

EXPLORING THE REUSE OF SPACES THROUGH TEMPORARY USES: THE CASE OF THE EXHIBITIONS OF THE HUB FOR HERITAGE AND HABITAT GROUP/

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Abstract. The article examines the transformative impact of temporary exhibitions organised by the Hub for Heritage and Habitat research group and how light processes of transformation can highlight the potential of spaces.

The exhibitions analysed concern the works of students from the Building Engineering-Architecture courses at the Polytechnic University of the Marche, typically focusing on the Marche Region.

We will analyse the “Cityscape” exhibitions, the title of the final exhibition held every July since 2013. The exhibition aims to share the results of UNIVPM students’ study courses with local administrations, industry professionals, and the public.

Architectural design courses focus on the recovery of existing building heritage and the redevelopment of peripheral urban areas. For this reason, these temporary exhibitions have always focused on marginal places, underused spaces, or those in a state of neglect.

The most recent exhibitions were set up between the municipalities of Ancona and Jesi. In 2019, for example, the Polveriera Castelfidardo was chosen, located in the heart of Ancona’s Cardeto Park, a recently renovated space rarely open to the public. In 2022, the venue was a warehouse within the Municipal Agricultural Consortium of Jesi. For the past two years, the exhibitions have been held at the staircase of the Caserma Villarey, a large, underused space, and the Chiesa del Gesù, in the heart of the historic centre of Ancona, which is open to the public only on a few occasions during the year.

By occupying these spaces with new interactive elements, users can recognise their unexploited potential: temporary exhibitions have turned a spotlight back on these places, making them more attractive and acting as catalysts for urban renewal.

Introduction. This article aims to explore how the reuse of spaces through temporary uses is a highly effective tool for the re-appropriation and revitalization of neglected or abandoned places, offering an operational perspective that intertwines architecture, territory and community. This approach, which combines architecture and culture, is deepened by the Hub for Heritage and Habitat research group with whom I had the opportunity to work as a team to design and create temporary exhibitions between the cities of Ancona and Jesi.

The group adopts an approach deeply rooted in the territories in which it operates, collaborating with public administrations, cultural realities and citizens. The enhancement of the existing heritage is addressed starting from the needs expressed by local stakeholders, through a process that brings together students, professors and communities. The method used is that of Research by Design, an approach that integrates theoretical research with design action in real situations.

The key aspect of these initiatives is that they are not limited to the mere presentation of projects or ideas. The temporary events organized by Hub for Heritage and Habitat are configured as tools for the reactivation of architecture, capable of giving new life to places that, due to their marginal position or lack of attention, risk being forgotten or underused. In this context, architecture takes on a mediating role between memory and design, between vision and built reality [1].

The process is divided into several phases: from the inspection and the shared selection of the site to the set-up and the public event, each exhibition is conceived as a moment of research and design, actively involving the territorial context. Temporary exhibitions act as catalysts for new visions for urban space, offering a concrete alternative to conventional regeneration. The very concept of ephemerality, often associated with a negative value, here takes on a propositional connotation: the temporary intervention becomes an open laboratory, a device capable of soliciting alternative imaginaries and practices [2].

The reuse of the existing architectural heritage, in particular of disused buildings, thus represents a design strategy that goes beyond simple conservation, proposing a new way of cultural and social activation. The interventions analysed in this study, in particular the Cityscape series of exhibitions took in exam in this paper, aim to stimulate public interest, favouring the collective appropriation of urban spaces. Such experiences show that through the temporary, shared imaginaries and lasting perspectives can be generated [3].

The main benefits of these practices include: the activation of local creativity, the promotion of cultural entrepreneurship, the awareness of the quality of urban spaces, as well as the creation of collaborative networks. The case studies illustrate how temporary reuse can translate into a replicable tool for participatory urban transformation. Furthermore, these actions contribute to redefining the role of the architect as a mediator between local instances and urban visions, overcoming the solitary figure of the designer-author in favour of a more collective and situated practice.

Case studies. The first clue to the complexity of temporary uses can be seen in the fact that such practices are defined in many different ways. Lehtovuori and Ruoppila define temporary uses as “those uses that have a developmental orientation, i.e. they have the capacity and aim to explore further potentialities of the places in which they are located. Thus, they form a category between momentary events and permanent (re)development [4].

An emblematic example of this approach is the annual Cityscape exhibition, organized by the group, with the support of cultural associations, local entrepreneurs and public bodies. This cycle of exhibitions, which

involves students of the degree course in Building Engineering-Architecture of the Polytechnic University of Marche, offers a platform to share the results of design teachings with citizens. The exhibition venues are selected from abandoned or undervalued places, often located in strategic but neglected positions.

The choice of marginal and abandoned spaces to host the temporary exhibitions promoted by the Hub for Heritage and Habitat group is configured as an action of enhancement, but also as a real design exercise aimed at urban experimentation. These places become open contexts in which to test new spatial, aesthetic and social relationships. In this perspective, the abandoned building is no longer just an empty container but is transformed into a generative device capable of activating reflections and creative practices. “Abandoned buildings can be understood as ‘spatial experiments’, capable of generating new creative ideas for the city” [5].

The purpose of the exhibition is therefore twofold: on the one hand, to communicate academic work to the public; on the other, to trigger a process of resignification of the selected spaces, which become catalysts of attention, comparison and urban vision for a short period. The curatorship of the event is articulated in a constant dialogue between design content and spatial container, generating unprecedented synergies between form, function and meaning. FIGURE 1.

2019 | Polveriera Castelfidardo

Among the most recent cases we find the former “Castelfidardo” powder magazine, a place surrounded by the greenery of the Cardeto Park in Ancona, a restored space but rarely open to the public, which in 2019 was temporarily transformed into a vital and dynamic exhibition space. Light and sound installations have also colonized the outdoor space, making it attractive and livable beyond the conference room inside the building.

The exhibition was articulated along the perimeter corridors, around the conference room, the central nucleus of the building, and followed thematic groupings, reserving a small area for a digital exhibition: here simultaneous videos, stories and musical accompaniments intertwined to amplify the sensory experience of the space. FIGURE 2.

The exhibitions not only reactivate spaces during their lifetime but also invite reflection on how such places could be reintegrated into urban life on a permanent basis.

2022 | Consortium of Jesi

Another example is the use of the warehouse of the agricultural consortium of Jesi, near Ancona. This space was used in 2022 for a temporary exhibition that opened to the public a place normally accessible only to a few insiders.

An important aspect that is not easy to implement is the relationship between temporary uses and masterplans: these small-scale changes are conceived as the first step to achieve lasting changes. Therefore, these practices are most effective when used in conjunction with long-term planning efforts [6]. This exhibition has been placed in an area that has been the subject of redevelopment projects by the administration (as well

as being the area of one of the projects exhibited within the exhibition itself). The location is actually strategic with respect to the urban fabric of the city, being between the railway station and the access to the historic center of the city.

The exhibition made it possible to physically and symbolically open this place to the community, stimulating reflections on its potential for urban reconversion.

Here the challenge of the set-up concerned the creation of different thematic areas within a single room that could also be suitable for accommodating participatory design tables. On the day dedicated to co-design and during the inauguration of the exhibition, we were able to see how that space (and that of the square in front) were actually adequate to cover alternative roles since the large square, protected by the consortium buildings on three sides and by a fence on the fourth, is used only in the months of May and June for the storage of wheat. FIGURE 3.

2023 | Villarey Stairs

In 2023, the staircase of the Caserma Villarey, home to the Faculty of Economics of our University, was chosen as the location. This large distribution space, occupied by a double staircase connecting the three floors of the faculty, is scarcely used due to its off-center position with respect to the main entrances of the faculty.

Temporary exhibitions, through installations, allow the viewer to be stimulated to reflect not only on the contents on display, but also on the intrinsic potential of the space in which he finds himself. The absence of permanent interventions creates an environment open to experimentation, inviting visitors to imagine new scenarios and uses for these places: the exhibition in this place served as a testing ground for the hypothesis of definitively converting this space into a university museum. Temporariness, as Bishop argues, allows for reactive and open design, capable of evolving with the context [7]. FIGURE 4, FIGURE 5.

A fascinating aspect of temporary exhibitions is their transitory nature, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. The temporary nature of the interventions allows free experimentation, in which spaces are reinterpreted in a non-binding way, offering new possibilities of use that meet contemporary needs. The brevity of the occupation creates a sense of urgency and invites visitors to see spaces that would otherwise go unnoticed in a new light.

2024 | Chiesa del Gesù

Last year’s exhibition venue was the Chiesa del Gesù, a deconsecrated church in the historic center of Ancona, designed by architect Luigi Vanvitelli. The large Baroque-style church is currently open to the public on a few occasions during the year: the hall is normally empty without sufficient lighting to enhance the interior. Despite the few opportunities for use, it represents an important reference in the city context.

In this case we had the opportunity to reinterpret the canonical space of the church, shifting the center of the viewer’s attention from the altar to the space of the nave, enhancing the icons on the sides and establishing a

dialogue between ancient and modern. The same supports of the set-up, metal gratings and wooden boards, typical of construction sites, help to reinforce the contrast, establishing a hierarchy between the elements and reinforcing the concept of provisionality. FIGURE 6.

These initiatives are part of an ongoing dialogue between the past and the future. Historical places, often full of memory and meaning, are reinterpreted through modern interventions that reveal their new potential. The event stimulated a reflection on the management and accessibility of disused ecclesiastical assets, which represent a great resource in many Italian cities.

Results. The temporary interventions carried out by the Hub for Heritage and Habitat group demonstrate how, even with limited economic resources and using recycled materials, it is possible to generate a profound change in the perception of spaces. The use of poor elements, such as metal gratings, wooden construction site panels or simple lighting fixtures, has made it possible not only to contain costs, but also to establish a direct dialogue with the provisional dimension of the installations. This approach has helped to make the hidden potential of neglected places tangible, transforming them into welcoming, stimulating environments full of new possibilities of use. The interaction with space generated by temporary installations has triggered a different way of using and reading places in visitors, highlighting how even the ephemeral can have a lasting impact on the collective imagination. In particular, the simplicity of the installations facilitated a process of spontaneous appropriation by the public, suggesting alternative uses and encouraging future visions of permanent regeneration.

Conclusion. The value of temporary uses, such as those organized by the 'Hub for Heritage and Habitat' group, goes far beyond the artistic or educational dimension. These initiatives represent a concrete example of how culture and academic research can converge to generate a positive impact on the urban environment. The reuse of spaces is not only an economic or functional necessity but becomes an opportunity to create more aware and responsible communities, capable of enhancing their heritage and imagining a sustainable and innovative future, promoting a new sensitivity towards architecture.

The experiences analysed show how temporary use can represent a concrete opportunity for experimentation for new forms of use and enhancement of disused urban spaces. Through a shared pact, it is possible to imagine a sustainable and inclusive urban transformation, capable of integrating the cultural, social and design dimensions of architecture.

The ultimate horizon is to generate impacts on the territory under research, pursuing the goal of the third mission and at the same time demonstrating that heroic strategies are not necessary to imagine an alternative future for spaces and places still capable of memory and available for innovative uses. The architecture of the temporary becomes a language with which to question the city, experiment with its possibilities and build new forms of collective habitability.

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Figures.

FIGURE 1 – Localization of venues in relation with the contexts.

FIGURE 2 – Corridors of Polveriera Castelfidardo.

FIGURE 3 – Participatory design activities at Consocium of Jesi.

FIGURE 4 - Exhibition at Villarey Stairs.

FIGURE 5 - Exhibition at Villarey Stairs.

FIGURE 6 – The contrast between materialities at Chiesa del Gesù.



