

THE SOUL PURPOSE OF MANAGING EMPTY REAL ESTATE

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VACANCY MANAGEMENT AND THE LIVEABILITY OF A CITY

An empty building is a lifeless place in the city. These buildings require a meaningful use. Without human energy and creativity, these locations do not fruitfully contribute to the community. Temporary use is the answer and can make a positive contribution to the liveability of a city. In particular, use at street level—the plinths—buildings can give a very different meaning to a building and the area. My company, ANNA Vastgoed & Cultuur (ANNA Real estate & Culture), conducts creative vacancy management. From this field, I see an important role for property managers in the use of empty plinths.

From a temporarily unoccupied building, a common meeting place can be created. It is the temporality of the sites that provides a fascinating dynamic and a common ground. The projects that take place, come into existence during a transition, a continuum that in itself tells many stories. There is no reason to design the building for a project: the process of putting the building into use is the project. Within such a context, what can you do as an independent artist, designer, performer, researcher, or scientist? A building consists of different aspects: architecture, location, feeling, future, history—but the context of a building serves as inspiration for expression. The context creates an environment where people, visions, and manifestations connect, even if at first sight they had nothing in common.

THE PLINTH

The use of the plinth is an additional challenge in vacancy management. Indeed, there is a direct link with the environment: entrepreneurs, residents, and visitors. The plinths of buildings determine, to a large extent, the experience of a city. A properly completed ground floor 'finishes' the city. A storefront that is dark and empty or an office block that looks faded and barren, are places where you quickly want to pass by. But what is an appropriate use of the plinths, where an owner and a passer-by, neighbour or co-entrepreneur can all be happy?

MATCH BETWEEN OWNERS AND USERS

When choosing a temporary tenant, it is important to consider a number of factors, including the demands of the owner. For instance: should it be clear that the building is for rent? If so, it may not be an option to establish a professional gallery, because the message of the availability for potential tenants should have prominent presence. If an owner wants to show that he aims to give something to the neighbourhood, you can program projects that have a direct relationship with the surroundings.

Also each location brings its own challenges. For instance, what is and is not allowed by the fire brigade? Is it a shop, living, or entertainment area? You can obviously not have night events take place in a residential area.

And finally there are the end users, the people and initiatives that are full of energy and good ideas to fill empty spaces. They have desires and preferences. A good vacancy-manager considers these factors in every vacant building and tries to make a match between the demands of an owner and user preferences.

A PUSH FOR TEMPORARY USE

These examples of temporary uses exist only by the grace of the good will of an owner. More and more offices and shops are now vacant and their managers hope, often in vain, that they will be rented or sold in the near future. In times of crisis, the value of temporary socio-cultural interpretation is difficult to measure in monetary terms. ANNA, and other people and companies with similar new initiatives can convince owners to stay, to experiment, and to gain visibility. Temporary use serves many purposes: increasing liveability, management and security, experiment for future forms of conversion, build image for the parties involved, and enhance community cohesion. Temporary use should become part of policy and vision in order to be ahead on long-term plans. In this way temporary use will become a way to cherish and maintain the soul of property or even give it new meaning.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD: POP-UP STORES, THEATRES AND EXHIBITIONS

ANNA@BH139

In The Hague, ANNA Vastgoed en Cultuur now manages ANNA@BH139: an old phone shop in a large office building. The former shop is located in a derelict shopping street and now houses temporary projects including a theatre, exhibitions, and pop-up stores. The involvement with the neighbourhood will get a place such as the theatre 'Masterplan Geluk' (Master plan of Happiness) here to stand with and by entrepreneurs from the street.



ANNA@BH139 - exhibition 'Blutbad' from Berlin artist KoDiAk

ANNA@KV20

Not only store plinths, office buildings also have a large presence on the street level. The former AXA building at Korte Voorhout in The Hague acquired a temporary tenant after seven years of vacancy: ANNA@KV20. In a prominent position located at the entrance of the city, it is now a building that attracts people. The high windows ensure that users are clearly visible from the street. In addition, a variety of programmed public activities provide a constant outside-to-inside dynamic, and vice-versa. For the owner *Rijksgebouwendienst* (the Government Buildings Agency) the building is now welcoming and associated with good property management.



ANNA@KV20 - plinth during Theatre Instituut NL exhibition 'Wie is de Nar'