



Leaba Te

Hotbed of Meanwhile Use

Meanwhile Use of Vacant Buildings as a positive disruption for regeneration of Irish Town Centres

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
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1. Introduction

‘Meanwhile Use’ is a key policy instrument for preventing and eradicating problematic vacancy and dereliction. This report by the agency anois delves into the world of ‘Meanwhile Use’ to demonstrate how it can enable a heritage led regeneration of historic cores. The report was funded by the Heritage Council under the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme.

The report presents the expert opinion of anois, on the best way forward in normalising ‘Meanwhile Use’ as a catalyst for regenerating Irish Town Centres. It provides a basis for igniting a new movement around ‘Meanwhile Use’ in Ireland, which should include a national campaign to educate, encourage and steer stakeholders from villages, towns and cities towards developing their own Meanwhile Use models that are tailored to their needs.

By exploring 4 international case studies the report highlights the various strategic benefits ‘Meanwhile Use’ can offer as well as highlighting best practice and implementation. The report concludes with the proposal to establish a Leaba Te (Hotbed) ‘Meanwhile Use’ Programme in Ireland and outlines the required policy interventions required to facilitate an effective ‘Meanwhile Use’ response to boost innovation and improve the liveability of Irish Town Centres.



2. Irish Town Centres

It will come as no surprise that Ireland is experiencing a significant systems failure in relation to the liveability and sustainability of its historic Town Centres. One thing that is particularly apparent to anyone visiting an Irish Town Centre is the destructive nature that the high rates of long-term vacancy and dereliction are having on the town's historic core.

The Heritage Council's CTCHC Programme's Land Use Surveys (Step 2 of a 15-Step process) have recorded extremely high commercial vacancy rates in some Irish Town Centres. For instance, Tipperary Town (2020) has a vacancy rate of 31% and Tralee has a vacancy rate of 25%. To put this in context, an acceptable vacancy rate is expected to lie below 5%, above which an emergency response is typically enacted by planners. The lowest ground floor commercial vacancy rate was in Bundoran at 10% (pre-Covid), double the acceptable vacancy rate.¹

Unfortunately, these high vacancy rates are not standalone issues but are reflective of, and feed into many long-term challenges that are holding back the vitality and vibrancy of Irish Town Centres. Visitors are greeted with a declining local economy, decaying heritage, wasteful use of resources, community disruption and in many cases community breakdown. Often these are compounded by traffic jams, dangerously high air pollution levels, a lack of respect for and understanding of the importance of biodiversity combined with a lack of public parks, seating

and toilets. This all contributes to an eroding of the sense of place and an ugliness derived from neglect.

All of this has clearly led to a reduction in the liveability of Irish Town Centres, their job creation and tourist potential. It has made them a less attractive environment for families, start-ups, retail, hospitality, investors and visitors, thus having a significant negative impact on the local economy and the long-term sustainability of the town.



¹ <https://www.businesspost.ie/Planning/surveys-reveal-vacancy-rates-of-up-to-25-in-many-towns-dc05c666>

To add further complexity, many Irish Town Centres will have experienced both a revival and downturn over the last 18 months due to repeated COVID-19 restrictions. For instance, some local grocery sales will have benefited from an increase in customers due to the 5km movement restrictions, an increase of staycations and renewed interest in supporting local businesses. However, many businesses operating within the hospitality sector are struggling to recover after repeated closures.

While all of us have had our movements restricted during COVID-19, many have used it as an opportunity to reimagine their local towns. For instance, the need for social distancing has speeded up trialling of street pedestrianisation with great success e.g. Malahide, Ennis, Clonakilty and Dun Laoghaire. This act of pedestrianisation brings with it many benefits not just of increased footfall and sales but also helps reconnects communities.

However, for many towns COVID-19 has resulted in an acceleration of many existing trends that have emerged over the past decade. For instance, the increase in online shopping is unlikely to be reversed and will continue to have a negative impact on the already struggling high streets, particularly in certain product categories.

Trends such as working from home could instigate a radical shift in how Irish people live and work. The high availability of empty buildings puts Irish Town Centres in a unique position to sustainably provide inclusive **RestPlayWork**² opportunities for everyone; that is homes, places to play and create, and places to work. Thus, giving Town Centre's a unique opportunity to provide a 15-minute urban living experience that encourages communities to co-create strong place-based solutions to future living. This will require innovative, sustainable and circular ways to reuse existing vacant homes, commercial buildings and disused sites.

Imagine...
a town that invites
everyone to
Rest Play Work. 

² <https://indd.adobe.com/view/000ed59e-56f6-470f-968b-66b0acd32103>

The process to restore Irish Town Centres to their former glory should start with rebuilding the social fabric, recognising what assets exist and restoring the built cultural heritage. This will require courage and clever thinking to incubate the future of Irish Town living.

Repopulating Town Centres will help Ireland face the many national and global challenges ahead including housing, climate change, biodiversity crisis and resource scarcity. To ensure Ireland can achieve a Just Transition all communities will need access to the tools, land and buildings to create local, equitable and responsible economies. Meanwhile Use offers the upcoming Town Centres First policy a relatively quick win for all stakeholders through innovative short to medium term land-use strategies.

Irish town centres need to become a destination.....

..... places to relax, socialise, create & experience

..... inclusive safe places for everyone from 8 to 80 year old

..... incubators for the future of town living



3. Epidemic of vacancy

The CTCHC³ and the 2016 Census⁴ clearly demonstrate that Ireland has a huge vacancy problem, both within residential units and commercial units. Vacancy is a wasted resource that drains the local economy and the community, negatively impacting local regeneration plans. Reducing high levels of vacancy is one of the most sustainable ways to improve the liveability and density of existing towns.

Long term vacancy puts buildings at significant risk of decay and dereliction. Without regular maintenance and without regular 'eyes on a building' what would be otherwise easily preventable problems can quickly escalate, sometimes causing costly structural damage. This can create a significant risk of long-term vacant buildings being demolished instead of being repaired and refurbished. The widespread acceptance of long-term vacancy in Ireland is one of the biggest gateways to dereliction in Ireland.⁵



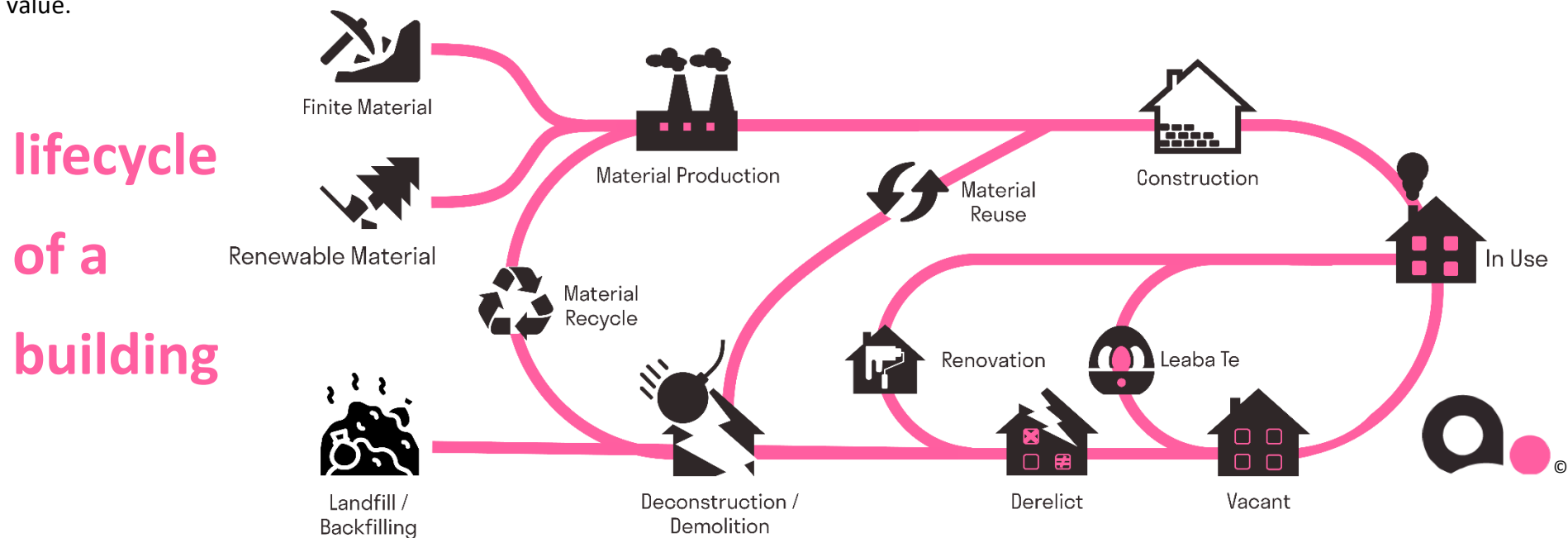
³ <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/town-centre-health-check-programme>

⁴ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp1hii/cp1hii/vac/>

⁵ <https://indd.adobe.com/view/fbe49c7c-0c2f-4d2b-9557-d09b541ccd71>

Since the **most sustainable building is the existing building**, Town Centres need to do everything possible to retain all existing buildings and ensure they are fully utilised and well maintained. Every building contains a large amount of embodied carbon and can contain irreplaceable materials especially in heritage buildings. When considering the full lifecycle of a building, Life Cycle Assessment studies demonstrate that it is more environmentally beneficial to retain and renovate an existing building instead of demolition and replacement with a new build.⁶ Retention of an existing building is a key aspect of a Circular Economy as it enables materials to be retained at their highest value.

The presence of heritage buildings provides many societal benefits such as creating a strong sense of place and anchoring people to their neighbourhood, thus improving a community's mental health, esteem and wellbeing. Likewise, urban environments that retain a strong heritage streetscape create many economic benefits for example by attracting tourism and creating jobs. Irish Town Centres have an abundance of heritage structures, in fact 16% of Irish housing stock was built before 1940 and many of these are located within Town Centres.⁷



⁶ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09613210601068161>

⁷ https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Deep_Energy_Renovation_of_Traditional_Buildings.pdf

High rates of vacancy and dereliction coupled with a large collection of them being heritage buildings, both place Irish Town Centres at significant risk. If Irish Town Centres lose these urban heritage streetscapes, they will lose their uniqueness. This cultural heritage is key to rebuilding our Town Centres back stronger, developing a brand identity that can compete globally, as well as attracting visitors and investment and people to come and RestPlayWork.

Although there needs to be a robust regulatory response, Meanwhile Use is a quick and cost-effective method that can kickstart an Historic Core revolution in Irish Towns that will prevent further decay and

destruction. Meanwhile Use can offer owners a cost-effective custodianship of their buildings, keeping an eye on wear and tear and ensuring maintenance work is carried out before faults escalate.

A recent in-depth study of Dereliction in Cork City Centre by anois highlighted the risk to Ireland's built heritage. The majority of derelict properties anois identified in Cork City are over 100 years old. More worryingly 1 in 4 have been identified as being of national heritage importance and were previously placed onto the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.



of derelict properties are estimated to be over 100 years old



of derelict properties are in Architectural Conservation Areas



of derelict properties are in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage



of derelict properties are protected structures

A vacant building or site is one that has been empty or unused for a period of time. Vacancy itself is not a problem if it's for a transitional period, for instance during a sale process or between tenancies. Vacancy becomes a problem when it's long-term (6-18+ months) or when the rates of vacancy exceed an acceptable level (5% for commercial properties and 2.5% for residential).⁸



Under the Derelict Sites Act 1990, **dereliction is a property or site that through some form of neglect has a negative impact on its neighbourhood.** The use or non-use of a building does not affect its

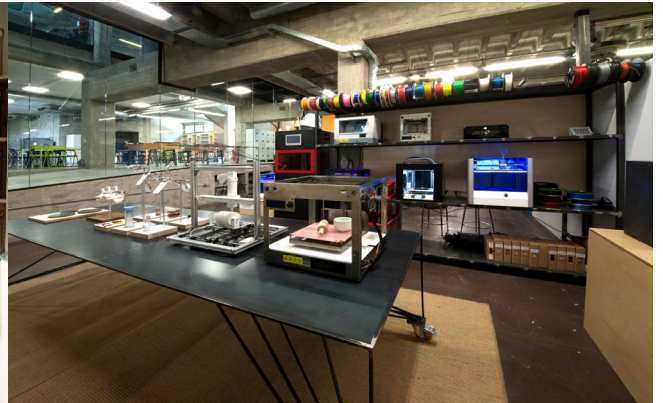
classification as being derelict. However, research shows that long term vacancy (12+ months) in an area with excessive vacancy rates (5%+) has a very negative impact on a neighbourhood's community, economy, psychological and physical health and the environment; Therefore, such problematic vacancy should be considered as derelict.

A study from the Scottish Land Commission claims that living within proximity to long term vacancy or dereliction can lead to negative impacts falling under four categories:⁹

1. **Mental and physical health impacts:** anxiety, agitation, anger, crime, fear and concerns over safety. This can lead to a lowering of quality of life and reduced life expectancy.
2. **Environmental impacts:** pollutants leaching into soil and waterways (e.g. lead), airborne particles, toxic materials (asbestos, PCB's, lead, zinc and copper), illegal dumping and litter as well as visual pollution.
3. **Economic impacts:** economic deprivation of area with lower property prices, opportunity costs, loss of economic activity all of which prevent or reduce opportunity for further development and investment.
4. **Community impacts:** degradation especially the loss of cultural built heritage and negative perception of an area can lead to the creation of hostile urban environments. This can be very destructive to community building.

⁸<http://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/publications/32.%2016-05-17-Vacant-Homes-Paper-Housing-Agency.pdf>

⁹https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5dd7d4dfa39b6_VDL%20in%20Scotland%20Final%20Report%2020191008.pdf



4. Meanwhile Use to the Rescue

Meanwhile Use takes a potential problem such as vacancy and turns it into an opportunity to help the local community, local creatives (e.g. performance, art, music, exhibition, making), the local economy (e.g. markets, start-ups, training services, skills sharing), positively impacting on wellbeing, quality of life and much more. Meanwhile Use can come in many different forms and there is no one singular template, given it will be dependent on the overall objective.

Meanwhile Use refers to temporary use of empty (vacant/derelict) buildings or sites, which typically have no immediate plans to be permanently used



MEANWHILE - INTERWHILE - INTERIM - SHORTTERM – TEMPORARY - WORTHWHILE - TRANSITIONARY

*“It is very important for these projects to be an asset and of interest to the local community. That’s where they should start, and then if you also attract people from a distance that’s a bonus. You should be wary if it’s done the other way round then and there isn’t a connection with the local community from the outset.” **Clive Dutton**¹⁰*

PLACEMAKING

Public engagement can often be seen as a one-way process where communities are locked out of key decision-making and only informed rather than enabled to co-create their future. Regenerating and building communities in areas with large vacancy problems will require a series of innovative, open, transparent and flexible interventions, or else initiatives will risk failure and community alienation. This planning by doing aligns with Tactical Urbanism approaches.

EXPERIMENTAL

Whether its start-ups or public service providers, Meanwhile Use offers the potential to trial and test different offerings to see if there is a market demand for a product or service concept. This form of experimentation aligns with design thinking that prototypes in order to fail fast, fail often and fail cheaply.

STANDALONE

This is an isolated Meanwhile Use in an empty building/site that does not aim to achieve anything more than make use of the current vacancy. This can include pop-ups, one off festivals, events, weekly markets etc. The standalone approach is ideal for areas that do not have high vacancy rates and where the vacancy building/site is not expected to last longer than a year.

PRE-DEVELOPMENT

Large scale developments can take many years to come to full fruition and often take longer than anticipated. If integrated into development plans from the start, Meanwhile Use can offer the potential to decrease costs associated with vacancy (e.g. security, rates) as well as increase usage of an area by maintaining or increasing footfall.

SHARING

Many buildings and sites are not efficiently used. This can be through underuse of space or prolonged periods of closure. This is wasteful on so many levels. The Moonlight Use or Sharing Economy approach offers the opportunity to fully utilise all spaces to their maximum capacity, fitting more into a lower urban footprint. For example, many school buildings are closed at weekends and evenings. If this space was opened to local community groups or food start-ups (if it had a commercial kitchen) it could be transformative.

¹⁰ https://content.stimuleringsfonds.nl/files/pro/i_1498/TEMPUSEBOOK.pdf

Meanwhile Use does not stipulate a timeframe of use and can range from 1 day to 10 years. However, in terms of best practice, it is widely accepted that a minimum of 5 years is needed to maximise the success of the Meanwhile Use model. If a strategic approach is required, such as reversal of long-term vacancy or regeneration of a declining area, a 10 year Meanwhile Use timeframe may be required, especially when integrated into a strategic placemaking masterplan.

Meanwhile Use is often misunderstood as just a stopgap while development plans are put on hold. This use of vacant sites and buildings in 'meantime' while they await future developments is often an emergency response commonly found during sudden economic declines. These temporary interventions are useful intermediary measures to ensure an area does not succumb to the negative impacts of high vacancy rates and does not slip into dereliction. This stopgap approach is especially key to stopping the spiralling of retail vacancy on a high-street. However, this narrow view of Meanwhile Use can blind stakeholders to other, more critical benefits Meanwhile Use can offer.

Meanwhile Use can offer an opportunity to experiment, to be creative, to innovate. It is this innovation that is urgently needed to tackle long-term vacancy in Irish Town Centres. Business as usual or singular policy interventions will be woefully insufficient at reversing the slow and long decline of Irish Town Centres over the last half a century. Meanwhile Use can provide an essential stepping-stone to kickstart the next revolution of town centre living in Ireland. Instead of waiting to raise millions in funding and years to put large development plans in place, Meanwhile Use is a

flexible, low cost and low commitment tool that has the potential to unleash a culture of innovation, experimentation and entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile Use provides an affordable and agile town regeneration process. The key to its success is flexibility, however this comes with some negative connotations and risks that need to be managed. A typical Meanwhile Use can be ended with one months' notice from either side, the owner or the user. While reducing the need to commit to a long-term lease (10 years), this flexibility might dissuade users from investing time, finances and resources into a space without security. Likewise, if an owner is required to look for new tenants every few months or year, they might decide that keeping the property vacant is more convenient.

To make Meanwhile Use attractive to end users and owners alike there are a few options available

- rent is removed or significantly lower than market rates
- end users cover operational costs of the property (rates, utilities, security, insurances etc.)
- rent is stepped, starting very low and increasing to full market rents within an agreed timeframe
- end users become building custodians covering maintenance and repair of the building
- owner provides up front loan to end users to cover key building repairs, users repair the loan in lieu of rent

meanwhile use

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT PLANS

OUTDOOR GYMS

SHOPS

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

SHARING SHOPS

EVENTS

COMMUNITY GARDENS

MAKER SPACES

HOMES

NATURAL PLAYGROUNDS

WILDLIFE AREAS

EXHIBITS

START-UP INCUBATORS

URBAN FARMS

CRECHES

TEMPORARY PARKS

REPAIR CAFÉS

CINEMAS

OPEN PLAY AREAS

ART GALLERIES

LIBRARIES

ZERO WASTE LABS

RESTAURANTS

STREET ART

ART INSTALLATIONS

ART STUDIOS

ALLOTMENTS

URBAN FACTORIES

There are no hard and fast rules of what model of Meanwhile Use is and isn't feasible. The possibilities are endless, which adds a real buzz of excitement, as diverse stakeholders can bring a burst of innovation to a Town Centre. Key to success is ensuring that overall objectives of any Meanwhile Use project are well defined and targeted from the outset, so that the most appropriate model can be selected and tailored to the needs of everyone involved.

While recognising that each stakeholder involved will have individual needs is also crucial. Meanwhile Use risks failure if all stakeholder needs are not considered from the start. Likewise, an overly rigid or singular model approach will not just fail but will create a bad experience that would hinder any future potential of Meanwhile Use getting embedded as part of the fabric of the local culture and economy.

Therefore, to enable an effective process it is essential for it to be open and transparent. This can be achieved by creating a general information pack for everyone and tailored '**How to Guides**' for each core stakeholder who is directly involved at key steps. This will help ensure every Meanwhile Use process is effective and potential barriers are anticipated and removed.

Core Stakeholders

- End Users
- Property Owner
- Local Residents and Communities
- Local Authority (Planning, Building Control, Rates Collection, Fire, Conservation etc.)

Secondary Stakeholders

- Estate Agents
- Local Businesses
- National Government Bodies and Departments
- Visitors (both tourist and wider community)
- Insurance Companies
- Funders and Creditors
- Building Contractors (engineers, electricians, plumber, builders, conservation etc.)
- Creatives, Designers and Architects
- Energy Use Specialist

meanwhile use model canvas



Town Objectives

Timeframes

Building Condition

Stakeholders Objectives

Costs

Suitable Uses for building & Location

Insurance / Liability

Community Needs

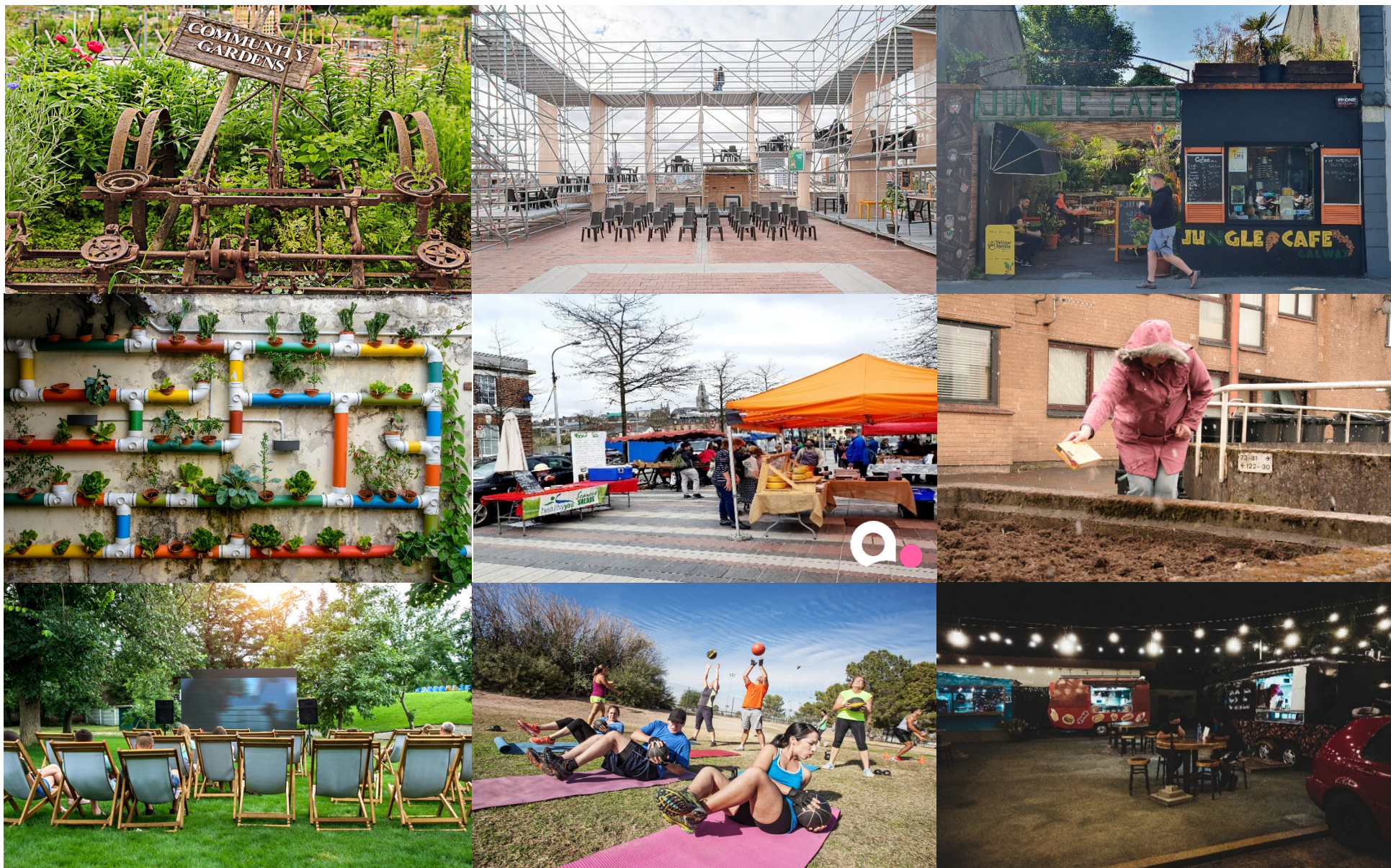
Skills Required / Available

Barriers

Market Needs

Exit Strategy

Risks



5. International Case Studies

i Bureau Broedplaatsen, Amsterdam, Netherland, 2000-Present

The Dutch have a strong culture of both formal and informal Meanwhile Use. As a city, Amsterdam has gone through numerous waves of tackling urban vacancy. During the 1970's and 1980's the city was declining in population and large-scale land speculation, dereliction and vacancy was holding housing stock off the market causing a shortage. This led to a rise in a squatting movement. A key step forward was when the movement managed to legalise its behaviour to obtain a right to remain in properties that have been unused for over 6 months. This resulted in many owners either bringing their properties back into use or back onto the market.¹¹

A cheap and quick way to bring a vacant building back into use was through antikraak (anti-squatting) agreements. These were agreements focussed on property guardianship and were made between the owners and those looking for a property. They were also commonly known as Meanwhile Use. These short-term flexible lease agreements were either free or low rents and would typically stipulate requirements for building custodianship and security against squatters. Antikraak was commonly used to provide homes, community centres and workspaces.

As Amsterdam transitioned back into a buoyant family friendly city by the late 1990s, its vacancy rates dropped. Many squats closed which reduced

the availability of cheap working spaces. Recognising the important role creatives play in a city's economy, Amsterdam Gemeente (Amsterdam City Council) established its Broedplaatsenbeleid (Creative Incubator Policy)¹². This led to the creation of the Bureau Broedplaatsen (Office of Incubators) in 2000. The objective of Bureau Broedplaatsen is to enable creative entrepreneurs and artists to access affordable working and living spaces. This proactive model was extremely effective in mitigating some of the worst impacts of the 2008's economic crash, as Broedplaats were able to quickly fill a vacant building, often retaining or increasing footfall in local neighbourhoods.



¹¹ In 2010 Amsterdam replaced legalised squatting with Compulsory Rental Orders for residential units that are vacant for longer than a 1 year.

¹² <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39743364.pdf>



The Bureau Broedplaatsen¹³

- Acts as an intermediary between property owner and creative users
- Provides financial loans (Borgstellingsfonds Broedplaatsen) through the ethical Triodos Bank
- Provides guidance on construction needs, building management, contracts, zoning, permits and fire safety, etc.
- Creates and manages an online map of vacant spaces
- Runs open competitions for innovative and creative Meanwhile Use opportunities

Currently there are over 60 Broedplaatsen across Amsterdam containing 1,200 working studios and 100 combined living/working studios. It is common for owners of vacant sites to seek the support of Bureau Broedplaatsen to find suitable Meanwhile Use tenants. This is because it could cost anywhere between €40,000 - €50,000 a year per hectare to maintain a vacant site or building (due to the legal requirements for ongoing security, cleaning and maintenance). Therefore, an owner can save considerable operating costs by agreeing to a time limited Meanwhile Use. Alternatively, creatives can approach the Bureau Broedplaatsen with an idea for a Meanwhile Use in a vacant building or site. Creatives can either come together to form collectives or a management company can run the Broedplaats space, subletting to end users and even going as far as to offer a full range of business support services. These flexible approaches have resulted in a multitude of business models, scales and uses making the Broedplaatsen a remarkable success for over 20 years.

¹³ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/pmb/opdrachten-projecten/broedplaatsen/>

The regenerative impact Broedplaatsen can have on an area is evident on Amsterdam's Knowledge Mile¹⁴. Now an innovation district and business investment area, the Knowledge Mile was started in 2015 by the Amsterdam Creative Industries Network in response to the transition of various Meanwhile Use buildings back into permanent use. In 2007, six large office blocks along Wibastraat were emptied with plans to demolish them to make way for a large redevelopment of the area. The onset of the economic crash ended these plans and instead the building's owners worked with the Bureau Broedplaatsen to open the buildings up for Meanwhile Use, initially agreeing to a 3-year timeframe.

The Volks Broedplaats¹⁵, became a vibrant creative hub for 6 years in what was the VolksKrant newspaper's former headquarters. The Bureau Broedplaatsen worked with just one organisation Urban Resort who sublet the 10,000m² to a variety of end users. Under the Broedplaats agreement Urban Resort had to rent 40% of the space to low income creatives at a low rent, these included everything from dance spaces, theatres and artist studios. This freed up 60% of the space to be rented to higher paying tenants such as conference spaces, bar, nightclub, restaurant and a local third level education institution. This enabled Urban Resort to pay off loans of €500,000 by the end of the initial 3 years. These loans were essential to cover upfront costs to bring the building up to safety standards for fire, electrics, access and plumbing. Volks has now transitioned to the permanent Volks Hotel and some Broedplaats tenants have retained artist studio spaces.

¹⁴ <https://www.knowledgemile.amsterdam/>

The creative Meanwhile Use of these 6 office buildings along Wilbastraat lead to a reinvigoration of the area and the eventual creation of the Knowledge Mile. By not solely targeting high value land or high rents but instead focusing on innovation through a living lab approach Amsterdam has been able to successfully tackle some of the cities key challenges, such as high office vacancy rates. It has led to a massive increase in both day and night-time footfall leading to a sustained increase in diverse commercial activity in an area that was previously an isolated office district.



¹⁵ <https://www.volkshotel.nl/en/broedplaats/>

ii Stalled Spaces, Glasgow, Scotland, 2010 - Present^{16 & 17}

Like many European nations, Scotland has a challenging time tackling long term vacancy and dereliction. It is estimated that 29% of the Scottish population live within 500m of vacant or derelict land, this can rise to 60% in some areas like Glasgow city.

Much of the dereliction and vacancy in Scotland is a result of a post-industrial economy. Brownfields sites are often the last to be developed yet lie within relatively central urban spaces offering a sustainable way to densify towns and cities. The economic crash in 2008 led to the creation of many new vacant sites which stalled during construction. In response to this Glasgow City Council established the Stalled Spaces project in 2010. The Stalled Spaces project sits within the Property and Land Services Department of Glasgow City Council.

Owners of vacant sites can contact the Stalled Spaces team and offer their site up for Meanwhile Use if construction is not expected to start within 6 months. The council then works with local communities to develop a suitable Meanwhile Use for these sites. Communities can avail of a £4,500 grant once they have developed a realistic timeline, management plan and exit strategy. The council also provides examples of standard legal agreements to be used between the landowners and the end users.



The Scottish Executive has established a Community Right to Buy in urban areas. Strengthening its existing asset transfer this compulsory sales orders forces the sale of vacant buildings for community use.

¹⁶ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/stalledspaces>

¹⁷ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees/viewDoc.asp?c=P62AFQDNDX2UUTDN2U>



The project has developed over 125 Meanwhile Use projects in vacant sites which have helped to improve the resilience and agility of many communities in Glasgow. A survey found the following results:

- 90% of participants felt their participation in a Stalled Spaces project had a positive impact on their wellbeing
- 75% of people feeling that they had become more connected and active within their community
- The project led to a reduction in social isolation through the creation a common goal and community aspiration

The Stalled spaces programme is currently undergoing a review for consideration to relaunch “as a strategic place-based approach with a nature-based solutions focus.”

Lessons learnt:

- The grants were considered too small to provide sufficient resources. The process has changed to offer larger grants, albeit fewer, in the recent updates to the stalled spaces Project.
- Communities required more support to empower them and to make them more resilient to the shocks. It is anticipated that enhanced community capacity building will be part of a relaunch.

iii Karolinelund, Aalborg, Denmark, 2011 - Present

In 2011 the Aalborg local authority closed an old amusement park¹⁸. Given there were long-term plans for the site they decided to open up the park area for temporary use until redevelopment plans were created and set in motion. Maintaining continuous public use of the site, ensured that the area adjacent to the park was not subjected to the typical negative impacts of vacancy and dereliction, such as increase in crime and decrease in mental and physical health of residents.

The site quickly evolved into a green nature and cultural oasis and became a very popular park to visit as well as a living open public consultation process. Ran by a voluntary user organization 'Karolines Venner', the park hosts events, concerts, sports and experimental art. It has a playground, skateboard park and kindergarten. The park also became the home of an Urban Garden for local residents, giving those without gardens the ability to grow their own food and flowers, as well as providing a space to meet.

Retaining the use of the site as a public park ensured that this use will be incorporated into future plans, while also preserving its architectural, cultural and landscape heritage. The success has also cemented the need for expanding the green spaces and plans now involve removing the culvert on the river that runs through the park.¹⁹

The process has resulted in a new light rail which will facilitate the densification of the area. The Masterplan for the wider area which is in

the process of being implemented includes opening up more entrances, large construction plans and providing essential green and community spaces.

KAROLINELUND

Helhedsplan marts 2015



Aalborg Kommune

COBE

¹⁸<https://www.aalborg.dk/om-kommunen/byplanlaegning/byudvikling/karolinelund>

¹⁹<http://referater.aalborgkommune.dk/Pdf.aspx?pdfnavn=16616467-14012291-1.pdf&type=bilag&id=38022>

iv Northern Ireland

In 2009, the UK established a state-wide Meanwhile Project which was delivered by a state-funded independently operated Social Enterprise Meanwhile Space CIC (Community Interest Company).²⁰ The Meanwhile Project runs several incubation pop-up centres in vacant commercial spaces as well as cultivating networking opportunities. Meanwhile Spaces takes on certain responsibilities and costs associated with vacant premises, such as insurance, rates, security etc. for an agreed period of time while the owner still continues their search for a long-term tenant. Meanwhile Spaces then works directly with the local community to find suitable Meanwhile Uses. To support communities a variety of guidebook and manuals are available targeting different stakeholders.

In 2010 Craigavon Borough Council's Development Department created Meanwhile Space Vacant Properties Programme where local enterprises could trial their business ideas in an empty shop for 4 months.²¹ The council worked with the owner to help them avail of their Shop Front Improvement Scheme grants to clean, paint and undertake simple repairs to buildings before opening them up for Meanwhile Use. Although rent was removed, these new businesses still had to pay business rates, insurance and utilities, while the owner continued to locate a new permanent tenant. The process involved the Development Trust Association taking on the lease and subletting the building to the experimenting enterprises.

²⁰<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/mag-position-paper-meanwhile-uses.PDF>

The Meanwhile Project led to a large number of short-term pop-ups and proved to be a good emergency response to an unexpected retail collapse as was experienced after the 2008 economic crash. To encourage reuse, vacant commercial premises in the UK are exempt from Business Rates for a period of 3 months only. In 2012, the Department of Finance and Personnel ran a business rates relief scheme for users to bring long term vacant commercial buildings back into use. 375 new ventures have benefited from this scheme since it was launched in Northern Ireland.

Although considered a stop gap, pop-ups do offer the potential to trial novel products and services, thus encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. It should be noted that replacing dying retail with pop-ups is not viable as a long-term solution.

v Italy

In 1998, in the Lazio region of Italy legislation was used to authorise the establishment of communities in vacant public buildings. There were conditions. The key one entailed that the community had to become a legally recognised body through the formation of a cooperative. While the owner remained as the public body which granted usage rights to the property for the tenure as agreed up front. Cooperative members then took charge of renovating and sharing the spaces as deemed appropriate.

vi LEIPZIG

Leipzig communities can become guardians of vacant buildings through their temporary use for a period of five to seven years since 2004.

²¹<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/meanwhile-heres-help-to-start-up-small-firms-29001214.html>

6. Meanwhile Use in Ireland

Meanwhile Use isn't new to Ireland. We all know the success story of Temple Bar, where Dublin City Council bought-up buildings for a large development that never materialised. It rented these otherwise vacant buildings on short-term leases for low rent while it waited for its development plans to materialise.²² This flexibility and affordability attracted and facilitated many creative uses and informally created a hotbed for a new cultural district which emerged and is still being celebrated as a tourist destination today. Whatever about current perception of the area it would be impossible to recreate another Temple Bar without this creativity that Meanwhile Use incubated.

In post-crash Ireland, Meanwhile Use gained traction as a way to keep some buildings in use. It was predominantly used as a way of offering free spaces to artists. These type of Meanwhile Use projects were often very short term, anything from 2 weeks and rarely longer than two months and generally in the format of pop-ups. For example, the 2010 Pretty Vacant Scheme run by Dublin City Council liaised between owners of vacant buildings and art groups to create temporary art galleries in vacant buildings. This short-term approach is not in keeping with European norms where Meanwhile Use typically operates for a minimum of 3 years.

²² Short term commercial leases are not uncommon in Ireland and are always shorter than 5 years. This is because after 5 years a commercial tenant has a right to a 25-year lease which can be repeatedly renewed every 25 years

Unfortunately, this pop-up approach has created a negative and narrowed view of Meanwhile Use in Ireland amongst certain key stakeholder groups. Pop-ups require a large amount of work to get a space fit for purpose as well as to advertise and attract visitors into this new functional space.





The excitement of being a first time Meanwhile User can be quickly taken over by the short return in terms of actual usage period. Frequently, users will be extremely reluctant to repeat the process due to these stressful pop-up timeframes. Whilst some projects were able to obtain a longer use agreement, premature evictions in what could be considered controversial circumstances and the subsequent return to vacancy followed by an onset of dereliction has also created a negative impression that Meanwhile Use does not have any wider societal impacts or bring long-term benefits to a community, local economy or area.

For instances, two artists collectives, Sample Studio and Camden Palace Hotel, were given access to two NAMA owned buildings in Cork City. Once these buildings were sold the artists collectives were evicted, however the

buildings were then left go vacant before being demolished. Years later these two spaces are still large derelict sites in the city centre, subject to changing planning applications and being sold on to yet new owners again.

This negative impression of Meanwhile Use has created a reluctance for key stakeholders to engage with this important policy instrument. As Town Centres emerge from COVID-19, they will need all avenues of support them opened up. Although the full implications of COVID-19 are yet to be foreseen, the demand to retain a right to 'Work from Home' could see many families wishing to relocate to Irish Town Centres. Particularly if more vacant homes and commercial spaces are made available and are affordable.

Meanwhile Use in Irish Policy

Framework for Town Centre Renewal²³

*“there is a new, emergent thinking that looks at revitalising spaces with cost effective, **temporary uses** that build on the longer-term vision for a space. The transformative effect of such efforts can showcase to all that change can happen in the here and now and can act as a catalyst for future improvements.”*

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025²⁴

Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages

Lead Delivery Body: Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

Policy Measure 54: *Examine the feasibility of introducing ‘**meanwhile use**’ legislation so that empty buildings and shopfronts on main streets can be brought back into compatible use on a short-term, temporary basis as pop-up shops, street markets, exhibitions spaces and other purposes in accordance with Town Centre First policies*

Irish Programme for Government²⁵

Mission: A Better Quality of Life for All

Town Centres First

Bring forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy.

Mission: Building Stronger and Safer Communities:

Creative and Cultural Infrastructure

*We will: Examine ‘**meanwhile use**’ legislation for vacant buildings, with a view to its potential application in Ireland*

**Programme
for Government**
Our Shared Future

²³ <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/A-Framework-for-Town-Centre-Renewal.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

Incentivised Vacancy

Typically, vacant properties are a financial cost burden to owners, whether it's ensuring an empty building is well maintained, regularly cleaned and secured through expensive fencing and surveillance. In countries with strict visual and structural building controls; cultures of squatting and heritage conservation; and/or vacant penalties (taxes and business rates increases), owners will be motivated to proactively engage with Meanwhile Use as a means of reducing these costs. For instance, in Amsterdam these costs can be up to €50,000 per hectare per year.

Unfortunately, many of these vacant costs are not currently present in Ireland, thus reducing an owner's motivation to make their spaces available for Meanwhile Use. Vacancy is only removed at the whim of the owner, however, due to challenges in selling property in Ireland, lack of skills for renovating heritage buildings and high return in speculation (rapidly rising land prices), it is often easier for the owner to do nothing. However, if owners were responsible for the True Costs²⁶ associated with long term vacancy this would quickly change.



²⁶ True Costs are external costs born by wider society. These include: opportunity costs to local economy; impacts on communities' health; aesthetic damage to urban fabric (visual pollution), increase land prices and rents from restricted supply.

²⁷ https://www.thejournal.ie/rural-town-centres-5131123-Jun2020/?utm_source=shortlink

To reduce the high vacancy rate requires a two-pronged approach.

1. Reusing vacancy needs to be rewarded and made easier
2. Problematic vacancy needs to be penalised

Meanwhile Use offers a simple and flexible reward to owners by reducing the costs of vacancy. However, in Ireland owners of vacant commercial buildings have a legal right to get a discount on their Business Rates. Not only does this mean Local Authorities lose out on €100 million a year, it also encourages owners to keep their premises empty until they obtain high rents. This rate reduction can be up to 100% in some areas and greatly disincentives active use, lower rents and Meanwhile Use. The Irish Government is currently exploring the removal of these Business Rates discount to encourage the use and conversion of vacant commercial buildings into residential use. For Town Centres with particularly high vacancy rates (above 10%) or for commercial buildings not suitable for residential use, Meanwhile Use should be promoted as a transitional solution while comprehensive regeneration plans are put in place to deliver long-term viable uses.²⁸

²⁸<https://www.businesspost.ie/houses/owners-of-vacant-commercial-properties-set-to-lose-rates-exemption-accee02a?auth=login>

One of the biggest challenges facing Ireland's built environment is a lack of reliable, accurate and up-to-date data. Although the CTCHC programme has undertaken a robust land use survey this has only been implemented on a small number of Town Centres. Unlike many other European Countries Ireland has no data on the age, condition, usage, heritage value and materials contained within its building stock. Without comprehensive data, progress on tackling vacancy and dereliction in Town Centres will be impossible to track and evaluate what is and what isn't working.





European Green Deal

The Irish Government will need to ensure the regeneration of Irish Town Centres aligns with European policies such as the Green Deal Net Zero ambitions and the New Circular Economy Action Plan. The construction industry in Europe accounts for 35% of waste, consumes 50% of all raw materials and emits 12% of GHG emissions²⁹. To ensure Ireland can transition to a low carbon circular economy, the current reckless overuse of demolition needs to end³⁰. Ireland is fortunate to have a large number of vacant buildings that can be brought back into use. Instead of consuming more raw material, producing more waste and emitting more GHG gases through unsustainable practices the focus must be on returning existing stock back into use. Meanwhile Use can provide an opportunity to keep existing buildings in use and well maintained. Crucially it can also provide a space to trial localised sustainable and circular solutions essential to forming the bedrock of an Irish 'renovation wave'.



²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2020/jan/13/the-case-for-never-demolishing-another-building>

7. Leaba Te (hotbeds) of Meanwhile Use

The international case studies in this report, presented several different ways Meanwhile Use Programmes can be delivered. To successfully manage risk and barriers, best practice points towards an intermediary body organising key Meanwhile Use Programme aspects. There are numerous benefits to having an intermediary body, including providing a level playing field including: transparency; removing barriers from potential users and owners; facilitating replication and scaling up; and supporting the required shift in culture and mindset around Meanwhile Use.

The level of involvement of such an intermediary party can vary widely but include:

- Promotion and awareness raising
- Providing guidance to core stakeholders
- Negotiating terms of use between owners and end users
- Providing financial supports through grants, loans or credit guarantees
- Leasing building from owner and subletting to end users
- Taking on responsibilities and liabilities including: rates; building repair and management; operational costs (utilities); insurance and public liabilities
- Finding suitable end users and suitable uses with and for the community which could be a mix of commercial and non-commercial uses
- Providing additional supports to end users such as
 - capacity building within communities
 - business support to start ups
 - building management skills



A strategic place-based approach should be taken to create a series of **Leaba Te** (hotbed) living labs to tackle the challenges currently facing Irish Town Centres. This would benefit from taking a Bauhaus transdisciplinary approach. **Leaba Te** could be established within Local Councils, Government Departments or a Town Centre Partnership however, best practice would be to establish an independent non-profit organisation. Due to the time-consuming nature of building community capacity, it is not advisable to leave Meanwhile Use up to the free market.

Leaba Te Independent **Non-Profit Organisation** should be tasked with:

- Running a **national campaign** to educate, encourage and steer stakeholders from villages, towns, cities towards Meanwhile Use
- **Piloting** Meanwhile Use in key CTCHC towns to develop best practice
- **Building capacity** amongst all stakeholders in areas such as local sustainable community developing, business services, community building
- Ensuring any Meanwhile Use models fit with the **Town Centre Masterplan**
- Producing best practices **Case study Booklets** and **How to Guides** targeting core stakeholders

“In terms of regeneration, temporary use has potential to sit within wider town centre interventions and inclusive growth plans and play a role in revivifying neighbourhoods.”¹



Meanwhile Use spaces give artist and creatives entrepreneurs a space to experiment, to test, pilot, trial, to innovate by failing fast, failing cheaply and failing with low risk.

8. Recommendations

- 1. Leaba Te Organisation(s)** to incubate innovative Town Centre Living Labs to evolve Irish town lifestyles
- 2. Forge Leaba Te Charter(s)** for Town Centres
- 3. Leaba Te Pilot Programme** starting with publicly owned buildings/sites
- 4. 10-year Leaba Te Funding Commitment**
- 5. Meanwhile Use (Leaba Te) Legislation & Policy**
- 6. Expansion of CTCHC Programme's 4-phase process**, cementing a heritage-led & evidence-based regeneration for all historic town centres
- 7. Inclusion of Meanwhile Use in Town Centre First Policy**
- 8. Heritage Led Regeneration**
 - a. Community led Civic Trust for Town Centres
 - b. Heritage registry with clear ownership
 - c. Flexibility in the planning applications such as suspension for requirements of change of use for 5 years within conditions of permissible uses, noise levels, active hours etc.
- 9. Sustainable Led Regeneration**
 - a. Regional assemblies
 - b. Buildings at risk
 - c. National Building Stock survey
 - d. 'Abolish Demolish' for all heritage buildings
- 10. Disincentivise Vacancy** through:
 - a. Enforcement of existing Derelict & Vacant Sites Acts (incl. removal of loopholes)
 - b. Vacant Property Tax & Business Rates Penalties
 - c. Compulsory Sales Orders
 - d. Strengthening Compulsory Purchase Orders
 - e. Compulsory Lease / Rental Orders
 - f. Compulsory Meanwhile Use / Custodianship Orders

9. Next Steps

There are a number of key steps to start the process of turning waste into an opportunity through Meanwhile Use, with overall responsibility for the policy instrument and its delivery laying with the Department of the Taoiseach.

anóis recommend starting with detailed **Policy Briefings** for and presentations to all the key departments (e.g. Taoiseach, Finance, Environment, Enterprise, Local Governance, incl. Ireland's Town Partnership & Town Centre Management Teams) to ensure they are up to speed on the possibilities.

This stage would be followed by **allocation of roles and responsibilities** and budgets. Funding sources could include carbon tax, dereliction tax and vacancy tax.

A **Feasibility Study** should follow, supported by 3 Leaba Te pilots, focusing initially on publicly own properties³¹. The aim would be to run for 12 months before roll-out nationally.



³¹ Another possibility is to work with a key stakeholder such as the Bank of Ireland and use Meanwhile Use to turn their recently closed banking buildings into community innovation hubs

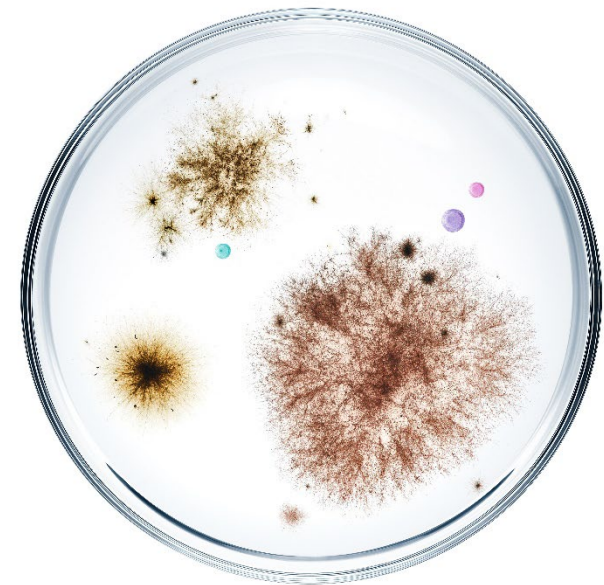
10. Research Methodology

anóis undertook a mixed methods research approach to understand how Meanwhile Use can be facilitated and embedded into current and future regeneration, placemaking and community building models for Irish Town Centres.

The approach predominantly involved desk-based research, supported with conversations with key actors and visits to several Town Centres (including the CTCHC towns of Tralee and Ennis) to get a clearer understanding of the situation on the ground.

A deep dive was undertaken on several Meanwhile Use³² schemes across Europe and Ireland to develop an understanding of international best practice. An overview of four international case studies are presented in this short report and key insights have fed into this report's recommendations. Stakeholder engagement has been ongoing during the research process. Every conversation has revealed invaluable insights and an appetite for Meanwhile Use, as a means of regeneration and strategic placemaking.

Although stakeholders discussed the potential of Meanwhile Use with anóis on an anonymous basis, the need for Meanwhile Use has been expressed by educators, innovators, artists, performers, creatives, community groups, start-ups and more, for applications such as studios, hubs, maker spaces and arts and cultural venues.



³² Please note for the purpose of this research, this report will only focus on Meanwhile Use in commercial properties/sites and not residential building stock (homes).

11. About anois

#DerelictIreland

During the Summer of 2020, anois co-founders Jude Sherry and Dr. Frank O'Connor began to share a Daily Dose of Dereliction, on one long twitter thread. Based on 18 months research the thread visualised and framed the vacancy and dereliction epidemic in Cork City Centre reaching over 450 properties within a 2km radius over a one year leading to a national #DerelictIreland movement.

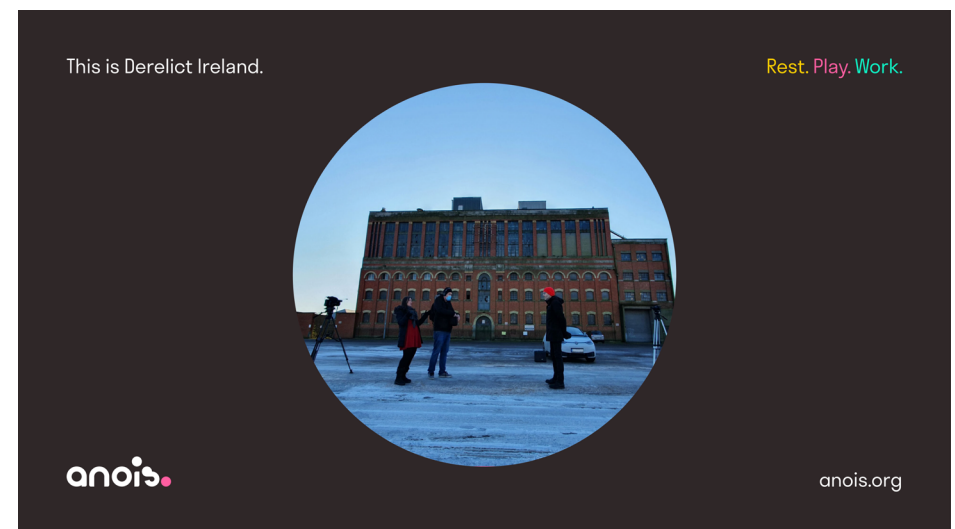
Their immersive research work has challenged Irish society to rethink its relationship with resources, in particular property, in the context of imagining a functioning social contract. It has also woken society up to the realisation that this epidemic of vacancy and dereliction in Ireland is not normal, its simply irresponsible waste, and for a functioning society and economy this vacancy and dereliction should be turned into an opportunity to create a liveable urban environment where everyone can RestPlayWork.

To challenge the common mantra that vacancy and dereliction is inevitable and unsolvable in Ireland, anois produced 'This is Derelict Ireland' report. Along with debunking the 10 common myths of dereliction it is the first ever in-depth data driven study of dereliction in the country. This report analyses and synthesises publicly available data for 340 derelict properties. It shows ending dereliction not only makes sense, but it is vital for a thriving community and economy. The report has been viewed almost 2 thousand times with a total of read time of over 125 hours since its launch in Spring 2021.

#RestPlayWork

anois imagine urban spaces where vacancy and dereliction are turned into an opportunity to create a liveable urban environment where everyone can RestPlayWork.

To demonstrate the potential dereliction presents, anois produced a RestPlayWork proposal for Cork City Council. This showcased the creative and beneficial transformations that could be applied to 5 council owned properties/sites in line with their anois RestPlayWork model.



Jude Sherry and Dr Frank O'Connor are global system designers, urban explorers and cofounders of anois. Combined they have over 50 years' experience working on sustainability projects all over the world, with governments on policy, businesses on strategy and educational institutes on curriculum development. anois apply a systems design approach to resources use in products, buildings and urban environments, always with sustainability, circularity, responsibility, equality and social justice at the core. anois creates vision, steers strategy and outlines potential solutions always backed by international best practice and data.

Jude and Frank are transdisciplinary, multi-award-winning, educated to masters and doctorate level and are viewed as international leaders in their field. For context Frank first called for a Circular Economy in Ireland in 1989. It is only now being embraced by the Irish Government, over 30 years later.

anois have pioneered their RestPlayWork model through an immersive-dialogic-empathic approach which creatively (re)imagines the World, always placing people, their well-being, a sense of place and prosperity at the centre, along with a transparent and functioning social contract. What this means in practice is everyone should have a place they can call home (Rest), a space where they can have fun and create (Play) and access to fair, just, meaningful jobs (Work).

anois believe all urban environments should be liveable, creative and productive. anois advocates for urban spaces to be co-designed with people and for people, with a focus of freely accessible social spaces. anois has evolved new ways of building urban communities and foundational economies and enterprises, which offer needs-based, local, circular and responsible product and services from under-utilised urban resources.

anois strives to bring meaning and enable change through applying 3 core iterative stages:

- 1) shine a light
- 2) challenge the way things are
- 3) demonstrate potential through alternative solutions

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