

Reflection

Graduation thesis: “From Phase-Out to Interim Use: Tracing the Process of Temporary Urbanism in Dutch Brownfields”

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Was my approach effective?

The approach I used, qualitative case study research across four Dutch redevelopment sites, allowed me to analyse temporary urbanism not as a fixed model, but as something that develops differently depending on the institutional and spatial context. By focusing on both formal plans and informal practices, I could trace how temporary urbanism emerged, who initiated it, how it was shaped over time and whether it aligned with the transition process. The strength of this approach was that it helped me connect different layers within the process: site access, governance choices, actor roles and longer-term planning ambitions.

That said, covering four cases in six months was a challenge. It required constant prioritisation: I had to make choices about which moments, actors, and developments to follow closely, and which to leave out. In retrospect, the variation between the cases proved more useful than I expected. It helped me distinguish different types of trajectories and governance styles, from the fully curated model in Bajeskwartier to the passive, fragmented situation at Steenenburg. This contrast sharpened my analysis and allowed me to develop a phase-based model that remained flexible enough to apply across all four sites.

Understanding the ‘how and why’

My methodology was grounded in the idea that focusing on processes, rather than just outcomes, would better reveal the dynamics of temporary urbanism. This proved to be the right choice. For example, interviews uncovered the importance of trust, informal decision-making, and behind-the-scenes negotiations, elements that would not have surfaced through documents alone.

I also learned that timing and local context play a bigger role than I had initially anticipated. Temporary urbanism doesn't follow a standard path; it unfolds differently depending on governance culture, ownership structures, and stakeholder interests. This open, in-depth approach allowed me to map the full trajectory of temporary use—including agreements, decisions and turning points. However, doing this for four cases was very time consuming and ambitious within the available six months. Still, the case studies offer a rich process-based understanding and make a meaningful contribution to the gap identified in the literature.

Feedback from mentors and how I used it

Mentor feedback played a key role throughout the project. Initially, my approach was strongly practice-driven, shaped by my work experience and hands-on perspective. I aimed to build the research question directly from real-world observations. My mentors encouraged me to start instead from the academic literature on temporary urbanism, redevelopment and planning processes. That shift helped me identify relevant theoretical debates and better frame my contribution. Gradually, I found a clearer balance between practical relevance and analytical depth. Along the way, I received feedback on focus and scope. I initially wanted to study six or more cases, but was advised to narrow it down. Reducing the number to four allowed me to go deeper and made the comparative insights stronger.

I also revised my research question once, temporarily shifting the focus toward outcomes rather than processes. This led to a mismatch with the methodological design. Mentor guidance helped me return to the process-based focus and stay aligned with the gap identified in the literature. In terms of writing, I was advised to better distinguish

between empirical material, interpretation and reflection. That structure now underpins the full thesis. Finally, I received useful input on visual communication. I worked on clearer phase diagrams, site timelines and stakeholder maps, which helped to communicate complex development processes more effectively.

What I learned from the process

This project taught me how to conduct research within the complexity of real-world urban development. With a naturally practical and hands-on approach, I initially focused strongly on the practice of temporary urbanism. I wanted to fully understand how things work in the field before defining my research question. Over time—and with the help of mentor feedback, I learned to shift my focus toward academic literature to better frame and understand that practice.

I also learned the importance of flexibility and trust: interviews required openness and clarity about my goals, and several cases required adjustments due to access or political sensitivities. The process became more iterative than I expected—literature shaped my initial direction, but insights from the cases pushed me to refine my framework and rethink assumptions. In the end, this project helped me find a balance between practical insight and academic reflection. It helped me focus more on the steps and decisions that shaped temporary use—such as how timing, ownership and early actor involvement influenced each case.

Towards the graduation defense (P5)

In the final phase, I will focus on sharpening the main structure and improving the clarity of the overall line of argument. This includes refining the connection between the problem statement, methodology, case studies and conclusions. I also plan to shorten the report where possible, without losing depth. I will revisit how the contextual conditions are integrated into the case sections, and may do one or two additional site visits to reassess spatial dynamics and update visual material. Finally, I'll complete the diagrams and timelines so they support the analysis in a clear and direct way.

The aim is to present temporary urbanism not as a neutral in-between phase, but as a selective and context-dependent part of urban redevelopment.

Relation graduation, master track and master programme

The graduation topic aligns with the studio topic 'Urban development' as redevelopment of brownfields is a specific focus in the field of urban development. The studio of urban development has a focus towards the development of circular, climate-proof and socially just cities. In this context, brownfields present significant challenges in circular (preservation), climate-proof (future-proof) and social (placemaking) redevelopment. The master track Management in the Built Environment (MBE) focusses on innovating management in amongst others, the latter challenges, from different perspectives in the real estate sector. The evaluation of the variety of aspects influencing a specific redevelopment process The Master track in Management in the Built Environment (MBE) focuses on innovating management practices to address challenges in the real estate sector from various perspectives. This study examines a specific aspect of the complex process of brownfield redevelopment in the Netherlands. While the research is approached from the perspective of the Management in the Built Environment (MBE) track, the challenges identified during the transition phase are relevant across the broader architecture and construction sectors. In doing so, the work contributes to the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences programme's broader focus on sustainable (re)design, (re)development, and management of the built environment.

How Research Informed Design and Recommendations, and Was Shaped by Them

The research shaped the way I approached design recommendations, particularly by emphasising the importance of timing, sequencing, and governance structure. Mapping temporary urbanism as a phased process helped clarify at which moments certain initiatives gained traction or stalled, and why. It also highlighted the influence of early actor involvement and strategic framing in determining the direction and stability of temporary use. At the same time, observations from the cases directly shaped the research framework. For example, the Coincidental Phase was added after it became clear that several cases began informally, without any predefined strategy. Comparing different contexts, such as structured versus passive governance, helped identify recurring dynamics. These formed the basis for the phase model and the contextual framework that underpin the conclusions and recommendations.

Valuation of approach and method

The chosen method, a comparative case study using interviews, document analysis and field observations, proved effective. It helped me capture both formal strategies and informal dynamics behind temporary use. Studying four cases was ambitious within the timeframe and not all site visits were completed, but the variety of contexts provided valuable contrasts. For example, comparing a highly curated approach (Bajeskwartier) with a passive case (Landgoed Steenenburg) highlighted what conditions enable or limit temporary urbanism. This contrast strengthened the cross-case analysis and helped make more general observations about actor roles and governance strategies.

Assessment of academic and societal value, scope and implications of graduation

This graduation project explores the role of temporary urbanism in the transition phase of brownfield redevelopment. Academically, it contributes to the relatively limited Dutch literature on the topic by offering a process-based perspective rather than focusing solely on outcomes. The study highlights how factors such as ownership, regulation and timing influence the development of temporary urbanism. Scientifically, the study contributes to broader urban redevelopment research by offering a conceptual approach to analyse how temporary urbanism unfolds during transitional phases. Rather than fixed tools, the four-phase model and contextual framework serve as analytical lenses, helping to structure observations and interpret how site-specific conditions influence the emergence, development and governance of temporary urbanism. They aim to support reflection and comparison, particularly in complex, process-driven redevelopment settings.

Socially and professionally, the project addresses how underused buildings and terrains can be activated in ways that support local engagement, adaptability and long-term goals. The findings offer urban planners, developers, policymakers and placemakers a structured lens to reflect on the governance and coordination of temporary use. While not prescriptive, the conceptual frameworks can assist in understanding how temporary initiatives evolve and which conditions enable or limit them. All research activities followed TU Delft's ethical guidelines. Interview transcripts are not publicly shared due to privacy considerations, but anonymisation and secure data handling were carried out in accordance with the Data Management Plan.

Assessment of value and transferability of your project results

The findings are most applicable to Dutch brownfield redevelopment, particularly in settings where temporary use is already integrated into planning practice. The phase-based model and contextual framework are not intended as universal solutions, but as a way of thinking, an approach to analysing how temporary urbanism develops over time and in relation to its context. This analytical perspective is transferable to other settings, especially those with long transitional periods and mixed public-private involvement. However, practical application may be limited in international contexts with very different legal or institutional frameworks. What remains broadly relevant is the insight that temporary urbanism only gains traction when actors actively support it, through access, coordination and strategic flexibility.

Reflection Questions

- How can I better understand and communicate the relationship between the development trajectory of an area and the role of temporary urbanism within it?
- What are the implications of actor sequencing and shifting responsibilities for how we evaluate the impact and fairness of temporary urbanism?