

CASE FOR STUDY n° 3

TEMPORARY USES OF BROWNFIELDS FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITIES
IN TIMIȘOARA (ROMANIA)

OVERVIEW OF THE REGENERATION PROJECT Type of brownfield: Industrial Budget: Costs were mainly born by private actors Starting date of the project : 2012 Current status of the project: Ongoing Type of intervention : Temporary Intervention areas: Creative industries, arts, culture	LOCALISATION AND GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT Country: Romania Region: Timiș Town: Timișoara, 3rd city of Romania with 319,000 inhabitants Geographic context: A university hub, and one of the most vibrant and developed urban areas in the country
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DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIAL BROWNFIELD

Twelve industrial buildings located outside the city centre have been closed after the end of the socialist regime. Located in the north-eastern and south-western industrial areas, these buildings were previously used for cigarettes, wool, hats, soap, candles and mustard production. They are all owned by private landlords, often living abroad, and have been abandoned for years, suffering from strong degradation. However, contamination levels were low.



REGENERATION PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objective of creative businesses (such as makerspaces, incubators and event spaces) was to host creative and innovative industries (robotics, woodworking, ceramics, 3D printing, laser engraving...) for a rental cost that is less than half the real estate average in Timișoara (two euros per square meters vs. five) . In such buildings, creative industries and non-profit organisations find a suitable, lively and cheap accommodation. Owners of these sites receive a rent paid by temporary occupiers, which allow them to reduce the maintenance costs of the building and to prevent further degradation; these temporary occupations are seen as the best option for owners in the absence of other possibilities or waiting for major investments from future developers. Another objective was to foster creative jobs in the city, requalify part of the city's identity, raise awareness on the industrial patrimony and eventually, enhance urban regeneration.

RESULTS

Between 2012 and 2020, 12 creative actors spontaneously occupied industrial buildings spread around the city with the agreement of the private owners. Occupiers encouraged artistic, creative and cultural businesses and entrepreneurs to work in their spaces. Before the pandemic, dozens of small entrepreneurs were benefiting not only from a vibrant and lively environment, but also from lower rents. Lapsus for instance, a makerspace and event space in Eastern Timisoara, rented its studios for € 200 per month on average, against € 400 – 600 in new studios. After the pandemic, three of the twelve creative spaces had to shut down.

The creation of the Timisoara Project Centre (TPC) is both a cause and a consequence of these grassroots movements in the city. Established in 2019, this new office within the Municipality aimed at providing financial support to cultural and artistic movements, in the framework of the designation of Timisoara as European Capital of Culture. On the one hand, the TPC was conceived as a lever to support the vibrant environment that was marking the urban landscape. On the other hand, it contributed to additionally strengthen creative industries in the city, with a total envelope of €2,5 million.

CONTEXT AND ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT



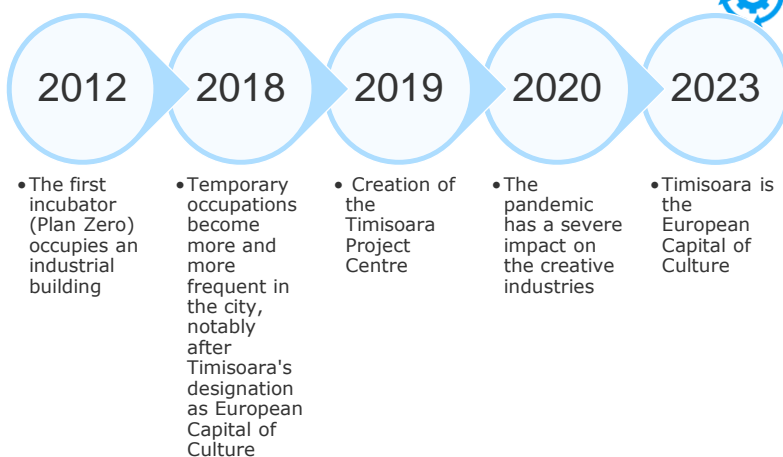
This case illustrates an informal phenomenon occurring in Timisoara, a creative hub in Romania. It has not been initiated by public authorities, nor supported (at least at the beginning) by public funds. At an early stage, the initiative was entirely led by creative industries that saw in the occupation of unused and abandoned industrial buildings a solution to rising real-estate prices in Timișoara. By their important sizes, these buildings appeared as “refuges” for artists and offered large capacities to organise events (concerts), welcome workshops or coworking spaces.



IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

Two main phases can be distinguished:

- Between 2012 and 2018, the occupation trend was essentially bottom-up. No support from public authorities was provided.
- After 2018, the designation of Timisoara as European Capital of Culture (2023) has not only boosted the artistic scene, but also led to an institutionalisation of temporary occupations and creative industries, that could benefit from public grants.



SUCCESS FACTORS



- A strong involvement and motivation of creative industries, also strengthened by the presence of universities and, in general, a young and qualified population.
- Physical features that fulfil the needs of these kind of industries : high ceiling, soundproofing, good location in the city, accessibility.
- The creation of a bottom-up creative ecosystem and community sharing common spaces
- A receptive local authority, aware of the role of culture in fostering urban development

OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES MET



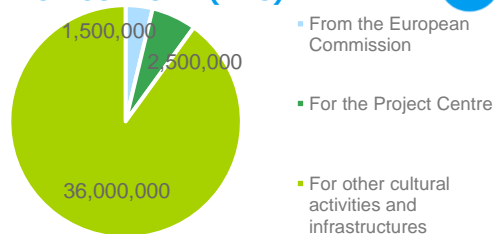
- At an early stage, lack of economic support from the Municipality (from which private companies could not easily benefit)
- An economic model based on subscriptions paid by industries to incubators and makerspaces, leading to fluctuating revenues.
- Uncertainty linked to the power of real-estate developers speculating on the areas

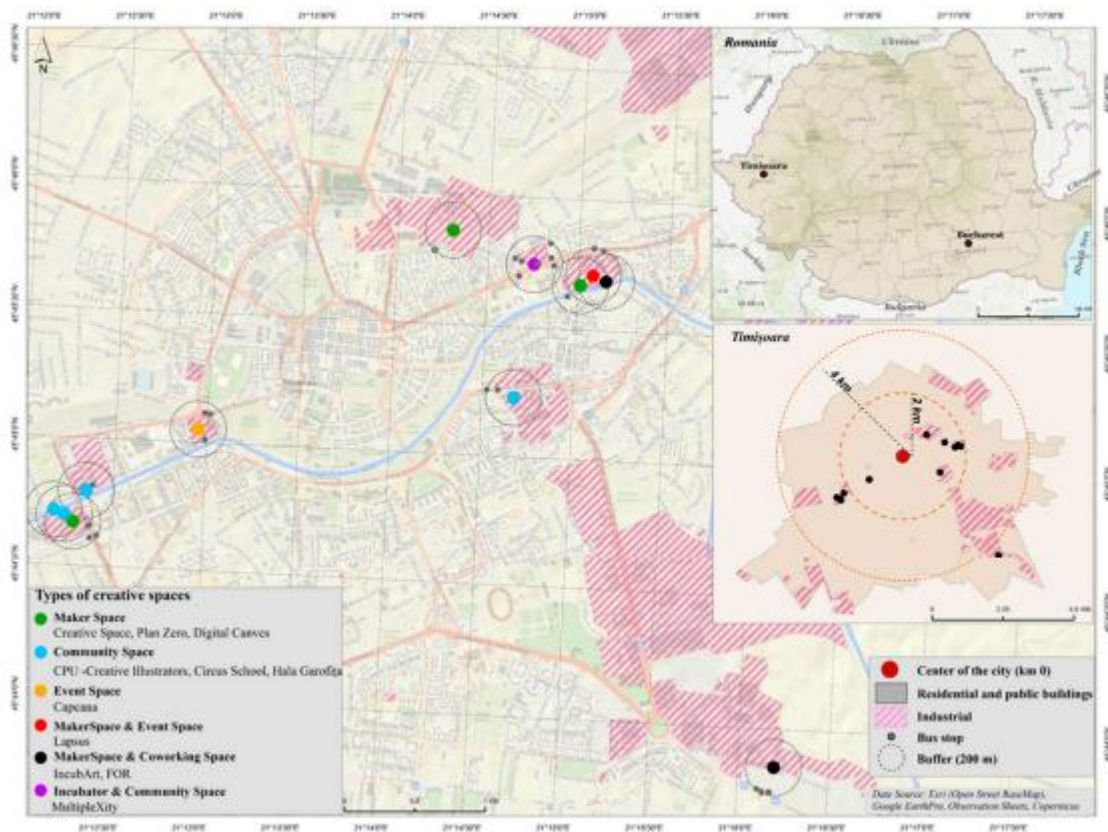
GOVERNANCE OF THE PROJECT



- 12 incubators and “makerspaces”
- Private owners willing to rent their properties, reassured by the presence of temporary occupiers
- The Municipality of Timisoara, through its Project Centre

BUDGET FOR TIMISOARA EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE (in €)





Location of creative spaces in Timisoara's brownfields.

Source: Marian-Potra et al., 2020, p. 9.

SOURCES

- Jigoria-Oprea L., Ignea F. S., 2014. Mapping of industrial landscape and analysis of urban brownfields : Timisoara perspective. *Geographica Timisiensis*, vol. XXIII, nr.1
- Mariana-Potra A.C. et al., 2020, Temporary Uses of Urban Brownfields for Creative Activities in a Post-Socialist City. Case Study: Timisoara (Romania). *Sustainability*, 12, 8095; doi:10.3390/su12198095
- Interview with Alex Boca, Lapsus. 14th February 2022.