

# Role and Conception of Temporary Pilots for Inner-City Development

## Participation and testing in living labs

In Germany, many municipalities are already actively working on the transformation of their city centres and central shopping streets. Usually, master plans and other complex urban development tools are used to help guide development and offer planning security to the stakeholders involved. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that temporary pilot projects in urban space can also have a significant effect. This was confirmed by interviews with stakeholders in the R&D project "Designing city centres as places of sustainable consumption" (SONa). Whether and how temporary pilots can realise this effectiveness largely depends on their design. Living-lab research offers many insights into the design of urban spaces so that they can develop long-term effectiveness in the context of piloting. The interview results and the findings of this living-lab research are summarised in the following factsheet.

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## 1 The role of temporary pilots within inner-city development

### 1.1 Visibility and dynamics

In one interview, the discussion extended beyond the conventional supply function of city centres and highlighted the significance of introducing new incentives for people to visit city centres (INT01<sup>1</sup>). There was also notable emphasis on the importance of improving the quality of time spent in public spaces (INT03).

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<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of the project, qualitative interviews were conducted on seven case studies with a person responsible for implementation. To preserve the anonymity of the interviewed persons, the conclusions from the interviews are quoted in coded form (INT = interview; 01 = interview number).



Temporary pilots, repurposing, and events (e.g. workshops) help to make future options and visions for city centre design tangible and experienceable before long-term, urban planning or other time-intensive redesign measures are implemented (INT01, INT04). The piloting of ideas, as formulated in the interviews, has the potential to wake the city centre "from its slumber" (INT01) and to gain insights into suitable and unsuitable formats and concepts (INT04). Successful pilots often "take on a life of their own" (INT02).

## **1.2 Formats of temporary pilots and challenges**

Temporary pilot projects can - as this case study analysis has shown - take on very different formats, ranging from the traditional events and festivals that are regularly organised in the inner-city area of most German municipalities to the short-term repurposing of shop spaces and experimental (re)designs of squares and streets. A central challenge in this regard is the absence of streamlined procedures within municipal regulations for facilitating (temporary) pilots and the repurposing of vacant spaces. Depending on the project, a large number of different municipal bodies have to be involved, a complexity that is initially daunting for many innovative urban designers. To help address this, the role of key contacts who can serve as intermediaries is highlighted as invaluable (INT01). Municipalities can support innovative pilot concepts, for example, by partially or even fully paying the rental costs for shop spaces for a certain period of time under certain conditions. The provision of space is crucial, especially for temporary pilots (INT01, INT02, INT03, INT05). Furthermore, municipalities can facilitate the exploration of shop concepts in pop-up stores by procuring high-quality, sustainable design and furnishing elements (INT02, INT03), while at the same time contributing to a pleasant consumer experience (INT05). Innovative ideas can be pragmatically realised even for vacant shop spaces posing challenges due to structural or other limitations. For instance, these spaces might be repurposed as sheltered bicycle garages for city centre visitors (INT03). The choice of use invariably depends on the specific pop-up formats envisaged or desired.

Temporary pilots in city centres face a structural challenge primarily due to fact that few municipalities own properties within these central areas. Property owners, in most cases, represent a formidable hurdle. Although in many small and medium-sized municipalities the properties in the city centre are not owned by real estate funds or other abstract ownership structures, communities of heirs and private individual owners can still pose a considerable challenge, even when they see themselves as part of the urban society (INT01, INT02).

## **1.3 Enhancing Sustainable Consumption Opportunities in City Centres**

Cities faced with a decline in the vitality of their downtown shopping areas and the looming threat of urban desolation (i.e. the *trading-down effect*) are actively striving to elevate the quality of consumption opportunities, especially through piloting (INT02, INT03, INT05). In their pursuit, the primary objective isn't always centred on the ecological or social sustainability of these offerings. However, it is within the context of pilot projects that the feasibility of an innovative and sustainable supply and consumption concept can be rigorously tested to ascertain its potential for real-world implementation (INT05).

## 2 Designing temporary pilots

### 2.1 Development of a project idea

At the beginning, a project outline is prepared in order to define the thematic and spatial parameters of the pilot initiative. Possible test questions are: which spatial, demographic and commercial structures are the starting point for piloting? Does the idea tie in with existing strategies and concepts for urban development?

Depending on the type of piloting, there are different responsible actors that should be involved. In the beginning it is necessary to clarify exactly which stakeholders (municipal government or municipal companies, politicians, business and associations, civil society, scientists etc.) should be involved, how they can be involved in the concept development, and who for example could be local implementation actors. It is also important to highlight the transdisciplinary character of a temporary pilot project, in which politics, administration, business and civil society actors work in an interdisciplinary exchange. This concerns both the participation of private individuals such as residents and local business owners. Special attention should be paid to local gatekeeper (i.e. a person with a particular power/influence to support or block an initiative). To establish informal channels of communication with those persons is of paramount importance. This strategic approach ensures that political discussions and interests permeate the community. It is through this deliberate dissemination of information that even those who may be challenging to reach directly or indirectly are still engaged, ultimately fostering acceptance and participation within the broader community.

In addition, the target group(s) to be addressed should be identified and presented. For this purpose, it is important to examine the structure of the city's/municipality's inhabitants and which groups of people currently spend most of their time in the inner city. Based on this, one can envisage how the opportunities, spatial structure and quality of stay in the inner city can be improved in order to attract a more diverse array of people.

### 2.2 Formation of a project team

In the next step, a dedicated project team is formed to take the outlined project concept and further refine it into a comprehensive implementation plan. During this step, a thorough assessment is conducted to identify any missing competences, responsibilities, stakeholders or decision-makers essential for the smooth progression of the project. Key questions in this regard are: who comprises the project team, and what additional individuals or specialized knowledge areas should be represented in the team?

Interdepartmental cooperation needs to be established on the urban/municipal side to provide fast and smooth communication channels and structures for the implementation and adaptation of the intervention. Possible review questions are: have central decision-makers expressed their support, for example through a formal resolution? Does the administration express support for temporary piloting? Do other municipal departments express support for the project? How should political bodies be involved in the implementation process?

Attention must also be paid to the formal process, including the necessary hearings with authorities formally linked to the measure, allowing it to be legally sanctioned. This involves conducting essential formal press and public relations work and, for example, posting announcement signs at the project site.

Within the project team, the goals underpinning the piloting initiative are discussed and documented. Furthermore, there is a concerted effort to clarify how these objectives should be measured and to anticipate both intended and unintended side effects. A pivotal question that arises is whether there is a shared understanding of the intentions and possibilities associated with the piloting effort. When selecting objectives, it is important to make sure that they are "SMART", i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed. Describing impact chains qualitatively can be beneficial, offering insight into the extent to which the planned intervention is likely to contribute to the chosen objectives, such as bolstering local-level participation opportunities. Addressing expected negative impacts or conflicting goals and outlining strategies for managing these challenges is equally vital. Ultimately, it is imperative to manage expectations and delineate what can be accomplished through the piloting process, recognizing that certain structural factors may surpass the scope of the temporary pilot project.

### 2.3 Realisation of the pilot

To initiate the implementation phase, a well-structured timetable is essential. This schedule should outline the necessary steps to facilitate the piloting process, including the formal procedural flow. It is advisable to allocate a lead time of at least six months for project planning. Regarding implementation, at least three months and up to one year is recommended (Wagner et al. 2021).

In the planning stage, it is important to plan for sufficient personnel resources, particularly for on-site contact persons. For example, it is possible to set up a key contact in the run-up to and during the pilot. Continuous proactive monitoring is also essential during implementation to ensure that everything is running smoothly and to gauge the current status of the process.

### 2.4 Proactive press and public relations work & evaluation

Proactive press and media engagement play a crucial role in the pilot project's progression. This involves various activities, such as informational events, mailings, and the establishment of a discussion platform well before the pilot commences. It is vital to tailor these efforts to the specific audience or target group.

Additionally, it's important to plan for project evaluation. Building upon the mutually defined goals, the impact of the piloting is systematically monitored and, whenever feasible, assessed.

## 3 Cooperation and Communication with relevant interest groups

Living labs are a collaborative study format between researchers and practitioners for the promotion of sustainable development that focuses on mutual learning in an experimental environment (Schneidewind 2014; Wanner et al. 2018; Wanner & Stelzer 2019). In them, transdisciplinary and transformative elements of sustainability research are combined and societal, long-term learning processes are triggered through so-called "real experiments" (Schäpke et al. 2017). The terms "temporary piloting," "interventions," and "real experiments" are used interchangeably here to denote **short- to medium-term interventions in real-world settings** aimed at exploring reuse and repurposing alternatives. (cf. Berding & Kluge 2014; März et al. 2022, p. 4ff.; Reiner mann & Behr 2017). Open-ended experimentation in living labs takes place in cooperation between administration, politics, business and civil society and also opens up a discursive space for negotiation on the distribution and design of space (Wanner et al.

2022, p. 230). In this context, temporary interventions are regarded as catalysts for change within spatial development processes, among others, and are frequently applied (Wanner et al. 2021, p. 236).

Whereas the classic remodelling of traffic routes often leads to criticism from residents and businesses at the latest when construction work begins, real experiments are strategically positioned to facilitate direct input from the community at various stages. This approach significantly enhances acceptance, underscored by the understanding that, as experiments, these initiatives remain open to deconstruction if necessary. Citizens are not merely passive recipients but are actively engaged, becoming integral to the piloting process (Schäpke et al. 2018; Wanner et al. 2018). It's important to acknowledge that not all citizens will be equally persuaded, but through informed engagement, participation, and targeted problem-solving, relief can be provided, substantially boosting overall acceptance compared to the conventional, hierarchical approach to infrastructure upgrades. Temporary pilots thus represent an option to gather valuable knowledge, avoid expensive planning errors, and test for optimised and cost-effective alternatives (März et al. 2022).

In order to successfully implement a real experiment, **coordinated action and clear communication** are key (Bergmann et al. 2021, p. 547; Rose et al. 2019, p. 23; Wagner et al. 2021, p. 52). It is especially important that communication with the different stakeholders as well as urban society both before and during the real experiment is approached from the beginning. This way, real experiments and temporary pilots can help to reduce fear of change and make it possible to experience something new.

Depending on the type of intervention, different actors are responsible and should be involved. **Important stakeholders** who have an influence on the future of the city centre are:

- Commercial: companies, building construction, civil engineering, trade, inner city players (e.g. retail and services, culture, restaurants, marketing associations), cities, and trade partners.
- Urban: municipal enterprises, municipalities, municipal utilities, public administration, and politicians.
- Civil: private users, start-ups, visitors, citizens, and property owners.

However, real experiments should - if possible - be **transdisciplinary**. This means that, as a matter of principle, politics, administration, business and civil society actors should work in an interdisciplinary exchange (Wanner & Stelzer 2019).

In order to ensure **broad acceptance and participation of inner-city stakeholders**, one of the first steps is to prepare inner-city-related topics for publicity (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie (BMWi) 2017, p. 5ff.). In the further process, it is also central that pursued projects are primarily oriented towards the actual problems of the interest groups and are embedded in an overall strategy. To make this possible, a common awareness of the problem must be created beforehand and the various stakeholder groups must be involved in the project's development. In this way, a sense of community and togetherness can be developed within and between the groups of actors. Progress reports create transparency about the projects and strategies and communicate to the stakeholder groups the concrete benefits of the piloting taking place. Corresponding documents also form a good basis for press and communication work (e.g. on social media) in order to promote broad support and new input from the various inner-city stakeholder groups (especially citizens).

**Cooperation** is therefore an **essential prerequisite** for successful inner city development as it is shaped by citizens, retailers, real estate companies, initiatives, and others. (Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit (BMUB) 2014, p. 8). Only if those various actors relevant to the city centre actively participate alongside the municipality, will it be possible to make the city centres fit for the future. For effective cooperation to materialize, the involved actors must come together and acquaint themselves with each other's working methods, interests, modes of operation, constraints, and assess the dependability of their various counterparts. Ultimately, this process is about establishing trust among the collaborating parties.

Inner-city revitalisation hinges on gaining the acceptance and commitment of its residents. Frequently, the catalyst for inner city development emerges from public discontent voiced by the city's population regarding the condition of their city centre. Engaging citizens constructively not only enhances their comprehension of the planning and inner city development framework but also fosters mutual appreciation among them (Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit (BMUB) 2014, p. 8). When citizens actively and constructively engage with their city centre, it not only serves as a foundation but also provides a valuable framework for their involvement in diverse citizen projects. Each of these initiatives uniquely contributes to the revitalisation of the city centre.

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