

## BEYOND EXPERIMENTATION: TEMPORARY USE AS A SOCIAL CIRCULAR STRATEGY

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### ABSTRACT

**Background and aim.** Temporary use of vacant spaces—the short-term activation of properties awaiting transformation—has gained recognition for its potential to foster urban revitalization. While such uses provide a platform for experimentation, accessibility, and social inclusion through participatory and cultural activities, they often remain precarious and underutilized as strategic tools for circular economy. This study aims to explore how specific hybrid approaches to temporary real estate management can transform temporary use into a social circular economy strategy, balancing social values with market logics.

**Methods and Data.** This research employs a qualitative analysis, first defining a framework from literature and then analysing specific temporary use projects through a retrospective case analysis of three cases by Plateau Urbain (France), communa (Belgium), and Stad in de Maak (Netherlands). Data collection included interviews, project documentation, and field observations, allowing an in-depth exploration of the enabling conditions for successful hybrid approaches in creating social value.

**Findings.** This study makes three key contributions. First, it conceptualizes collaborative temporary use as a social circular strategy, clearly defining the evolution of the concept and its potential in temporary real estate adaptive reuse. Second, by drawing on the literature on organizational hybridity and case study analysis, it identifies key enabling conditions, such as tweaking the balance between social value and market logic over time to recalibrate impact—that underpin temporary use projects as social circular economy strategies. Third, it offers a framework to determine whether a temporary real estate reuse initiative can function as a social circular economy strategy.

**Theoretical / Practical / Societal implications.** This study offers theoretical insights into hybrid organizing for urban development and practical recommendations for integrating temporary reuse of real estate into social circular economy frameworks. Societally, it underscores the potential for collaborative temporary use to foster circular urban transformation by balancing economic goals with community-driven social value creation.

**KEYWORDS:** temporary use, adaptive reuse, social circular economy, real estate management, value creation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Temporary adaptive reuse – the temporary uses of existing real estate—naturally stems from circular practices by reusing vacant real estate and recovering, reusing, or recycling components such as furniture and construction materials. From the first independent urban pioneers of temporary use in Berlin (Oswalt et al., 2012; Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin, 2007) to contemporary European research projects (Galdini, 2022; *gE.CO Toolbox* | *gE.CO Toolbox*, n.d.; *Resources* | *MESOC*, n.d.), temporary use is based on building reuse for diverse purposes that meet social needs, employing essential modifications to enable functionality while

prioritizing material recovery and community engagement.

The past decades have seen growing attention to the temporary use of buildings and public spaces, driven by the diverse benefits and advantages these short-term uses provide to a wide range of urban stakeholders. Beyond pop-up stores or short-term rentals, temporary use that actively engage communities and foster socio-cultural processes have the potential to start placemaking and create diverse kinds of value, namely economic, social, environmental, and cultural (Bragaglia & Caruso, 2022; Karachalis, 2021; Mangialardo & Micelli, 2017; Martin et al., 2019).

Experimental temporary uses include socio-cultural oriented initiatives, that test communal approach to place management and are frequently dedicated to placemaking and non-profit activities. These unconventional practices can generate significant benefits for both people and stakeholders in the real estate sector by enhancing place attractiveness, improving neighbourhood amenities, and contributing to the vibrancy and functionality of urban environments. These practices often rely on hybrid organizing (Mitzinneck & Greco, 2021) involving collaboration among initiating organizations, property owners, and public authorities, to realize their potential benefits. These organizations enable diverse stakeholders to utilize available spaces, incorporating them into place governance and, in some cases, involving users directly in decision-making processes. Temporary uses managed under this model test forms of real estate management, services, and forms of collaboration and sharing.

The intangible benefits of building reuse, social inclusion, and cultural initiatives seem evident, and are replicated even if they have not been clearly evaluated (Munzner & Shaw, 2015). At the same time, these practices face challenges due to economic constraints and social challenges due to their short-term nature (Ferrerri, 2020). In traditional economic terms, profit motives dominate investment decisions, whereas in the realm of non-profit, hybrid organizations, resources from the sharing economy, such as time, trust, and availability, become tools to produce social value (Greco, 2024). In turn, intangible assets become instrumental in community-led real estate management and collective practices. Social strategies demand a reimagining of investment incentives, merging financial objectives with ESG principles to create value-driven and impactful decision-making frameworks.

In the built environment, material circularity and use value underpin circular practices in adaptive reuse (Hamida et al., 2025), temporary building uses (Talamo et al., 2020), flexible temporary shelters to reactivate public space (Ginelli et al., 2020) and the broader spectrum of community-oriented management (Greco et al., 2024). Social topic appear in a recent study to conceptualize circular economy (Kirchherr et al., 2023), with concepts of ‘social equity’, such as human health, well-being, and just transition. In fact, from a doughnut economy perspective (Raworth, 2018), the reuse and recycling of goods and services meet the need for social equity and resource distribution. Hence, experimental temporary uses in buildings can be considered a spontaneous form of social circular economy strategy, for their collective and inclusive approach to building reuse.

However, despite the growing attention to temporary real estate reuse on one hand, and to socially driven circular economy on the other, there is still a lack of studies that specifically address temporary real estate reuse as a strategy for the social circular economy.

Thus, the purposeful embedment of these approaches in temporary real estate reuse planning, combined with the

adoption of social circular strategies raise two fundamental questions:

- *What are the factors that make temporary reuse of real estate a social circular strategy?*
- *What are the enabling conditions for hybrid organizations to implement social circular strategies through temporary use?*

Exploring these questions through the lens of the value proposition in sustainable business models (Baldassarre et al., 2017; Greco, 2024) provides a first step towards understanding their potential impact. Drawing from the literature and qualitative analysis of three cases of temporary use, this paper explores which factors can make us consider temporary uses as social circular economy strategies and what are the enabling conditions for temporary uses to serve as social circular strategies in real estate management.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The experimental temporality in cities is shaped by the creative potential of temporary urbanism (Bishop, 2015; Madanipour, 2017). It is constituted by ecosystems of temporal events, that take place in public or private real estate. Because private developers are increasingly interested in the integration of informal uses for temporary real estate (Matoga, 2019; Vivant, 2022) private and public organizations are testing forms of collaboration and management.

In the public context, Patti & Polyak, (2015) did an inventory of policies for temporary use. In the relationship between practice and policies for temporary use, they stated that value is created by fostering transparency in real estate management, incentivizing the reuse of vacant spaces, and easing regulatory and financial barriers. However, true innovation in municipal policies depends on coordinated support from various public departments and bodies. Central to this process is trust: without mutual understanding of motivations, objectives, and working methods among actors, such as civic organizations, design studios, developers, and municipalities, effective cooperation in regeneration projects becomes challenging.

In this section, we frame the theory of hybrid organizations as tools, and the social dimension of the circular economy as objectives. This theoretical framework will then be applied to structure the methodology and the analysis.

### 2.1 HYBRID ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational hybridity refers to the blending of diverse organizational goals that would not typically align within a single organization, enabling the simultaneous pursuit of social, environmental, and economic objectives (Mitzinneck & Greco, 2021). Hybrid organizations blend public, private, and community-driven models, to create flexible frameworks that prioritize social value and outcomes over monetary revenues. They are positioned to contribute to civic wealth creation by addressing complex

societal challenges that traditional organizations or purely market-based solutions often overlook. By integrating public, private, and civil sector approaches, hybrids foster inclusivity, innovation, and value creation across multiple dimensions (Greco, Long, & de Jong, 2021). The benefits of hybridity are manifold. Hybrid organizations excel at leveraging diverse resources, forging cross-sectoral partnerships, and aligning stakeholders around shared goals. This adaptability makes them effective in tackling systemic issues such as inequality, environmental degradation, and access to essential services (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). Moreover, their capacity for sustainable business model innovation enables them to remain responsive to changing societal needs (Greco, 2024). However, hybridity also presents significant limitations. Balancing competing logic can create tensions that strain internal identity coherence (Ebrahim et al., 2014), decision-making processes, and stakeholder relationships (Greco et al., 2021). Additionally, sustaining hybrid organizations requires navigating financial constraints and maintaining legitimacy across diverse audiences, which may hinder their scalability and long-term impact (Doherty et al., 2014).

Despite these challenges, hybrid organizations play an essential role in fostering societal resilience and innovation. Their ability to experiment with unconventional strategies makes them instrumental in advancing novel solutions to pressing societal challenges (Mitzinneck & Greco, 2021). This makes them highly relevant to the theme of temporary use of buildings as a social circular strategy. By leveraging their ability to align diverse stakeholders and opposing goals while fostering collaborative spaces, hybrid organizations are uniquely positioned to create enabling conditions for temporary use projects and maintain their impact so to contribute to social inclusion, cultural vibrancy, and urban sustainability.

## 2.2 THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The social dimension has been mostly overlooked in research on circular economy, as highlighted in some literature review on the topic. A systematic review by Padilla-Rivera et al. (2020) identified thematic areas such as *labour practices*, *human rights*, *societal impacts*, and *product responsibility*. These aspects feature the importance of equitable labour practices, diversity, community inclusion, and participatory governance in the circular supply chains. In a different review, Mies & Gold (2021) mapped the social dimension of the circular economy, identifying employment opportunities, education and awareness, health and safety, and government involvement as the most discussed social issues. Their study assessed social aspects across various stakeholder groups, including workers, organizations, consumers, local communities, and society at large. To capture the complexities of sustainability, they emphasized the need for a more diverse consideration of the social dimension in the circular economy, integrating

multiple social aspects that extend beyond easily measurable factors directly tied to economic or ecological sustainability: A shift that requires changes in organizational and societal mindsets, supported by education, awareness-raising efforts, and active engagement of diverse stakeholders. In this review, the social circular economy began to go beyond the quality of the labour of the *circular* product.

In a more radical perspective, Savini (2023) explained that the socio-ecological value of waste lies not only in material reuse but in fostering circuits of care and mutual support. This shift aligns with degrowth theory, integrating circular economy principles to challenge conventional paradigms. Instead of prioritizing monetary value, the focus moves toward recognizing the socio-ecological value of waste.

A more recent literature review on the social contribution of circular economy has been based on capability approach variables. It showed inconsistencies in the literature regarding the assessment of the circular economy as a development strategy (Valencia et al., 2023), highlighting contrasting perspectives in its contribution to the socioeconomic system, namely development focused and degrowth. Beyond job creation opportunities, topics like decision-making, collaboration, equity, liveability in cities and quality of life expand the understanding of circular economy as part of a socio-economic system. Valencia et al. (2023) highlight that the *built environment with the growing sharing economies* is a priority for the social dimension of the circular economy.

Thus, based on existing research, we can consider the social dimension of circular economy in the real estate sector at the intersection of social value creation from labour, management, and new sharing economies. Building on this, we define social circular strategy as an approach to circular economy practices that integrates material reuse with social value creation by fostering community participation, equitable governance, and adaptive economic models. Unlike traditional circular economy approaches that focus solely on resource efficiency, a social circular strategy transforms temporary use and hybrid organizational forms into mechanisms for recalibrating the balance between social and economic value over time.

## 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs qualitative analysis methods in two phases:

- Theoretical analysis: A review of articles on the social dimension of the circular economy in temporary real estate reuse was conducted using the Scopus database. Publications on the social aspects of the circular economy were combined with more specific studies focusing on circular economy practices in temporary use contexts. The result is a theoretical framework that identifies and outlines the key factors involved. It is a tool to determine whether

temporary uses of vacant real estate can represent a social circular strategy, or to what extent they can.

- Case studies comparison: A retrospective analysis has been done guided by the theoretical framework and structured according to a process-tracing method (Beach, 2020; Beach & Pedersen, 2012; Collier, 2011). Process tracing is a detailed, within-case study approach used to examine causal mechanisms and their effects in a specific case. It helps develop and evaluate theories that connect causes to outcomes within a set of causally similar cases.

It has been employed to disclose from practice what capabilities and enabling factors enable social circular economy in temporary use projects in vacant real estate. Observing the relationship between the temporary use of vacant properties, hybrid organizations, and the social circular economy, a whole system in some cases (Figure 1). Hybrid organizations, which bring together the public, private, and civil sectors, can form temporary collaborations or other forms of partnership for the reuse of spaces. These collaborations serve both economic and non-economic purposes, such as housing. Key factors of the social circular economy—related to labour, human rights, product responsibility, care, and sharing—are increasingly integrated into real estate projects with a social focus.

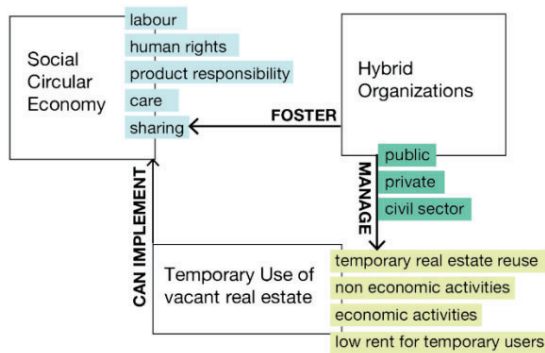


Figure 1. Analysis context.

The factors influencing the development of temporary real estate use projects originate from several sources: the availability of space, such as vacant properties; the demand for use, which may be specific or general and expressed by either property owners or potential users; public policies mandating social or cultural services in neighbourhoods or in emergency situations, such as migrant housing; and real estate rehabilitation projects that initiate reactivation while awaiting permits and final preparations. These factors drive the initiation of a project.

Data have been collected within the context of the NOMAD research project on 15 cases from the Netherlands, Belgium and France (Mazzarella, 2023) from:

- Semi-structured interviews with project initiators, managers, and participants to understand their roles, experience, motivations, and practices.
- Project documentation and archival data, public communications on social networks, and project reports, to analyse operational models.
- Field observations, and participation in community activities.

The analysis has followed a thematic coding process.

## 4. RESULTS

In this section, we present an analytical framework to investigate the social dimension of circular economy in temporary real estate uses. It has been outlined by the literature that has studied or considered the social value of temporary uses in real estate. The results of the case study analysis are presented based on the framework and the retrospective analysis using the process-tracing method.

### 4.1 THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN TEMPORARY REAL ESTATE USES

Adding social value has not been explored as a direct objective of circular economy strategies, but rather as an additional condition within strategies focused on the environmental sustainability. Literature on real estate temporary use recognizes its social value, though it seldomly connects to the circular economy, with only a few exceptions. The case of the real estate sector of the French national railway company (SNCF Immobilier) has been promoting *transient urbanism* strategies together with Plateau Urbain, implementing temporary projects stemming from discourses on the importance of the frugal city, the reuse of existing buildings, and the circular economy (Pinard, 2020). In the Italian context, Roversi et al. (2021) recognized the functional reuse of cultural heritage (Cerreta et al., 2020; Gravagnuolo et al., 2024) as a prerequisite for the circular city, understood as a spatial/territorial manifestation of the circular economy. In the same territorial context, Fatigato & Capaldo (2024) incorporated circular economy actions related to food in their research, integrating them into the incremental temporal phases of a real estate reuse design.

From a non-institutional perspective, (Calzati et al., 2022) analyse the temporary urban commons of two no-profit organizations (also considered in this paper as case studies, i.e. *communa* and *Stad in de Maak*), where circular economy is declared to be part of the *communa*'s mission.

In a circular economy perspective, Meslec & Haase (2024) analysed the application of nature-based solutions (NBSs) as a circular strategy and multi-scalar business models to invest in vacant sites. From a material flow perspective, Kawa, Schoor, et al., (2024) examined the material-based design of nine pioneering projects in Brussels and developed a framework of guidelines to support materialization, design, and stakeholder engagement in temporary use projects. Further analysis of



stakeholder ecosystems within temporary makerspaces highlighted their role in fostering community building, exchange, and knowledge transfer in the context of circular practices (Kawa, Galle, et al., 2024).

Thus, the social dimension of the circular economy in real estate temporary use is primarily conceived in relation to the reuse of properties and the implementation of circular economy actions. By integrating the perspective offered by recent literature on the Social Circular Economy (see Section 2.1), we can also consider aspects of social well-being linked to both productive and non-productive activities associated with the different phases of temporary property reuse (Table 1).

*Table 1. Group and indicators of social circular economy in temporary real estate reuse.*

Group	Indicators
Circular economy actions	Real estate reuse
	Nature-based solutions (such as gardening, or related to food)
	Furniture and component reuse
	Material recycle
Productive activity	Labour conditions
	Work well-being
	Start-up of new companies
Social activity	Community building
	Mutual support
	Sharing goods and services
	Knowledge transfer
	Social cohesion
	Start-up of new associations

The assessment of social value indicators for the use categories (non-productive activities, productive activities, and circular economy solution) can let us consider a temporary use as a social circular strategy.

## 4.2 ENABLING CONDITIONS IN TEMPORARY USE

In this section, we focus on an in-depth analysis of three case studies. Temporary occupation, as defined by the Urban Catalyst project (Oswalt et al., 2012), can follow different patterns: Displacement, Subversion, Pioneer, Parasite, Coexistence, Consolidation, Impulse, Free Flow and Stand-In. In any case, temporary activation involves the cooperation of landowners and hybrid organizations managing the temporary use to prepare the site, activate it, ensure its functioning, and eventually vacate it.

To disentangle these mechanisms, we apply a qualitative retrospective analysis using the process-tracing method, focusing on the three innovative cases selected (Table 2). As mentioned, these have been initiated and coordinated by three non-profit organizations committed to temporary uses and real estate management: Plateau Urbain, communa, and Stad in de Maak.

Plateau Urbain is a cooperative specializing in solidarity-based real estate and transitional urbanism. It offers affordable workspaces and, where possible, emergency housing solutions in creative, and socially driven third places across Île-de-France and several major cities,

including Lyon, Bordeaux, and Marseille. Additionally, the cooperative provides consulting and support services throughout France (*Plateau Urbain*, 2025b).

Communa is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering a more affordable, democratic, resilient, and creative city. While temporary occupation is their main approach, they also develop other practical solutions to address the commodification of urban spaces (communa ASBL, 2025).

Stad in de Maak is a no-profit association that explores new, socially inclusive housing models in the city. The foundation oversees buildings that enable collective living for diverse target groups, with 30% of these spaces dedicated to 'commoning', sharing and managing facilities for the neighbourhood and social organizations (Stad in de Maak, 2025).

*Table 2. Temporary use projects by no-profit organizations: LAC, Minima, and DGB.*

	Les Arches Citoyannes	Maxima/Minima	De Grote Beer
Organization	Plateau Urbain	communa	Stad in de Maak
City, Country	Paris, France	Brussels, Belgium	Zwijndrecht, Netherlands
Neighbourhood	4 <sup>th</sup> arrondiss.	Forest	Planetenbuurt
Building type	Heritage architecture	Office building	Social housing
Building Owner	BNP Paribas Real Estate, RATP Solutions Ville and Apsys	Municipality of Forest	Trivire Housing Association
Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	30000	6000	1500
Objectives	Activating the building and testing uses	Experimenting uses and promoting social initiatives	An autonomous neighbours' house
Functions	Work and leisure	Social activities for neighbours	Social activities for neighbours
Temporary Users (n.)	450 organizations (1000 daily users)	70 organizations	25 neighbours
Duration (years)	3 years (2021-2024)	5 years (2020-2025)	5years (2024-2029)
Kind of Use (UC)	Stand-In, Impulse, Consolidation	Stand-In, Consolidation	Consolidation

Three collaborative temporary use projects managed these no-profit organizations were selected to provide examples and insights on the intersection of social value and economic conditions in temporary reuse and are: Les Arches Citoyennes by Plateau Urbain in France, Maxima/Minima by communa in Belgium, and De Grote Beer by Stad in de Maak in the Netherlands. Their temporary uses have been started and are managed by hybrid organizations with property owners, users, and associations.

The three organizations play a role of intermediaries in the temporary real estate usage. In the case of communa and SidM, Calzati et al. (2022) discussed how these

organizations also work to consolidate their socio-cultural practice through cooperative ownership.

#### 4.2.1 The social circular economy in the real estate temporary use

The retrospective analysis of three of their projects provides a qualitative lens to identify the key factors that enable them as social circular economy strategies. Applying the process-tracing method, we have identified recurrent causes and outcomes in the development of temporary use projects (Figure 2).

Factors that define a temporary real estate use as a social circular economy can be identified at different stages of the process.

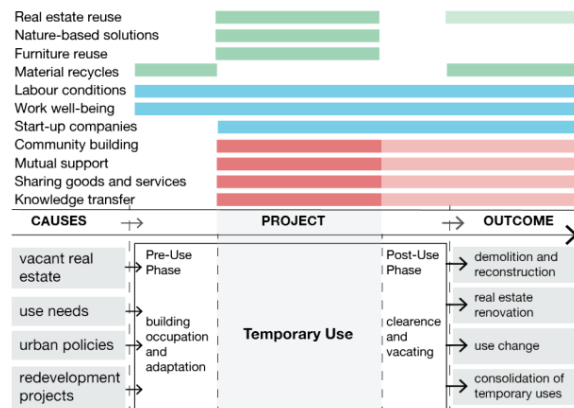


Figure 2. Process-tracing of Social Circular Economy factors and Temporary Use conditions.

During the temporary use phase, the site can host either non-productive or productive activities, both of which can include actions related to the circular economy. In cases where projects are social and inclusive, community building is the central factor in the success of the temporary project. Temporary inhabitants who share living, working, or recreational spaces, when guided by mediators or associations focused on creating social value, are enabled to collaborate in managing collective use decisions.

#### 4.2.2 Case studies analysis

Les Arches Citoiennes is a temporary project of co-working and community spaces run by the non-profit cooperative Plateau Urbain in Paris (France). It is a private investment project aimed at start testing future uses of “Citizen Hospitality” in response to the “Reinventing Paris 3” call for projects in a historical Haussmanian building during the few years before the beginning of its renovation and redevelopment for the permanent project.

The **Les Arches Citoiennes** project has been initiated by Plateau Urbain in the centre of Paris (Plateau Urbain, 2025a) in team with Base Commune, Vraiment Vraiment, Association Aurore in setting up the transitional phase of transforming two historical Haussmann buildings used as offices into housing, shops and services. The temporary

use is a prefiguration phase that included the team in the BNP Paribas Real Estate and RATP Solutions in response to a call for the *Réinventer Paris 3* call for projects (*Réinventer Paris 3 : La Reconversion de l’ancien Siège de l’AP-HP – Le Sens de La Ville*, n.d.) (Figure 3). The AP-HP (Assistance Publique–Hôpitaux de Paris) launched a consultation in June 2021, shortly before relocating to the Saint-Antoine Hospital site for the transformation of its former headquarters located in the centre of Paris.



Figure 3. Process tracing of Les Arches Citoiennes

Private investment enabled the necessary renovations and activation of the space, creating a foundation for its diverse uses. The space was purposefully reorganized to host 450 organizations and activities that open the place to young people and artists, and test future uses, creating economic, social and cultural values for both private and public stakeholders.

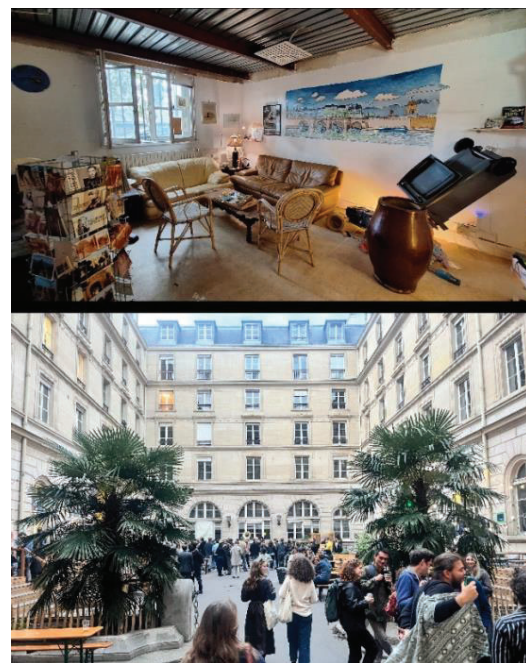


Figure 4. Les Arches Citoiennes, Paris. Open living room at the ground floor and the courtyard (Photos: Chiara Mazzarella, May 2024).

A significant strength of Les Arches Citoyennes is its inclusive management model, which prioritizes affordability and accessibility for diverse users through flexible business model schemes, i.e. ateliers are rented according to the organization income, and the La Cantine restaurant has an agreement based on a fair economy model.

The project provides coworking spaces for social enterprises, artists, start-ups, and has opened the ground floor to public events. The prefiguration of a new urban public space in the courtyard envisions the reuse of the patio as a semi-public area, fostering social interaction and community engagement. The heritage architectural design of the ground floor, or building plinth, remains closed off to the sidewalks, creating a sense of enclosure while maintaining an atmosphere within (Figure 4). Openly accessible furniture encourages flexible and inclusive use of the space, while the presence of the restaurant *La Cantine* serves as an anchor for activity, drawing people in and enhancing the vibrancy of the courtyard as a shared urban space.

Plateau Urbain's expertise in managing temporary use projects emerges in their ability to coordinate with private investors, public authorities, place users and other diverse local organizations. The goal of testing future uses to respond to partners (investors) is a tool to make accessible the 30000m<sup>2</sup> of the buildings to creatives, young people and passing visitor, that thousands of people per day.

Maxima/Minima is a temporary project managed by the non-profit association *communa* in the Region of Brussels (Belgium). It is a temporary use project in a public property that has been made available by the Municipality of Forest for social services to the neighbourhood.

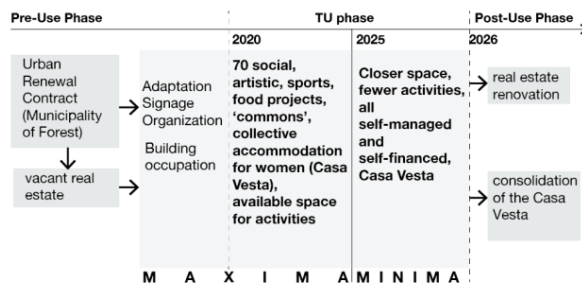


Figure 5. Process tracing of Maxima/Minima.

After five years, and at the time of writing, the project is currently facing challenges of financial self-sustainability without public fundings.

The evolution of Maxima into Minima in Brussels offers insights into the opportunities and challenges of public funded temporary use projects. This case highlights how a large, multifunctional space could be adapted and sustained in the context of urban renovation, by community engagement, and facing financial constraints.

The Municipality of Forest (Brussels) provided the initial access to a vacant 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> property previously used as a private headquarters, enabling the project to take root.

Financial support through the *Contrat de Rénovation Urbaine* enabled the transformation of the space into an accessible and functional place (Figure 5).

Communa has been experimenting with several uses of the site, including local associations, and giving accessible space to neighbours in the courtyard (Figure 6), aligning with the Municipality's vision of creating a permanent public facility by 2026 within the Saint-Antoine neighbourhood in Forest, where a strong associative culture already existed.

The space was configured to support 70 diverse projects, from artistic and cultural initiatives to social and culinary activities, enabling the site to become a hub for community-driven initiatives.

The co-creation of *Casa Vesta*, a collective housing project for women in precarious conditions, in partnership with *Samu Social* association, demonstrated the stakeholders' capability to address urgent social needs building partnerships.

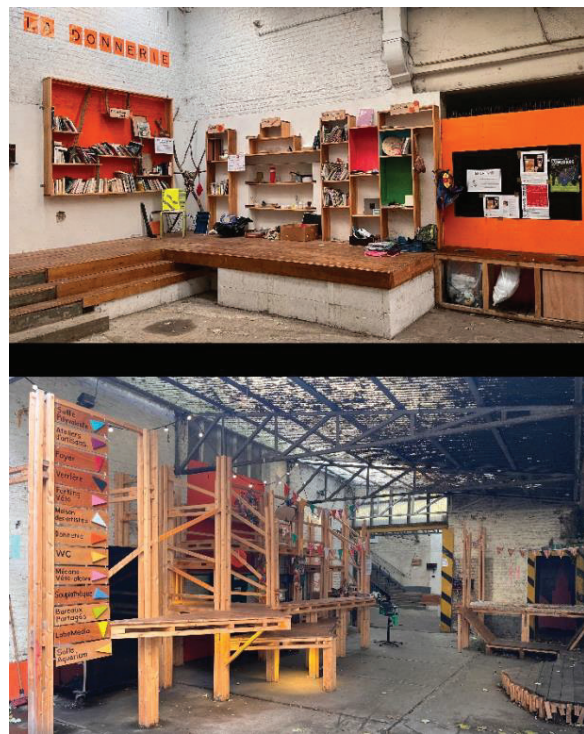


Figure 6. MAXIMA, Municipality of Forest, Region of Brussels. Open space at the ground floor (Photos: Chiara Mazzarella, Nov. 2023).

The Municipality's ownership of the property and its commitment to supporting interim use provided a stable foundation for the project. The financial backing of the *Contrat de Rénovation Urbaine* enabled the transformation of the site and the initiation of community-oriented activities (Figure 5).



The dense associative culture of Saint-Antoine and the neighbourhood's need for space to host activities were key factors in the project's relevance and acceptance. Flexible and participatory approaches allowed the space's functions to evolve based on ongoing dialogue with local actors.

The willingness to experiment with new forms of shared management and multi-purpose uses allowed communa to test and refine models of co-management, social circularity and shared governance, laying the groundwork for future consolidation of the place.

Currently, *Minima is Maxima, but smaller*. Facing the end of public funding at the end of 2024 (Communa ASBL, 2024a), communa had to restructure the project into *Minima*, a shrieked and self-managed version of *Maxima* with some associations for food distribution, psychosocial support, and activities for young people, but closing the courtyard (Communa ASBL, 2024b).

This transition reflects their ability to adapt autonomous operational models in response to financial limitations, and not renouncing to the place opportunity in name of the organization aims and goals.

**De Grote Beer** is a temporary project by the non-profit association Stad in de Maak (SidM) in Zwijndrecht (Netherlands). The housing association Trivire asked to SidM to create a community and a commons space at the beginning of a long redevelopment phase of five blocks.

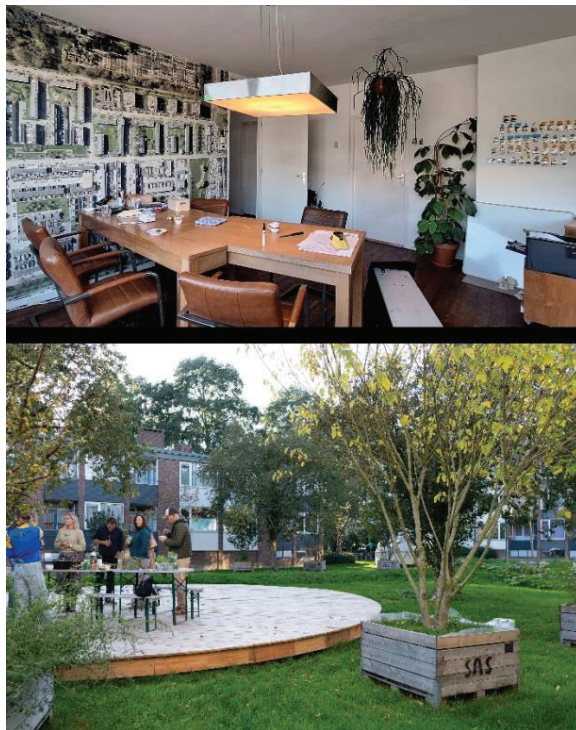


Figure 7. De Grote Beer, Zwijndrecht. Meeting room and the garden yard (Photos: Chiara Mazzarella, Oct. 2024).

During the redevelopment SidM has been asked to support the social transformation of the area. According to the 'Programma veerkrachtige buurten Zwijndrecht 2024-2040' (Coalition Resilient Neighborhoods, 2024) (Figure 8) the residents need more social support and facilities. In this context, the SidM's *commons community center* aims to establish a lasting social center for the neighbours (Stad in de Maak, 2024b).

The project was commissioned by the housing association Trivire to Stad in de Maak for the 2022-2027 period. Trivire owns and manages residential housing complexes in Zwijndrecht (Figure 8). Over the coming years, some of the buildings will be renovated, while two will be demolished and rebuilt. During this process, many residents will be relocated, and new ones will move into the neighbourhood. Amidst this dynamic transformation, SidM has been revitalizing a ground-floor apartment and an open garden since 2024, creating an accessible social space for the neighbourhood.

SidM's inclusive and collaborative approach began with directly involving residents, organizing convivial gatherings and informal meetings to build connections (Stad in de Maak, 2024a). They don't make open call for submission to fill the space but are looking for human resources in the area that are available to get involved in the community building. Thus, identifying and attracting residents of the neighbourhood has been the organization's first step in this project.

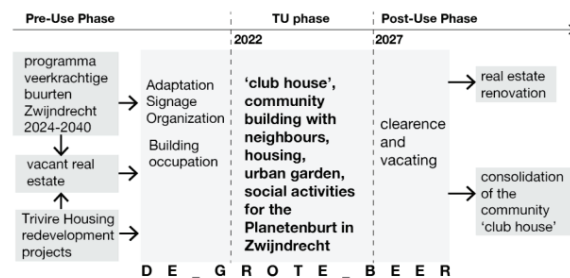


Figure 8. Process tracing of De Grote Beer.

SidM is managing an apartment, a building and a yard with the goal of transforming it into a self-managed social space for the neighbourhood's residents. The objective of the temporary use is to test activities and forms of collaboration by enabling local neighbours to self-organize projects and self-sustainable activities. To get people involved, a SidM member *rings people's doorbells to ask what they need* (Stad in de Maak, 2024a).

This direct community engagement process is progressively forming a constellation of actors, local associations, and new groups of people potentially interested in getting involved into the De Grote Beer social club. In December 2024, a group of residents started the *Tuintje Planetennbuurt* ("Little Garden Planetenbuurt") to make a vegetable garden in the yard. The yard is a garden that is also being used for meetings



and outdoor lunches on temporary wooden structures built by SidM. The organization has funds to support the purchases and expenses of these volunteer-led initiatives. During a conversation, a resident remarked that he had "never seen anything like this in the neighbourhood."

In the same residential complex, temporarily vacant apartments are being managed by *Ad Hoc*, one of the anti-squat companies in the Netherlands that manage empty properties for short periods to prevent them from being left unused.

While the benefit given by anti-squat companies is only in renting properties to lower price, SidM manages spaces as *commons*, adopting an open, inclusive, and unconventional approach that share decision-making power to the users, allowing freedom in temporary adaptation based on their needs and shared use of resources.

At De Grote Beer, the temporary wooden structures and other equipment were reused from a previous project (Vlaardingen Meent).

De Grote Beer project is still in its early stages, but the approach clearly reflects principles of the social circular economy and shared governance. The mechanisms for maintaining these activities remain to be observed as the project develops further.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

Temporary use of vacant real estate show to have the potential to be embedded within urban planning as a strategic tool for implementing a social circular economy under specific conditions.

Our research shows that the social circular economy is evolving beyond its initial focus on labour well-being to social value creation through new forms of real estate management by hybrid organizations. We argue that for real estate reuse to qualify as a social circular strategy, it must not only incorporate circular economy activities but also prioritize labour well-being and foster social interaction. This study contributes to the literature on temporary use, by identifying three set of practices that can be conceptualized as social circular strategies, namely: 1) Circular economy actions, such as the real estate functional reuse, the presence of nature-based solutions (gardening, food recycling), reuse of furniture and component reuse, adaptations with material recycling; 2) Productive activities, such as favourable labour conditions, work well-being, entrepreneurial activities, i.e., the creation of start-up of new ventures, and 3) Social activities, such as community building, mutual support, sharing goods and services, knowledge transfer, social cohesion, and the creation of joint new associations. These factors of social circular economy have been verified in the temporary use phases of a property.

Building reuse is a fundamental prerequisite for any temporary use, making it a consistently relevant condition. The presence of nature-based solutions depends on the presence of a greenery, such as in De Grote Beer, where gardening has been an activator for

neighbours' engagement and community building. All the cases considered have furnished second hand furniture and reused temporary structures: in the case of De Grote Beer the domo in the garden is moved from the previous project in Vlaardingen.

This study does not explore indicators of the social dimension in productive activities, which would require further in-depth research through interviews. Being the three associations no profit organization with high commitment in social value creation, these indicators could be assessed exploring the work quality of their employees.

Figure 2 highlights that social activities can take place during the use phase and can last if the temporary use is a prefiguration of future uses, as in the three case studies.

Social activities vary greatly across the three cases. LAC operates on the scale of a city, where the users of the workshops and offices know their neighbours and some of the regular visitors. Many independently proposed internal activities have not been successful and have faded over time. The director of LAC reflected that sometimes, all it takes for a social moment is a break and a place to relax, such as the restaurant in the courtyard. The space hosts numerous events and cultural activities, attracting many visitors to the courtyard. It is not possible to identify a single community in LAC but rather a collection of groups and individuals who share social moments centred around art and culture.

At Minima in Brussels, funding cuts have led communa to reduce the number of activities of the building, limiting access to only those associations that have managed to establish a lasting presence in the neighbourhood. Creating communities in places awaiting transformation may seem paradoxical, as once the temporary use ends, each temporary inhabitant will be forced to find another place to live or work. However, in the three cases we have examined, while the temporary inhabitants (i.e., the 450 structures of LAC, the 70 associations of Maxima, and the temporary residents of the buildings in Planetenbuurt) will have to leave, the residents will continue to benefit from the cultural and social services provided to the neighbourhood. Start-ups and initiatives that manage to establish themselves still have the opportunity to carry forward the work developed during the temporary use.

Moreover, some residents of LAC have pointed out that bonds and connections do not necessarily end when a project concludes, and in many cases, the association Plateau Urbain helps its residents find new workspaces within its properties.

Thus, the circular capacity of temporary uses can be assessed based on the expected impacts of each initiative: In the case of LAC, the prefiguration of uses to be consolidated; in the case of Maxima, the activation of social services for residents; and in the case of LGB, the creation of a local resident community. Temporary development requires investments that, within a perspective of social circular economy, should be contextualized according to the interests of investors

(whether public or private property owners) and the broader framework of public programs and policies. One aspect that requires further investigation is temporality in relation to placemaking in their urban contexts (Zhang, 2018), or the ability to sustain a shared economy and foster new bonds of trust in temporary communities in real estate contexts when places in constant transformation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This article explored the connection between the social circular economy and temporary uses, highlighting the role of hybrid organizations in the innovative management of experimental temporary use. While the social dimension of circular economy is increasingly explored, a review of the literature reveals that there is limited research on circular dimension of temporary reuse in the real estate context. Hence, this paper conceptualizes the social circular economy within the context of building reuse and presents a framework detailing its practices, drawing from a comparative retrospective multiple case study analysis.

The framework proposed represents an initial identification of three key groups of indicators that can guide the development of social value within the context of temporary property reuse.

The three case studies presented demonstrate that, even under extremely different conditions, temporary uses managed through inclusive and collaborative approaches have the potential to serve as strategies for social circular economy. In particular, the success of temporary real estate reuse projects within the framework of a social circular economy depends on multiple enabling conditions. These conditions are shaped by the characteristics of the property itself, the objectives of the owner, the management approach adopted by temporary use organizers, and the long-term vision for the space. The key factors include:

1. Resources: The availability of real estate, financial, and human resources, is necessary to sustain temporary use operations.
2. Management Approach: The governance model and operational strategies that shape the social value of the temporary use activities.
3. Property Value: The real estate market value and the potential of the space to attract funding or support for renovation projects that can host temporary uses as a prefiguration phase.
4. Urban Policies: Municipalities that call for social services or amenities in neighbourhood encourage developers to implement those social circular strategies in temporarily vacant buildings.
5. Short- and Long-Term Objectives: The alignment between immediate use and the broader vision for the area or real estate development define the temporary use management and objective.

These factors determine whether a temporary real estate reuse initiative can effectively function as a social circular economy strategy.

Additionally, the case study highlights how enabling factors such as institutional support, community engagement, and strategic partnerships can drive such initiatives toward long-term impact.

The limitations of this study include the scope of the literature considered and the number of case studies. A systematic review on the topic of social value within the circular economy, applied to adaptive reuse, could identify additional criteria and indicators as tools for developing sustainable property management plans. Further case studies could provide additional insights into the role of hybrid organizations in the context of temporary uses.

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