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Peer-reviewed author version

PLEVOETS, Bie & SOWINSKA-HEIM, Julia (2018) Community initiatives as a catalyst for regeneration of heritage sites: Vernacular transformation and its influence on the formal adaptive reuse practice.. In: Cities, 78, p.128-139..

DOI: 10.1016/j.cities.2018.02.007

Handle: <http://hdl.handle.net/1942/25856>

Title:

***Community initiatives as a catalyst for regeneration of heritage sites:  
Vernacular transformation and its influence on the formal adaptive reuse practice***

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Published: Plevoets, B., & Sowinska-Heim, J. (2018). Community initiatives as a catalyst for regeneration of heritage sites: Vernacular transformation and its influence on the formal adaptive reuse practice. *Cities*.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.02.007>

Abstract:

Over the past few decades, the adaptive reuse of buildings—transforming them to meet new functional and aesthetic needs and requirements—has become a highly specialized domain within architectural and conservation practice, and is becoming a field of scholarly study in its own right. However, in juxtaposition with this highly specialized practice, people reuse and adapt all sorts of buildings in spontaneous and informal ways in a process we call “vernacular adaptation.” This paper investigates such vernacular adaptation of built heritage, along with its specific characteristics, opportunities, and threats as well as its influence on more formal adaptive reuse practice. As methodology, we examine relevant literature to review historical and contemporary examples of vernacular adaptation and reuse. In conclusion, we present the vernacular approach as a valuable alternative to the “formal” or specialized, top-down method to managing existing built environment, especially for buildings and sites that possess compelling social value. Moreover, our study indicates that in practice, the division between the vernacular and the formal is not rigid, elaborating on the possibilities and risks of joined initiatives between local communities and private or public developers.

Keywords:

adaptive reuse, heritage, urban renewal, vernacular, community initiative, bottom-up

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past few decades, the adaptive reuse of buildings—transforming them to meet new functional and aesthetic needs and requirements—has become a highly specialized domain within architectural and conservation practice, and is becoming a field of scholarly study in its own right. However, in juxtaposition with this highly specialized practice, people reuse all sorts of buildings in spontaneous and informal ways in a process we call “vernacular adaptation.” This paper investigates such vernacular adaptation of the built heritage, along with its specific characteristics, opportunities, and threats; its influence on the more formal adaptive reuse practice is also examined.

First, we present a brief overview of the evolution of adaptive reuse as a professional and academic discipline, and point to the position of vernacular transformation within this

evolution. Second, we elaborate on the characteristics and opportunities of vernacular adaptive reuse projects, focusing in particular on the role of community initiatives in the regeneration process for which we rely on examples from relevant literature. Third, we investigate how the vernacular adaptive reuse processes may influence the formal adaptive reuse practice in relation to gentrification and heritage-place-making. Finally, we describe how the vernacular can be orchestrated, discussing the pros and cons. As a methodology, we draw on relevant literature to review studies and examples of vernacular adaptation and reuse, which are pertinent to support the argument.

Community-initiatives have been analyzed in the context of spontaneous redesigning of public spaces. However, their impact on the regeneration of buildings and sites has not yet received adequate attention in scholarly studies. Moreover, the influence of community-initiatives on the formal practice of planning, architecture, and conservation remains under-examined. Therefore, this study aims to understand the potential of the vernacular approach as an alternative to or complementing the “formal” or specialized, top-down method to managing existing built environment.

## **2. The vernacular process of adaptive reuse: Conceptualization**

### **2.1. Adaptive reuse: The evolution of a discipline**

Spontaneous or user-led intervention with regard to building reuse has existed throughout all of history. In the past, reuse and alteration of an existing building was generally cheaper and easier than the construction of a new one, so the motivation behind this was mainly practical and economical. Historical features of the building were preserved, adapted, or removed without question, as the building was considered a material resource. Traces of such spontaneous interventions can still be found in the contemporary urban fabric, our historical building stock, and interior spaces. Examples include the historical center of Split that contains traces of the Ancient palace of Diocletian and the Piazza del Anfiteatro in Lucca where local people constructed their houses within the contours of the former amphitheater (Pérez de Arce, 1978; Powell, 1999; Rossi, 1982). Many of these historical examples of transformation are user-led: the building is changed in order to fit new needs or requirements.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the notion of “heritage” was introduced and the existing building fabric was seen as a container of material and immaterial values (see, among others, Choay, 1992; Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, 2013; Powell, 1999; Scott, 2008). Instead of a user-led transformation, the approach used in a great deal of the historical building stock became heritage-led, which implied “restoration” (Viollet-le-Duc, 1967 [1854]) or “conservation” (Morris, 1877). As such, during the course of the twentieth century, working with existing buildings became a prerogative for archaeologists, historians, and heritage-trained engineers and architects, while modern architects focused their practice on new construction.

However, from the 1970s onwards, the fields of architecture and heritage conservation both showed increased interest in adapting and reusing historical buildings for new programs.

There were multiple reasons behind this shift, including (1) the fact that the increasing density of the built fabric limits the possibility for new construction; (2) the widening scope of heritage conservation boards and increased number and variety of listed buildings and sites makes it impossible to conserve all heritage assets in a strictly restorative manner, extracting them from an active societal life; (3) the current need for sustainable development patterns rejects large-scale demolition in favor of transforming what is already there, securing a more sustainable building fabric in both ecological and socio-cultural terms; and (4) today's economic climate, which significantly prohibits governments from funding heritage conservation and instead draws on heritage as a valuable resource for society, as it can generate added value in touristic, cultural, social, and economic senses (see e.g., CHCfE Consortium, 2015). Thus, adaptive reuse has become a field of practice in its own right, which is highly specialized and interdisciplinary—involving experts from all kinds of domains such as archaeologists, historians, conservationists, urban planners, engineers, architects, and interior designers (Brooker and Stone, 2004; Bullen and Love, 2010; Cramer and Breitling, 2007; Douglas, 2006).

## **2.2. The concept of “vernacular” in adaptive reuse theory**

Some buildings, however, slipped away from the formal approaches and are used, reused, and adapted in a spontaneous, user-led, or “vernacular” way. The term vernacular is introduced in the context of building adaptation by Fred Scott (2008) in his book, *On altering architecture*, in the chapter entitled “the literate and the vernacular.” Elaborating on Boudon's sociological study of Le Corbusier's housing complex in Pessac (1972), Scott reflects on the status of the adaptations made by its inhabitants—replacement of the continuous horizontal windows with traditional rectangular windows, closing of porches and terraces to enlarge the interior space, or even the addition of inclining roofs—in light of the heritage value of this building complex. Scott raises the question—which of the houses are most authentic? The houses adapted by its inhabitants in a spontaneous and user-led way, or the houses that have been restored to their original state?

[Insert image 1 about here]

The adoption of the term vernacular in the context of the spontaneous, user-led transformations of existing historical buildings sheds new light on the discussion. Vernacular architecture has been perceived as an important aspect of our cultural heritage over the past several decades, and the specific problems related to conservation of this type of heritage has become a field of study in its own right.<sup>1</sup> By applying the term vernacular to spontaneous, user-led transformations of a more “formal,” or in this case even iconic, heritage building such as those discussed by Le Corbusier, Scott implicitly attributes a heritage value to these spontaneous interventions. The adoption of the term vernacular by Scott fits within a recent tendency in vernacular heritage theory to broaden the interpretation of vernacular (Hourigan, 2015) from “*traditional buildings of the people, as opposed to the buildings of the elite and*

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<sup>1</sup> For example: The ICOMOS International Committee on Vernacular Architecture was founded in 1976.

*especially modern ones,”* to interventions performed at the site of shared meanings and created through use (Garfinkel, 2006/2007), including, for example, suburban houses, self-built “counter culture” architecture, and squatter settlements (Asquith and Vellinga, 2006). Beside Scott, also Mould (2014) has applied the term vernacular to speak about spontaneous and creative transformations of the urban fabric by its inhabitants, and elaborates on the relationship between the vernacular interventions versus the more formal urban planning strategies.

The tension between the use of heritage sites and their conservation is also discussed by Ioannis Poullos (2011). He criticizes management acts that remove or restrict the use and evolution of the site in favor of strict conservation of the original physical fabric, or presentation of the site for tourism. He supports the move beyond the traditional concept of heritage conservation that focuses on the protection of the physical remains at the expense of the continuity of the living tradition, which is embedded in the use, maintenance, and pragmatic user-led adaptation of the site. He elaborates on the above-mentioned example of the historical center of Split. In the sixth century, a group of refugees settled in the ruins of the ancient Diocletian Palace and started to recreate a settlement in, around, and on top of the ruins. The transformation took place gradually, based on the functional needs of the inhabitants, but also reflecting the social stratification of the inhabitants (Pérez de Arce, 1978). Today, the historical center of Split is a palimpsest, an interweaving of fabric from different periods, conserved and shaped through constant vernacular adaptation. Today the site is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; however, as with the housing complex in Pessac, tension arises here between the conservation of the material fabric and the continuity of the spontaneous use by its inhabitants. Poullos describes and criticizes the fact that conservation authorities today try to limit all new interventions and attempt to remove modern interventions in the ancient walls of the Diocletian Palace, and, as such, restrict the use of the site in favor of the preservation of its material remains.

### **3. Vernacular adaptive reuse projects: Characteristics and qualities**

#### **3.1. The power of community initiatives**

The reasons for the transformation of the Pessac houses and the ancient ruins in Split by its inhabitants were basically utilitarian; thus, researchers have been able to gain insight into the living conditions of the individuals and communities of the past. Apart from housing, however, derelict historical buildings and sites within the urban fabric have been reused in an informal, spontaneous way for artistic, cultural, or social activities, such as by squatting communities (Göbel, 2014; Pruijt, 2003; Shaw, 2005). Kunsthaus Tacheles in Berlin is one such example. The building was originally constructed in 1907 as a shopping arcade, but the project was not very successful and went bankrupt only six months after opening. In 1928, the building was used by AEG electric company, and after 1934, it was occupied by the Nazi's and used as offices. By the end of World War II, the building had suffered serious bomb damage. Nevertheless, after the war, parts of the building were put to use temporarily until the central part of the former arcade was completely destroyed by a controlled explosion in 1981; a ruin of the façade and a section of the front building were all that remained. After

the fall of the Berlin Wall, a group of artists squatted in the ruins, transforming it into an informal art center known as “Kunsthaus Tacheles.” The center included a small movie theatre, café Zapata, studios for artists, and exhibition spaces; the large open land where the actual arcade had once stood was used as a sculpture garden and event venue (Boym, 2001; Jakob, 2010; Sandler, 2011; Shaw, 2005; Steward, 2002).

The transformation of the ruin was a continuous process, led by the artists that occupied the building. The new interior developed spontaneously without a pre-set plan, using mainly re-claimed and salvaged materials. As such, the spaces seemed “occupied” rather than “redesigned.” The interventions were either pragmatic or artistic; for example, the open backside was initially left open, but gradually some of the rooms were enclosed using different types of re-claimed materials. Graffiti and other art works decorated the original walls, floors, and ceilings of the ruin, and large art works and found objects ornamented the open land in the back called the “sculpture garden.” The main characteristics of the ruin—distorted boundaries between interior and exterior, roughness, strong patina—were kept, and even strengthened, through the interventions.

In addition to squatter-communities, other groups of likeminded people look for interesting and inexpensive places to organize social, cultural, or professional activities. Accordingly, these groups also reuse and adapt abandoned buildings or sites in pragmatic, user-led, and economical ways. Such bottom-up or user-led projects have become the subject of scholarly studies, especially within the last decade. The economic decline beginning in 2007 created ideal conditions for these types of initiatives: expensive, large-scale redevelopment projects have been put on hold, budgets for restoration projects have been shrinking, and many derelict buildings have remained unoccupied. Apart from these financial reasons, this crisis also initiated a mind shift as to private and collective ownership, sustainable redevelopment, and architecture for a significant part of society. Moreover, several authors have pointed to the influence of information technology and social media in the emerging of community-led initiatives in an urban context (among others: Bradley, 2015; Krivy, and Kaminer, 2013; Mould, 2014; Sawhney, De Klerk, and Malhotra, 2015).

Numerous examples of the vernacular adaptation of derelict buildings have been realized, moving from public art installations (Iveson, 2013; Zeiger, 2012), to improvised performance and event locations (Göbel, 2014), bars or small restaurants (Carr and Dionisio, 2017; Zeiger, 2011), shared offices in derelict industrial or other historical buildings by creative industry professionals (Cizler, 2014; Kosmala and Sebastyanski, 2013; Krivy, 2010; Sasaki, 2010), or a combination of these different types of uses. In the same sphere, interventions have been made in public spaces and unused open plots through the creation of community gardens, public seating, bike lanes, or sport or leisure facilities (Douglas, 2013; Overmeyer, 2007; Schaller and Guinard, 2017).

### **3.2. The impact on the urban fabric and dynamics**

This type of informal, community-driven activity is usually referred to as Do-It-Yourself (DIY) urbanism (Bradley, 2015; Deslandes, 2013; Douglas, 2013; Iveson, 2013; Sawhney,

De Klerk, and Malhotra, 2015; Vallance, Dupuis, Thorns, et al., 2017), tactical urbanism (Bela, 2015; Mould, 2014; Pfeifer, 2013), pop-up (Beekmans and De Boer, 2014; Schaller and Guinard, 2017), urban pioneer movements (Overmeyer, 2007; Pulkkinen, 2013), guerilla or insurgent urbanism (Deckha, 2003; Hou, 2010), etc. Although the various terms that point to the phenomenon have many common characteristics, they are mostly community-driven, low budget, temporary, and experimental. Finn (2014) states that the lack of clearly defined terminology is somehow the natural result of the capacious and free flowing nature of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the various terms seem to have slightly different meanings and connotations: “guerilla” and “insurgent” both underline the political and reactionary motivation of the action; “urban pioneering” stresses the innovative and experimental nature of the intervention; “pop-up” refers to the temporary and short-term aspect; “tactical urbanism” refers to the ad-hoc and pragmatic approach towards the existing need or problem; and “DIY urbanism” stresses the fact that participants seem to act by themselves rather than trying to solve problems through lobbying or traditional ways of participation. Yet, many authors use the different terms interchangeably.

The phenomenon is usually described as a recent trend which emerged as opposition to top-down approaches, capitalist economy and planning (Douglas, 2013), privatization and commercialization of public space (Bradley, 2015; Hou, 2010; Wortham-Galvin, 2013), or as a reaction against expert-led participatory frameworks (Carr and Dionisio, 2017). As such, the phenomenon mainly occurs in capitalist democracies in Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, and some Asian countries such as Japan (Bradley, 2015). While the practice of unauthorized, spontaneous intervention in the public domain do occur frequently in the slums of the Global South, these are usually initiated in absolute necessity and are often less temporary (Angelovski, 2013; Finn, 2014; Spencer, Bolton, and Alarcon, 2015).

The roots of DIY urbanism are usually appointed to the mid-twentieth century when the shortcomings and limitations of modern city planning were first felt (Douglas, 2013; Finn, 2014; Iveson, 2013; Wortham-Galvin, 2013). From the 1950s onward, artists involved in groups such as the Situationist International acted in public spaces—e.g., Guy Debord’s graffiti slogans in Paris—as a critique of the ongoing social, cultural, and political ethos and practice (Finn, 2014). Talen (2015), however, argues that such community-driven initiatives have their origins in the nineteenth century when authority interference in city planning and design was more limited, as they were focusing mainly on the improvement of the hygienic situation in the city (drinking water, epidemic control, etc.), width of streets, and location of open spaces; thus, more well-off citizens were investing in the beautification of the city through the introduction of art in public spaces and buildings, and the erection of monuments and fountains in public squares and parks. Soon, initiatives for urban beautification were not only taken by individuals, but also by groups of people such as women organizations; additionally, the scope began to broaden and included the introduction of necessary infrastructure such as public baths, schools, theaters, swimming pools, and playgrounds.

Although it is clear that community-led intervention in the urban fabric is not a new phenomenon, the dynamics and motivation underlying those actions do change over different

time periods. In the nineteenth century, the intervention was solely esthetic and initiated by rich men rather than the public at large. In the early twentieth century, initiative was still taken by the elites of society, but as a group rather than an individual. At this time the goal was to meet the actual needs of lower class inhabitants. From the 1950s onward, motivation for intervention, mainly by artists, becomes more political. During the most recent decades, the groups of people involved in such actions have broadened. Additionally, the motivation behind the interventions have become more diverse, moving from primarily political or critical motivations towards more social or functional reasons.

An example of such socio-cultural, vernacular initiative is the reuse of the former Franciszek Ramisch factory in Łódź (Poland) by Fabrykancka, a group of young artists and students who wanted to stimulate social interaction and participation in the development of the city primarily through artistic events. In 2007, Fabrykancka met with the owner of the Ramisch factory, a textile factory complex located just off of the main street Piotrkowska in Łódź. The owner, a real estate developer, had planned a commercial revitalization project for the site, but due to the financial crisis the plans were put on hold. The owner agreed to allow Fabrykancka to temporarily use some of the empty space as an art gallery and music club, in order to create a platform for local and upcoming bands and artists and organize exhibitions and debates about current issues related to the city of Łódź. In doing so, Fabrykancka was actually able to create awareness about the local identity, and generate certain changes in the municipal policy (Interview with Błażej Filanowski, one of the Fabrykancka founding members, 2016; Majer, 2015: 153-154; Bendyk, 2015). Although Fabrykancka were not officially squatters, as they had a formal arrangement with the owner, the outlook and atmosphere of the site resembled that of an urban squat. The place has been accompanied by a sense of freedom, typical for grassroots-initiated cultural activities, combined with the characteristic aesthetics of an unrenovated, partially abandoned site. The old as well as more recent graffiti, in addition to the pragmatic, cheap, and spontaneous interventions conducted by Fabrykancka, somehow seem to merge with the strong patina, broken windows, crumbling stones, and rusted ironwork of the historical building.

Sandler (2011, 2016) introduces the term “counter-preservation” to point to such an informal approach towards the historical build environment. She explains:

In contrast with official preservation practices sponsored, defined[,] and approved by governmental agencies (including public projects and private developments), the informal treatment of historical buildings by diverse social groups is often more open-ended and dynamic by its very nature. Informal or unofficial approaches to the built environment often lack funding, support[,] and permanent legal status; as a result these approaches involve improvisation, temporary solutions[,] and incomplete or makeshift interventions (Sandler, 2011: 687).

In most projects, the dilapidated and ruined state of the building has not been erased, which may evoke a rich and unique experience that differs significantly from the experience of a



restored heritage building or site. However, the aesthetic appreciation of decay can only exist when contrasted with the clean, organized, and conventional environment; therefore, it can only evoke a positive experience when it is present on a limited number of buildings and sites (Edensor, 2005; Sandler, 2011, 2016).

[insert image 2 & 3 about here]

#### **4. The influence of the vernacular on the formal adaptive reuse practice**

##### **4.1. Vernacular adaptation and gentrification**

Regeneration of derelict urban sites has stirred up controversy regarding the relationship between such rehabilitation and gentrification, “*an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighbourhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversion, and the construction of new housing stock.*” (Perez, 2004: 139, cited in Brown-Saracino, 2010). Although gentrification may be conceived as a positive phenomenon linked to “recapturing the value of the place” (Zukin, 1993: 192), this process also has its downsides, which have been brought to the forefront of development discussions by activists, planners, and academics. One main downside of gentrification is the relocation of the original population, which is a consequence of rising rents and property taxes, making the cost of living in the “revitalized” neighborhoods economically impractical (Brown-Saracino, 2010; Pruijt, 2003; Shaw, 2005; Zukin, 2016).

Cizler (2014) has argued in favor of civil and bottom-up initiatives as opposed to commercial redevelopment in order to avoid gentrification. However, instead of avoiding gentrification, vernacular adaptive reuse projects may unintentionally become the driving force behind the long-term gentrification process by highlighting the social and economic value of a particular area or site. As stated by Douglas (2013):

If neoliberal conditions such as uneven development make space for DIY urban design, it may also be the case that some DIY urban design enables or encourages the continuation of these very conditions. The creators of these interventions may not only be acting in the context of neoliberal processes, but may be inherently part of these processes through both their direct actions and their longer term impact (Douglas, 2013: 19).

Indeed, user-led projects are often initiated by people from the “creative class” (Douglas, 2013; Florida, 2011)—like artists or young professionals working in creative industries—and have repeatedly acted as pioneering projects in the gentrification process (Chapple, Jackson, and Martin, 2010; Sasaki, 2010). However, the success of these projects might threaten their survival (Shaw, 2005); this was the case for Kunsthau Tacheles. Located in Mitte, the area surrounding Tacheles went through a process of gentrification, and in 1999, the plot where Tacheles was located came under the ownership of a project developer. At that time, Tacheles had become one of the most important alternative cultural centers in Berlin; its

international appeal—making Berlin a major creative European city—helped the municipality realize its significance. In order to save Tacheles, the building was listed under a monument protection regulation and the artist collective was granted a 10-year lease to continue using the building (Shaw, 2005). These measures did not stop the gentrification process, it only slowed it down by a decade. The lease expired in 2009, but the artists refused to leave, again becoming squatters. In 2011, however, all artists left the building and the art center was shut down. Due to its protection as a monument, the building cannot be demolished, and it is currently awaiting a new use—likely a “formal” cultural use. Contrary to Le Corbusier’s housing complex in Pessac, which was protected because of the quality of its original design, the reason behind the protection of Tacheles was its role in the alternative or “underground” art scene in Berlin during the 1990s, with the artists’ interventions as the physical evidence of this heritage value. As such, these vernacular interventions should be preserved. However, a question remains as to how to meaningfully preserve these vernacular interventions.

#### **4.2. Heritage-place-making and city branding**

Tacheles is not an isolated example of a vernacular reuse project that led to the recognition of the different values of the site, whether economic, social, architectural, historical, or urban. For example, in certain cities or districts, other squatting communities generated subcultures in their own right that appealed to people from outside their own communities and strongly contributed to the “sense of place” or *genius loci* of the city or district. In western Europe, such cities include not only Berlin, but also Amsterdam, with many squatted buildings located in the city center and the dock sites since the 1960s. Initially, the city of Amsterdam strongly reacted against squatting in an attempt to upgrade the city center’s image; however, by the late 1990s to early 2000s, the municipality acknowledged that the alternative culture, which flourished in the city center and in the squatted art centers in particular, could offer an added value to the city. The city adopted and emulated its alternative, uncomplicated, and vibrant characteristics to strengthen the city’s image and branding. The squatters, in turn, recognized that they could more effectively cooperate with the municipality than continue to fight against it. The creation of the *Broedplaatsen* (breeding places)—residences and ateliers that were made available for artists at low or no rent—was a joint initiative between the city of Amsterdam and the squatter movements: the city provided the means to facilitate the adaptive reuse of derelict buildings; the *Bureau Broedplaatsen* organized property deals, performed basic renovations, and selected tenants; and the cultural content and day-to-day management was done by the residents themselves (Peck, 2012; Shaw, 2005).

The concept of the *Broedplaatsen* is considered an exemplary case of institutionalization of a vernacular initiative (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016; Lalou, and Deffner; Peck, 2012; Shaw, 2005). Others, however, argue that although the *Broedplaatsen* were initially set up either to legalize some of the squats or to compensate for others that had been removed in order to preserve the alternative cultural scene in the city, but they soon became more mainstream and even commercial (Bontje, and Musterd, 2009), or stimulating the process of gentrification of the area rather than working against it (Lindner, and Meissner, 2015). While gentrification of the area is probably unavoidable, Draaisma (cited in Shaw, 2005), one of the spokesmen of

the squatter movement, stresses the importance of long-term contracts in order to avoid that the *Broedplaatsen* become a catalyst for gentrification of the site itself.

One of the well-known *Broedplaatsen* in Amsterdam is the former ship yard called the *NDSM-werf*. NDSM was closed in the 1980s, and this large industrial area was squatted in the 1990s and 2000s. In 2007, NDSM became part of the *Broedplaatsen* project and the management of the area became the responsibility of the users itself, represented by “Kinetisch Noord.” In the last decennium, NDSM has become a national and international oriented hot-spot for the creative scene in Amsterdam with a skate park, ateliers of artists and creative entrepreneurs, and many festivals. Recently, however, a new phase for the site has been announced including the construction of 245 residences and a large parking area, with the plan to have 1,300 residences completed by 2025. Although the developed states that NDSM will preserve its “row character” (NDSM, 2017), this development will certainly change the character and atmosphere of the site.

The NDSM site was protected as a monument in 2007. Unlike the motivating factor leading to the protection of Tacheles, this site was not protected for its spontaneous transformation but rather for its historical value (Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed, 2016). Nevertheless, the vernacular reuse of the site has generated awareness of its potential and values. As has been the case with the Pessac houses and the historical center of Split, a discussion has arisen regarding which values to preserve at the NDSM-werf site and the (un)suitability of its current use as a *Broedplaats*.

[insert image 4 & 5 about here]

#### **4.3 Orchestrating the vernacular as a regeneration strategy**

The power of community initiatives as a catalyst for regeneration and gentrification may hereafter be used as a tool or strategy in urban development. Cizler (2014) reflects on the added value of low-profile community-driven reuse projects as opposed to large-scale commercial development, focusing on industrial sites in Czech Republic. She urges local and regional governments to support user-led adaptive reuse projects in their quest for sustainable urban development and heritage management.

The complexity of the re-use of heritage requires new, innovative approaches that would complement official policy. There is a need for a change from traditional planning models towards a strategic, long-term model which would leave room for unexpected changes such as temporary use and the greater involvement of non-institutional and non-investor initiatives in the production of a place. These approaches should be more holistic in order to allow people to adapt spaces according to their needs (Cizler, 2014: 209).

This resonates with Finn (2014) and Pfeifer (2013), who both call for implementing methods from and building on the dynamics of community-driven initiatives in the formal planning process. Aside from initiatives supported by local and regional governments, Overmeyer

(2007) reflects on the possibility of developers actively searching for temporary users in order to increase the value of their property, but states that this approach has yet to be applied in practice. Today, a decade later, owners and developers of derelict buildings and sites are attracting temporary users and opening their sites for vernacular reuse initiatives in order to show the potential and values of their property. Other authors have been more critical towards such a strategy. Mould (2014) states that community-engagement in such cases is (ab)used to serve “neoliberal political agendas”. Schaller and Guinard (2017) argue that vernacular interventions may be used as a “camouflage” for commercial development. Zeiger (2011) is more nuanced in her analysis of the tension between user-led versus formal or commercial projects as she points to the often ambiguous motivations and outcomes of user-led projects: practical or financial support from commercial or governmental agencies for community-driven projects does not necessarily undermine the social outcome of the initiative; thus, community-driven projects are not always inclusive to engage the community at large, but may instead only involve the well-educated, creative, hipster people.

Following the user-led initiative by Fabrykancka, the developer who owned the Ramisch factory applied this as a strategy by creating “OFF Piotrkowska.” After Fabrykancka had been using the site for a few years, other creative people became interested in renting spaces there. In 2012, the developer named the site OFF Piotrkowska, indicating the start of a more conscious effort to brand and organize the site based on the characteristics and connotations it had earned over the years. The aesthetics of unrenovated, abandoned post-industrial buildings corresponded with the unofficial character of the undertaken artistic activities. The combination of the user-created activities and the architectural environment, carefully selected to fit the concept and atmosphere of the site, provided a sense of “authenticity” to the space. Thanks to cultural events used to foster the space’s development, OFF Piotrkowska was positioned outside the consumer mainstream, which was used by the developer as an important element in ennobling and promoting the space (bż/b, 2014; Sowińska-Heim, 2017). Only two years after the official creation of OFF Piotrkowska, the first symptoms of gentrification appeared: more expensive shops, bars, and restaurants attracting wealthier and more mature customers. While the interiors initially consisted almost solely out of rubbish and second hand furniture and decorations, they now seem to be professionally designed, combining carefully selected vintage pieces with fashionable new materials. In 2012, Fabrykancka left the site due to an argument with the developer, and since then, all remaining users are—in some form or another—commercial enterprises.

Currently, OFF Piotrkowska is entering its next phase. In 2016, the developer officially announced a design for an intervention into the existing architectural tissue of the former Ramisch factory, including the restoration and transformation of one of the existing buildings into offices and retail spaces and the erection of a new building on the site with a similar program (OFF Piotrkowska, 2016). The outlook of the new and renovated buildings and the impact of this development on the current program and atmosphere remain questionable. Even so, the installation of new windows, cleaning the façades, and upgrading the exterior space will significantly alter the alternative atmosphere of the site. Additionally, the types of businesses targeted with this new development are more upscale than many of the site’s

current tenants. The announcement of this project has generated concern and has provoked protest among the residents, leading them to submit a petition to the conservation office (Manguszewska and Witkowska, 2016). In response, the developer emphasized that the existing unique atmosphere of the place will be maintained (Styś, 2016), and ensures that the most public area of the site will retain its public function as a meeting place with a summer cinema, relaxation zone, and new cafeterias.

OFF Piotrkowska is not an isolated example of the use of vernacular adaptation as a means to intentionally evoke a process of gentrification. In Gent (Belgium), the former Sidaplex site is soon to be redeveloped into a housing district. Awaiting the start of the project, the developers that owned the site worked together with “Kerk” (Dutch for “Church”) to provide a temporary use for the site. Kerk wants the place to be a venue where people from the neighborhood can meet in an open, free, and creative atmosphere (Kerk, 2016). Similar to the other examples described above, they use the site and spaces as found, without restoration, by adding reclaimed and cheap materials. Their activities are mainly social and cultural, without commercial interest. Unlike Fabrykancka’s initiative at the Ramisch factory, Kerk explicitly presents itself as a temporary initiative and clearly emphasizes their cooperation with the real estate developers that own the site. The developers, on the other hand, advertise the temporary use of the site extensively and openly as a marketing strategy, as this strategy has increased the popularity of the site. The planned housing development, which is called Rute, is presented to the market solely by exhibiting the ambience, convenience, and vibrant atmosphere of the site and its neighborhood; not a single image of what is to be built has been presented thus far. Instead, Rute’s Facebook page and website advertise activities organized by Kerk and present a map and small description of nice shops, restaurants, bars, and other interesting venues in the neighborhood (Vanhaerents Development & Re-Vive, 2016a, 2016b).

The redevelopment strategies behind OFF Piotrkowska and Rute both employ the mechanism underlying vernacular adaptive reuse as a means to initiate a process of gentrification, and as such, increase the value of their sites. Nevertheless, there are many differences between the two projects. In the redevelopment of the Sidaplex site, the different phases are clearly publicized: the temporary use by Kerk, followed by the start of the demolition and erection of new construction. The temporary use serves as a way to attract attention to the site, letting people experience the place and the neighborhood. The new project, however, will be built from scratch without any intention to incorporate any aesthetic nor programmatic aspects of the temporary use. The activities undertaken in the area of OFF Piotrkowska by the developer, however, are introduced gradually and carried out over a longer term. In this way, smoothly implemented subsequent phases of the commercialization of the space are almost imperceptible to an average customer. An initial introduction of cultural grassroots activities, followed by skillful use of a concept of creative activities, along with the well-thought promotion of such activities with an emphasis on the unique nature of OFF Piotrkowska, allowed for the creation of a place that fell outside of the negatively perceived commercialization (Sowińska-Heim, 2017). Thanks to connotations developed over the years and a consistently built brand, the aura of uniqueness and sense of ennoblement of the place,

associated with the paradoxical impression of the location of the project beyond the consumer mainstream, is likely to remain.

[insert image 6, 7 & 8 about here]

## 5. Discussion

This paper aims to highlight the qualities and potential of community initiatives in the field of adaptive reuse. Building further on Scott's theory, we have adopted the term vernacular to speak about this specific type of adaptation and reuse. The vernacular approach is revealed to be a valuable alternative to the "formal" or highly-specialized, top-down method to handle the existing built environment. We believe that this concept of "vernacular adaptive reuse" has significant potential, not only as an urban planning strategy, but also as a means for building and site regeneration. The concept might be used by heritage agencies, architects, urban planners, policy makers, and developers as a tool to: (1) gain a better understanding of the intangible values of architectural heritage that are important to the local community and perceived by the community as worthy of preservation; such knowledge would be based not only on theoretical discussions and consultations, but observation of practical behaviors; and (2) gain a better understanding of the needs of the community for the new function of a specific place.

Vernacular reuse as part of the adaptation process has strong social significance. It is an interesting and useful way to initiate or build upon an intense relationship with the place, as the community is directly involved in the "creation" of the functional new place and its contemporary history; it is not imposed by the developer as a finished product. In particular, we believe it is beneficial for sites that are difficult to redevelop due to their increased social value. In addition to individuals and social groups with strong political attitudes, other groups of likeminded people might be interested in engaging in the low-profile, hands-on, vernacular reuse and redevelopment of derelict buildings. An example of a building type with high potential for vernacular reuse are churches; due to the process of secularization that takes place in many countries in western and northern Europe, as well as in the United States, many churches have been or will soon be abandoned. Experimenting with community-driven projects could be a valuable strategy for creating a future for some of these abandoned churches, especially since these types of buildings play an important role in the preservation of local identity.

The power of society to question leading principles and set methodologies within different fields such as heritage conservation, architecture, urban regeneration, and site management can enable those disciplines to push their limits and rethink their own paradigms. However, in practice, the division between the vernacular and the formal is not that strict; on the contrary, the *Broedplaatsen* project exemplifies the successful collaboration between governments and user groups in establishing projects which are an added value for both groups. Moreover, as illustrated by the redevelopment examples of the Ramisch factory and

Sitaplex site, professional redevelopers also endeavor to draw upon bottom-up, society-driven initiatives.

On the other hand, social groups involved in user-led reuse often act as “amateur professionals” or “professional amateurs,” meaning they perform amateur activities to professional standards (see Cisler, 2014). They sometimes also look for professional partners such as local or regional governments, non-governmental organizations, or commercial partners. In OFF Piotrkowska and Rute, the collaboration and social involvement seems only temporary; in the end, the professional, commercial developers appear to be the only party that could sustain the projects. In the case of the *Broedplaatsen* in Amsterdam, however, the initiative and collaboration is much more balanced and seems to provide a long-term positive outcome for the various stakeholders involved. In order to achieve more sustainable projects—in social, economic, and environmental terms—further research and communication about the different aspects underlying (orchestrated) vernacular projects is necessary.

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