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Occasional Paper**

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Planning for the  
Unplanned: Tools and  
Techniques for Interim  
Use in Germany and  
the United States

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## Introduction

In both Germany and the United States, many cities face a range of social, economic and physical challenges. Social and economic challenges include shrinking populations, concentrated poverty, poorly performing schools, and decreasing tax revenues. Spatial challenges include obsolete or under-utilized infrastructure and vacant land and buildings. Every day Germany adds an estimated 50 hectares to its inventory of vacant land.<sup>1</sup> In most cases, there is no foreseeable development demand. In the United States, vacant land in many inner cities is increasing, even as land on the fringes of urban areas is swallowed up at a rate of one million acres per year.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this excess of vacant urban property, local governments in both countries have sought solutions, ranging from large-scale demolition programs to land assembly. But these approaches are out of fiscal reach for cities that are barely able to afford the cost of basic public services, leading governments to seek more affordable solutions. One such approach is the 'interim use' (Zwischennutzung) of vacant land and buildings. Embracing a wide range of creative projects, interim uses have brought positive attention and new energy to neglected areas in many cities. To varying degrees, local governments in Germany and the U.S. are beginning to embrace interim uses as an effective response to the problem of excess urban land.

However, like a typewriter repairman faced with a laptop computer, city government has few tools that meet the demands of interim use. The practice of city planning is traditionally oriented towards long-term growth. Tools such as zoning, master plans, and land use plans are relatively inflexible instruments designed to regulate future development. These tools were created to protect private interests as well as public welfare, and they work well in an environment of consistent growth. The German 'Zoning Plan' (Bebauungsplan), for instance, is a planning tool that specifies in detail what is to be built on a site. Both government agencies and the public have several opportunities to suggest changes before it can be finalized and the final plan becomes a city ordinance. If the plan is later changed, even to incorporate an interim use, the city may have to pay compensation to the property owner.<sup>3</sup>

Tools like the Zoning Plan have little to offer the shrinking city, where empty space dominates, property owners are disengaged, and investors are scarce. Long-range planning for these areas is little more than an exercise in futility. Yet empty spaces have the potential to serve as creative laboratories for a city, if they are allowed to do so. To 'plan for the unplanned', cities are developing new approaches that respond flexibly to changing conditions and opportunities. Using a comparative approach, this report highlights some of these tools and techniques and discusses how they can be further developed.

To the extent city government, whether German or American, grapples with interim use, it is also confronting its shifting role in urban development, from a regulating role to an

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1 *Michael Krautzberger*, Opening Remarks, Stadtforum Berlin 2020: Verschenken? Bewalden? Zwischenutzen? Was tun mit der freien Fläche?, 15 April 2005, transcript, p. 2. One hectare equals approximately 2.5 acres.

2 *Ralph Heimlich and William D. Anderson*, Development at the Urban Fringe and Beyond: Impacts on Agriculture and Rural Land (Washington DC: US Department of Agriculture, 2001), p.2

3 Baugesetzbuch §§ 30, 34 and 35.

activating one (verordnen vs. fördern), from writing master plans to writing marketing brochures.<sup>4</sup> This shift in the role of city administration represents a power shift that offers a significant opportunity for citizens to take a more active role in their city's development, and the potential for them to take a place at the decision-making table along with the traditional big players of government and private investment.

## Organization

This report begins with an overview of interim use, including its key characteristics and its relevance to current urban development conditions in Germany and the United States.<sup>5</sup> I then examine how interim use has forced government to develop new and more flexible planning tools and techniques. Descriptions of programs and projects from four German and American cities illustrate these approaches in action. The report concludes with recommendations for further development of tools for interim use.

The research for this paper began with a literature review of American and German academic and trade publications. Interviews were then conducted with people working with interim use in the U.S. and Germany, including interim users, city administrators, researchers and architecture and planning consultants.

## Interim Use Defined

'Interim Use' (Zwischennutzung) is the temporary activation of vacant land or buildings with no foreseeable development demand. The terminology itself provides an initial insight into how differently interim use is regarded in the U.S. and Germany. In the United States, interim use has no precise definition as a planning term. In Germany, by contrast, 'Zwischennutzung' has recently become a familiar term to planners, as a characteristic phenomenon of eastern German cities since German reunification.

In both the U.S. and Germany, interim uses are diverse in form, but similar in underlying characteristics. First, use of a site is, by agreement with the owner, time-limited. This limitation varies, often depending on the improvements planned, from a few weeks to a few years. The time limitation of the use may also depend on the position of the city in the real estate investment cycle. In one city, interim uses may rarely experience development pressure, whereas in another, they may come under pressure at any time. In either case, interim use is permitted until an investor emerges. Interim use does not change the long-term zoning or land use for a site.

Interim users typically contribute the value of their own time and effort to develop their project. Donated labor and materials can also be important resources. Some initial financial investment is often required, and funding may come from private or public sources.

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4 Tobias Habermann and Susanne Heydenreich, Bürgerschaftliche Zwischennutzungsprojekte: Vorschläge für unterstützende Maßnahmen aus Nutzersicht, in: *PlanerIn*, March 2005, p. 46-47.

5 Support for this project was provided by the Robert Bosch Foundation under the Bosch Fellows Program. Research was conducted under the sponsorship of German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) researcher Robert Sander, who co-organized a Difu seminar with Dr. Heidede Becker entitled, 'Neue Brachen und Flächenpotentiale: Nutzungsmanagement als kommunale Herausforderung', held in Berlin, 13-15 June 2005.

When public funding in Germany usually comes via urban development programs such as Rebuilding the East or the Social City.<sup>6</sup> Even European Union funding has gone to interim uses. In the U.S., both federal and state funding has been deployed for interim use. Some interim uses also generate income that can help offset costs.

### An Idea with History

Though its entry into planning terminology may be new, interim use is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to Germany and the United States. Some of the more famous interim uses have taken place in Berlin: the use of the Tiergarten city park as a vegetable garden in the hungry years following World War II (Photo 1), the so-called ‘Poland Market’ (Polen-Markt), where Polish vendors brought their goods to sell in vacant land around Potsdamer Platz in East Berlin shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the informal night clubs established in East Berlin during the early 1990’s, when unclear ownership histories made many vacant buildings temporarily accessible.<sup>7</sup> Other European examples of interim uses include the ‘Paris Plage’ project initiated in 2002, in which highways running along the banks of the river Seine in central Paris were transformed for several weeks in summer into sandy beaches with deck chairs, bars and swimming pools. Amsterdam and Vienna have also been the location for interim uses in recent years.

Photo 1



Tiergarten with Brandenburg Gate in background, Berlin

Photo 2



‘Wheatfield : A Confrontation’, New York City

In the United States, New York is well-known for its interim uses, namely through its long and contentious history of community gardens. Other interim uses there include the artist Agnes Denes’ 1982 project, ‘Wheatfield: A Confrontation’, in which she transformed two acres of vacant land in lower Manhattan into a field of wheat for one growing season

6 Rebuilding the East (Stadtumbau Ost) is a federal program in which cities create comprehensive long-term development plans which form the basis for further federal support. Socially Integrative City (Soziale Stadt) Program is another federal program developed since reunification that provides staffing and project funding to individual cities to support community-driven improvement projects in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

7 *Klaus Overmeyer*, *Raumpioniere Berlin* (Berlin: Studio Urban Catalyst, 2004), p. 5. Much of the background section on interim use is indebted to Overmeyer’s study.

(Photo 2), and the 'World Views' project, which turned vacant office space on the 92<sup>nd</sup> floor of the World Trade Center into temporary studios for artists from 1997 to 2001.

In Chicago, a demolished and vacant downtown block, 'Block 37', was used for projects ranging from an after-school art program to an ice-skating rink for almost a decade.<sup>8</sup> Near San Jose, California, garages have been sites for interim use of a sort, serving as start-up laboratories for future computer giants including Apple and Hewlett Packard.

## The Uses

The scope and scale of interim uses vary widely. The following list, based on a survey of examples from Germany and the U.S., gives some idea of the range:

- Parks and Gardens, including pocket parks, dog parks, playgrounds, community gardens plant nurseries, and urban farms (Photo 3)
- Art/Culture, including art installations, re-use of vacant retail spaces and former industrial buildings for studios, workshops and performance spaces
- Sport/Recreation, including skate parks, riding centers, adventure courses, urban beaches/volleyball
- Entrepreneurial, including start-up businesses, open-air markets, bars and night clubs (Photo 4)
- Parking lots and storage sites
- Alternative Living Situations, including trailer parks, house boats and tent cities

Photo 3



Intercultural Garden Köpenick, Berlin  
Photo: Förderverein Lokale Agenda 21  
Treptow-Köpenick e.V.

Photo 4



Freeswimmer Bar and Restaurant, Berlin  
Photo: Freischwimmer Berlin

## The Actors

There are several key actors that are needed to initiate an interim use. First, there must be a potential user, whether it is an individual or a group of people, who wishes to develop a project. Artists, entrepreneurs, and community organizations or other volunteer groups are all potential users.

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<sup>8</sup> Ross Miller, Block 37, Encyclopedia of Chicago, [www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/146.html](http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/146.html).

The property owner, whether private or public, must be willing to allow the site to be used—more often, they must be an active participant, obtaining permits and permissions, in order for the project to proceed. Property owners may include private individuals, public agencies, real estate corporations (Baugesellschaften), public utilities, and railroad companies.

Whether or not it owns a potential site, local government is usually involved in interim use through its traditional role of providing building and use permits. Agencies involved may include the planning department, as well as building and environmental departments for permitting. Other agencies, such as youth and parks and recreation agencies, may also be involved as interim uses intersect with their missions. Sometimes the public sector takes on more innovative roles, such as acting as an agent to bring owner and potential user together for a first meeting. This role will be discussed further in the “Tools and Techniques” section.

Interim use agents also come from the private sector. These agents, often young planners or architects, find sites and match them with potential users, receiving a small commission if the process is successful. Finally, nearby community residents often play a role in fostering (or hindering) the development of interim uses and may become actively involved with the interim use over time, as is often the case with community gardens.

## **The Locations**

Interim uses take place in a variety of locations, including:

- Infill sites (Baulücken), which could be as small as a few hundred square meters<sup>9</sup>
- Former industrial sites, where factories or warehouses may sometimes still be standing
- Former housing settlements, often on sites of demolished housing
- Vacant infrastructure, including areas between rail lines and abandoned roadways
- Empty and unrenovated shops, offices and apartments

## **User Motivations**

The motivations of those who seek interim space vary widely and depend on the users. In many instances, volunteer or non-profit groups may be motivated to strengthen the image, economy or community of an area. Artists are often looking for spaces to create art and build an artistic community. Entrepreneurs may be looking for publicity and cheap temporary space for their start-ups and proximity to others like them. Finally, interim users may be looking to showcase an alternative lifestyle, such as eco-living, or wish to make a political or personal statement.

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<sup>9</sup> One square meter equals 10.76 square feet.

## The Process

There is no uniform process for the start-up of an interim use, but there are a number of steps that usually take place, especially when the project involves public financing.

First, the property owner and the potential user must agree on a use for the site. In Germany, the owner then presents a proposal to relevant city officials for their initial approval. If formal approvals or permits are needed, the owner must obtain these for the user. In the U.S., the user is more often responsible for obtaining permits. Owner and user then sign a written lease or use agreement, which covers terms such as length of contract and renewal options, rent, use of property, insurance, maintenance, and utilities. In some instances, local government may act as a middleman, signing one lease with the property owner and another with the user, which may assuage the owner's concerns about rent payments, liability, and so forth. Applications and solicitations for public and private funding may also be developed. Once any permits have been obtained and final cost calculations are done, the space can be occupied and the project moves forward.

Of course, in many cases where the project is less formal or has a minimal budget, such as a community garden, permits may not be required, use agreements can be extremely informal, and work proceeds when labor and materials become available.

## Relationship to Contemporary Urban Development Trends

Current development conditions and trends in both the U.S. and Germany appear favorable for interim use. In Germany, this has led local governments to embrace and encourage it. In the U.S., interim use is supported by local government in a reactive, informal manner, when it is supported at all.

Relevant trends that favour interim use in Germany include an urban policy that is strongly oriented towards environmentally sustainable development, which encourages the recycling of land. Coupled with this is an emerging return to inner-city living, after decades of suburban growth.<sup>10</sup> City officials perceive interim use as a means to attract residents and businesses to the city by enhancing its image as a creative center. Furthermore, federal urban development programs, such as the Social City, which seek to enhance the physical character of disadvantaged neighborhoods and encourage resident involvement, are optimal for funding interim use initiatives. Taken together, these trends have led local governments, especially in eastern Germany, to support and encourage interim use in proactive, formal manner.<sup>11</sup>

Development trends in the U.S. favorable to interim use include the 'Smart Growth' movement, which advocates for environmentally sustainable development through reduction of sprawl and re-use of urban land. 'Brownfields' programs, which support assessment and cleanup of vacant contaminated sites that are often located in core cities, also provide potential sites for interim use, though they often provide only partial cleanup

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10 Hasso Brühl, Claus-Peter Echter, Franciska Frölich von Bodelschwingh and Gregor Jekel, *Wohnen in der Innenstadt—Eine Renaissance?* (Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik, 2005), p. 19.

11 Undine Giseke, Professor of Landscape Architecture, Technical University of Berlin, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 2 December 2005.



reimbursement.<sup>12</sup> Declining crime rates have helped spur a decade-plus long trend of inner city re-investment, bringing attention to long-neglected areas with inventories of vacant land. Interim use also complements the currently trendy theory of the ‘Creative Class’, which links the development of jobs in creative industries (arts, media, consulting) to future urban growth, by providing a spatial canvas for artistic types.<sup>13</sup> Yet in the American examples that this report profiles, interim uses succeed because of the vision, tenacity, and, importantly, the relationships of users to public officials. There is no document indicating the city’s stance on interim use—it simply exists ‘between the lines’ of local government land use policy.

### Rewards and Risks

Interim use brings both rewards and risks to the cities where it appears. On the positive side, interim use focuses attention on a site and may help market it to future investors.<sup>14</sup> It can reduce maintenance and security costs for property owners. Interim use showcases the creative talent of the city, especially important in a cultural capital like Berlin, where young artists flock to the city seeking outlets for their ideas. Interim use offers a means to compete with the suburbs for attracting residents. Moreover, interim uses offer the possibility for average citizens to take a more active role in the development of their neighbourhood, which may be seen as an opportunity or a risk, depending on the city and its politics.

On the negative side of the debate, there is often a fear on the part of the site owner that once a site has an interim use it will be difficult to get the user to relocate, or that the user may demand a replacement site, or other compensation. New York City initiated programs to encourage community gardens in the fiscal crisis of the 1970’s, but had to go to court to regain control of the land when developers emerged in the 1990’s. People’s Park in Berkeley, California, became internationally infamous in 1969 when then-governor Ronald Reagan called in the National Guard to evict the hippies that had transformed what had been a parking lot into a park.<sup>15</sup>

### Factors Affecting Interim Use

Interim uses are affected by many of the same factors as real estate in general, such as location, size and condition.<sup>16</sup> A central and easily accessible location is usually an advantage, though an isolated site may be an attractive for users such as music clubs. Clustering of interim uses, such as along the river Spree in eastern Berlin (Spreerraum), is also popular, as it can enhance users’ visibility and networking opportunities. Site conditions can also be sig-

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12 The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines a brownfield as “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant”, <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>.

13 *Richard Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: 2002), p. 1.

14 *Chris Reed*, Principal, Stoss Landscape Urbanism, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/Boston, 16 November 2005.

15 See the People’s Park Webpage, [www.peoplespark.org](http://www.peoplespark.org).

16 *Klaus Overmeyer*, ‘Raumpioniere in Berlin’, lecture presented at Stadtforum Berlin 2020: Verschenken? Bewalden? Zwischennutzen? Was Tun mit der freien Fläche?, 15 April 2005, transcript, p. 15.

nificant, in that contamination, for instance, can hinder the use of a site, but the presence of vacant buildings or building ruins can inspire and facilitate the development of a site.

Environmental conditions on the site also play a role. Especially in the United States, even if a site is not actually polluted, the owner may fear potential environmental liability. In Germany, another environmental factor may also come into play: land that has been vacant for some time can become a habitat for plants and animals that may be protected species, hindering the site's development. Greening of a site may therefore be perceived by owners as creating potential obstacles to long-term development.

Bureaucratic flexibility also affects interim use. In Leipzig, the city created a program to save deteriorating housing stock by allowing normally unoccupiable buildings to be lived in and maintained in exchange for free rent. Conversely, in Berlin, a flea market was closed down by city officials for lack of food and vending permits that were not required when the market opened. A rooftop garden proposed for an experimental cultural center in Chicago was rejected by permitting officials, despite the mayor's stated position of encouraging 'green' building practices.<sup>17</sup>

Cost of using the site is also critical, as most interim users have limited financial resources. Private owners may require greater compensation to cover their holding costs. Public land is more often made accessible at a nominal cost. Cost is also a concern for local government, which may be concerned that the use cannot sustain itself without continuous support.

## Tools and Techniques for Interim Use

With some background on the general characteristics of interim use, I now turn to the planning tools and techniques that city governments use to support interim use. These tools and techniques are not new themselves, but are being newly employed for interim use. 'Tools' address primarily documents and funding, while 'techniques' focus on communication and other 'soft skills'.

### Tools

A primary tool is a searchable and accessible *site inventory* for interim use. This inventory can be made available through city staff, or better yet, directly to the public through the internet. One private interim use agent even developed an inventory of potential users who were matched with appropriate sites and then sent postcards with site information.<sup>18</sup>

*Model documents* are another tool to support interim use. Since many users have little experience with real estate transactions, these documents can greatly simplify the process for them. Model documents can include design templates, budget estimates, and lists of

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17 Dan Wang, *Downtime at the Experimental Station: a Conversation with Dan Peterman* (Chicago: Temporary Services, 2004), p. 16.

18 Stephanie Raab, *Die Zwischennutzungsagentur*, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 24 November 2005.

planting materials. One city even developed a step-by-step brochure to encourage children to seek interim uses in their neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup>

Another tool that is essential to many projects is *financial support*. Although most city budgets have little room to fund interim uses, cities in Germany have successfully competed for funds from the federal government and the European Union. In the United States, there is federal, state and private foundation support for urban agriculture and greening project. In both countries, support by individual donors is also strong.

Another key tool for interim use is *dedicated staff*. Interim users benefit from having a single contact person in city government, which can be either a city staff person or a private consultant under contract. These people are the ‘door-openers’ who get the process started, although they may not necessarily help with all the steps required to getting the interim use approved. Though their position outside city bureaucracy can sometimes be a hindrance, independent private interim use agents often have more flexibility in how they can serve the user. For example, they may be able to help write grants for the project.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, another tool that has been developed in Germany in the past few years is the so-called ‘*Baurecht auf Zeit*’ (right to build for a limited time).<sup>21</sup> This instrument seeks to reduce the relative inflexibility of German planning law with reference to time-limited development projects. Examples for where it can be employed include multiplex cinemas and commercial musical theatres, both of which have relatively short investment amortization periods. The *Baurecht auf Zeit* protects the short-term and long-term use of the site, as well as the possibility of a progressively more intensive use of the site. Despite its concern with ‘interim use’, this tool is not explicitly oriented to the sort of small interventions characterized by the interim uses in this report, and will require further development if it is to address both types of interim use.<sup>22</sup>

## Techniques

Although it is so obvious as to hardly be considered a ‘technique’, *acknowledgement* of the potential of interim uses to address the problems of vacant property is a key first step for city governments. Another critical soft tool for fostering interim use is simple *communication*. Most basically, this involves bringing potential users and owners together, since they may not know how to find each other. This role is especially important because these communication lines do not otherwise exist.<sup>23</sup> Communication is also essential to making more transparent the process of obtaining approvals for an interim use.

The related technique of *moderation* can be important in instances when owner and user have differing goals or opinions. City government can help shape the discussion, use its experience with interim use to suggest solutions, and mediate when conflicts arise. *Flexibility*

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19 Rebekka Bendig, Sven Hessmann, Stephanie Raab, Maria Richarz and Heiko Wichert, *Auf die Plätze! Kinder und Jugendliche erobern FreiRäume* (Berlin: Stiftung SPI Drehscheibe Kinder- und Jugendpolitik Berlin, 2005).

20 Giseke, 2 December 2005.

21 Baugesetzbuch § 9, paragraph 2.

22 Robert Sander, *Zwischennutzung und Baurecht auf Zeit*, Unpublished document, Berlin, 2005.

23 Giseke, 2 December 2005.

is often called for, in that interim uses may require new interpretations of existing rules. An example of this would be the interpretation of building codes to allow for temporary occupancy of a structure without requiring costly building improvements (though the user would have to be aware and responsible for the risk of their presence in such buildings).

Other important techniques include *marketing* and *monitoring*. Marketing is important to promote the concept of interim use and to draw out interested owners and users. Finally, monitoring of sites that are under interim use is useful for documenting how they are developing and can be a means of heading off problems if the site is not being used or developed as planned.

### **Interim Use in Practice in Germany and the United States**

The examples from German and American cities below show a sample of interim uses, along with the tools and techniques city government has employed to assist them. These examples highlight the different approaches that local government in Germany and the U.S. have towards interim use.

#### **Interim Use in Berlin**

The German capital of Berlin is home to 3.4 million people spread over a large land mass of 984 square kilometers.<sup>24</sup> 40 years of political and economic division left the city with an excess of vacant land, especially in the areas bordering the former Berlin Wall. Though Berlin experienced a building boom following German reunification in 1990, new construction concentrated in a few areas, and in some cases led to overbuilding. A sluggish economy in more recent years slowed construction activity and led to high vacancy rates. There remains a sizeable inventory of undeveloped land with no active interest from investors—within the inner city (inside the Ringbahn) alone there are an estimated 1,000 vacant sites totalling 150 hectares. This number rises to 700 hectares if empty industrial spaces throughout the city are counted, including the 300-hectare Tempelhof Airport, due to close in 2006.<sup>25</sup> In recent years a severe fiscal crisis has also plagued the city, as the crushing cost of unification and its associated debt were compounded by loss of jobs and industry.

Possibly as a result of these circumstances, Berlin government began to express publicly its interest in interim use. In 2004, the Senate Department of Urban Development sponsored a study on interim use, 'Land Pioneers of Berlin' (*Raumpioniere Berlin*).<sup>26</sup> The *Land Pioneers* report provided an overview of interim use in Berlin and showcased nearly 100 local examples. In April 2005, the agency hosted a City Forum (Stadtforum) to highlight the study's results and debate further ways to encourage interim use. A follow-up report

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24 Berlin population peaked at 4.5 million before World War II. From 1890 to 1920 it was the fourth largest city in world; today it is around the 80<sup>th</sup>. One square kilometer equals approximately 0.4 square miles.

25 Advisory Committee of the Stadtforum Berlin, Summary, Stadtforum Berlin 2020: Verschenken? Bewalden? Zwischennutzen? Was tun mit der freien Fläche?, 15 April 2005, p. 1.

26 Berlin is both a city and a federal state (Land). Its city department leaders form a Senate, which acts as the cabinet of the state government. There is both a Berlin-wide planning office, as well as planning offices for each district of the city.

with detailed recommendations for the city administration was commissioned in 2005 and is expected to be complete in early 2006.<sup>27</sup>

Among many observations, the *Land Pioneers* report cited Berlin's website as being a helpful resource for interim use, in that it offers a searchable database for vacant sites, although it is more geared to traditional developers than to interim users. This database could certainly be marketed to encourage interim use.<sup>28</sup>

The *Land Pioneers* study recommended the creation of a city-wide policy-oriented position for interim use, although funding limitations make this a challenge.<sup>29</sup> The report noted a number of socially-oriented, private interim use agents that match interim users and sites. Examples include Die Zwischennutzungsagentur, Agentur Spielfeld, and Stattbau GmbH. The Zwischennutzungsagentur, which has a mission of improving community involvement in land planning through the development of interim use, tapped into urban revitalization programs such as URBAN II for start-up funds.<sup>30</sup>

These firms sometimes find it challenging to work with the city administration and cite officials as being reluctant to put allow publicly-owned sites to be made available for interim use, and a lack of public funds to support use. Public officials, however, note the difficulty of moving some interim uses once they are established, and that even detailed leases do not always prevent problems. In the words of Senate planner Ursula Renker, 'Every user wants to become permanent.' Renker also cites the challenges of making funding available for interim use, given Berlin's large size and financial condition.<sup>31</sup>

These firms have also called for clearer rules for interim use. It seems likely that the forthcoming study on interim use will offer some advice in this area, perhaps using examples from other German cities.

Despite these challenges, the outlook for interim use in Berlin seems positive. As Renker states, 'interim users help keep a place awake, so it isn't forgotten....Interim use is an investment in a city's image.'<sup>32</sup> The challenge is how to make interim uses a standard part of the land use planning and development process in such a large and diverse city.

### **Case Study: Interim Use Coordinator in Marzahn-Hellersdorf**

The *Land Pioneers* report identified the development of a staff coordinator position for interim use in the district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf (Photo 5) as a major step forward for initiating interim use in the border areas of Berlin. This coordinator position, held by Michael

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27 The City Forum (Stadtforum) is a public forum sponsored by the Senate Department for Urban Development and held every few months that brings in expert speakers and panel discussions to discuss current planning and development topics. The follow-up report is being prepared by the planning firm Stadt Land Fluss of Berlin.

28 *Raumpioniere Berlin*, p. 50. The City database can be found at: [www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/baulueckenmanagement/de/baulandrecherche.shtml](http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/baulueckenmanagement/de/baulandrecherche.shtml)

29 *Ibid*, p. 46.

30 *Stephanie Raab*, 24 November 2005.

31 *Stefan Bätz*, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 24 November 2005.

32 *Ursula Renker*, head of team Freiraumgestaltung, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 23 November 2005.

Meyer from 2003 through 2005, was the result of a pilot project between the district and the Berlin Senate, using funding from the Stadtumbau Ost program to pay Meyer's salary.<sup>33</sup> The creation of such a position at the district level, rather than in the Senate Department for Urban Development, was logical, since approvals and permits for interim use are handled by the districts.

Photo 5



Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Berlin  
Photo: District of Marzahn-Hellersdorf

Photo 6



Michael Meyer, Interim Use Coordinator, Berlin  
Photo: *Land Pioneers* Report

During his tenure, Meyer marketed approximately 100 hectares of open space for lease under the slogan, 'Land in Exchange for Ideas' ('Tausche Flächen gegen Nutzungsidee').<sup>34</sup> (Photo 6) By networking with community groups and individuals, Meyer assisted the development of a number of community gardens, parks and recreation sites. Despite his attempts to reach out to artists from outside the community, it was difficult to attract cultural uses to the district.<sup>35</sup> Meyer believes this has to do with the district's relatively distant location from the center of Berlin. Meyer also cites as a challenge a rule passed by the Berlin Senate in November 2004 which requires any land owned by the city that is leased for interim use to take in rent enough to cover maintenance costs for the city.<sup>36</sup> This puts the larger sites in the Marzahn-Hellersdorf district at a disadvantage compared with more central areas of Berlin, where vacant lots tend to be smaller. Meyer also has concerns about the long-term sustainability of some interim uses in Marzahn-Hellersdorf, given limited public funds and the uses' lack of connection to established community groups.

33 *Raumpioniere Berlin*, p. 44, and *Michael Meyer*, Bezirksamt Treptow-Köpenick von Berlin, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 9 December 2005. Meyer was promoted to another district and the position is now held by Ms. Zschocher. Marzahn-Hellersdorf sits on the north-east edge of Berlin, and was developed as planned city by the East German government in the 1970's. Most of the 100,000 apartment units are in monotonous high-rise buildings. Since reunification, thousands of units have been demolished and the remaining units extensively renovated in an effort to keep residents from leaving for more attractive apartments in the inner city or single-family suburban homes.

34 *Michael Meyer*, Tausche Flächen gegen Nutzungsidee – Temporäre Nutzung und Flächenmanagement in Marzahn-Hellersdorf – Strukturen, Herangehensweisen, Projekte (Berlin: Bezirksamt Marzahn-Hellersdorf, 2005), p. 1.

35 One exception is the ORWOhaus, former factory that was occupied by a group of musicians. This use was initially unwanted by the Treuhand Liegenschaftengesellschaft, a government entity that handles the sale of assets from the German Democratic Republic. After being threatened with eviction, the ORWOhaus group organized a successful protest, ending with a signed purchase agreement in April 2005. ORWOhaus did not receive any direct assistance from Mr. Meyer.

36 *Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin*, Drucksache 15/3388, 15 November 2004.

To date, no other coordinator positions at the district level in Berlin have been created. However, the planning offices in the districts of Mitte, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, and Treptow-Köpenick have all worked with landowners and potential users to bring about new interim uses. Many people interviewed for this report cited a more pressing need for interim use assistance in border areas such as Marzahn-Hellersdorf. For these areas, more extreme measures, such as long-term re-naturation, may be appropriate.<sup>37</sup>

### Case Study: R.A.W.-Tempel

The R.A.W.-Tempel cultural initiative in Berlin's Friedrichshain district is a living example of the issues and challenges of establishing an interim use in inner-city Berlin. (Photo 7)

Founded by West Germans who had established a similar project in the city of Dortmund in the 1980's, the abandoned repair yard was first used in the mid-1990's as a setting for outdoor concerts.<sup>38</sup> The group became interested in improving the four empty buildings on the northern edge of the site for community gatherings and for studios and performance spaces. In 2002, the group secured an initial lease from VIVICO, the real estate affiliate of the German railroad, with the help of the district government, which acted as an intermediary by signing one lease with R.A.W. and another lease with the owner. Later the same year, the group secured Euro 400,000 of European Union structural funds (URBAN II) to renovate one building. (Photo 8) The grant agreement required a minimum ten-year lease directly with VIVICO, so R.A.W. had to immediately re-negotiate. Today the organization acts as an umbrella group and home to over 30 artists, performance groups, and other cultural and socially-oriented organizations.<sup>39</sup>

Photo 7



Berlin Friedrichshain and the Spree River  
Photo: Berlin Senate for Urban Development

Photo 8



R.A.W. Tempel building under renovation, Berlin  
Photo: R.A.W. Tempel

37 *Undine Giseke, Bernd Hunger and Simone Schmidt, Zwischennutzung und neue Freiflächen – städtische Lebensräume der Zukunft* (Berlin: Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau- und Wohnungswesen, 2004), p. 5.

38 The name R.A.W.-Tempel refers in part to its location on a former railroad repair yard, originally called the Reichsbahn Improvement Works (Reichsbahnausbesserungswerk) in part to Temple (Tempel), the original Dortmund artists' organization. R.A.W. is also a play on the English, meaning 'uncooked'.

39 *Mirko Assatzk, R.A.W.-Tempel Director of Public Relations, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, 18 November 2005. Most of the background information on R.A.W. was provided in this interview and by the R.A.W. website, [www.raw-tempel.de](http://www.raw-tempel.de).*

R.A.W.-Tempel faced many challenges in establishing control of the site, despite its apparent abandonment. It is generally acknowledged that it is very difficult for any private users to obtain land from the German railroad, despite its being a major owner of vacant land. In order to secure the lease with VIVICO, R.A.W. had to solicit the assistance of the area's federal political representatives. Only their pressuring of top-level managers at VIVICO resulted in an agreement being reached. The group faced another challenge beginning in 2001 with the initiation of a zoning plan (Bebauungsplan) for the site by VIVICO and the Senate for Urban Development. The R.A.W.-Tempel portion of the railroad site occupies about 6,000 square meters of a total of 10 hectares, in an area that has become a magnet for creative industries in the past five years.<sup>40</sup> The zoning plan, after an approval process, governs the eventual development of the site. The initial proposal called for an entirely commercial development. With R.A.W.-Tempel's survival hanging in the balance, the group mobilized enough public support to pressure the Senate to place a R.A.W. representative on the plan jury and to expand the usual two-part community comment process to allow for additional input.<sup>41</sup> The result was partial success: the final iteration of the plan states that the site where R.A.W.-Tempel currently sits will remain a 'cultural use' under a future development scenario, though R.A.W. itself may be forced out by future investors. If that happens, it will likely be a tough battle, given the group's strong community base and support from local and national politicians.

### Interim Use in Leipzig

Just a few hours south on the Autobahn from Berlin, Leipzig offers a different example of interim use in Germany. Probably the city in Germany most associated with the practice, interim use has been an active part of city development policy since the late 1990's. The reasons for this are clear to any visitor—there is a great deal of vacant land and buildings in Leipzig, not only at the edge of the city, but also in many central neighborhoods.<sup>42</sup> The vacant land is a product of mass demolitions that took place in the post-unification period. If people imagined these sites could be immediately filled with new houses, it was not to be. Out-migration to the suburbs and to western Germany after 1990 reduced the city's population by over 100,000. With substantial subsidies from the federal government, two-thirds of the preferable older housing units were renovated.<sup>43</sup> But even after massive investments, by 2000, 20% of 300,000 total housing units were still vacant.<sup>44</sup>

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40 Both MTV Europe and Universal Studios have their European headquarters nearby.

41 *Renker*, 23 November 2005.

42 *Giseke*, 2 December 2005.

43 Leipzig is about the size of one of Berlin's 12 political districts. Although it had 750,000 residents before World War II, at 493,000 residents, it is still the largest city in the federal state of Saxony. During the period of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1989) many mass-produced housing projects were funded, and older housing stock was rarely renovated. In comparison with Berlin, Leipzig's older housing stock (Altbauten) is less attractive: apartments are smaller and fewer of them have balconies or terraces, both disadvantages in the competition with the suburban housing (*Giseke*, 2 December 2005).

44 *Dezenat für Stadtentwicklung und Bau Leipzig*, Stadterneuerung und Stadtumbau in Leipzig – gestern – heute – morgen (Leipzig: Stadt Leipzig, 2005), p. 23.



In late 1990s, city leaders began to realize that the vacant land and buildings were a long-term problem that called for policy solutions.<sup>45</sup> It became clear that the housing market had become a renter's market, and for a neighborhood to be attractive to renters, apartments had to not only be well-renovated, the neighborhood had to look good too. Vacant property was a major disadvantage. The city faced the additional challenge that 80% of the vacant land and buildings belonged to private owners, 90% of whom did not live in Leipzig. Thus not only was vacant property out of city hands, its owners were not even present in the city to help formulate solutions.

In the face of these challenges, city leaders decided to begin by activating the empty lots and houses with interim uses. The slogan they developed, 'More Green, Less Density, More Individuality' became the catchword for the activity that followed.

With this slogan in mind, city leaders obtained funding to initiate a number of projects for interim use. Today the city has a 'bouquet' of support programs for interim use through the European Union, the federal government, and the city's own redevelopment designations.<sup>46</sup> None of these initiatives would have been realized without special funding—Leipzig could not afford to do anything for interim use within the parameters of its own budget.

One possible advantage that Leipzig had over Berlin in tackling these problems was its small size, allowing it to make noticeable progress without a budget of billions. Leipzig's smaller size also meant the bureaucracy was smaller and simpler, making it less complex to institute new land use policies.

Leipzig created a coordinator position for interim use within the Office of City Renewal and Housing Development (Amt für Stadterneuerung und Wohnungsbauförderung), which is held by Heike Will. Planner Astrid Heck consulted with the city in the development of program tools. Will's office, in consultation with Heck, developed two basic models for interim use. In the first model, used in designated urban renewal areas,<sup>47</sup> a *public-private* partnership is established. The city contracts with the owner for public use of the property through an 'Authorization Agreement' (Gestattungsvereinbarung). Will's office drafts the actual contract, which covers use of the property, term of contract, insurance, and maintenance. In exchange for public access and city approval of the site design, the owner receives up to ten years of property tax relief. In return, the money the owner saves on taxes is used for maintenance of the property.<sup>48</sup> The city then uses grant funds to pay for greening or other improvements to the site. If the owner wishes to develop the site before the contract expires, they repay the value of the tax abatement received to date. Additionally, within the designated urban renewal areas, the city has the

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45 Astrid Heck, Urban Planner, and Heike Will, Projektleiterin Grüne Stadt, joint interview by author, tape recording, Leipzig, 25 November 2005. Much of the information on interim use in Leipzig came from this interview.

46 Ibid.

47 Those areas are Leipziger Osten and Leipziger Westen in central Leipzig, and Grünau, an East German-vintage housing settlement in outer Leipzig.

48 German property law compels owners to secure and maintain vacant property. Despite some problem owners and sites, Leipzig and Berlin have not experienced the scale of property abandonment and resulting dumping and criminal activity that is found in many older American cities. Owners are located through the federal Grundbuch (Grundbuch).

right to invoke eminent domain (Enteignung). To date this power has not been employed by the city, but it is nevertheless a tool to motivate property owners.

In the second model for interim use, a *private-private* partnership is established between private owner and private user. City staff may introduce a potential user to a site owner, but the city is not a party to any contract. Will's office provides guidance to the property owner as to what is permitted on the site, but it is the owner, not the potential user, who has to obtain all required permits. In practice, most of the interim uses in Leipzig are between private parties, probably because users find it easier to work with private owners than the city.<sup>49</sup> Private-private contracts may also be more desirable because there is no public access requirement, and the city has no input into the design of the site. However, there is also no tax abatement offered for these types of contracts.

Leipzig, like Berlin, has many late 19<sup>th</sup>-century (Gründerzeit) neighborhoods that lack private open space. In these areas, the city tries to encourage adjacent property owners to adopt vacant lots. The problem is different, however, in the housing settlements (Großsiedlungen) where there is already plenty of open space. Leipzig planners emphasize that there is a need for new ideas for use of vacant space in these areas, and that as a whole, Leipzig has more interested property owners than it does potential site users.<sup>50</sup>

Despite these challenges, these models for interim use have proven effective in Leipzig. By 2005, the city had activated a total of 27 hectares, had developed over 200 Authorization Agreements, and was seeking interim use on an additional 35 to 45 hectares.<sup>51</sup> Population loss has stopped and the city has even gained 13,000 residents in recent years, mostly in inner-city neighborhoods.

The question of long-term use of interim use sites evokes a different response from officials in Leipzig than in Berlin. Though Leipzig's population has stabilized, city officials state that they are not opposed to some interim use sites becoming permanent, given low growth expectations.

Other tools that Leipzig uses to encourage interim use are an extensive array of publications, including folding postcards and flyers designed to encourage citizen interest, pamphlets that describe successful projects, reports on the status of renewal areas, and an ideas guide for interim use design and development that includes sample plans, budgets, and planting recommendations (PHOTOS 9-10). The city also holds events in the community to showcase successful interim uses and solicit interest, complete with music and the typical German welcome of 'coffee and cake'. Additionally, Ms. Will works closely with community groups to market her services and develop new sites, though this can be challenging in disadvantaged areas, where community groups are not always strong.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Heck and Will, 25 November 2005.

50 Ibid.

51 Engelbert Lütke Daldrup, *Zwischennutzung – Standbein oder Spielbein der Standortentwicklung?*, lecture, Stadtforum Berlin 2020: Verschenken? Bewalden? Zwischennutzen? Was tun mit der freien Fläche?, 15 April 2005, transcript, p. 5.

52 Heck and Will, 25 November 2005.

Photo 9



Interim Use Postcard, Leipzig  
Image: Leipzig Office of City Renewal

Photo 10



Interim Use Guide, Leipzig  
Image: Leipzig Office of City Renewal

Unlike Berlin, Leipzig does not have an inventory of available sites, public or private, that is accessible to the public. There is a detailed inventory on all properties held by the environment office, but it is only searchable on request. This lack of an accessible inventory could hinder some potential site users. On the other hand, Leipzig has developed a monitoring program through its planning and development office to keep track of property in the city. This is used by Ms. Will's office to identify potential sites. This monitoring database could potentially be adapted for the public to search for potential sites.

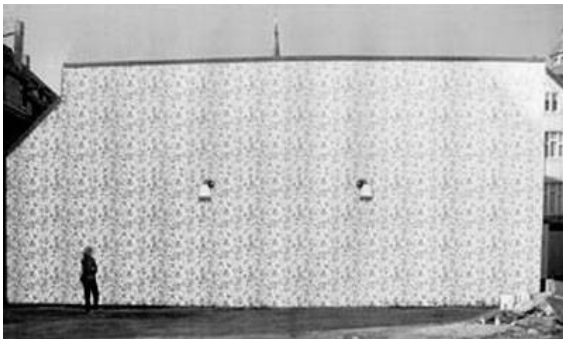
### Case Studies: 'Save the City' and 'Save the House'

The following sample projects provide a sense of what interim use looks like on the ground in Leipzig. Particularly noteworthy for their creativity are the 'Save the City' (Stadthalten) project in Lindenau and the 'Save the House' (Haushalten) projects. In the 'Save the City' project, the city worked with the non-profit Leipzig Art Exhibit (Leipziger Jahresausstellung), which hosts an annual art exhibit for artists affiliated with Leipzig. Dense with elegant but crumbling Gründerzeit homes, the Lindenau neighborhood in West Leipzig was in need of a project to activate the vacant spaces along a central corridor and to improve resident's image of their own neighborhood, according to Art Exhibit Director Rainer Schade.<sup>53</sup> Using European Union funds, the Art Exhibit worked with Will's office to develop a competition for art installations that addressed the issue of reactivating vacant land. After the competition drew over 80 entries, an independent jury selected 13 works, which were installed through a joint effort between the city and the art organization in 2002. The projects show a range of creative and playful interpretations of outdoor space, such as the 'Wallpaper Room' ('Tapetenzimmer'), an installation of a living room wall on an exterior house wall facing a small park, and 'In Place of a Park' ('Stattpark'), a play on the idea of 'park' through the placement of tightly-spaced car park-

53 Rainer Schade, interview by author, tape recording, Leipzig, 29 November 2005.

ing signs on a grass lot.<sup>54</sup> (Photo 11-12) The installations were complemented by new walkways, landscaping, benches and signage.

Photo 11



'Tapetenzimmer', Leipzig  
Photo: City of Leipzig

Photo 12



'Stattpark', Leipzig  
Photo: Leipziger Jahresausstellung

Photo 13



'Save the House' building, Leipzig  
Photo: Haushalten e.V.

Photo 14



'Save the House' residents, Leipzig  
Photo: Haushalten e.V.

A second notable project in Leipzig is the 'Save the House' project, which is an effort to stem the loss of Gründerzeit housing stock from the city. According to city estimates, there are still more than 1,000 empty Gründerzeit buildings in the city, many along high-traffic corridors which make them less desirable for renovation. The Save the House program offers five years of free rent to people willing to live in these vacant buildings. Tenants undertake basic maintenance and small repairs, and notify the landlord of larger problems. The program began in early 2005 and as of the end of the year, there were two pilot project houses occupied to date. A non-profit, also called Save the House, was formed and receives funding from the city to market the program. This organization also helps match owners and users in much the same way as city coordinator Will works with owners and users of open space.<sup>55</sup> Given the physical conditions of this housing stock and the large number of vacant homes, it seems likely that the organization will be chal-

54 *Dezernat für Stadtentwicklung und Bau Leipzig*, p.43.

55 Haushalten Website, <http://www.haushalten-leipzig.de/>.

lenged to make a significant impact on the problem, but the approach is fresh and has captured publicity. (Photo 13-14)

### Interim Use in Chicago

Interim use in Chicago provides an interesting contrast with that of Berlin and Leipzig. Although there are no formal city programs for interim use, informally, some city agencies encourage some interim uses, especially, as these examples will show, when the property is city-owned and the user is well-known to city staff. According to one city official, this informality has to do with the city's 'political climate and culture', a possible reference to the city's emphasis on economic development over community empowerment, as compared with previous administrations.<sup>56</sup>

With approximately 2.9 million residents living in a metropolitan area of 9.3 million, Chicago is America's third largest city. Encompassing an area of 606 square kilometers, the city contains a wide range of neighborhoods and housing, ranging from dense apartment blocks to suburban-style ranch houses. Although Chicago lost population in the post-war era, in recent years the city has experienced a renaissance, gaining population along with increased development pressure in many areas. Yet the city still owns 8,000 vacant lots, mostly on the poorer south and west sides.<sup>57</sup>

### Case Study: City Farm

Next door to one of Chicago's most infamous housing projects, one interim use is flourishing. Cabrini-Green, built between 1942 and 1962, sits just north of downtown, only a short distance from the wealthy 'Gold Coast' neighborhoods bordering Lake Michigan. Once home to 15,000 residents, the community became an urban nightmare, plagued by drugs and violence, and was targeted for a controversial rebuilding in the 1990's under the federal HOPE VI program. Today all but 5,000 residents have been relocated, and many of its apartment buildings have been demolished. In their place, private developers are building new low-rise, mixed income townhouses and apartments.<sup>58</sup>

The City Farm project evolved out of the recycling projects of the non-profit Resource Center.<sup>59</sup> The group was founded in the 1960's by Ken Dunn, who still leads it today. Among other activities, the Resource Center served as a non-profit recycling provider, long before the city offered recycling as a public service. Over the years, Dunn developed close contacts with city agency staff in the Streets and Sanitation and Environment Departments.

In recent years, Dunn became interested in the recycling potential of unused land in Chicago. Dunn approached his agency contacts with the idea of creating a completely mo-

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56 *Joan Jones*, Asset Manager, Department of Planning and Development, City of Chicago, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/Chicago, 29 November 2005.

57 *Jones*, 29 November 2005.

58 'Cabrini-Green' Entry in Wikipedia.org, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabrini\\_Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabrini_Green).

59 *Chris Anderson*, Farmer, City Farm, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/Chicago, 16 December 2005. Most of the information about City Farm comes from this interview.

mobile farm, which would be located on temporary sites and could be relocated from season to season, simply by loading the dirt from raised beds onto a trailer and moving it to a new location. Working with his city contacts, Dunn identified vacant city-owned sites with no immediate planned use. He was then able to obtain one-year extendable use contracts at a nominal cost from the Department of Environment, with the promise they would not be broken during the growing season.

City Farm's first growing season was 2002, and in the following years it has flourished. Produce is sold to the general public, originally at area farmer's markets, and since 2005 from an on-site farm stand. The farm has moved several times before arriving at its current location at Cabrini-Green. The garden produces a range of vegetables, including thirty varieties of tomatoes, which are sold to top Chicago restaurants like the Frontera Grill and the Ritz-Carlton. In addition to produce sales, income from the recycling business, small grants and private contributions support City Farm. There are plans to build mobile city farm stand using straw bale construction and truck roll-off containers. (Photo 15)

Photo 15



City Farm, Chicago  
Photo: the Resource Center

When a replacement site is needed, staff from the Environmental Department provide Dunn with a list of possible sites for him to choose from. This list is not made available to other users seeking temporary sites. Farm staff have found that a minimum of a one-acre lot is needed to make the economics of production work.

Though the community is supportive, to date community residents has not been heavily involved with the project. According to City Farm staff, the Cabrini-Green community is not particularly "coherent"—it is too much in flux right now with the extensive relocation of residents. A regular and surreal sight at the farm stand last summer was Gold Coast residents in their Mercedes pulling up to purchase tomatoes side-by-side with homeless people and their shopping carts summer.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The Resource Center sponsors other projects that engage the community more directly, including community gardens on the south side of Chicago. There are several other urban farming and gardening

City Farm staff cite the importance of Dunn's relationships with city to the success of the project. The Commissioner of Environment, Sadhu Johnston, is very supportive, and Dunn has even met powerful Mayor Richard Daley on several occasions. As City Farm Chris Anderson states, "It is good to have someone at the top."<sup>61</sup>

### **Case Study: Open Studio**

A partially vacant building owned by the City of Chicago provides another setting for interim use. In 2003, the Department of Planning and Development asked the Cultural Resources Department to propose an idea for a temporary use of vacant retail space in the Page Brothers building at 177 N. State Street in downtown Chicago. This was the birth of the Open Studio program, which has been extended several times and is expected to continue at least through early 2006.<sup>62</sup>

The program concept is simple. Artists apply to Cultural Resources and are selected to receive temporary studio space, which rotates to a new artist every month. The space is open to the public, who can interact with the artist and watch them make art. Artists must be willing to work during busy retail hours—between lunch and commute time, when foot traffic is highest. Artists receive \$500 each to offset their costs.

There is no lease on space between the city agencies, and the city covers utility and insurance costs. The city made very few modifications to the space, other than building one wall. The building will be eventually sold to a developer.

The program has received positive public response and media attention. According to Public Art Curator Nathan Mason, by bringing in a cultural site to a commercial area, the Open Studio helps demonstrate unthought-of permanent uses to other property owners.

### **Interim Use in New York City**

Interim use in New York City provides a similar picture to that of Chicago. Since the 1960's, interim land use in New York has been associated most strongly with the community garden movement. These gardens were organized by groups of volunteers who wanted to create green space and strengthen community in areas of the city that had been abandoned by nearly everyone. Over several decades, the gardens flourished, while the neighborhoods struggled and then were slowly rebuilt. Beginning in the mid-1990's, when New York began to experience an unprecedented building boom, many gardens came under extreme development pressure. Some were displaced, especially in Manhattan. Despite these setbacks, many gardens survived, though few have outright ownership of their land. Gardens receive assistance from groups such as Operation Green Thumb, a

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groups in Chicago, though none are so oriented towards temporary use of sites (*Anderson*, 16 December 2005).

61 *Anderson*, 16 December 2005.

62 *Nathan Mason*, Nathan, Director of Open Studio Public Art Program, Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Chicago, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/Chicago, 23 November 2005. Most of the information about this program comes from this interview. Cultural Affairs was also responsible for the initial interim use of Block 37, described in the History section.

subsidiary of the city's Parks Department, which provides both organizational and material support. Operation Green Thumb is the only city-funded organization with the specific focus of supporting interim use through community gardening. Even though many gardens have years-long waiting lists for new gardeners, Green Thumb does not focus on finding sites for new gardens.<sup>63</sup> New York City has no other program or staff position oriented towards finding interim use for vacant land. Interim uses happen through individual initiative, and city support must be earned.

### **Case Study: Added Value and the Red Hook Community Farm**

Since New York's community gardens have already been well-documented,<sup>64</sup> this report chose to focus on an example of interim use of a related but different sort—the establishment of an urban farm on city parkland in the low-income Red Hook neighborhood of South Brooklyn. This project highlights how city government is taking a mostly reactive role when it comes to the use of vacant land, and the importance of community-based initiatives to stimulate city interest.

Once home to the a thriving waterfront industry, Red Hook was cut off from other neighborhoods by highways and infrastructure in the 1940's and economically isolated as the shipping industry in New York began a sharp decline in the 1950's. Population shrunk from 21,000 to around 10,000, with most residents remaining in public housing as private housing decayed and was abandoned. The area is still poor: recent average family income was \$14,000, far below the city average.<sup>65</sup>

In the year 2000, Ian Marvy and Michael Hurwitz, young professionals who had worked in social services agencies in Red Hook, founded a non-profit organization called Added Value, with the goal of fostering the capacity of the area's young people<sup>66</sup>. In 2001, the group responded to the closing of the only grocery store in the neighborhood by starting a weekly farmers' market and establishing a small vegetable farm on a privately-owned site, through an informal agreement with a private owner. Since then, Added Value has expanded to offer a range of job training opportunities for local young people. It hosts educational projects during the school year for children to learn about urban agriculture. Added Value has a strong commitment to the 'food justice' movement, which advocates for equal access to healthy food for residents of impoverished communities, and involves community members in all stages of food production and distribution.<sup>67</sup> The organization is supported by donations, private foundation grants and through the sale of its produce. Added Value also lobbied successfully for federal and state funding, which was provided through the support of the area's Congressional and State representatives. (Photo 16)

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63 Operation Green Thumb Website, <http://www.greenthumbnyc.org>.

64 *Zwischennutzung und neue Freiflächen - städtische Lebensräume der Zukunft*, p. 90-91. For a comprehensive ethnographic study of community gardens in New York, see *Malve von Hassel*, *The Struggle for Eden: Community Gardens in New York City* (New York: 2002).

65 *Jill Slater*, 'A Farm in the Asphalt Heart of Brooklyn.' *Seasonal Chef*, October 2005, [www.seasonalchef.com/farmredhook.htm](http://www.seasonalchef.com/farmredhook.htm)

66 *Ian Marvy*, Added Value Director, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/New York, 12 December 2005. Most of the information about Added Value comes from this interview.

67 *Ibid.*



Photo 16



Added Value youth farmers, New York  
Photo: Added Value

In 2004, Added Value signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding with the City Department of Parks and Recreation for use of the Todd Memorial Ballfield. In exchange for minimal rent, the group was then able to develop the Red Hook Community Farm on the abandoned 2.75 acre site. This represented the culmination of several years of planning and work with city officials. In 2002, Added Value staff discovered the site, formerly a football and baseball field that served the area's dock-workers, that had been abandoned after the city, following years of community pressure, constructed improved facilities nearby. The group brought a proposal for using the site as a farm to community and church groups for their approval, then to the local Parks Department manager, who was receptive. After several refinements, the proposal was approved by the Brooklyn Parks Commissioner and then received unanimous approval from the District 6 Community Board.<sup>68</sup> The farm currently produces over 40 types of produce on raised beds on a one-acre portion of the site. There are plans for greenhouses and structures for livestock, composting and vermiculture, which will be developed as funding allows. The initial vegetable garden required no permits, but plans and permits for the expanded garden are still in negotiation with the Parks department.

As in many states, state law makes it difficult and costly for New York City to sell or lease parkland.<sup>69</sup> Though the law helps prevent parkland from being developed for commercial purposes, it presents challenges for non-profit organizations like Added Value. Though the organization is currently working with the city to extend its agreement, it is unlikely to gain permanent control of the land. That may not matter, given its close community ties, political support, and successful fundraising history.

The case of Added Value shows that innovative projects that gain community support can convince city leaders to create room for interim use, even in the pressured development

68 New York City's 59 Community Boards are advisory groups composed of volunteer area residents. They meet regularly and conduct public hearings on city budgets, land use and zoning, and other major community issues. Their opinions, while not binding, are considered by city officials in making final decisions.

69 The 'parkland', or 'public trust', doctrine, which states that parks are to be kept for public use, is part of New York common law, a body of law established by judicial decisions that recognizes generally agreed-upon rights. See *Anne Schwartz*, 'State Protections For City Parkland', *Gotham Gazette*, October 2002, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/20021001/14/609>.

environment of New York City. Yet with the arrival of an IKEA in Red Hook, and the development of the first new private housing in decades, in the coming years, Added Value's use of open space may be challenged by the forces of gentrification. It will be interesting to see how the farm's development tracks the development of the community. In any event, in a neighborhood that was a victim of official planning for many years, the Added Value project shows that it is still possible for a community-based initiative to succeed.

### **Interim Use in Other U.S. Cities**

Though interim use gravitates to larger metropolitan areas in the U.S., there are a number of notable initiatives taking place in other cities, undertaken by individuals or private foundations in partnership with government. A landscape planner in Massachusetts developed a concept for the small city of New Bedford as part of its master plan to grow plants known for their phytoremediation benefits on contaminated brownfields sites, until they could be fully cleaned up. These sites could then serve as locations for educational mini-field trips from nearby schools (students would not be endangered by the visits). The project, which has not yet been implemented, would buy time for the sites, change their image, and activate them in small ways.<sup>70</sup> A similar project, called the Neighborhood Environmental Demonstration Sites Program, will be implemented in 2006 by the Bridgeport, Connecticut chapter of Groundwork USA, an urban environmental organization founded in the United Kingdom in 1981.<sup>71</sup>

In Philadelphia, the city parks agency, in partnership with several private organizations, developed the 'Urban Voids: Grounds for Change' competition, to reactivate the city's 40,000 vacant lots. Though conceptual in nature, the goal is to solicit multi-disciplinary approaches to the problem. Plans will likely include the re-naturation of some areas.<sup>72</sup>

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Using the tools outlined in this report, I conclude with some recommendations, some easy to achieve, other more involved, for better support of interim use. In Germany, cities should improve communication not only with users and owners, but also with private interim use agents and across agencies and political districts. Cities should increase access to inventories of vacant sites and develop model contracts and other documents. They should also streamline the approval process for interim uses, perhaps through the creation of a one-stop shop, a model that has successfully been used in many American cities to streamline the building permit process, and revise ordinances so more interim uses do not have to be permits in the first place.

Laws that regulate interim use should be revised to reduce negative effects. The Berlin ordinance that calls for interim uses to bring in rent proportionate to their size has detrimental consequences for the re-use of larger sites that need to be addressed. Planning law

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70 Stoss, 16 November 2005.

71 Richard Tiani, Executive Director, Groundwork Bridgeport, Connecticut, interview by author, transcript, Berlin/Bridgeport, 11 November 2005.

72 See the competition website, <http://www.vanalen.org/urbanvoids/>.

such as the *Baurecht auf Zeit* also requires revision to address the kinds of interim use profiled here.

In the U.S., more basic change is needed. City government needs a new viewpoint on vacant land, in which interim use is seen as a means to create a livelier, more creative city. This new viewpoint opens the door to a range of possibilities, especially if cities are willing to take a leadership role and develop specific strategies. Leipzig can serve as a model for what steps to take. Other necessary tasks include the examination of legal and administrative barriers to interim use, as well as the concerns of private property owners. Owners of long-vacant land need to be penalized, either through liens on their property, or through a progressive land tax. Brownfield programs should be revised to allow clean-ups to be funded fully and up-front. Finally, more discussion of how race and class impacts the development potential of inner cities would be a step forward in bringing attention to places where there is now only dumping and criminal activity.

Ultimately, interim use is about a new approach to urban development. It is about government activating instead of regulating. It is about looking more at what is on the site instead of approaching land as a *tabula rasa*. It is about taking smaller steps and input from all the actors, big and small, more seriously. To achieve this approach, new tools are needed, that focus on process instead of product. The result can be a city that has more variety of use, form, and time horizon.<sup>73</sup>

Daniel Burnham, architect of the 1909 plan for Chicago, once famously said, "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood". In the case of interim use, Burnham couldn't have been more wrong. Interim use is all about making little plans that turn traditional planning on its head.

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73 Giseke, 2 December 2005.

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