

In T-Factor, we have already travelled more than two years, experimenting with meanwhile uses within a diversity of regeneration projects in Amsterdam, Bilbao, Kaunas, Lisbon, London and Milan. We have reached a point where we are beginning to gather insights and reflections on what the potential of meanwhile use is for inclusive and sustainable urban regeneration, and what aspects we need to explore further if we aim for these practices to become the *new normal* in the way we equip cities for contemporary challenges.

In this document, you will read what we have mainly learned so far, where our thinking and practice are mostly going, and what we believe should be explored more for enabling meanwhile uses as a vision of city-making.

This is an ongoing process; we welcome further reflections and contributions.

Get in touch: [t-factor.eu](https://t-factor.eu)



*What if*  
**THE NEXT BIG  
THING ARE MANY  
SMALL THINGS.**

*What we are learning from  
meanwhile uses in urban  
regeneration.*



T-Factor gathering at La Friche Belle de Mai, Marseille.  
Photo Credits: Laura Martelloni

## UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MEANWHILE

The topic of meanwhile and meanwhile uses in urban regeneration is far from being univocally understood as a possible lever for positive urban transformations and transitions to more inclusive, sustainable and vibrant cities. Especially where meanwhile practices already have history, they may be surrounded by ambiguous understandings and contradictory feelings that, by extension, may apply to urban regeneration. Claims and concerns may be raised whether meanwhile uses are **another way to listen to needs or create expectations which will likely remain unheard**, adding to consultation fatigue where participatory engagement can be perceived as a way to extract bottom-up information with no payback. Or, as we learned from grassroots initiatives in Zorrotzaurre (Bilbao), 'meanwhile uses' is basically an unwanted label and a narrative that may hide and switch the attention from the fundamental threat to their stability and future in the area.

If we are to advance meanwhile uses as the opportunity for participatory placemaking and inclusive urban regeneration, we should always question how different people and communities understand and perceive this term and practice, and the extent to which these understandings encounter or contrast with each other, as well as with the vision of those who are actually driving the meanwhile strategy. And even when these perspectives land on the same orbit, the complexity and diversity of the interests at play require a very careful, aware and critical approach.

***We should always ask ourselves who is participating, why, how, with what perspectives and expectations.***

Approaching meanwhile uses as ways to listen to and engage with as many voices as possible is thus key if we are to set the proper conditions for participatory and inclusive cities, even if this means risking continuous situations of lock-ins.

## MEANWHILE USES AND URBAN CHALLENGES

Whether meanwhile uses can meaningfully contribute to solve pressing urban challenges is yet to be fully demonstrated. The often small and contingent nature of meanwhile uses may make them apparently unsuited for the scale and scope of actions needed.

Yet, a potential contribution of meanwhile practices is essentially in the possibility to narrow down grand challenges into the everyday life of people and urban spaces.

**It means interrogating what climate breakdown, deprivation or lack of access mean and look like for those who are actually experiencing these issues, and exploring what can be done in the meanwhile for alleviating the effects while anticipating opportunities for mitigation and prevention in the long run.**

Where meanwhile uses across T-Factor were leveraged to engage with a plurality of voices, we can observe more diversified and holistic strategies aiming to test a number of different yet connected paths to co-benefits through meanwhile intervention, as well as a higher degree of willingness and perceived legitimacy to action towards urban challenges. Moreover, concrete experiments across T-Factor's pilots such as 'messy corners', civic curricula, green shelters, digital placemaking tools and others necessarily require to interrogate the key conditions - *across access to space, maintenance, governance, funding* - that eventually allow learning and benefits to be scaled up. This in turn iterates **the need for meanwhile uses to go beyond interventions on physical spaces only.**

One point emerges especially when it comes to **how meanwhile uses can help make cities greener and sensitive to biodiversity protection and preservation** - a point that almost all the pilots are addressing, yet through different foci. Nature is typically slow and thinks in terms of seasons. Although we may all sense the fundamental value of

nature vis-à-vis human life, whether this can turn into more awareness, motivation and willingness to (bottom-up) action is well beyond obvious. As we have seen especially in the pilot at Amsterdam Science Park, the temporality of meanwhile uses may stand as a barrier to wide engagement with greening and eco-practices, because people might not immediately perceive the benefits of these practices in the short time. Moreover, if we are to really design cities *for and with nature*, **we must begin to listen to and include voices other than those of humans, and ask ourselves what the *right to the city* would look like if a tree, a bird, a frog could have their say.** If this is a long term challenge that requires us to embrace novel ways of governing urban assets - not to say to bring back the value and wisdom of indigenous cultures which we have denied or considered inferior for centuries in history, at least **in the meanwhile we can begin to ask new questions and spark novel understandings of rights to the cities that contemplate a variety of inhabitants, including non human.**



Anna's Tuins & Ruitge Garden at Amsterdam Science Park. Photo Credits: Hadas Zohar

## MEANWHILE USES AND LOCAL AGENDAS & INTERESTS

That meanwhile practices can effectively align and create synergies among different agendas and interests is one of the key assumptions of T-Factor, and yet an aspect that at present is yet to be demonstrated, especially through reliable evidence. Among the pilots, only Euston (London) and to some extent MIND (Milan) and Aleksotas (Kaunas) show some emerging, positive signs on this aspect, mostly witnessed by the continuous interest and participation of the developers to the project's ongoing evolution, increasing openness to explore and support temporary uses especially in address to vulnerable groups, and - in the case of Euston and Aleksotas - with new, joint projects elaborated on top of T-Factor for additional funding. Nonetheless, even when these agendas align there might be **the risk that meanwhile uses serve the interests and decisions of those who are driving the redevelopments, instead of being a way to put them under question. Therefore, there is continuous, fundamental work to be done in terms of negotiating interests and motivations.**

However, when the local teams were able to get the full support and commitment of the key regeneration stakeholders, this had a variety of spillover benefits throughout the meanwhile strategy, not least by overcoming blockages in access to spaces or identifying new opportunities for intervention early in time. One positive aspect can instead be said for all the Local Coalitions\* *'from within'*, especially those who are participated by many partners and organisations locally. Generally, the process had positive effects on their capacity to work together; indeed, there was no shortage of discussions and conflicting views over time, and **a lot of unplanned effort was needed to manage and overcome internal blockages.** However, most of the Local Coalitions were increasingly able to negotiate and find common ground, mostly as effect of ongoing dialogue and confrontation.

\*In T-Factor, we call 'Local Coalitions' the local alliances of actors and organisations driving the T-Factor meanwhile strategy.



## MEANWHILE USES, PLACEMAKING PROCESSES AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The approach to meanwhile uses as an iterative, agile and emergent process largely stands as the unique feature of T-Factor.

Although challenging vis-à-vis the typical linear thinking and culture of achievements in which we all tend to move and act, this process is proving beneficial when it comes to unlocking novel capacities and possibilities for meanwhile intervention and urban regeneration. It is also an approach most worthy of further exploration in response to rapid change and systemic risk, **but also against the typically different timings through which meanwhile uses, the broader regeneration path and in turn urban development and transformations happen and unfold** - if we want these layers to interact and influence each other towards spillover benefits. Moreover, **meanwhile uses allow us to explore a diversity of topics within the local development context, and to build capacity around**

them (amongst diverse stakeholders). Promising examples demonstrate how we can trigger bottom-up action towards greening and biodiversity, preservation and protection of local identities and heritage, upskilling and reskilling in emerging fields such as the circular and collaborative economy.

## MEANWHILE USES AND URBAN SPACES

The large majority of the pilots have concentrated their efforts and experiments on **public and open air and green spaces**. While this is valuable in terms of how meanwhile practices can help unlock new functions, qualities and values of public spaces in cities, **still this is a weak point when it comes to demonstrating their versatility in leveraging a variety of spaces, including buildings**. There were reasons why most of the pilots had to opt for the said choice, including problems in access and availability of spaces during construction periods. In Aleksotas (Kaunas) and Trafaria (Lisbon), for example, the Local Coalitions leveraged alternative spaces nearby the area under redevelopment as a way to overcome this issue. Similarly, Euston (London) and MIND (Milan) pilots were mainly harnessing outdoor spaces, not only as a choice but also as a necessity. In general, this difficulty in accessing indoor spaces might also entail a certain resistance of developers and regeneration stakeholders in allowing access to buildings, including in terms of risking effects of attachments which may in turn makes it more difficult to sell or locate spaces at a later stage. Somehow, this is a core issue of meanwhile uses when they start to cross private interests and future private spaces, and across the pilots, it proved to be possible only when there was direct support from developers.

**(Bottom-up) access to space for meanwhile intervention largely stands as a highly challenging aspect in the period considered**, possibly reflecting a major issue and broader trend across European cities that we often tend to ascribe to 'gentrification' and to general dynamics of displacement and replacement, but that in essence might signify **a shortage in democratic access to city-making - or at least a shortage in democratic access to the capacity and resources required to implement meanwhile uses**.



Plugaz Climbing School in Zorrotzaurre, Bilbao, Photo Credits: Plugaz



Workshop at Aleksotas Kaunas. Photo Credits: Kaunas University of Technology

## MEANWHILE USES AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Designing and delivering meanwhile strategies is a complex and demanding effort that requires proper capacities and **a high degree of adaptation and flexibility to evolving conditions**. Across the pilots, there was usually considerable time and effort spent on planning, delivering and following up. There were often multiple activities that followed each other in a relatively short timespan, which was necessary to keep engagement and momentum high, but also required a lot of planning. Typically, meanwhile strategies require **articulated teams**, including not only design and management expertise, but also competencies and skills in facility management, communication, and more. Overall, the operational aspect has proven to be particularly demanding, and in some cases created negative effects in terms of leaving time and space for more strategic and long term thinking.

## MEANWHILE USES AND FUNDING

Funding and spending are crucial aspects in the large majority of the pilots. In many cases, the financial resources provided through T-Factor were not sufficient to cover the scope and scale of the activities, especially in terms of covering capital costs or costs other than personnel and light equipment. However, some pilots such as MIND, Aleksotas and Euston were particularly successful in retrieving additional finances, especially when they deliberately designed and addressed meanwhile uses as ways to embrace local strategies and initiatives of sustainable urban development through multi-stakeholder collaboration. This may mean that when meanwhile strategies are conceived as 'platforms' for convening and hosting already existing initiatives and efforts, they could have more chances to pool resources and make better use of existing capacities and assets, tangible and intangible. One critical point emerges instead about **the need to make spending flexible, agile and less bureaucratic, hand in hand with the key nature and characteristics of temporary uses as practices by emergence and by design**.

The way money can be spent or rapidly reallocated to different budget's headings is key if we want to remain open to possibilities and discoveries along the path. **It would be also important that financial resources can be spent on hard materials and infrastructure**, especially when access to buildings and indoor spaces is hard. Pilots such as MIND, Amsterdam and Zorrotzaurre were and keep on looking for ways to raise external funding to make this possible, as the T-Factor funding poses limitations on this.

### 'ADDITIONALITY' OF MEANWHILE USES

Meanwhile uses typically occur within broader and complex processes where many factors are simultaneously at play and influence each other. Proving what their added value is in urban regeneration is hard in general, and hardly doable with attribution mechanisms and approaches. Moreover, **thinking in terms of outputs and outcomes only risks returning a heavily limited picture of what is really happening on the ground, especially when contrasting and projecting the results toward the long run of urban regeneration.**

What we have learned in this period is that the most interesting and valuable insights usually emerge from **peer discussion and critical reflection, and through stories and anecdotes captured on site.** While a lot of effort has been put on evaluating and assessing single activities, the return in terms of learning and understanding the pilots' evolution was somehow limited. Often in time, it worked way better through discussions and loosely organised moments of collective reflections. While we remain aware that 'measured' evidence is needed to contextualise and demonstrate the benefits of meanwhile uses and T-Factor as a whole, toward the next period we shall increase time and depth dedicated to ongoing reflection, particularly by putting the spotlight on 'soft' dynamics emerging all along the path and processes of running temporary uses locally, and contrasting and confronting them across the pilots and beyond.



T-Factor experiment in Everton Mews, London. Photo Credits: University of the Arts London.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE MEANWHILE

Critical reflection as we engage with as many voices and perspectives as possible.

## MEANWHILE USES & URBAN CHALLENGES

Interrogating what major challenges mean for people & communities, and exploring what can be done in the meanwhile for alleviating the effects while anticipating opportunities for mitigation and prevention in the long run.

## MEANWHILE USES & LOCAL AGENDAS

Continuous negotiation and critical dialogue with developers to mitigate the risk for meanwhile uses to 'serve' a few interests only

## MEANWHILE USES, PLACEMAKING PROCESSES & CAPACITY BUILDING

Embracing an iterative, agile and emergent process that unfolds through people in places - away from linear thinking and design.

## MEANWHILE USES & URBAN SPACES

Supporting meanwhile uses in both public and private spaces to boost democratic access to placemaking

## MEANWHILE USES & OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Working through articulated teams, with due time allocated on planning and facility management, yet leaving space for strategic thinking

## MEANWHILE USES & FUNDING

Support flexible and less bureaucratic ways of spending to enhance experimentation and creativity in types of meanwhile uses

## 'ADDITIONALITY' OF MEANWHILE USES

Emphasis on 'soft' and processual dynamics also captured through stories and peer to peer exchange





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- anai localia
- LAND
- PLUSVALUE
- espcio open
- tecnal a
- Futuribile
- KAL rauga
- FRICHE LA BELLE DE MAI
- ktu
- waag
- Propeller
- South Denmark
- Camden
- UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
- DXI
- TONGJI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF DESIGN AND INNOVATION
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