 people, many commentators expressed doubts about the scalability of these models:

How commoning might work at the local neighbourhood level is relatively clear. (...) But "how can radical decentralisation – surely a worthwhile objective – work without constituting some higher-order hierarchical authority? It is simply naive to believe that polycentrism or any other form of decentralisation can work without strong hierarchical constraints and active enforcement. (Harvey 2012:84).

In other actor-networks, somewhat overlapping with the commons movement, the connection to the international scale appears with a different tone. For instance, building on the international dissemination of the concept of "City Making," the 2012 edition of the IABR ("Making City") was followed by many events of a similar concept, from the Make City Festival in Berlin (June 2015) to the City Makers Summit in Amsterdam (May 2016), bringing together City Makers from various European cities and thus establishing an international network based on the movement's identity and objectives. As we can read in the introduction of the 2016 New Europe City Makers Pre-Summit:

All over Europe, pioneering City Makers take up initiatives to increase the liveability of their cities. They redevelop neglected brownfields, start community enterprises to create jobs in the neighbourhood, rethink food production through urban farming, address increasing vacancy of shops and industrial heritage or promote a more sustainable use of existing resources altogether. Our cities face many contemporary challenges, but the manifold initiatives of City Makers contribute to the innovative climate that determine our cities today. What drives them, and how can we make sure that the best practices flourish and accelerate? How can City Makers combine their societal impact with sustainable business models? What could new roles of government officials look like? And are there rules and regulations that should be adjusted in favour of the City Makers movement? (Pakhuis de Zwijger 2016)

As this description suggests, actor networks of community initiatives, City Makers or policymakers are not completely separate: at many occasions, they overlap with each other; either in terms of persons who are present in various actor networks, or in terms of concepts, where policy proposals refer to individual experiences of community initiatives or city makers. City makers' way into policy has also been emphasised by the Dutch government's envoy to the new EU Urban Agenda:

City Makers are important in building cities around Europe together with other citizens, business, local, regional and national governments and the EU. We all have our role to play in urban development. In the EU Urban Agenda we try to bring the most relevant actors contributing to the development of the cities together through the partnerships. (Urban Agenda for the EU 2016)

When with the help of international summits, festivals and knowledge exchange programs, different actors, including citizen initiatives, public administrations and private developers form an international actor-network, and they act towards shared objectives, they are gradually building up a movement. This raises dilemmas similar to the expansion of anti-speculation foundations and quasi-public organisations run by private and civic organisations: how to multiply or scale up influence

without losing touch with the ground, or giving up personal connections? If “trust doesn’t scale up” as a member of the German solidarity housing network *Mietshäuser Syndikat* suggested (Schönberg 2016) how to connect the scales and retain the trust that constitutes the basis of these cooperations? What are the formats of international cooperation that can pressure international decision-making, at the level of the EU, in a way that it benefits local communities and allows them to strengthen their positions? What is the democratic legitimacy and accountability of such a network and how can it change politics and logics of cooperation beyond the urban scale?

Concluding remarks

Citizen initiatives to reuse empty spaces operate within actor networks that are deeply embedded in social tissues and structures of cooperation. After exploring the cooperation networks of Budapest, Rome, the Randstad and Berlin through presenting discourses, initiatives and policies of accessing vacant buildings, this chapter analysed the similarities and differences between the role of the public sector; the different models of civic-public cooperation and the components of structuring the mechanisms of access to space in these cities.

Available spaces, skilled initiatives, transparency, flexible regulations, funding, legitimacy and trust are the most important elements of civic reuse that local cooperation networks have to address. When all these elements come together, they constitute the necessary conditions for successful civic spaces, but only in case the participating actors work together: if national lawmakers, municipal departments, private owners, and potential users coordinate their activities by creating pertinent cooperation structures. These structures require a flexible legal framework enabling a fast decision-making process and an enhanced sensibility for local needs and resources.

Local cooperation networks are quite different from each other: besides the differences of the physical environment and the availability of vacant spaces, individuals, collectives, public administrations, mediating organisations, and the regulatory and financial environments all play a different role in the various cities. This puts a limit to the transfer of ideas and models between different contexts. Locally, these actors together constitute cooperation networks that also define their space of manoeuvre: actions only come to effect in interaction with other actors in these networks and their actions.

The extended governance of spaces only works when actors outside of regular planning and development mechanisms are recognised as legitimate actors who can create value that no other actors are able to create for the city. The quality of these cooperations also define the limits of urban regeneration and civic spaces: while good policies are not enough without the right partnerships between civic initiatives, private and public owners, supportive communities and public officers, good initiatives cannot go much ahead either without supportive policies. Despite discourses that emphasise the role of individual or collective initiatives in the creation of new models for civic spaces, civic innovation in urban development almost always relies on public resources and facilitating structures. Nevertheless, by forming a critical mass, citizen initiatives can bypass existing frameworks and rewrite the rules of cooperation.

Conclusions

This dissertation has explored the actor networks that help turning vacant buildings into civic spaces in four European cities. These civic spaces comprise community facilities, grassroots cultural, sports or health centres, social kitchens, co-working spaces or simple venues for socialisation: the foundational institutions of urban life. The problem of abandoned, empty properties has been a cyclically returning topic during periods of political and economic hardship (Németh and Lanhorst 2014), demographic shifts (Oswalt 2005), migration, changing patterns of life, work and consumption (Krätke 2004) and the transforming role of the public sector (Swyngedouw 2005): it has again become an important element of the public debate about urban transformation during the last economic crisis (see Introduction). The opportunity of vacant buildings presented to non-institutional actors of urban interventions and development has been periodically recognised by artists (Zukin 1982), squatters (Holm and Kuhn 2011), community initiatives (Oravecz et al. 2015), designers (Bey 2014), temporary users (Overmeyer 2004), space pioneers (Overmeyer 2004), spatial entrepreneurs (Buttenberg et al. 2014), city makers (Brugmans et al. 2012) and commoners (Stavrides 2016). For actors without significant financial resources, properties outside the regular real estate market often represents a lower threshold of accessibility and more flexibility in using spaces. Furthermore, abandoned buildings also embody architectural values and memories that are perceived as inspiring and fecundate the activities taking place in them.

In the past years, I have been following many civic space initiatives that are embedded in local situations and respond to local challenges but are connected to broader social and cultural currents responding to global constellations of urban transformation (see Chapter 1). In the meanwhile, starting from these initiatives, I have been observing the unfolding of a multi-faceted international movement that, at the margins of housing rights movements and the discourse of the common, addresses the lack of affordable cultural, sport, health, working, socialising and community spaces (Polyák and Oravecz 2015). While this movement connects various local actors through the circulation of concepts, models and tools, this transfer of ideas from one context to another is not without any difficulties (Stone 2012). The bare emptiness of buildings and the existence of initiatives in need of space do not automatically produce successful processes of reappropriation. The creation of civic spaces in vacant buildings depends on many conditions: well-kept spaces, skills, transparency, regulations, funding and the acceptance of civic initiatives as legitimate actors in actor networks around urban development, property management or welfare services (Patti and Polyak 2015).

In some contexts, where the transformation of the public sphere unfolded with the shared administration of some services (Foster and Iaione 2016), this legitimacy has been gradually established. In these contexts, the contribution of artists, citizen initiatives, space pioneers, entrepreneurs or city makers has been recognised as a source of value creation in the city and was encouraged through established mechanisms of access to spaces. In others, cooperation remained rare and limited to individual cases where the modalities of cooperation constantly has to be renegotiated: this gave unique access to space for individuals or groups with particular skills but did not necessarily lower the threshold of access for other initiatives.

In this dissertation, I have looked into the various conditions of vacancy, initiatives to realise civic spaces in four urban areas in Europe, and the different actors that interact with these initiatives. While I chose cases that I found paradigmatic of different kinds of relationships with various actors like public and private sectors, structuring mechanisms, policies and buildings, I was not so much interested in the inner workings of these initiatives as in the external cooperations and conflicts that enable or obstruct them. With over 50 interviews conducted and many initiatives regularly revisited in the course of 5 years, I have aimed at telling the stories of these cooperations through the testimonies of some of the protagonists of selected civic spaces and their partners in local cooperation networks. Based on the interviews, field research and the analysis of relevant literature, I examined the actor-networks emerging around the selected cases, compared them and established four distinct models based on these networks. In the following pages I will revisit some of the diagnoses I made during this research.

In order to analyse different modalities of public-civic cooperation around the community-led reuse of vacant buildings, I chose four urban regions that differ in their cultures and dispositions of urban governance and participation. Despite their differences, the four areas, Budapest, Rome, the Dutch Randstad (the area comprising the Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht regions) and Berlin have all faced similar challenges in the past decades as a result of economic and social processes characteristic of the transformation of European welfare societies and urban economies. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, in the 1990s, all four areas witnessed waves of privatisation and the establishment of a private investment- and ownership-driven model of urban development (Berdini 2011) with speculative real estate booms (Brugmans et al. 2012) and public administrations economically interested in promoting growth and construction activities (Vanstiphout 2014a). These real estate booms were fuelled by the arrival of cheap debt capital that helped turning real estate into financial products (Uffer 2013), shifting the lead in urban development from planning instruments and visions to speculative investments in these cities.

Privatisation and private sector-led urban development did not ease the public sector's financial pains in any of the four areas: the four regions all suffered from linking the financial health of public administrations to development activities and the sellout of private assets. While Budapest and Rome accumulated debts that made their situation even more vulnerable after the outbreak of the crisis, the failed speculative investments of Berlin's Bankgesellschaft in the 1990s (Krätke 2004) and Dutch housing corporation Vestia in the 2000s left tremendous debts in public budgets that would define the administrations' fiscal policy for years. As a result, the economic crisis, political restructuring and austerity policies prompted local administrations in all the examined cities to redefine their social services and infrastructures, leading to a gradual disengagement by the public sector in various societal challenges and a growing stock of vacant properties (Bader and Scherenberg 2010, Erban 2013). As a response to these conditions, the examined cities all saw the emergence of new actors generating similar processes: the fight for access to (vacant) space (Dohnke 2013, Cellamare 2014), the professionalisation of organising access to (vacant) spaces (Overmeyer 2004, Rietveld 2014), and the establishment of mechanisms and policies of access (Patti and Polyák 2015) as well as conflicts around instrumentalisation (Peck 2012b), gentrification (Colomb 2012) and ownership (Buttenberg et al. 2014).

Gradual public disengagement in all four cities generated important discussions about the role of the public sector in representing the "public interest." (Cellamare 2014) It raised the question if governments and municipalities could and should remain the central actors of the welfare, cultural and education system, continuing to manage the spaces and services that traditionally belonged to the public domain. It also questioned if public administrations, often overwhelmed by their core tasks, bureaucratic procedures or political dependence, and limited in their skills, capacities and networks could use better their left over assets, and manage better the spaces that accommodate crucial services (Foster and Iaione 2016). While the Netherlands elaborated mechanisms to outsource services to community organisations (see Chapter 5) and Berlin became home to a blossoming independent cultural and music scene (see Chapter 6), the emergence of many civic initiatives taking over public tasks such as drug prevention, food distribution and services for homeless in Budapest (see Chapter 3) or sports and education facilities in Rome (See Chapter 4), led many observers to wonder if civic actors or communities could better fulfil these tasks based on their flexibility, local knowledge, resource-efficiency and persistence. At the same time, this process also raised the dilemma if the involvement of civic actors in providing public services is just another way of privatising services and dismantling the public domain and its welfare services, and if civic spaces are ultimately a competition for public spaces or an extension to them. This dilemma implies many questions for future research about the long-term implications of public-civic cooperation in delivering welfare services and managing spaces: how to create a shared governance model including civic actors without further disassembling the welfare state?

The variety of backgrounds of individuals and groups leading spatial reappropriation processes in each city's civic scene implies different names for their roles and spaces. The expressions "civic city"

and “house of culture” in Budapest, the emphasis on the “commons” in Rome, the character of the “city maker” in the Netherlands and the figures of “spatial pioneer” and “spatial entrepreneur” in Berlin are all embedded in different social realities, have different political positions in these realities and different visions of civic spaces, sometimes with concealed economic apparatuses, like in Rome (see Chapter 4), or with an emphasised economic role like in the Randstad (see Chapter 5). The terms attached to civic initiatives taking over vacant spaces are called in different contexts are telling about the ethos of these new actors operating in the field abandoned by the public sphere: the “spatial pioneer” (Overmeyer 2004) that explores uncharted territories and finds opportunities in areas abandoned by both the public and the private actors, the “spatial entrepreneur” (Buttenberg 2014) that turns space into an economic asset through an unconventional use, or the “city maker” (Brugmans et al. 2012) that emerges as a new kind of urban developer, private in its non-standard choices and public in its claimed responsibilities; they all seem to be individual figures that operate at the margins of mainstream urban processes and on the ruins of failed public and private action. As the narrative of spatial pioneers, entrepreneurs and city makers tells us, these figures are capable of turning crisis into renaissance, disaster into opportunity, waste into resource: they are there to fix the problems the public sphere could not solve and the private sphere did not engage with. However, as I have demonstrated in the cases of Budapest, Rome, the Randstad and Berlin, the contribution of complex actor networks is indispensable in these activities. So is the support of the public sphere that largely defines the success of these initiatives. This support might range from tolerance to accommodation, from subvention to shared governance. Based on the different relationships and modalities of cooperation between actors, I have examined the selected four urban regions and compared the similarities and differences in their processes of spatial reuse, as well as the various actor-networks and modalities of cooperation and conflict around practices and mechanisms of re-appropriating vacant buildings.

For the actor-networks around citizen initiatives in the four cities, I established four distinct models of creating civic spaces. I described the Budapest situation, where many social and cultural initiatives providing crucial services withdrew into private spaces perceived as safer than politically pressured public properties, as the isolationist model (see Chapter 3). I saw the many initiatives and spaces in Rome claiming a key role in a local community and solidarity economy that prefer to stay outside of regulations but put significant pressure on the administrations in terms of policies of space, as parts of a confrontative model (see Chapter 4). The case of Dutch municipalities establishing streamlined mechanisms to share with civic groups responsibilities and resources related to specific spaces and services, and thus supporting the professionalisation of intermediaries, can be described as the consensual model (see Chapter 5). Finally, the Berlin context, where citizen initiatives push existing governance mechanisms further and private foundations and solidarity funds begin to take the role of public administrations in protecting public services that operate in civic spaces and assuring their long-term sustainability, can be conceived as the autonomous model (see Chapter 6).

These differences are rooted in distinct cultures of cooperation as well as varying levels of trust between public administrations and civic initiatives. While in cities like Amsterdam or Rotterdam, more confrontative forms of claiming spaces like occupations have been tamed and channeled into compromising but functioning mechanisms of cooperation (Peck 2012b), in others like Rome, continuous confrontation makes cooperation seem like a concession (Patti and Polyák 2016c). Yet in others like Berlin, communities choose to eliminate their dependence from the public sector through establishing new forms of ownership (see Chapter 6), or like in Budapest, go invisible in a parallel infrastructure of civic spaces, hidden from authorities and operating in mainly private spaces (see Chapter 3).

While there are successful civic initiatives to reuse vacant buildings in each city, as I have there outlined in the dissertation, there are important differences between their potential to be multiplied or scaled up. The existence or lack of specific policies or mechanisms to facilitate and accelerate citizen access to vacant spaces is characteristic to each city's cooperation network. Governance structures for spaces or mechanisms to enable civic spaces need procedures to give legitimacy to non-institutional

actors. This legitimacy, in turn, requires a certain level of mutual trust and recognition. As long as civic organisations, design studios, development companies and municipal departments, the various actors of regeneration projects are not aware of each other's motivations, objectives and ways of working, a cooperation process is very difficult to orchestrate: trust between these actors is crucial for multiplying or upscaling successful initiatives. Creating structures of mediation between property owners, potential users and administrations requires the systemic recognition of the skills, capacities, motivations, needs and language of civic actors. As I have claimed based on field research and interviews, the key to the success of these intermediate organisations is their recognition in playing a role that cannot be replaced by municipal officers or private owners and traditional real estate agencies. My case studies show that replicating good practices, that is, establishing mechanisms that help initiatives go through civic reuse processes with the lowest possible thresholds, becomes difficult if like in Budapest, each initiative has to struggle to be recognised as a legitimate actor (see Chapter 3), or like in Rome, participatory processes have to face constant accusations related to their transparency and openness (see Chapter 4).

Another key difference among the cities examined in the previous chapters is the role of regulations and flexible administrations in granting citizen initiatives access to vacant spaces. In contrast with the rigid regulations of Budapest and Rome, my findings show that civic initiatives in both Berlin and Dutch cities benefited from temporarily suspended or overlooked rules (see Chapters 5 and 6). While in the past decades, Berlin and the Netherlands have all prohibited squatting, they also created frameworks to legalise many of the occupied spaces. While civic initiatives in Rome are stuck in their quasi-legal status that is not approved by everyone and that remains under significant pressure by the press and right-wing parties (see Chapter 4), and Budapest projects remain completely dependent on the goodwill of public or private owners (Chapter 3), clear frameworks in Berlin, Amsterdam or Rotterdam allowed initiatives to gain strength, develop resilience and experiment with new economic and organisational models towards higher levels of autonomy. Experimentation in both contexts has been facilitated by flexible or absent administrations: the lack of regulatory interference in 1990s Berlin and the adaptability of Dutch planning regulations both proved stimulating of temporary and long-term civic uses of vacant spaces.

While administrative flexibility has played an important role in spatial experimentations in both Berlin and Dutch cities, Berlin initiatives have established continuity between temporary uses and long term tenancies, and have managed to use their skills to turn their experiences into long-term presence, thus contributing to a more resilient, more stable scene of civic spaces (see Chapter 6). In the Dutch context, while administrative flexibility lowers the threshold of accessing spaces, the same flexibility also makes civic spaces relatively precarious, and subject to real estate speculation and missing value capture from the side of civic initiatives (see Chapter 5). In contrast, the complete lack of regulatory flexibility in Budapest or Rome makes it very difficult for civic initiatives to access publicly or privately owned vacant spaces in a legal manner (see Chapters 3 and 4). In the same time, applying principles of flexibility in contexts like Budapest or Rome, both devastated by speculation, opaque public real estate management and corruption scandals, could prove disastrous: hence the never-ending discussion among Rome activists about the dilemmas of direct allocation or competition (see Chapter 4). Therefore, regulatory flexibility is not a value in itself, but should be seen as a situational tool that is necessary at some phases of urban regeneration and that can turn harmful in others. Regulations of access to and use of space therefore have to be conceived as part of a constantly negotiated set of interactions between actors in a changing framework that might or might not favour spatial innovation and access by civic initiatives. In the end, as regulations are reinforced by public officers, flexible regulations also need flexible administrations. This raises another question for future research: what legal, economic and governance arrangements can provide both the flexibility needed to create a lower threshold of accessibility to vacant spaces and the security to help initiatives capture a part of the value they created?

Similarly to regulatory flexibility, temporariness can be a helpful or menacing tool for citizen initiatives and civic spaces. Although it cannot give an answer to all urban ills, many commentators see

temporary use as a precursor of a more inclusive planning system, where civic initiatives are invited to take part in the regeneration process, create value and benefit from an interim situation (see Chapter 2). Temporary use practices can act as platforms where spatial needs and resources are matched, where bottom-up initiatives meet public development strategies of administrations, forced by the decline of urban economies to rethink their development processes. In the same time, temporary use is often criticised for accelerating gentrification and for instrumentalising the presence of cultural activists and creative producers in raising the value of properties and neighbourhoods (Colomb 2012, Peck 2012b); this is why many spatial pioneers and spatial entrepreneurs moved on from the notion of temporary use to the broader issues of access to space and to common resources in general (Buttenberg 2014, Jansen 2015). Nevertheless, similarly to regulatory flexibility, temporary use is a situational tool that can help some actors in a situation and might menace them in another. While it is easy to blame temporary use for gentrification as examples of Berlin and Amsterdam demonstrate, other cities like Rome or Budapest could benefit from streamlined mechanisms to temporary use. However, the gradual recovery of the financial markets and speculative real estate development projects questions all the achievements of spatial experimentations of the past years and gives important questions for future research: what remains of space pioneers in the post-crisis period, what is the legacy of crisis-time experiments and extended actor-networks, and how to safeguard the values created?

The pursuit to go beyond temporariness and embrace longer-term uses reflects an ambition that has surfaced in the past years among initiatives exposed to short-term tenancy contracts and those who seek for more autonomy in the spaces they manage. In this quest, the emergence of new, community-based property development models, where the contribution of new, responsible financial actors like Stiftung Maryon or trias enable citizens and artists groups in accessing to the ownership of their buildings (see Chapter 6), has been game-changer and inspired many initiatives in Berlin and beyond to follow their examples. The proliferation of civic spaces that are moved off-speculation and into the shared ownership of citizen initiatives and private foundations raises many questions that go beyond the scope of this research.

This research has been intertwined with various activities, with activist and professional roles. The main questions of this dissertation arose when I was organising roundtable discussions and workshops with community activists, designers or planners, leading site visits to innovative initiatives, meeting municipal officers to discuss the possibilities of implementing this or that model in their cities. I began to think about many of the issues discussed in these chapters when I tried to understand what are the components of successful or failed initiatives, and what are the rules of transferring concepts, models and tools from one city to another. My research was constantly interwoven with many other research topics that I saw as potential continuations of my inquiry, subjects related to the economic models of civic spaces, the opportunities of pooling economy for community services, the legal aspects of the commons or the potentials and limitations of shared governance arrangements.

Similarly to the assumptions earlier in this chapter, the shift from temporary use to shared ownership with the help of alternative finance organisations open a variety of directions for further research. When examining the scalability of alternatives it will be necessary to examine what happens with cooperatively owned properties on the long term, how to their economic conditions change, and how do they relate to their surroundings. Similarly, the emergence of a non-public cooperative sphere that delivers public services and accommodates activities of public interest makes it important to investigate the possible designs of governance structures of vacant buildings and civic spaces that assure their accountability and public values but give them more protection than public institutions. Addressing these questions will be crucial in helping citizen initiatives access vacant spaces and turn them affordable, sustainable and resilient civic spaces, thus assuring the foundational institutions of urban life.

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