



GLOSSARY

2025



This glossary was developed and written by the team of Plateau Urbain, based on projects conceived or managed by the cooperative as well as its partners in recent years. This exciting second edition builds on Plateau Urbain's first-ever glossary released in 2021. This work attests to the collective effort to define terms used on a daily basis by members of the cooperative. Moreover, it reflects a common understanding of words frequently used in the field of temporary urban planning, rarely defined. The objective of this glossary is to promote comprehension and clarity in communication rather than collecting an exhaustive list or imposing homogeneous principles, as is sometimes the case of urban planning vernacular.

URBANISM

TEMPORARY

Action endowing a vacant space with a or several uses for a fixed term while awaiting the future, permanent project (demolition, reconfiguration, regeneration, rehabilitation). Such use in the transformation of delimited space can be understood as a temporary occupation, operationalizing contemporary principles of adaptability and resilience.

TRANSITORY

Practice of prefiguring the possible use of space with respect to the changing urban context and the future project. The period of time in which such projects develop permits planners, programmers, and users of the space alike to test new spatial configurations, discover unexpected ways to interact within it, and to be surprised by the landscape.

TACTICAL

Practice of spatial transformation, functional or symbolic, relying on frugal and agile interventions that can efficiently welcome new uses or evolve perceptions of the space.

ALTERNATIVE

Heterogeneous group of divergent and committed urban and architectural practices that rebuke conventional and/or outdated practices no longer in coherence with the realities of our urban spaces today, united by a willingness to experiment with new ways of making the city.

TRANSITIONAL

Practice of transforming urban production models and systems towards greater ecological and social resilience.



CIRCULAR

Philosophy reimagining the terms of architectural construction in the city from an anti-consumptive framework, in connection with the movement for frugality. Circular urbanism underlines the need for the regulation of extractive and wasteful practices in citymaking, by encouraging reuse and recycle as well as prototyping new socio-spatial systems in response.

LOW-TECH

Planning approach that breaks with the innovation and technological model of growth that prevailed in the 2000s. It places emphasis not on super-powered "high-tech" solutions, but the proposition of simple and effective alternative strategies that encourage slow growth.

CHRONO-URBANISM

Proposition to help reconceive the city in terms of timescales, moving away from urban planning that is guided and mitigated through space and scale. Chrono-urbanism proposes the optimization of urban space usage by organizing it according to users' rhythms of life (day, week, year).

SPACES

HYBRID SPACE

The functions of a hybrid place are multiple and interconnected: spaces for work, meetings, activities, production, leisure, services, to which a residential function can be added. Hybrid spaces can be specific to a typology of user or open to multiple communities who participate in its creation, use or management. They are based on a collective, open use of space, the principles of solidarity, and the emphasis on organic, non-lucrative exchange. Experimentation, open programming and neighborhood linkage are often hallmarks of a third-place.

SOCIAL THIRD SPACE

Unlike commercial third places, social third places are inclusively designed to bring together actors, often excluded from the urban fabric, that find it difficult to develop their professional activities given the inaccessibility of the commercial real estate market. The regrouping of such economic actors under the social umbrella attributes new ties to place and activities. Social third spaces can nonetheless include “commercial” activities that help to secure their business plan, using any profits to reinvest in the space or in other projects with social benefits.

RESIDENTIAL THIRD SPACE

Lived third places offer short-term living or temporary housing solutions for people in precarious situations, youth on the streets, exiled individuals, homeless, taking the form of shelters or shared accommodation often with social support. These third places mix lodged individuals, present 24/7 with working individuals who work, create, train or visit there.

URBAN COMMONS

Urban commons are wells of resources, places either built or unbuilt (natural, green space, brownfield) that are managed by and for a community of users. They accommodate a diversity of functions, but resist the degradation of social values when evaluated in market times and commercialized. They are most notably characterized by the collective management of the property as opposed to a shared ownership. They are part of a real estate and land context subject to multiple tensions: financial, economic, ownership, appropriation, management and use



INITIATIVES

OPEN PROGRAMMING

Classic urban and architectural programming defines the uses and functions of a space, whether built or unbuilt. Open programming, on the other hand, opens the possibility to leave all or part of its use undefined and without functional design. It ensures a place for the unplanned and spontaneous in each project, allowing context and place-based practice to take root regardless of the project's scale. This reaffirms the benefits of a non-functional planning approach, allowing users to interact authentically with place and shape it daily.

PREFIGURATION

Prefiguration introduces uses to a site for a given period of time in order to prepare and announce a future or final form of a project, as well as to test the possibility of alternative programming.

EXPERIMENTATION

A project-based approach predicated on in situ interventions, the aim of experimentation is to test the relevance of forms, functions, management, financing or governance methods. Urban experimentation takes place in a circumscribed space and time, with an inclination to diffuse its tactics broadly from the targeted site to its urban environment. It allows for modification, adaptation, and even reversal. Experimentation can follow pre-conceived hypotheses or unfurl organically, observing and reacting to unpredictable phenomena and unexpected uses.

OCCUPATION

The occupation of a space or building refers to the installation and appropriation of the site by its various actors, inevitably inspiring the creation of new communities.



ACTIVATION

The activation of a site is a phase of alternating length. It is one that marks the initiation of a new project in a building or outdoor space, formerly underused or inactive put back to use. This normally also includes a period of technical rehabilitation in order to bring the site up to reglementary standards with the aim of adapting to the new users who will occupy the site.

EQUALIZATION

Equalization is a scheme crossing different types of revenue in order to balance a global business model. For instance, high fees and charges of one site can be used to reduce the cost of other facilities. This mechanism can also be imposed on a single site, charging rates proportional to capacity to pay. Equalization supports the most economically disadvantaged by ensuring their right to enter into a site, either thanks to a balancing of resources within the economy of the site or across an organization's activities.

INITIATIVES

MAINTENANCE

Maintenance is the activity by which existing things, for instance buildings and their equipment, are cared for to extend the duration of their life cycle. Unlike repair, maintenance doesn't wait until the point of breakdown or damage to intervene. The act of maintenance can delay the expiration date of the material of the immovable world that surrounds us. In this respect, it opposes a logic of hyper-consumption and the tendency towards demolition of our contemporary building stock.

REUSE

Reuse extends the lifespan of equipment, building materials and structures. Reuse does not encapsulate specific technical or systemic processes, but rather introduces an alternative conceptual framework based on a logic that restores value to built objects, rendering them functional once more, which thereby limits the need to start anew.

REPURPOSE

Repurposing a building is a manner of reusing it and its existing resources having served their original purpose. For instance, many materials can be reused from one building to another: partitions, furniture, radiators, fire safety equipment, etc. Re-use can sometimes take advantage of its qualities (thermal, insulating, acoustic, etc.) for new and unexpected purposes.

RECYCLE

Recycling consists of re-mobilizing resources that can no longer be used in their present state. They are however more interesting when their

raw materials are harnessed and their base components extracted rather than destroyed in their entirety. The recycling mechanism thus often requires complex, long, and environmentally-intensive transformation processes.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is a collective process aimed at identifying, qualifying, and measuring the externalities generated by an actor (an association, a company, a public entity) on a territory (its population, environment, economy). Evaluation is not a goal in and of itself, but an occasion to analyse actions by weighing their impact. Beyond accountability, it can become a tool for better management, value enhancement, stakeholder empowerment, new knowledge production and policy advocacy.

EFFECT MEASUREMENT

The measurement of effects corresponds to a concrete result that can be objectified. This analysis is based on quantitative criteria, which can themselves be translated into indicators. Both "impact" and "effect" are preferable as they imply a less rationalist approach, less focused on the idea of performance and profitability.

EXTERNALITIES

Externalities are the direct and indirect effects of an actor's projects, not necessarily produced intentionally. They can be positive (e.g.: creation of a new site or even neighborhood) and also negative (e.g.: pollution generated by the activities taking place there).

INVOLVED ACTORS

COMMUNITY

A community is made up of all those who participate in the life of the site: occupants, residents, operational teams, recurring visitors and regular distributors of goods and services. The community is bound together in the daily sharing of place, which often entails the establishment of operational guidelines and motivates individuals to seek one another out in regular moments of exchange.

OCCUPANTS

An occupant is either the individual or the organization part of the community of a transitory project. They practice regular (professional, creative, commercial) activities on-site

USERS

Users are those individuals or organizations that benefit from the space. They are mainly the same occupants and residents that compose the internal community of the site, but may also extend to visitors in the instance of a project open to the general public.

RESIDENTS

Refers to the residents of a temporary occupancy project, often in emergency accommodation or reintegration situations.

SITE MANAGER

The site manager, as opposed to a site run by all occupants or residents in a horizontal collaboration, is the guardian of the project vision, largely in a role of facilitation that ensures benevolence, tolerance and mutual support on site. In addition to ensuring the smooth running of the building from a technical, regulatory, administrative and economic point of view, they act as a link between the property owner, the various occupants, and the neighborhood. In this way, they embody a spirit of connection and openness that permits each and every individual to take ownership in their role in managing their space and to develop new projects that open to the burgeoning community.



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