Temporary Uses of Urban Brownfields for Creative Activities in a Post-Socialist City. Case Study: Timișoara (Romania)

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Abstract: The linking (in terms of functional use) of brownfield sites with creative spaces is a frequently encountered phenomenon in western European, post-communist, and industrialized countries in general and is viewed as a way of revitalizing, repurposing, or simply making temporary use of them. It may also be seen in the municipality of Timișoara in Romania, where 12 creative spaces, each involving one or more kinds of functionalities (coworking space, maker space, community space, event space, incubator), are operating on such sites. A content analysis of interviews with those in charge of these 12 creative spaces brought to light, on the one hand, the opportunities represented by the existence of derelict industrial spaces, as represented by their large size, low rents, and innate flexibility, but on the other the reality of a number of long-term constraints on the use of these spaces, given the financial instability of cultural operators, the limited numbers of the public who are interested in creative activities of this kind, and, most seriously, the development pressure exerted by some real-estate developers on derelict industrial spaces.

Keywords: creative spaces; temporary uses; urban brownfields; urban regeneration; Romania

1. Introduction

Creative industries are nowadays being regarded with great interest by those seeking to identify new (linked) sources of economic growth and urban renewal, with creative projects frequently adopting “regeneration through culture” as their motto [1,2]. The exploitation of artistic creativity is a premise of innovation in numerous sectors and one that in turn makes technological development and economic progress possible [3]. As a generalization, areas that are more prosperous and more sophisticated can easily sustain cultural-creative activities, and it is possible that they could have attained this level without the prominent feature of cultural added value. Besides this, creativity can generate opportunities for countries in the course of development, since it is a value unique to the cultural context of each country and thus not the prerogative of developed ones [4].

In creative activities, professional knowledge and experience and the socio-cultural and material heritage of a place both have a major role to play [5]. Old craftworking centers that were then industrialized, benefiting from a valuable vernacular patrimony and a population with a wide range of professional qualifications, have the attributes needed today to establish themselves as anchors of development in the creative sector. This is the position in which the great cities of Central and Eastern Europe, whose post-socialist development was characterized by deindustrialization and the shift to a market economy, but one based on knowledge, find themselves [6]. The creative sector, although new on the scene in the former socialist countries, is aware of the value of the industrial
heritage and comprehends activities that have focused on the development of innovative projects via the establishing of technology and science parks and of makerspaces and community spaces, the aim being to transform decayed industrial platforms into areas where creative enterprises can be concentrated [7,8].

Those active in the creative industry sector are predominantly freelancers, NGOs, creative workers, and independent artists/cultural operators, who work flexible hours but are focused on stimulating urban innovation and on creating synergies within interested communities [9]. However, it is a recognized fact that this sector is a vulnerable one, given the economic insecurity of its activities, the difficulty artists and creative workers have in finding employment, and also the problems they experience in conforming to bureaucratic regulations [10]. Given this context, the economic development of creative-cultural activities holds out promise as a long-term way forward, yet at the same time, changing these activities into a matter of business transactions risks becoming an obstacle to cultural freedom [11], something regarded by artists and creative workers as essential for creativity and cultural excellence.

Taking the context described as a jumping-off point, the issues being addressed in this article were expressed in terms of three research questions: (1) What motivation underlie the choice of industrial spaces as a place for carrying out creative activities? (2) What are the evolutionary trends of creative activities temporarily located in brownfields? (3) What are the explanations of the temporary use of brownfields by creative activities? The aim of the research was to analyze the perception of some administrators of creative spaces with a view to identifying the factors that determine the selection and temporary use of brownfields for carrying out creative activities in Timisoara, a post-socialist city with enormous experience in traditional industry. More specific objectives were to identify the mechanisms of functioning and structuring of creative activities in industrial spaces; to understand the way creative actors relate to the use of an industrial space; and to assess factors that influence the carrying-out of creative activities within industrial structures.

2. Conceptual Background

Urban creative spaces have been attracting more and more attention in recent years. They started to be analyzed in a contextual way as soon as the phenomenon of urban gentrification gathered strength [12–14] and have begun to be the principal line of approach for the promotion of creative cities [15]. The concept of “creative city” was conceived as a rubric for urban regeneration [16], with the emphasis being placed on the revitalization of cities (with potential for economic profitability) by means of creative interventions and cultural activities. A “creative city” is a city where creative people live and/or work, where creative processes take place, and creative products are made, supported by local policies [7]. According to Lambooy [17], creative cities have at least four characteristics: Attractiveness, productivity, connectivity, and adaptability, the latter also involving openness to novelty and innovation. The knowledge and creativity based economy is specific to cities having a diverse economic structure, both in terms of the labor market, as a variety of skills, and the types of activities carried out, but also a concentration of people, which generates favorable conditions for communication and interaction [18]. Besides, interfirm networks characterized by a relatively free flow of information are deeply significant elements of the innovation process in creative cities [19].

A city’s economic success is conditioned by the presence of a “creative class” with professionals capable of creating the prerequisites for certain specific activities, including for the creative industries [20].

Creative industries define the new knowledge-based economy; they involve the generation of cultural-creative products, creative workers, and the attendant infrastructure [21]. As input, the creative industries have a cultural dimension, even though the things they produce are chiefly functional [22]. These are coming to include ever more kinds of production processes, which both integrate creative elements into larger-scale processes and use them as components in a very wide range of sub-sectors. All these extensions and ramifications of definition make it hard to have a coherent discussion about
how one might justify State intervention, through public policy, in support of the development of creative activities [23].

Being a result of the fertile convergence of arts, culture, businesses, and technologies, spaces associated with creative industries host activities of planning, production, and distribution of goods and services that use intellectual capital as a principal contribution. In a space of this kind, innovative ideas are transformed into creative products or services for society that are based on innovation and generate new opportunities for employment and for urban regeneration [24–28].

The restructuring of urban functions as a consequence of the crisis of classical industry [29,30] resulted in a proliferation of abandoned industrial sites and warehouses—brownfield, friche—in many cities [31]. During the time of waiting for public town planning projects or private initiatives to reinvent or reinvest in these spaces, it is the creative workers [32–34] who come forward with a more pragmatic vision of how to utilize brownfields. Creative activities are typically small, low capital, and flexible about the spaces they occupy [35], which makes abandoned industrial spaces particularly attractive to their practitioners given their low rents, creative atmosphere, and capacity to be transformed to suit their particular needs [36]. For their part, owners of brownfields see creative workers and their activities as a provisional, temporary solution that prevents buildings decaying and losing value and as a way of reducing the costs of managing these properties [35,37]. As well as this, the new activities add significant symbolic and social capital to these spaces and thus speed up the process of their being recovered for the real estate market [38]. The famous creative industry neighborhoods of SoHo in New York, Ile de Nantes in Nantes, and Montmartre and Rive Gauche in Paris are only a few of the success stories achieved by different artists and creative workers by exploiting the advantages provided by old industrial complexes; they are accessible and well known for their creative activity [36].

The concepts of “creativity”, “creative class”, and “creative/cultural industries” prevailing in the Western world since the 1980s were adopted very quickly in discourses that shaped urban development policies in post-socialist contexts [39]. In post-socialist cities there has been a tendency to adopt very similar approaches to the use of creativity and culture as economic resources [40] while “top-down” policies have been implemented [41]. Processes such as the enlargement of the European Union (EU), the increase of the European intercity competitions focused on the use of culture (e.g., European Capital of Culture), and the increase of trans-European networks for sharing knowledge and creative ideas (e.g., the EU-funded Creative Metropoles Projects are elements to support creative activities in post-socialist cities [39]. Global institutions also play a role in the diffusion of creative city, e.g., the UNESCO Creative Cities Network founded in 2004 which, among others, Krakow joined in 2013, Sofia and Prague (2014), Budapest, Katovice, Kaunas, and Lviv (2015), Brno, Gabrovo, Košice, and Lodz (2017), Veszprém, Sarajevo, and Wrocław (2019), and Vranje (2020) [42]. Post-socialist cities follow different paths of development based on their strengths and different legacies. Thus, some can become creative cities starting from their diverse cultural heritage, while others can gradually turn into hubs of technological knowledge. The different local contexts in which creative policies are implemented could influence both the choices made by cities and the results of these policies as they develop over time [40]. In Poznań, for example, one of the major innovative projects launched after 1990 was the rehabilitation of an industrial ensemble, the former brewery, and its transformation into a cluster of artists, young entrepreneurs, architects, and designers [43]. The same is true of New Belgrade, today one of the main areas of concentration of creative activities in Belgrade [44], and of the city of Novi Sad, where the post-industrial transformation of the Kineska neighborhood on the banks of the Danube has been achieved by means of a spontaneous and informal culture-based movement [45].

Over time, socio-economic conditions, the mechanisms governing the real estate market, local planning circumstances, and tensions that can arise with the various interested parties—local authorities, property developers, the owners of the plots concerned, neighboring interests—may have an influence on the repurposing of abandoned spaces [46,47]. This being the case, the temporary use of industrial spaces appears to be a more and more frequently adopted approach, as it is regarded as an intermediate step in the process of restoring these sites to economic usefulness [48]. Bürgin and
Cabane [49] defined temporary use in terms of economically marginal activities that occupy abandoned urban sites for a temporary period. The purpose of this temporary use of abandoned spaces is important for the definition of the concept, but this is often hard to determine, since the pioneers of projects of this kind, creative ones included, would generally prefer to achieve permanent status for their activities in their chosen locations. In fact, the trajectory followed by these projects is influenced by a number of factors, the overriding issue being the divergence between the vision/interests of the property owner or the local decisionmakers and that of the administrator of the creative project [50].

Frequently linked with a crisis involving a lack of vision for the long-term exploitation of urban spaces, temporary use can become a success story, with an innovating effect on certain types of activity [34], while at the same time, as a consequence of the immediate and flexible benefits it generates [51], it may be seen as an opportunity for urban regeneration and renewal [52], functioning according to alternative principles, based on community involvement and “the common good” [48]. Temporary use arrangements are in tune with the development needs of activities specific to the modern economy, oriented as it is towards solidarity and community. They offer a moderately priced space for experimentation suited to the setting-up of incubators for creation and for the transformation of non-formal practice into actual occupations [53]. Temporary use is therefore a particularly attractive option for many start-ups in the creative industries, since it gives creative actors access to easily maintainable spaces that are often located in central areas of cities. Often, however, such a temporary use finds itself facing the need to move on, which means that the temporary users either find themselves a different unoccupied space towards the edge of the city or, for lack of anywhere suitable, have to cease operation [54].

3. Territorial Context/Creative Industries in Post-Communist Romania

The way the creative industries have developed in Romania is characteristic of the former socialist countries, shaped as they are by the changes associated with the economic transition. The changes that followed the ending of socialism encouraged population movement and the flow of information, both as an effect of these countries becoming integrated in various international networks, but destabilized that part of the workforce that was involved in the industrial sector, which affected the industrial patrimony (among other aspects). In Romania, the knowledge economy, which exploits such things as creativity, talents, and cognitive and physical capacities, has recently been stimulated by the participation of the creative industries too [55]. While creative activities are regarded as a viable method of revitalizing industrial complexes [56], the approach is often a bottom-up one, with the initiative coming from the creative entrepreneurs. Public policies aimed at the creative sector are sequential and focus on particular domains of activity, while in urban planning strategizing creative activities are viewed only in a patchy way as a means of achieving urban regeneration and preserving the industrial heritage.

Assessments of the status of the creative industries in Romania, carried out in the past 15 years, indicate that the country has a peripheral position in European terms but a much healthier one in terms of these industries’ growth potential [57]. The creative domain in Romania receives support from funds allocated under the Creative Europe program [58] for the development of the cultural and audio-visual areas; this program also has a transverse financial component through which all small and medium-sized businesses in the cultural and creative sectors can receive guarantees and credits.

Using the DCMS definition and the SIC (Standard International Classification) industrial classification, the following breakdown of the creative industries, based on the CAEN codes, has been suggested for Romania: architecture, art and culture, handicrafts, design, media, publicity, software, WEB and IT solutions, sport and entertainment, newspapers, and journals [59]. Creative activities that have a rapid commercial spin-off (downstream activities) are found chiefly in major urban centers that have a greater potential both in terms of available human capital (in university centers, for example) and as regards demand for products of this kind [60]. It therefore follows that Romania’s creative economy is concentrated above all in counties with a highly developed urban environment and regional metropolises. The greatest concentration of creative activities is found in the capital. Data from the
Ministry of Public Finances show that in Bucharest there are over 20,000 companies that specialize in creative activities—equivalent to over 13% of the city’s economic agents. Also, whole-country statistics show a significant proportion of creative activity businesses in the counties of Cluj (7.5% of all firms registered), Timiș (4.4%), and Iași (3.1%) [61]. A European Commission assessment published in the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor [62] used performance indicators to quantify the cultural-creative potential and role of the urban centers of Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași, Sibiu, and Baia-Mare (Figure 1). On the basis of their cultural-creative attractiveness, all six cities assessed in the EC Raport competed in 2016 for the title of European City of Culture 2021 (ECoC 2021).

Choosing Timișoara city as a case study is justified by a series of characteristics that, in terms of literature review, could act as favorable premises for the emergence and development of creative activities. The major city of Timișoara is the polarization center of the Western Development Region (NUTS II), the capital of the multicultural Banat region, and the winner of the title of European Capital of Culture 2021. Its numerical size (326,636 inhabitants in 2019) places it in third place among cities in Romania, after the capital of Bucharest, and the Iași city, respectively. Since the 2000s, Timișoara and its polarization area are constantly placed among the top three cities in Romania in terms of socio-economic performance indicators [63].

The economic success of Timișoara city in Romania is the result of a cumulative process of urban functions, from political and strategic in the Middle Ages, to the economic center, since the Modern Age. Since the 18th century, the historical region of Banat (currently cross-border) of which Timișoara is part was the outpost of the Industrial Revolution in the current territory of Romania. The industrial spaces multiplied and expanded constantly, they experienced a significant development as a result of the socialist industrialization, and a wide destructuring in the first decade after the transition to the market economy in 1989 [64].
Since the middle of the 20th century, as a university center, Timișoara emphasized its university and tertiary and quaternary functions. Thus, the city has now an important number of educated and cosmopolitan consumers, representing a force in many of the complementary fields—educational, cultural, and artistic—fed by the creative industries.

Holding the title of European Capital of Culture received for 2021 by Timișoara confirms the city’s cultural strengths, but this success is also a challenge for more ambitious policies to ensure the long-term development of creative activities in support of a more democratic and sustainable “creative city” symbol.

In Timișoara, the major industrial complexes that had seen intensive development during the communist period gradually ceased operations from 1990 onwards. Although they could no longer fulfil their original purposes—from economic reasons, because of their siting, because they did not conform to current operating standards—those whose buildings are in good condition have the potential to be repurposed through initiatives taken by the creative industries [65].

These industrial spaces are characterized by their easy accessibility and proximity to the pericentral urban area. To give an example, the Calea Buziasului industrial complex in the south-eastern part of the city borders on the pericentral area and has a legacy of excellent abandoned sites previously occupied by non-harmful light industry and food industry concerns. Similarly, the one-time Wool Industry, Cigarette Factory, and Fructus industrial spaces, located in the pericentral area and close to the Bega Canal, possess serious regeneration potential and would be equally suitable for creative industry use. The repurposing of Timișoara’s abandoned industrial spaces would a way to regenerate the entire area of which they form part, to revitalize a decayed urban fabric, and to reintege into the urban space a number of extensive and currently unused pieces of land. Several disused industrial buildings, including the Cigarette Factory, the Hat Factory, the Garofita, Garment Factory, the Azur Soap and Paint Factory, and the Optica Factory, have recently began the process of functional repurposing, with creative spaces of a non-conformist type operating inside them (exhibitions, spaces for artistic creation, concert halls, etc.), or are being used for underground culture. Yet, the issue of how to make the use of industrial spaces for creative activities permanent remains.

4. Methodology

Methodologically speaking, this study involved two stages of research (Figure 2): (1) The data collection involved identifying creative spaces in industrial areas, recording their specific features and interviewing their managers, while (2) the data processing and analysis consisted of locating and mapping the items of interest and assessing the perceptions of creative space managers with a view to pinpointing the structural and functional fixed points of creative spaces in industrial areas and, by implication, the factors that determined their choice of these locations.

Data collection in socio-human research is frequently carried out by means of direct observation [66,67], the instrument employed being the observation sheet [68], which allows data to be recorded about people, processes, and cultures in different clusters [69] and sets the phenomena analyzed in the context of the spatio-temporal dynamic. In the present study, the observation sheet (Figure 3) was employed in the period May–July 2019 to identify and record 12 creative spaces currently operating in industrial areas in Timișoara. It also allowed us to classify the particular features of each space in terms of three categories that echoed the research questions addressed in this study: The present and former use of the space, its physical appearance (kind of buildings, interior configuration, state of preservation of the buildings), and accessibility of the space in physical and functional terms. Data collected were then mapped using ArcGIS 10.4 software, with the location of each creative space being established according to its geographical coordinates as taken from Google EarthPro. The identification of degrees of territorial accessibility for the spaces mapped was achieved via a GIS proximity Buffer analysis.
The process of collecting data and information was rounded off, between September 2019 and February 2020, by the application of semi-structured interviews to those responsible for the 12 creative spaces. This piece of qualitative research \[70,71\] was aimed at raising discussion topics that were decided in advance and yet thought out in such a way as to give respondents the freedom to express what was specific to their own situations. The topics raised in the interview grille thus helped us to identify the mechanisms of functioning and structure of the creative activities and to understand respondents’ feelings about the use, even for a temporary period, of industrial buildings.

The qualitative analysis was carried out by extracting information from the interviews \[72,73\] and assigning it to clusters \[74\] in accordance with established variables (Figure 4). The identification, in the course of the interviews, of key words in the form of repeated semantic structures that suggested the existence of factors imposing constraints on the practicing of creative activities completed the qualitative analysis. Results were correlated with an analysis of external factors that could potentially have an influence on the success of creative activities in former industrial spaces, with account being taken here of the role of the local real estate market and of any local authority urban regeneration projects.
| Typological clusters associated with the questions related to interviews | Research questions                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                        | What motivation underlie the choice of industrial spaces as a place for carrying out creative activities? |
|                                                                        | What are the evolutionary trends of creative activities temporarily located in brownfields? |
|                                                                        | What are the explanations of the temporary use of brownfields by creative activities |

**The specifics of the activities**

- History of creative activities;
- Types of creative activities currently practiced;
- Reasons of choosing the location in correlation with physiognomic/ architectural elements specific to the industrial space;
- Landmarks of the evolution of creative activities in industrial spaces;
- Benefits generated by the creative activities by the temporary use of industrial spaces.

**Human resources and addressability of activities**

- Opinions about the requirements and needs of the target audience;
- The specifics of the target audience;
- Defining elements of the creative community in Timisoara;
- Perceptions on the creative potential of Timisoara community and the involvement in re-functionalizing the industrial spaces;
- Data on institutional management;

**Financial resources and encountered difficulties**

- Data on space rental and maintenance costs;
- Opinions on the profitability of carrying out creative activities in industrial spaces;
- Data on funding sources and their viability;
- Data on institutional management;

**Collaborative relationships**

- Data on collaboration relations (partners, projects, sponsorships);
- Data regarding the collaborative relations with different decision makers (local administration, owners);

**Characteristics of mapped space: strengths and weaknesses**

- Opinions regarding the conservation state of the industrial building;
- Elements of territorial accessibility;
- The strengths and attractiveness of the industrial space;
- Perceptions on the capitalizing vision of the industrial space owner;

**Figure 4.** The correlation of research questions with the information collected by conducting the interviews.

5. Results

5.1. Typologies of the Sampling Locations

Our field research shows that in Timisoara there are 12 creative actors operating in disused industrial buildings (Figure 5). The majority of these are engaged in creative industries that are new for the city, which represents progress; however, they are still vulnerable from the point of view of the forming of a strong, united creative community, not to mention economic sustainability. The development of these creative activities is potentiated by the city's great wealth of experience in traditional industry and by the lively university milieu, especially given its technological tradition [75].
The precise nature of the creative activities being undertaken in the 12 locations makes it possible for them to be classified in terms of the classification matrix recommended in the World Bank Report Creative Community Space [8]. Thus, according to the definitions proposed in this report, the analyzed creative environment includes activities that can be divided into four categories of creative spaces (Figure 5) practiced in:

- **Makerspaces (n = 7).** This category includes activities that define an innovative type of industry, developed through art, creativity, science, engineering, based on access to innovative manufacturing tools and permanent mentoring. The preponderance of makerspace type locations, which epitomize an innovative kind of industry, attests to the fact that the siting of creative spaces, and especially of those that are technological in nature, occurs in neighborhoods of the city that are close to enterprises that were for a long time active in traditional industry [8].

- **Community spaces (n = 5).** Within these locations, the activities carried out aim at consolidating social cohesion through creative-cultural events (art exhibitions, performance art, and lectures), the creation of a new entrepreneurial community, by proposing specialized workshop programs, respectively. The revitalization of declining spaces through the involvement of the creative community is also a basic functional landmark of this category of spaces.

- **Event spaces (n = 3) are focused on organizing thematic events, while in some cases, they even host business meetings. The events are addressed mainly to the community that joins the respective space.**

- **Coworking spaces (n = 2).** Particularly attractive today, within the context of the fast development of remote economic activities or those in the independent sector, these locations bring together artists, IT programmers, creative fields consultants, who, based on membership, have access to various facilities.
• Incubator (n = 1). This location offers a common meeting place for the community concerned with the development of businesses and start-ups, within which managerial assistance, coaching sessions, etc., are provided.

Some of the spaces identified (n = 5) fit into several domains of activity and thus have a heterogenous style of operation that brings together two or three kinds of creative spaces. Such a hybrid model can be of two kinds: One in which the space itself is partitioned between basic activities of a makerspace type and ones of a coworking or event space nature, and a different system in which the creative structure is a combination of community space, event space and incubator.

5.2. Favorable Factors of Using Brownfields within Creative Activities in Timisoara

5.2.1. The Characteristics of the Industrial Spaces

Those interviewed generally see the siting of creative spaces in various industrial structures as an opportunity. Their positive perception of the arrangement is based on the link between the motivation that underlay the inception of the creative project and the particular nature of the activities undertaken and the benefits and possibilities that an industrial space, given its characteristic features, has to offer. Administrators of makerspaces make particular reference to the generous size of industrial buildings, allowing them to be compartmentalized to suit individual needs, and to their good structural quality:

“It isn’t just the modest rent that influences the choice of these industrial locations but above all the fact that they give you a large area” (AB, Lapsus); “The factory building was in good condition and its thick walls deaden the sound of the various machine tools we use in our production processes” (FV, IncubART).

This need for a large area to devote to the activities pursued in makerspaces is a principal element influencing the choice of a location, given the large number of domains of activity that cohabit inside such spaces: Electrotechnics, electromechanics, product design, robotics, woodworking, ceramics, 3D, printing, 3D modelling, and laser engraving. Industrial workshops are large enough to meet this need, a point underlined in what the administrators say: “We have nine rooms, which means we can allocate a different space to each of the activities practised” (AV, CreativeSpace). Interviewees made a link between this positive aspect and proximity, since these locations are situated in areas where industrial activity is concentrated, which gives new opportunities for collaboration with other members of the creative community and at the same time means that noise pollution is not an issue:

“What we do makes a noise, but we are in an area where there is other industrial activity going on, and we are in the basement of a building, with no windows that could be broken as the result of our using various kinds of apparatus, and that’s an advantage for us” (AV, CreativeSpace).

The community spaces identified are venues intended to create synergies based on shared values via learning activities, exchanges of ideas and the expression of ideas through a variety of media (painting courses, photography, ceramics and sculpture, digital art, art exhibitions, talks, performance art). The link between the particular nature of the activities carried out in community spaces and event spaces and the consequent requirements as to location is one frequently made by administrators of spaces when talking about the advantages of their chosen site: “extensive ground area”, “being able to subdivide the space into different rooms”, “the considerable height of the room, which makes it possible to show films or set up a stage”. The very initiating of these kinds of creative projects is described in terms of a desire to make a contribution to the rehabilitation and restoration to use of the industrial patrimony:

“The inspiration for founding the MISC. organisation sprang from a wish to rehabilitate and promote an industrial space through art; from a wish to give the community a space for culture and to work on some cultural projects that would directly involve the community of the Iosefin industrial neighbourhood” (AW, Misc.).
The setting up in some makerspaces of a cowork-type component is a different mode of making best use of large industrial workshops and is regarded by interviewees as a way of reducing to the minimum the costs of having the entire space in use.

Besides the benefits generated by the generous size and good structural quality of industrial buildings, the creative actors point to another factor, related to appearance, which influences their choice of these locations, namely industrial architecture, which, by its very nature, enhances creativity and upholds freedom of creative expression see [36].

“They have an aesthetic that is all their own […], you don't find it in new buildings. Industrial workshops are attractive from an architectural point of view; they are like walled cities with little fortresses” (AB, Lapsus).

In addition, the architecture of industrial buildings allows them to provide working spaces that are minimalist in design, a desideratum in creative work since on the one hand they can be modified to suit the particular activities being carried out and on the other the creative workers’ products become visible in the new setting of formerly abandoned spaces (Figure 6).

![Figure 6. Types of creative spaces located in Timişoara’s brownfields: (a) Event space; (b) maker space; (c) coworking space.](image)

5.2.2. Costs Associated with Renting and Managing the Industrial Space

Given the acknowledged economic precariousness of the independent cultural-creative sector [76], made worse over time by various critical moments such as repeated recessions (2008, 2018), all the more obvious in a country that has passed through a period of economic transition and is still a novice when it comes to establishing a regulatory framework and implementing public policies that address this sector, the issue of making the costs associated with the carrying out of creative activities affordable is an aspect of management that exercises the minds of creative entrepreneurs in Timişoara. Thus, besides the fascination that creative workers (artists) feel for old industrial spaces and their desire to promote them through art, the majority of interviewees mentioned low rental costs as their chief advantage (Lapsus, Creative Space, Plan Zero, IncubArt) and as something that made up for any necessary investment in rehabilitation and fitting-out. These low rents may be explained by the owners of industrial buildings having an interest in preventing them from decaying and so losing much of their value, even though in most cases the arrangement is seen as merely provisional:

“Given that the building is a former industrial space that required money spent on rehabilitation, the rent is less than half the real estate average for Timisoara; it’s two euros per square metre, while the average is five” (AV, Creative Space)

With the exception of two individual cases (Creative Space, IncubArt), those interviewed listed among the positive factors that influenced their choice of industrial locations, alongside affordability, the good structural standard of the industrial buildings that they had turned into creative spaces, which meant lower rehabilitation costs: “it already had double glazing, which greatly reduced our fitting-out costs” (MD., Plan Zero), or again “the structural resistance of the building, a consequence of the high quality...
materials used in its construction, meant that no money needed to be spent on strengthening the walls” (AW. Misc.). A further advantage is that industrial buildings are capacious enough to provide space for activities that generate immediate financial profit (concerts, renting out offices as coworking space, workshops).

5.2.3. Features of the Insertion Space

In an urban morphostructural context of polynuclear type, in which the historical areas have been preserved almost entirely, the creative activities have capitalized on the disused industrial platforms located especially in the pericentral area. The distribution in the urban space of the analyzed locations reflects, with some exceptions, two concentration areas, one in the central-eastern side (former Azur factory), and another in the central-western side of the city (area of the former Cigarette Factory), along the Bega canal (Figure 5). The emergence of these urban areas of creative projects coagulation is reflected in the discourse of respondents as a positive aspect. Firstly, they generate opportunities for co-operation and exchanges of ideas. Secondly, these sketches perspectives for the creation of hubs, seen as solutions for consolidating the creative community of Timișoara and increasing the potential for action and continuity of creative activities in industrial spaces, which also leads to greater visibility of creative products in projects urban regeneration.

“There are other creative spaces in this building, we enjoy their presence, we have developed and thought together projects, and when they need our space for different events, we give them the access key here. The success of some projects is greater when we manage to be closer spatially; it is a setback for the real estate interest” (A.B. Lapsus)

Studying the accessibility of a space involves the making of connections between its physical, geometrical accessibility (connected with means of transport and opportunities for moving around in the city) and its symbolic, perceived accessibility [77]. Where the latter is concerned, the links that are established between physical presentation and spatial reality are often paradoxical and are influenced by the attractiveness of the space in question. A space that is attractive often seems more accessible despite being a long way away, since its attractiveness distorts our perception of the distance–time relationship. Most of the creative spaces identified in Timișoara have this happy conjunction of the strengths of physical and symbolic accessibility, bearing in mind that many of the creative activities project a perception that plays an important role in the way they function.

Ensuring comfortable, safe access is a contemporary challenge. Leaving aside questions of spatial discontinuity as regards footfall and attractiveness, many of Timișoara’s creative spaces have taken access to public transport into account when deciding on a location. The Buffer proximity analysis shows that there are two or three public transport stops per direction within a radius of 200 meters of creative spaces (Figure 5). For example, IncubArt, the only space located in the periphery of the city, is close to the line of the city’s most frequent tram, thus ensuring easy access to and from the central area. Other creative spaces have capitalized on the new infrastructure for cyclists, as in the case of those operating in the abandoned industrial spaces of the Fabric and Iosefin neighborhoods (MISC., Plan Zero, Școala de Circ, Lapsus, Digital Canves, FORmarkerspace etc.), which make full use of the cycleways now running beside the Bega Canal.

Again, creative spaces can be more accessible if located close to a commercial or cultural center on the periphery of the city than in a central area. This is true for some creative spaces sited near large commercial centers, with their public transport access and guaranteed flow of visitors (Creative Space). Symbolic accessibility plays a major role in decisions about the siting of creative activities, since non-formal, abandoned settings have the power to transcend the material limits of the literal, industrial factory and attain the status of the immaterial “factory of ideas” so necessary for artistic creation: “post-industrial spaces have become a refuge for artists” (A.B. Lapsus). This accessibility has a direct effect on the attractiveness of the space concerned.
5.3. Restrictive Factors of the Development of Creative Activities in the Brownfields of Timișoara

The use (even temporary) of brownfield sites as spaces where creative activities can be practiced generates benefits, many of them ones that those responsible for Timișoara’s creative projects had previously described as objectives. Restoring industrial patrimony buildings to economic productivity, rehabilitating industrial structures and bringing renewal to industrial neighborhoods, raising consciousness regarding the value of the industrial patrimony, and promoting it by means of culture—all these arguments are mentioned again and again by interviewees in their conviction that brownfields deserve to be exploited for creative activities (Figure 7).

“Our location here was a benefit for the owner, which is why we believe that the rent was lower, because we invested a lot in the interior rehabilitation of the building, [. . .] before there was a mustard factory here, and the walls were in a deplorable state” (AV, Creative Space).

“First of all, this creative project, through its activities, aims to save from decline a construction of sentimental value for the inhabitants of this area, who for years have carried out their activity in this building, and subsequently this element of to promote industrial heritage, including tourism” (AW, Misc.)

![Figure 7](image_url)

**Figure 7.** (a) Former Optica factory, now Incubart; (b) former Azur Soap and Paint Factory, now Lapsus and ForMakerspace; (c) former mustard factory, now Creative Space.

Quite apart from the advantages generated by the conversion of brownfields into creative spaces, the creative entrepreneurs link temporary usage with the immediate, even though short-term, benefit that owners receive in the form of rent paid and the tenants’ contribution to the preservation of buildings. However, the way the administrators of creative spaces speak about the length of rental contracts makes clear the constraints that severely limit creative entrepreneurs’ chances of being able to make long-term use of industrial platforms. Figure 7 shows the rehabilitation of brownfields through creative activities.

5.3.1. Financial Vulnerability

Financial pressure is a fact of life for many non-profit organizations [78]. In this case too, the low level of financial sustainability of creative activities is frequently cited as the decisive factor working against creative projects managing to establish themselves permanently in industrial locations. In Timișoara, we cannot yet speak of a flourishing of activities of this type, which means they draw their financial support from members’ monthly contributions (Plan Zero, MISC, Creative Space), donations from various partners (Nokia, Flex), renting out working units (Incubart), charges for attending a variety of courses, creative workshops, and events (Creative Space, Nomo, Școala de Circ, Capcana, MISC.), and to a lesser extent from the sale of products made in small-scale production workshops (Incubart). This being a sector that is relatively new for Timișoara, creative entrepreneurs are still at the stage of testing out and promoting some of the services they provide, trainings and workshops for example, with the result that the financial contribution made by this line of informal and non-formal education currently only partially succeeds in ensuring the economic stability of
the activities concerned. For most of the creative projects, members’ subscriptions remain the chief source of financing, but, as interviewees explain, there are risks associated with this kind of financial arrangement: They frequently find themselves facing problems caused by members of the association being behind with paying their membership fees, income fluctuates with membership numbers, and the danger that they will not be able to pay the owner of the space their rent is a constant concern.

“Membership numbers in our association fluctuate, which means we don’t have a steady contribution income to rely on month by month; the process of collecting the money is stressful, with delays, leading to delays in our paying the rent too, so naturally the owners put pressure on us” (MD, Plan Zero).

Only those creative spaces that have the status of cultural organizations receive financial support from cultural foundations or public bodies (Lapsus, Multiplexity), but they still have to face the problems that flow from the public’s low level of interest in the creative sector.

The local authorities provide few opportunities for the creative milieu to develop, and financial support is not generous. One factor here is that public decision-makers have a limited amount of control over industrial sites, the majority of which were privatized in the 1990s, and that creative sector initiatives are predominantly private ones. The few creative initiatives that have been gathered under the umbrella of cultural associations (Multiplexity, Lapsus), which could be given financial support, are only at an incipient stage, and the projects they promote are little known.

“We want these spaces to function as places in which a livelier artistic community can come together” (A.B., Lapsus)

5.3.2. Poorly Articulated Local Creative Community

Analysis of the internal factors reflects a further restrictive issue, which, in the medium term, has an impact on the progress of creative activities and, by implication, on the use of industrial spaces, namely the limited size and vibrancy of the local creative community. Although the activities laid on by creative spaces are aimed at a varied target group, the fact that Timișoara’s creative sector is at an early stage of its development means leads to there being only a small number of people who are interested in practicing creative activities and participating in events initiated by creative entrepreneurs. An additional problem concerns the nature of the involvement of those who belong to the creative structures themselves, since for them this is not a regular arrangement but more of a hobby; this being the situation, long-term financial support is difficult.

“Passion no longer comes first; everything is commercial. [...] We started businesses too quickly, people aren’t ready for creativity or open to it, [...], I have the impression that we are 25 years behind civilisation, there is no active creative-domain community” (AV, Creative Space)

5.3.3. Low Degree of Involvement in the Management of Creative Activities

Interviewees also speak of a number of problematical issues as regards the coordination of creative projects. For the majority of the administrators, their involvement in managing creative spaces springs entirely from their enthusiasm for particular creative activities, but they actually work elsewhere. The time they invest in growing creative activities is often directly proportional to the success of these creative projects.

“With the exception of the administrator, no one wants to take on a managerial role” (MD, Plan Zero); “There are other spaces that have started a business of this kind, but they did not succeed, because you have to have someone responsible for running them full-time” (AV, Creative Space).

5.3.4. Disadvantages of Location

The choice of these industrial locations has brought with it a number of disadvantages and risks. These are caused, on the one hand, by being close to tall residential buildings (Multiplexity), heavy urban
traffic and the resulting constant noise (Multiplexity), a lack of natural daylight (Creative Space, Capcana), or problems with disabled access (Creative Space), and on the other by the constant threat of being forced to move, because of the high level of interest from property developers in the land around these industrial premises, with its potential for being used as part of large-scale urbanization projects. This means that temporary use is itself a risk that creative workers take on whenever they embark upon activities in these kinds of spaces. Obtaining authorization to use a space involves a process of negotiation between the interested potential users and its owners, who are looking for reduced maintenance costs and a better image. This type of temporary use is viewed by owners as the best option for vacant spaces in the absence of other development possibilities, but they are frequently skeptical about whether these kinds of activities will be able to generate the income needed to cover costs long term.

“Owners think that artists don’t produce anything, they don’t have confidence in our ability to pay the rent, but neither do they intend to invest in post-industrial spaces for cultural purposes” (A.B., Lapsus).

5.3.5. Real Estate Pressure

The influence of the real-estate market on the siting of creative spaces in Timișoara is a complex issue, affected on the one hand by the interests of property developers with significant financial resources and on the other by the as-yet-slight contribution of investors in creative clusters. As in other large cities in Romania, the property market in Timișoara shows an inverse gradient from the center to the periphery. Prime, well positioned pieces of land command high prices and major investment is therefore needed for them to be made economically profitable. In terms of competition, the balance has come down in favor of the large developers, who have already laid claim to the most prime sites in Timișoara, but here and there and almost imperceptibly other, smaller spaces are being reinvented in a creative way for community use. The temporary use of industrial spaces, in the respondents’ perception, is directly influenced by the real estate pressure and, in this context, by the owner’s interest in obtaining a more valuable financial offer:

“I haven’t been here for more than 5 years, it’s just a matter of negotiation until the owners here sell it to real estate developers, and it’s very close to the mall.” (A.V., CreativeSpace)

In correlation with the development of the real estate market and the desire of the authorities to develop urban regeneration projects aimed at standardizing the urban interface, there is also the phenomenon of gentrification, with increasing trends in the next period and immediate effects on the continuity of creative activities in former factories locations.

“Spaces are freed while the activities are moved to different locations to gentrify the area. […] Industrial locations represent a huge potential, but I think that they will disappear in 10–20 years and even more from the effervescence of microcosm and creative micro-community will be gentrified” (A.B., Lapsus).

The representatives of creative activities that we interviewed were almost unanimous in giving lower rents as the reason they chose their locations, but in most cases, it was clear that they were also motivated by the acute shortage of suitable sites for creative activities and the lack of involvement of the local authorities in finding facilities for the cultural sector.

At the level of fine words, the local authorities are in favor of the idea of repurposing the huge areas of industrial land that Timișoara inherited from the communist period. The General Urban Plan of Timișoara, finalized in 1998 and still in force today, contains no clues to strategies for implementing the foreseeable repurposing of this industrial/military patrimony, with a minimum plan of coherent actions and their flexible adaptation to the demands of the new free market situation. The strategies formulated by the city administration put forward the concept of urban self-regeneration of the traditional historic neighborhoods, with particular emphasis being placed on making the Cetate [former citadel]
quarter functional once again and turning it into a “creative open-air mall”. At a concrete level, these strategies took shape in a tertiary sector redevelopment of the Cetate quarter and in encouraging major investors and developers in the commercial/residential sector to position themselves in the abandoned industrial spaces immediately north of the central area. As for repurposing brought about by investors in the creative sector, this has taken place in a non-obvious and holistic manner in abandoned industrial spaces in less prime locations, without their having set out in a programmatic way to do this. It has happened because small investors in the creative domain spontaneously found a home in more financially accessible spaces, which naturally led to their speaking in unison and collaborating in administrative procedures. Something else that becomes clear from the interviews is a measure of uncertainty: “However, we are aware that nothing is permanent and are prepared to relocate at any moment. That’s the story of a site. If you aren’t the owner, you can’t have any security” (A.B. Lapsus).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The article presents an exhaustive research of all the creative activities that take place in industrial spaces, in a post-socialist city, Timisoara. Despite the large number of derelict industrial spaces, only 12 of them are refurbished through creative activities.

As in the case of other post-socialist cities, such as Ostrava [79] or Novi Sad [45], the present study highlights the importance of small entrepreneurs and spontaneous initiatives in asserting the potential of creative activities to capitalize on the potential of former industrial spaces. A common element seems to be related to the inertia and outdated mentality of the authorities, for which only large-scale projects matter and their inability to perceive the multiple beneficial valences of creative activities in this field. As in the post-socialist cities mentioned above, the intensity and scale at which industrialization took place seem to explain the low interest of the authorities, but also of the entrepreneurial environment and even of the local population for creative activities such as those investigated.

The answers to the research questions addressed by this study, based on an in-depth research, may have helped to understand the intimate springs of the dynamics of the investigated field.

The first research question aimed at investigating the motivations underlying the choice of industrial spaces for the setup of creative activities. Thus, the physical and physiognomic strengths of the wrecked industrial spaces for such activities are significant. The generous dimensions make it possible to combine different activities, namely flexible compartmentalization or the entire process—from creation to production, but also to exhibition and launch events—in the same location. The solid structure of these spaces recommends them to accommodate production processes involving powerful machines and trepidations. Minimalist architecture is preferred by creative workers, for whom any element of aesthetics would have meant a hindrance both in the process of creation and in the exhibition of their works.

The second category of attractive factors are of a financial nature, with direct reference to low rental and maintenance costs; these elements are essential, given that most activities are still in the growth phase, in a socio-economic environment that still does not value them enough.

The third category of favorable factors includes aspects of insertion space. It must be physically accessible (easily accessible to the location by various means and means of transport), or be symbolically accessible (creative invitation), or functionally accessible (if the space is located in close proximity to a previously frequented center for commercial function).

The second research question focused on the evolutionary trends of creative activities located in derelict industrial spaces. In a city with an industrial tradition and traditionally oriented, especially towards financial efficiency and productivity, the sector of creative activities such as those investigated is relatively new and little valued. The activities are timid, and the modest financial benefits make many of the activities grow slowly, remaining for a long time in the hobby stage for their managers. In this way, it is not possible to speak, at this moment, about a well-structured creative community that revolves around these creative spaces. On the other hand, from the analysis of urban planning documents
and local authority projects, it resulted in their disinterest in capitalizing on creative activities for the revitalization of neighborhoods and urban regeneration. Such an attitude is undoubtedly an aggravating factor see [80]. It is worth noting the great variety of activities and creative spaces. This highlights a creative potential worthy of note, able and eager to manifest in various directions and directly connected to the ways of manifestation on a global scale.

The third question sought to reveal the explanations for the temporary use of industrial spaces. The incompatibility of the activity with the present location was a very punctual explanation, the most frequently invoked factor being related to the real estate pressure, which makes the relocation spectrum hover at any moment, as soon as the owners get the price they want. The uncertainty of this type is completed with the financial one, which makes the administrators of the activities to be looking for spaces with more tender rents. The lack of a public database on land prices makes it impossible to objectify information on the impact of real estate pressure.

It remains to be investigated whether the year 2023—when Timișoara will be the European Capital of Culture—will represent a positive bifurcation in the evolution of these activities. In this sense, the directions to be researched, in the future, will aim at: Solving the limitations of this research, related to the availability of data (access to the map of real estate prices and to updated urban development plans) and the analysis of the structuring of a creative class; analysis of the multiplier impact of creative activities and the extent to which they will become profitable and significant in the city’s functional portfolio; and assessing the fermenting role of urban regeneration for the insertion neighborhoods and the types that urban regeneration has taken, starting from these activities.

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