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Safeguarding Interim Urban Spaces: The Scholarly State of the Art

Dr. des. Thomas Betschart
Dr. Jonas Hagmann

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Intermediary urban spaces, such as temporary uses, occupations of vacant land and informal appropriations, are becoming increasingly relevant in contemporary urban development across European cities. These spaces often emerge in response to economic shifts and planning uncertainties. They act as flexible, adaptive nodes within the urban fabric and carry the potential to foster social innovation. At the same time, their activation imposes questions of public security. On one hand, they may support safety by encouraging informal monitoring and creating social presence. On the other, their temporary status, ambiguous governance and informality can pose specific challenges for policing, safety and control. In this way, intermediary spaces are both shaped by and shaping broader dynamics of urban security. Despite their growing presence, the security dimensions of intermediary spaces remain underexplored. Much of the existing literature on urban security focuses either on formal public spaces or informal settlements, which leaves a conceptual and empirical gap when it comes to these hybrid, transitional environments.

This review draws together debates from urban studies, planning and security research to clarify how intermediary spaces relate to questions of urban security. It explores four core themes: the conceptualization and governance of intermediary spaces; their characteristics based on temporality and institutionalization; theoretical perspectives on urban security and the forms of security governance—both formal and informal—that operate within them.

Findings show that intermediary spaces are defined by fluidity and temporality and often exist between formal and informal systems of governance. They may open up opportunities for community-based safety and informal regulation but also give rise to contested practices of control and securing. Security in these settings is shaped through hybrid arrangements involving local actors, municipal authorities and private stakeholders. These dynamics are closely tied to questions of spatial justice, inclusion and public discourse which raises concerns about how security interventions reflect and reshape power relations in the city.

By outlining these dimensions, the review sets the stage for future empirical work. It suggests that comparative approaches, methodological openness and attention to emerging technologies may offer valuable insights into how intermediary urbanism interacts with and potentially reshapes the politics of urban security.

Dr. des. Thomas Betschart, **Dr. Jonas Hagmann**

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The projects is hosted at the Office for Cantonal and Urban Development, Basel-Stadt, Switzerland.

contact: thomas.betschart@bs.ch

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1. Introduction

There is one thing, however, that all the heterogeneous forms of open source urbanism have in common: they all incorporate spaces, actors, and developments into the process of city planning that classical city planning has long since ceased to reach.
(Phillip Oswalt, 2013)

This literature review examines how intermediary urban spaces are conceptualized, with the aim of clarifying their definitions, characteristics, governance mechanisms and relationship to urban security. It offers a review of academic studies, aiming to consolidate existing knowledge, identify research gaps and to provide an initial foundation for further exploration of security governance in transitional urban environments. The review is part of a larger research project embedded in the public administration of the Canton of Basel-Stadt. The project runs from 2025 to 2027 and also includes, among other things, a review of practitioner knowledge on the subject and in-depth empirical case-study work in Switzerland and beyond.

Intermediary urban spaces, often emerging in underutilized or former industrial areas, are increasingly recognized as strategic elements of urban development (Oswalt et al.; 2013; Madanipour, 2018; Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021) as these interventions exemplify grassroots creativity and urban experimentation. By reactivating neglected sites, they foster social presence and informal monitoring, which some studies suggest may contribute to urban security, by activating public space, fostering social cohesion and urban resilience (Ochoa & Allegri, 2021; Frisk & Loulie 2021). At the same time, the fluid nature of temporary spaces—often marked by unclear responsibilities, shifting user groups and evolving access patterns—has been identified as a source of governance challenges and contested legitimacy, with implications for spatial stability and safety (Autero et al., 2024; Németh & Langhorst, 2014). The literature highlights this ambivalence as a core tension in managing such spaces. The review therefore addresses the following questions:

- How are intermediary urban spaces defined and conceptualized across academic debates?
- What definitions and governance models characterize these spaces in terms of temporality and institutional integration?
- How is urban security understood in and around intermediary spaces—conceptually, spatially and in relation to urban design?

- What forms of formal and informal security governance are applied in intermediary spaces and how are these linked to broader questions of control, inclusion and participation?

These questions guide the structure of the review. Section 2 responds to the first question and outlines how intermediary urban spaces are defined and discussed across different academic debates. Section 3 introduces a typology of intermediary spaces based on governance structures and temporal positioning, addressing the second question. Chapter 4 examines the role of security in intermediary spaces: Section 4.1 develops theoretical and conceptual perspectives on urban security; 4.2 investigates community-led and informal security practices; 4.3 focuses on spatial design principles and 4.4 analyzes governance mechanisms and discourses around securing urban environments. Together, these chapters explore how security is enacted, negotiated and governed in transitional urban settings.

By synthesizing existing research (Section 5), this review provides an entry point for further inquiry into the fragmented and evolving discussion on how security might be addressed through holistic, inclusive and sustainable approaches in these spaces. An integrated analysis of intermediary urban spaces—including their conceptualization, management and security-related practices—provides insights for urban planners, policymakers and community stakeholders.

2. Conceptualizing the Intermediary Urban

Temporary and underutilized urban spaces have become increasingly visible across cities in recent years, appearing in the form of vacant lots, closed industrial sites or stalled redevelopment zones. Such vacancies do not occur randomly. The cyclical nature of capitalism generates temporal fluctuations in the production of space, as its production, supply, demand and distribution are subject to continual variations (Harvey, 1985). Vacant spaces in cities often emerge as a result of shifting urban dynamics, shaped by cycles of investment and disinvestment influenced by market forces, policy decisions and broader economic transformations. These fluctuations create temporary or transitional phases where spaces remain underutilized, awaiting new functions or investments. One key factor is planned redevelopment, where the anticipation of future projects discourages immediate investment, leading to stagnation or what is often referred to as planning blight (Jacobs, 1970). Additionally, spaces may become vacant due to the relocation or restructuring of economic and social activities, leaving former hubs of activity partially or entirely underused. Empty spaces thus can be understood as a crisis in

spatial production**,** where supply exceeds demand (Harvey, 1985). When such vacancies grow in size and scale, they may reflect broader political and economic disruptions in the urban fabric. According to Jacobs (1970), the presence of large amounts of vacant space points to economic failure, social desertion and deeper urban problems that are expressed spatially.

However, recent work has pushed back against the idea that temporary urbanism is simply the outcome of crisis or failure (Madanipour, 2018; 2023; Oswalt et al., 2013). This repositions the concept: rather than treating temporary urbanism as a sign of breakdown, we can understand it as something that amplifies structural shifts. Oswalt et al. (2013) emphasize that temporary uses are neither new nor marginal. They have long emerged in response to economic downturns, post-war recovery and wider socioeconomic changes. Rather than being mere leftover spaces, these sites are closely linked to broader dynamics of urban change. According to these authors, the transition from Fordist production to knowledge-based economies—along with deindustrialization and the emergence of more flexible labor markets—has led to more underused spaces and a greater demand for adaptable, short-term interventions.

Over time, what once seemed like spontaneous improvisation has been increasingly integrated into endeavors of strategic urban planning—particularly in parts of the Global North. Temporary urbanism now tends to be marked by its creative, flexible and transitional qualities (Madanipour, 2018; Andres, 2013; Christmann, 2018). These uses serve a range of purposes. Some help maintain activity and prevent decline while cities prepare for long-term development (Oswalt et al., 2013; Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). Others arise from below, acting as responses to neglect or exclusion (Wacquant, 2007). Importantly, temporary urbanism is not just about fixed time spans or predictable phases. It includes a wide variety of short-term actions that often resist linear development timelines (Shaw, 2015). For property owners or developers, such practices help to maximize the use of idle space (Madanipour, 2018). For temporary users, they offer access to affordable places that encourage experimentation, skill-building and the activation of socioeconomic capital (Andres, 2013; Oswalt et al., 2013). As these practices have become more accepted, they have moved into the realm of formal policy. In many cities, temporary use is now embedded in planning strategies aimed at managing spatial transitions, boosting image-making or paving the way for speculative development (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021; Madanipour, 2018). What used to be makeshift or informal is now often increasingly planned. Local governments may even use these spaces to retain control during periods of uncertainty or delay (Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). This evolution has contributed to a blurring of boundaries between temporary and permanent, formal and informal, improvised and planned. Oswalt et al. (2013) argue that what's at stake here is a broader shift in how cities are governed and planned. Temporary spaces, once seen as peripheral, have become

part of how cities are made. To grasp this shift, it is crucial to trace the changing role of temporary urbanism in today's neoliberal city-making.

Building on these conceptual debates, intermediary urban spaces take multiple forms depending on governance structures, socio-economic contexts and local agency. A range of definitions has emerged to describe these diverse models, each emphasizing different mechanisms of temporary urban use and adaptation. The literature reviewed in this section frames intermediary urbanism as a field characterized by conceptual ambiguity, strategic instrumentalization and contested meanings. While various models exist, they ultimately resist strict classification.

3. A Typology of Intermediary Urbanism: Forms, Functions and Governance

The following section outlines six overlapping definitions of intermediary urbanism: hyperghettoization, makeshift urbanism, networked urbanism, adaptive use, *Zwischennutzung* or interim use and strategic temporary urbanism. Temporary urbanism encompasses a variety of approaches, each shaped by different governance structures, economic conditions and spatial contexts. Rather than following a strict spectrum from informal to institutionalized, these approaches can be better understood through two key dimensions: the extent to which they are embedded within governance structures and their temporal function within urban development. Some forms emerge as grassroots occupations in response to crisis or disinvestment, while others are strategically activated by policymakers and investors. Over time, these spaces may remain ephemeral, transition into semi-permanent uses, or be fully incorporated into urban planning agendas.

At one end of the spectrum, spontaneous and informal occupations arise in the gaps of formal urban governance, often as reactive interventions responding to economic crises, vacancy or marginalization. The term "Hyperghettoization" describes spaces of entrenched marginality that persist outside structured urban planning due to socio-economic exclusion. Hyperghettoization refers to spaces of advanced marginality characterized by economic disconnection, social fragmentation and political neglect (Wacquant, 2007). These areas experience territorial stigmatization, punitive policing and neoliberal labor policies that reinforce cycles of exclusion and fragmentation. Hyperghettos are not transitional but are deeply entrenched sites of socio-economic deprivation, often operating outside formal planning frameworks. They are included in the typology to show how extreme and persistent informality can become a stable urban condition, highlighting the far end

of the spectrum where intermediary dynamics have hardened into marginalization. Empirical examples include the South Side of Chicago in the 1980s and 1990s—particularly neighborhoods such as Bronzeville and North Lawndale—where deindustrialization, racial segregation and mass incarceration contributed to concentrated poverty, the collapse of public institutions and the rise of informal economies (Wacquant, 2007). In France, the banlieues of Paris, including La Courneuve's Quatre Mille estate and Clichy-sous-Bois, have similarly been described as hyperghettos, especially in the context of the 2005 urban unrest, where long-term socio-spatial neglect and symbolic exclusion produced entrenched marginality (Wacquant, 2007). Comparable dynamics have been observed in Palestinian refugee camps, where decades of spatial confinement and political abandonment result in entrenched exclusion (Agier, 2009). Even in rural contexts, the term has been extended to describe U.S. communities shaped by carceral expansion—where prisons, surveillance and punitive governance replace social investment and contribute to entrenched marginality and economic collapse (Eason, 2010). These cases illustrate that hyperghettoization is not only about displacement or spatial disorder but reflects durable patterns of institutional disinvestment, spatial stigmatization and urban containment.

"Makeshift urbanism" refers to small, provisional interventions that emerge in overlooked or underused urban spaces. Often labelled interstitial, pop-up or austerity urbanism, these practices respond to economic downturns, stalled developments or planning vacuums. Rather than following official plans, they operate on the margins, creating temporary order through improvised structures. Tonkiss (2013) describes this as making durability from the temporary—working with what is available, filling in urban gaps without long-term guarantees. What begins as grassroots action is often absorbed into larger urban narratives. Several cases illustrate how makeshift interventions unfold in real settings. In Berlin, the Prinzessinnengärten project (2009–2012) turned a vacant lot in Kreuzberg into a mobile urban garden run by volunteers. In Paris, a former vacant lot in the Saint-Blaise district was used between 2005 and 2008 for gardening, performances and informal gatherings. In London, temporary cricket fields were installed in Croydon in 2012 on a speculative building site to offer recreational space to asylum seekers. These projects speak to a common thread: modest yet transformative uses that temporarily reimagine urban life (Tonkiss, 2013). At the same time, makeshift urbanism increasingly intersects with strategies of branding and investment. Projects once born of necessity—gardens, installations, pop-ups—are now folded into regeneration schemes and marketed as creative assets. Vasudevan (2014) links this tendency to broader squatting practices, showing how informal settlements in cities like Berlin and New York operate as spaces of resistance, improvisation and collective making. Dovey (2014) frames temporary urbanism as a testing ground for new uses, often tolerated at the edge of formal control. What holds these examples together is their capacity to unsettle fixed notions of ownership, function and tem-

porality. Makeshift urbanism can be understood as a spatial practice that negotiates the absence of planning, permanence or investment through improvised and collective interventions that both adapt to and contest dominant urban logics (Vasudevan, 2014).

“Networked urbanism” describes a form of spatial organization in informal settlements where governance and infrastructure are structured through social ties rather than formal state institutions. This model emerges in contexts where public planning is weak or absent and residents rely on embedded networks to access services, manage resources and navigate daily life. In Nairobi’s Mathare Valley, residents use kinship and neighborhood ties to build referral systems for work, education and housing. Governance here operates through hybrid forms, involving both elected leaders and informal gatekeepers who mediate access to services and influence community decisions. These ties foster local resilience and innovation, though they also risk excluding more vulnerable residents (Morgner et al., 2020). In Medellín’s Comuna Nororiental, residents have incrementally shaped public spaces through community-led initiatives. While the area has seen formal interventions, such as the Metrocable system and integrated urban upgrading programs, many spaces remain governed by informal agreements, negotiated access and collaborative use (Kamalipour & Dovey, 2023). This co-existence of formal and informal planning points to a layered mode of governance shaped by trust, history and spatial familiarity. In Europe, similar dynamics unfold in contexts often overlooked by planning institutions. Roma settlements across Southern and Eastern Europe operate through strong internal networks that coordinate housing, service access and conflict resolution in the absence of formal state provision. Likewise, the Jungle of Calais in France, before its demolition in 2016, functioned through informal governance where residents created schools, shops, religious spaces and managed logistics through community delegation (Kuffer et al., 2023). These examples illustrate that networked urbanism is not confined to the Global South. It reflects a broader pattern of spatial adaptation and self-governance in contexts of urban neglect, where communities organize from within and develop systems of mutual reliance in response to institutional absence.

Moving towards more structured interventions, transitional and adaptive uses occupy a position between informal grassroots initiatives and regulated urban policies. These spaces are often temporarily activated to address urban vacancy, economic stagnation or social needs, yet they may also evolve into semi-permanent or institutionalized urban features. “Temporary use for vacant land” exemplifies this model, functioning as a tool for economic revitalization, social engagement and spatial repurposing in shrinking or underutilized areas (Németh & Langhorst, 2014; Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). In the United States, cities like Detroit and Cleveland have promoted community gardens, art installations and recreational pop-ups on abandoned plots to stabilize declining neighborhoods and mitigate disinvest-

ment (Németh & Langhorst, 2014). Philadelphia has used temporary land repurposing as part of urban greening programs, often tied to goals such as crime reduction and public health. In Germany, cities like Leipzig and Berlin have actively supported temporary uses as part of broader regeneration strategies. In Leipzig, interim gardens and cultural initiatives were implemented under the perforated city model, a planning approach developed in the early 2000s to address long-term population decline. Rather than attempting to re-densify empty neighborhoods, the model accepted urban voids as permanent features and strategically repurposed them for temporary or open uses such as gardening, play or cultural production (Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). These measures were supported by national redevelopment funds and marked a shift in planning logic from growth-oriented to adaptive and incremental. In Berlin, temporary uses on sites like Tempelhofer Feld, the city's old airport, illustrate how cities accommodate spatial uncertainty through time-limited interventions, even if such projects are later absorbed into formal development agendas (Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). These projects often blend bottom-up initiative with formal support, illustrating a shift toward hybrid governance arrangements that recognize temporary use as a strategic component of urban development.

Zwischennutzung, or "interim use", refers to the temporary activation of vacant land or buildings in the context of planned redevelopment. Unlike spontaneous or ad hoc appropriations, *Zwischennutzungen* are increasingly embedded within urban policy frameworks and tied to broader cycles of transformation. Initially rooted in grassroots practice, interim uses have evolved into instruments for municipalities, landowners and developers to prevent decay, mitigate speculation and maintain activity during long planning phases (Christmann, 2018; Oswalt et al., 2013). This shift reflects a broader trend in temporary urbanism, where informally activated spaces become integrated into institutional redevelopment regimes. Today, *Zwischennutzung* functions not only as a tool of spatial experimentation, but also as a vehicle for city branding, public engagement and early-stage value creation (Colomb, 2012; Fabian & Samson, 2016). In Basel, the NT-Areal (1999–2013) became a reference point for civic-led interim use. Situated on a disused freight terminal, it was combining public programming with informal occupation. The project opened a closed-off site to collective use while long-term redevelopment remained unresolved (Bürgin & Cabane, 1999; Berger, 2011). A similar logic has guided the development of Holzpark Klybeck, which transformed adjacent riverfront land into a curated cultural venue. While Holzpark plays a central role in Basel's contemporary interim use landscape, it has so far been discussed mainly in municipal reports and practitioner media. Its limited academic documentation highlights the relevance of further empirical engagement. In Berlin, multiple cases illustrate the diversity and evolution of *Zwischennutzung*. Strandbar Mitte (2002–ongoing) began as an informal riverside bar and was later integrated into formal park development. The Arena Berlin/Badeschiff site was converted from a transport depot into a cultural complex, blending temporary use with long-term commercialization.

Meanwhile, Schwarzer Kanal (2000–2010), a trailer park and Skulpturenpark Berlin Zentrum (2006–2010) offered politicized and artistic interventions that were later removed or displaced. In the Spree zone, temporary venues such as Bar25, YAAM and Oststrand became focal points of resistance against large-scale redevelopment (Colomb, 2012). Together, these cases illustrate the entanglement of temporary cultural use with speculation, displacement and image politics. In Copenhagen, the transformation of the Carlsberg Byen brewery district included curated events and cultural installations designed to shape public perception and attract investment during redevelopment. These interventions, while participatory on the surface, were primarily guided by strategic branding logics (Fabian & Samson, 2016). Together, these cases show how *Zwischennutzung* has moved from subcultural tactic to calibrated planning instrument. It occupies a space between informality and institutionalization, offering flexibility while enabling governance, capitalization and the managed transformation of urban space.

“Planned and institutionalized temporary urbanism” represents the most structured form of intermediary use. In this model, temporary interventions are not reactive or spontaneous but embedded into governance frameworks as deliberate tools for managing space, testing policies or activating stalled development. Municipalities, real estate actors and cultural intermediaries collaborate to implement time-bound projects that align short-term activity with long-term planning. This form of temporary urbanism contrasts with makeshift or grassroots-led models by foregrounding controlled flexibility, where temporariness is orchestrated to serve development goals (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021; Madanipour, 2018). An example is Les Grands Voisins in Paris (2015–2020), where a former hospital complex was temporarily activated as a hybrid urban space combining emergency housing, creative industries and public cultural programming. Coordinated by civic associations in partnership with the City of Paris, the project framed temporariness as a space of experimentation while simultaneously preparing the site for a future eco-district. It served as both a socially inclusive intervention and a testbed for real estate-driven redevelopment (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021). A similar logic shaped the Transfert project in Nantes (2018–2022), developed on a vacant slaughterhouse site. Run by a cultural organization with public and private backing, Transfert hosted artistic installations, participatory events and modular structures. While framed as an open-ended cultural experiment, it also operated as a tool to reframe public perception of the site and facilitate its long-term transformation into a mixed-use district (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021). In London, the Chesterfield House project (2013–2016) provides another example of planned temporary urbanism. There, a former office building was used to host affordable co-working spaces, artist studios and community services. Supported by the local borough and enabled through a short-term lease with a private developer, the project offered a socially beneficial use for a waiting site while also contributing to value creation in a gentrifying area. As Madanipour (2018) argues, this form of temporariness embodies both opportunity and precarity—offering room for experimentation while ultimately serving

speculative planning processes. These cases illustrate how temporary urbanism is used not to interrupt but to stage redevelopment. It is a mode of strategic flexibility, instrumentalized to secure soft transitions, cultivate place identity and generate early investor interest. At the same time, this model has been criticized for diluting participatory goals and masking precarity behind inclusive rhetoric. Planned temporariness thus reflects the ambivalence of institutionalized experimentation—offering space for innovation while reinforcing long-term agendas of control.

The following working typology illustrates how intermediary urban spaces can be situated along a continuum of institutionalization and temporality, rather than existing as fixed or discrete categories. Some remain informal and ephemeral, while others transition into semi-permanent arrangements or become absorbed into structured urban development agendas. The fluidity of these spaces underscores that intermediary urbanism is best understood as a dynamic process rather than a set of static types. Definitions such as makeshift, interim and strategic temporary urbanism do not exist in isolation but instead oscillate, overlap and evolve, depending on governance structures, economic pressures and community agency. These loose characteristics highlight the multiplicity of intermediary practices and provide a conceptual base for examining how they intersect with urban security.

Typology of Intermediary Urbanism

Terminology	Definition	Key Characteristics	Governance Models	Example Cases	References
Hyperghettoization	Spatially concentrated, socially fragmented and politically neglected areas of “advanced marginality”	Economic disconnection, territorial stigmatization, state retrenchment and penalization, social fragmentation & symbolic splintering	Punitive Governance, state retrenchment, urban containment, neoliberal labor policies, informal economies, symbolic stigmatization. Security policies are often exclusionary, emphasizing containment rather than protection	South Side Chicago (1980s–1990s), Banlieues Paris (2005), Palestinian refugee camps (post-1967), Rural US prison towns (2000s)	Wacquant (2007), Agier (2009), Eason (2010),
Makeshift Urbanism / Interstitial Urbanism / Pop-Up Urbanism / Austerity Urbanism	Temporary, provisional and small-scale interventions that emerge in the cracks of formal urban planning	Arises in response to economic crises, disinvestment; operates in abandoned or "leftover" spaces; often co-opted into urban branding	Hybridity between bottom-up activism and top-down commodification; security governance often contested with conflicting interests between municipal authorities and grassroots actors	Prinzessinnengarten Berlin (2009–2012), Saint-Blaise Paris (2005–2008), Croydon Cricket Field London (2012)	Tonkiss (2013), Vasudevan (2014), Dovey (2014)
Networked Urbanism in Informal Settlements	Self-regulating social networks in informal settlements	Socially embedded governance, gatekeeper systems, resource circulation and informality, state withdrawal	Informal, self-relying, customary governance. Security is largely self-regulated through social networks rather than formal policing	Mathare Nairobi (ongoing), Comuna Nororiental Medellin (2000s–2020s), Roma settlements in Eastern Europe, Jungle of Calais (until 2016)	Morgner et al. (2020), Kamalipour & Dovey (2023), Kuffer et al. (2023)

Temporary Use for Vacant Land	Temporal occupation of vacant urban land, explicitly distinguished from permanent urban development. It emerges from the need to address economic decline, depopulation and underutilized spaces	Focus on economic revitalization and community-driven projects, often in context to shrinking cities, incremental, explicit temporality, crisis driven	Bottom-up initiatives, sometimes city-supported. Security concerns are often tied to land ownership disputes and policing of informal activities	Detroit and Cleveland (2000s–2010s), Philadelphia greening programs (2010s), Leipzig 'perforated city' (2000s), Tempelhofer Feld Berlin (post-2008)	Németh & Langhorst (2014), Dubeaux & Sabot (2018),
Zwischennutzung (Interim Use)/ DIY Urbanism	Temporary activation of vacant spaces before long-term redevelopment	Often municipally regulated, aimed at preventing urban decay, crisis driven, increasingly incorporated into city marketing, instrumentalized to attract investors, gentrification	Public-private partnerships, local government incentives, security often informal, relying on self-regulation and soft-policing by municipalities	NT-Areal Basel (1999–2013), Holzpark Klybeck Basel (2014–ongoing), Strandbar Mitte Berlin (2002–ongoing), Arena/Badeschiff Berlin (2000s), Carlsberg Byen Copenhagen (2010s)	Oswalt et al. (2013), Christmann (2018), Colomb (2012), Fabian & Samson (2016), Bürgin & Cabane (1999), Berger (2011)
Strategic Temporary Urbanism	Strategic use of short-term urban interventions to reactivate vacant or underutilized spaces	Once a bottom-up practice, it is now co-opted into official city policies; often used to increase land value or manage uncertainty in urban planning	A mix of public, private and civil society actors, creating tensions between participation and commercialization; security oversight varies, often relying on municipal authorities while maintaining public-private collaboration	Paris Grand- Voisins, Nantes Transfert Projet	Bragaglia & Rossignolo (2021), Madanipour (2018)

A key insight from recent research is that temporary does not necessarily mean short-lived. While some initiatives end quickly, others persist far longer than expected and gradually become part of the urban fabric (Stevens, 2018; Ferreri, 2021). This challenges the assumption that temporariness implies ephemerality. On the contrary, the flexibility and adaptability of temporary uses can enable them to respond to changing conditions and endure through reconfiguration. As Stevens (2018) shows, such projects often function as durable assemblages, not despite their temporary status, but because of it. At the same time, scholars have pointed out that temporality is not neutral. It is shaped by power relations: different actors—planners, property owners, grassroots groups—use time as a tool of governance, speculation or survival (Tonkiss, 2013; Ferreri, 2021). Temporary uses can be framed as creative or inclusive, yet their duration is often controlled by those in power, raising critical questions about who determines how long intermediary spaces last—and to what ends.

Similarily, institutionalization is not binary. Many intermediary spaces originate from grassroots practices and become formalized over time. The case of

Zwischennutzung illustrates how bottom-up responses to vacancy evolve into municipal tools, balancing community engagement with speculative development. This challenges simplistic binaries between informality and formality: intermediary spaces are neither fully autonomous nor fully controlled, but sites of negotiation between diverse actors (Christmann, 2018).

They are also embedded in political processes and power relations. Strategic temporary urbanism, for example, is often used to pilot policy, attract investment and increase land value—sometimes at the cost of displacement (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021). In contrast, makeshift and networked urbanisms show how marginalized groups navigate exclusion through self-organization (Tonkiss, 2019; Morgner et. al., 2020).

Ultimately, intermediary spaces act as laboratories of governance. Their transitory nature allows for policy experimentation (Frisk & Loulie, 2014) but also exposes vulnerabilities (Bragaglia & Rossignolo, 2021), while their existence depends on shifting political and economic conditions. Thus, understanding intermediary urbanism requires a processual and context-sensitive lens, as these spaces vary along a spectrum from officially sanctioned initiatives to self-organized experiments. Some integrate into formal frameworks, while others rely on informal governance, social negotiation and adaptive use (Németh & Langhorst, 2014). This fluidity extends to security. Sometimes lacking rigid enforcement, intermediary spaces rely on hybrid governance, informal practices and spatial adaptation. While many of these projects begin with participatory, flexible approaches, the move toward formalization often entails stricter regulation, surveillance and exclusionary practices (Ferreri, 2021).

4. Adaptive Security in Fluid Urban Contexts: A Review of Approaches

The following discussion addresses the third and fourth guiding questions introduced in the beginning of this review: (3) How do intermediary urban spaces relate to urban security, both in terms of opportunities and risks? and (4) What forms of formal and informal security governance are applied in intermediary spaces and how are these linked to broader questions of control, inclusion and participation?

Section 4.1 provides a theoretical overview of security governance in transitional urban settings, while outlining the conceptual frameworks most relevant to intermediary urbanism. Section 4.2 explores informal and community-based safety practices that emerge in the absence of conventional policing. Section 4.3 reviews design-led strategies such as CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental

Design) and examines how spatial interventions influence security outcomes. Section 4.4 analyzes how formal, hybrid and discursively constructed governance models shape the securing and control of intermediary environments. Together, these sections show that intermediary spaces challenge binary distinctions between formal and informal, temporary and permanent, safe and unsafe. Instead, they call for hybrid, adaptive security approaches—ranging from participatory planning to tactical urbanism—that respond to evolving spatial, social and governance conditions.

4.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Security in the Intermediary Urban

By operating outside conventional planning and regulatory frameworks, intermediary urban spaces often challenge established governance systems. As Németh & Langhorst (2014) argue, their transient and negotiated nature complicates formal structures of control and accountability—features that are also central to dominant security logics. At the same time, they contribute to safety by activating underused areas and deterring neglect-related risks often associated with vacancy and abandonment (Andres, 2013; Desimini, 2015). Often repurposed from vacant lots or former industrial areas, these spaces foster creativity and experimentation but also raise concerns about safety, accessibility and governance. As Jill Desimini (2015) shows, temporary uses frequently sit outside conventional planning and institutional frameworks, resulting in governance arrangements that are often fragmented, informal and ambiguous. This is compounded by the structural tendency to treat such uses as low-risk, short-term solutions, which may discourage long-term investment or integrated planning. As a result, governance often remains reactive and ad-hoc, shaped more by immediate needs than by sustained urban policy or coordinated safety strategies (Desimini, 2015). Yet, as Khilani and Daher (2024) point out, this very temporality is often instrumentalized by municipalities as a soft security strategy: Tactical urban interventions—such as pop-up parks or temporary public spaces—are deployed not just for revitalization but to preempt vandalism, control movement and manage perceptions of safety without engaging in overt policing. These “security-light” interventions blur the line between spatial activation and control, illustrating how temporary urbanism can be leveraged as a governance tool.

Despite the growing body of research on urban security, relatively limited scholarly attention has focused specifically on how intermediary spaces both contribute to urban security and create their own sets of security challenges. Also, limited research exists on what dimensions of (in-)security are activated in such processes and how they apply differently to different actors involved in interim spaces. Most of the urban security literature reviewed here addresses either

formalized public spaces such as parks, transit nodes or downtown business districts (e.g. Coaffee, 2004; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007), or informal settlements and socially marginalized zones at the urban periphery (e.g. Wacquant, 2008; Morgner et al., 2020). As such, intermediary urbanism remains largely absent from these debates—not because its security dynamics are irrelevant, but because they cut across existing categories and are often difficult to capture through traditional frameworks or set definitions.

However, in order to analyze security in intermediary urban spaces, a range of overarching theoretical frameworks can serve as entry points. While not all were originally developed with temporary or informal urbanism in mind, these perspectives offer conceptual tools to understand how (in)security is produced, contested and governed in spatial settings that fall outside conventional planning structures. The following macro-level approaches illuminate different dimensions of this problem—ranging from the tension between formal control and lived practices, to the role of power, exclusion and negotiated governance in shaping safety.

At the overarching level, Lefebvre's theory of the production of space offers a possible entry point into the analysis of security in intermediary urban contexts (Lefebvre, 1974). While Lefebvre conceptualized urban space as socially produced and contested, his framework can be adapted to understand the security dynamics of intermediary spaces, which exist in flux between formal planning and informal adaptation. These spaces reflect the tension between conceived space—how planners envision urban security—and lived space—how residents and users shape safety through informal mechanisms. This gap between formal governance and lived realities suggests that rigid institutional frameworks may be insufficient for addressing security also in transitional spaces, where dynamic urban practices and lived experiences play a particularly significant role.

Alternatively, David Harvey's Right to the City framework argues that urban governance often reinforces exclusion by aligning with dominant economic interests to regulate access to space (Harvey, 2008). Intermediary spaces challenge this logic by introducing informality and adaptability, which can either disrupt or reinforce exclusionary dynamics. While such spaces are often celebrated for enabling grassroots practices and offering flexible access to marginalized groups (Andres, 2013), their openness is rarely stable. Yiftachel's (2009) notion of "gray spaces" illustrates how informal environments can foster belonging, but also remain vulnerable to erasure. Importantly, security measures in these contexts do not operate neutrally. As Haselbacher et al. (2024) show in the context of public space, efforts to foster inclusion—such as social programs or redesigns—can coexist with surveillance and regulation that disproportionately affect racialized or vulnerable groups. In intermediary spaces, this duality is often more pronounced: temporary uses may be framed as inclusive, yet still function

as instruments of control or precursors to gentrification (Ferreri, 2015; Tonkiss, 2013). This tension highlights the need to examine how security governance can simultaneously enable and restrict access, not only through overt policing but through the institutional framing of openness itself.

Urban regime theory offers a useful lens to understand how security governance in the urban is rarely centralized, but instead shaped by coalitions of public and private actors (Van Ostaaijen, 2023). Rather than assuming top-down control, this perspective highlights how agencies of governance, investors and civil society actors negotiate shared or competing interests. In the context of intermediary urban spaces—where institutional responsibilities are often less rigid—this dynamic becomes particularly relevant. These spaces frequently exist in regulatory grey zones, where security measures emerge through formal policy, informal negotiation or ad-hoc adaptation. As a result, governance tends to be fragmented and contested, with different actors influencing security practices in line with their priorities. In some cases, interventions aimed at mitigating risks like vandalism or disorder can also contribute to spatial control—intentionally or not—especially when intermediary spaces are situated within broader redevelopment trajectories (Van Ostaaijen, 2023). This raises the question: who benefits from these arrangements, and who may be excluded?

These contradictions indicate that security governance in transitional spaces requires approaches beyond conventional law enforcement frameworks, i.e., differentiated analyses and understandings of what is meant by (in)security. Additional theoretical perspectives may help to unpack how security operates as a dispersed, negotiated and relational process. Foucault's concept of governmentality emphasizes that governance extends beyond policing to include embedded mechanisms of control within planning, surveillance and everyday social interaction (Foucault, 1978). Wacquant's work on advanced marginality shows how securing often functions as a form of spatial containment in precarious urban contexts, reinforcing social exclusion rather than mitigating it (Wacquant, 2008). These insights are particularly relevant where temporary or informal urban uses are not formally policed but nonetheless governed through spatial design, legal grey zones or behavioral expectations (Haselbacher et al., 2024; Frisk & Loulie, 2021). Although not focused on intermediary spaces per se, both perspectives help to illuminate how security arrangements can be diffuse and power-laden, even in informal or temporary environments.

Saskia Sassen's analysis of global urbanism adds that intermediary spaces frequently emerge at the margins of financialized cities, where formal regulation is limited and governance networks become improvised (Sassen, 1991). From a different angle, Jane Jacobs' emphasis on community-led safety underscores the role of informal oversight and street-level interaction as alternatives to formal policing (Jacobs, 1961). Although her work focused on stable, mixed-use

neighborhoods in mid-20th century North American cities, the relevance of her insights extends to intermediary spaces, particularly those shaped by active pedestrian use and community self-organization. While not originally framed around transitional uses, her argument remains relevant in contexts where self-regulated practices shape safety and use. Similarly, Doreen Massey's notion of relational space positions security as an evolving negotiation among multiple actors, rather than a fixed or top-down mechanism (Massey, 2005). Her approach, though not developed in relation to urban security per se, provides a useful lens for understanding how intermediary spaces host overlapping and sometimes conflicting spatial claims, making safety a situated and contested experience.

Theories of assemblage urbanism are particularly well-suited to analyzing intermediary urban spaces. Rather than viewing security governance as centrally planned, assemblage perspectives highlight its dynamic emergence through interactions between institutions, property owners, private security actors and user groups, and as shaped by technologies, methods and knowledge(s) (McFarlane, 2011; Hagmann 2017). In intermediary settings, where responsibilities are often fragmented and temporality plays a central role, governance is negotiated and adaptive. From an assemblage perspective, these processes reflect the contingent, situated nature of urban ordering, responding to uncertainty through evolving interactions among diverse actors and material conditions (McFarlane, 2011). At the same time, assemblage-analysis opens the door to understanding that not all security functions may apply evenly to everyone using urban space – but indeed, that some might be concerned more than others (Fawaz et al. 2012).

The adaptation of these theoretical perspectives suggest that intermediary urban spaces challenge static or universal conceptions of urban security. Rather than being categorically safe or unsafe, these spaces show how security is produced, experienced in differentiated ways and contested across overlapping spatial, social such as temporal dimensions. Security here is not a fixed regime, but a situated process shaped by informality, temporal volatility and multi-actor governance. Building on these theoretical insights, the next chapter examines how security is negotiated in practice. While intermediary spaces resist fixed frameworks, they also give rise to situated practices that are often informal, community-driven and shaped by local knowledge.

4.2. Beyond Policing: Informal and Community-Based Security Practices

In intermediary urban contexts, community-based and informal means of the organization of safety are important, and at times more so than conventional policing. Much of the empirical literature on these practices focuses on creative

hubs, cultural initiatives, self-managed spaces and grassroots interventions that arise during periods of vacancy or redevelopment (Colomb, 2012; Ferreri, 2021; Lara-Hernandez et al., 2018). While these examples do not always label themselves as 'intermediary urbanism', they align closely with its characteristics—particularly in their provisional status, informality and embedded governance. These spaces often emphasize self-regulated norms, where participants establish shared expectations that support everyday security. Hernberg (2017) emphasizes the role of urban practitioners–mainly architects–as mediators in these settings, helping to bridge informal use with formal oversight. Furthermore, according to Colomb (2012) creative hubs rely on collaborative management and informal rules to cultivate a sense of inclusion and safety.

Critical urban security studies often regard safety regimes in transitional areas as extensions of control (Klauser & Giulianotti, 2010; Coward, 2009). However, intermediary practices can challenge this framing. Security tools introduced in these contexts do not always serve exclusionary purposes. In some cases they may contribute to longer-term safety cultures, driven by trust and participation. Sometimes, these embedded networks contribute to urban security models that persist even after the temporary interventions end. This raises further questions about how informal safety arrangements evolve: do they harden into restrictive systems, or do they sustain inclusive governance (Hagmann & Kostenwein 2021)?

Research from Berlin's temporary initiatives shows that negotiated, trust-based structures can support social order through informal agreements and unwritten norms. Yet Colomb (2012) cautions that these self-regulating mechanisms may unintentionally exclude—particularly when dominant users begin to define access and shape the culture of participation. Stevens (2018) adds that while such spaces are framed as open, they may risk losing their participatory foundation when absorbed into formal planning processes. Once institutionalized, their governance models may shift—often to prioritizing efficiency or branding over inclusive engagement, which can also affect how order and control are managed. Ferreri (2021) examines this transition in London, where grassroots safety practices in temporary hubs were gradually formalized as spaces became aligned with municipal regeneration plans. For example, Pop Brixton began as a bottom-up initiative but was later integrated into the city's development strategy, altering both its access structures and social function. Ferreri shows how informal safety, rooted in mutual trust, is not immune to hierarchy: exclusion can emerge even in artist-run spaces, where inclusion is filtered through social ties despite public narratives of openness.

Lara-Hernandez et al. (2018) clarify that not all temporary uses are informal. Some, like authorized pop-up markets or regulated street vending, blend formal approval with user-led oversight. Their study shows how hybrid governance can preserve informal dynamics within institutional settings. They also note that

temporary appropriation can foster informal ownership and localized security—though exclusion may still emerge when access is controlled by “stronger” actors. Jayne and Hall (2019) explore similar patterns in authorized live-in guardianship schemes, where people live temporarily in vacant buildings to deter squatting and vandalism. These spaces rely on collective norms rather than formal enforcement, but offer little legal protection. As a result, conditions are often precarious, and access tends to depend on social capital—raising concerns about selective inclusion, in line with the critiques of Ferreri and Lara-Hernandez et al.

Van de Pas et al. (2022) highlight how informal safety practices are often shaped by broader political interests. Temporary governance tools may be tolerated when they align with urban development objectives but are dismantled if perceived as disruptive by the authorities. In Amsterdam, for example, squat-based models were once accepted as pragmatic property maintenance strategies but were later incorporated into formal housing policy. In Paris, informal migrant settlements that provided self-regulated safety were forcibly disbanded. Berlin’s cultural initiatives faced a similar dynamic—refugee-led efforts were suppressed, while others were selectively co-opted under cultural policy (ibid.). These cases underscore how power relations determine which informal safety models are legitimized. Overall, they show that security in intermediary spaces is adaptive and situated. Trust, flexibility and informal collaboration play a central role—but are also vulnerable to political pressure. What begins as autonomous safety can be formalized, co-opted or repressed. Informal governance is context-dependent and may support either inclusive or exclusive dynamics, depending on social relations and power structures.

4.3. Security by Design: The Role of Urban Form in Intermediary Spaces

Urban security is closely connected to the built environment. While existing research often centers on permanent urban areas, the intermediary urban, marked by fluidity, temporality and adaptive governance, poses unique and context specific challenges. Most studies on spatial security—particularly in the CPTED and defensible space traditions—focus on residential neighborhoods, formal parks, or high-crime public zones in permanent urban contexts (Newman, 1973; Coaffee, 2004; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007). These settings differ markedly from intermediary spaces, where governance is less stable and spatial layouts evolve in response to temporary use. Given the limited literature on security in such spaces, this chapter draws primarily from broader urban security theories, examining their applicability in these contexts.

Newman's Defensible Space Theory (1973) proposed that crime could be deterred through spatial design, building on earlier ideas by Ray Jeffery (1971), who emphasized the interaction between individuals and their environments. Jeffery's framework incorporated both the physical environment and internal factors such as biology and psychology, emphasizing a holistic understanding of how behavior is shaped by the interplay between individuals and their surroundings. Alice Coleman (1985) extended Newman's ideas, arguing that ambiguous spatial boundaries contribute to insecurity. As noted by Jacobs & Lees (2013), her emphasis on structured design was particularly influential in 1980s London. These early frameworks emphasize territorial clarity and structured spatial organization as mechanisms intended to foster urban safety. While Coleman's work emphasized structured design at the residential scale, later studies began to expand this logic to city-wide strategies. Coaffee's (2004) analysis of London's "Rings of Steel" illustrated how spatial design can support security by restricting access and embedding surveillance. Originally developed as temporary responses to terrorism, such interventions often become normalized over time, even if initially intended as temporary. Autero et al. (2024) similarly observed that in cities like Tampere, evolving security strategies in the context of grand sporting events often outlasted the transformations they accompanied, thus shaping long-term governance.

In contrast, to these findings, Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that safety arises through social interaction in public space. Her findings suggested that mixed-use areas with high pedestrian activity enhance natural surveillance. In public spaces, Lynch (1960) linked safety to spatial predictability and coherence, while Jakaitis (2015) showed through GIS analysis that disconnected spaces correlate with higher crime. These insights imply that intermediary spaces may benefit from design elements that improve visibility and accessibility while preserving openness. Taken together, an adaptation of the reviewed theories and spatial strategies suggest that intermediary spaces may require a careful calibration between structure and fluidity. While traditional urban security frameworks—often informed by residential areas and public space—offer insights into territorial reinforcement and spatial coherence, intermediary environments may call for more adaptive, user-responsive approaches.

One influential approach to design-based security is "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design" (CPTED). It refers to the strategic use of urban design to reduce crime and enhance perceived safety by shaping the built environment in ways that influence behavior (CPTED Canada, n.d.). This sets the stage for examining how spatial security interventions—particularly those grounded in participatory and context-sensitive CPTED models—can be operationalized in temporary and transitional settings. Nemeth & Schmidt's (2007) study of New York City parks, for example, assessed how security measures shape spatial behavior, distinguishing between inclusive and restrictive design features. They found that

over-securing through surveillance, access barriers and ambiguous rules—can discourage interaction and disproportionately exclude marginalized groups. These critiques are especially relevant in intermediary spaces, where openness and inclusivity are often central to their function. Similarly, Autero et al. (2024) observe that top-down security measures in transitional urban settings frequently lack public legitimacy, due to limited transparency. Galdini (2020) cautions that overly rigid interventions can limit the experimental character of temporary spaces. Frisk & Loulie (2021) similarly show that security-focused urban design strategies—such as access control points, surveillance infrastructure and restrictive street furniture—can reinforce processes of social exclusion in gentrifying creative districts in London and New York. Their findings underline how spatial interventions intended to improve safety can, in practice, limit accessibility and informal use, especially for marginalized groups. While these issues are not unique to intermediary spaces, they are particularly pertinent in settings that claim to rely on openness and diversity of use.

These critiques raise a broader concern about how security strategies in intermediary spaces might avoid replicating exclusionary or overly rigid spatial arrangements. In this context, the evolution of CPTED offers a useful framework. While first-generation CPTED emphasized surveillance, visibility and access control, second-generation approaches incorporate principles of social cohesion, participatory design and local ownership (Cozens & Lowe, 2015). Evidence from Australia's mixed-use urban areas demonstrates the risks of overly rigid implementations—such as fenced-off areas or gated layouts—which may displace crime rather than prevent it and increase fear by limiting natural surveillance (Cozens, 2011). In contrast, participatory strategies—where local users co-design spatial interventions—tend to foster trust, improve perceptions of safety and support social interaction. A few empirical cases illustrate the relevance of these adaptive strategies for intermediary contexts. In Berlin's Friedrichshain district, Ikeda (2018) documented how better lighting and clear sightlines enhanced both safety and community interaction. In Sydney, co-designed lighting projects improved perceptions of safety (Duarte et al., 2011), while in Cheonan, South Korea, the integration of greenery, public art and pedestrian-oriented design strengthened social ties (Seo & Lee, 2017). These cases reflect a shift in the empirical literature toward the suggestion of context-sensitive and flexible CPTED applications.

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests that intermediary urban spaces present specific challenges for spatial security strategies due to their impermanence, informality and evolving user dynamics. Rather than applying rigid or standardized design models, effective approaches in these settings emphasize adaptability, visual coherence, participatory planning and reversibility. These principles, drawn from both foundational theories and empirical studies, provide a conceptual foundation for operationalizing urban security in spaces that are not

fixed, but continuously shaped by shifting spatial and social relations. In particular, the findings underscore the importance of situationally grounded design measures that integrate both physical and social dimensions of safety. The research further indicates that intermediary spaces, even if disconnected from conventional security infrastructures, are not inherently insecure. On the contrary, their openness can enable alternative forms of spatial organization and collective oversight that contribute to safety through informal social control.

4.4. Governance as Assemblage

Governance structures play a decisive role in shaping security in urban contexts. Coward (2009) conceptualizes the networked city as a site where security emerges through interdependent arrangements involving municipal authorities, private corporations and security firms. These actors collectively manage infrastructure and risk, producing dispersed but coordinated mechanisms of urban control. However, intermediary spaces may disrupt this assumption, as they often lack full integration into security networks and exist at the margins of governance, where no single entity assumes complete responsibility for safety. As temporary urban sites often exist in regulatory grey zones—areas where formal zoning, ownership or administrative responsibility is undefined or fragmented (Khilani & Daher, 2024)—their governance is negotiated between municipal authorities, private stakeholders, community groups and surrounding discourses. This raises questions about whether security governance in intermediary spaces can remain sustainable without formalized networks or institutional integration.

Research on governance models in temporary spaces reveals that cities adopt varying approaches, from laissez-faire policies that encourage grassroots innovation to stricter regulatory frameworks that align with long-term urban development goals and lean more towards the formalization of governance (Dubeaux & Cunningham Sabot, 2016). In shrinking German cities such as Leipzig and Halle, temporary uses have been employed as part of urban regeneration strategies targeting depopulated areas and vacant lots. These projects have served as placeholders, enabling local authorities to test new urban functions or community programs while maintaining regulatory flexibility. However, the municipalities retain the ability to reassert control once long-term redevelopment plans are activated (Dubeaux & Sabot, 2018). Khilani & Daher (2024) describe tactical urbanism as a cyclical process through which cities can test new governance approaches, monitor community responses and adapt regulations over time. This model aligns with the notion of governance, where temporary interventions serve as feedback loops for managing uncertainty within flexible regulatory frameworks. Frisk & Loulie (2021) show that governance mechanisms in intermediary spaces often reflect broader political and economic agendas. Their

comparative analysis of Paris and Nantes illustrates how temporary urban projects are embedded in contrasting governance logics¬¬, which refers to differing institutional rationales, policy priorities and implementation strategies. In Paris, initiatives such as “Les Grands Voisins” emphasize inclusive planning and social experimentation, with strong participation from civil society actors and NGOs. These projects are framed as laboratories for urban innovation and social cohesion. In contrast, projects in Nantes—including the “Île de Nantes” redevelopment—have been more closely aligned with urban branding strategies and real estate development agendas. Here, temporary uses are leveraged as tools for image-building and phased development, often accompanied by more centralized control and surveillance measures. These contrasting cases underline the heterogeneity of governance approaches and demonstrate how intermediary spaces can either foster participatory urbanism or reinforce top-down spatial agendas, depending on the broader policy context and institutional frameworks.

In addition to institutional policies and planning frameworks, governance in intermediary spaces is also shaped through discursive constructions of security and insecurity—particularly how these spaces are portrayed, perceived and politicized in public debate. As Stephen Graham (2012) highlights, urban security is not merely a matter of physical interventions but is deeply entangled with discursive and political processes that define which spaces are perceived as secure or insecure. These socially constructed security discourses sometimes serve specific political and economic interests, shaping how different urban environments are governed. One striking example is Reitschule in Berne, a long-standing cultural and political space that has repeatedly been framed in Swiss media and political discourse as a hotspot for crime and insecurity. Media narratives have consistently portrayed the site as unruly and threatening, reinforcing calls for stricter policing, surveillance and even closure. Despite functioning as a creative hub and space for political expression, public debate surrounding Reitschule often mobilizes imagery of disorder. This mirrors broader trends in urban governance, where alternative and self-managed spaces are often framed through discourses of securitization, particularly when their use conflicts with dominant urban branding strategies or investment agendas (Bänninger, Krönkvist & Mäder, 2015). This process aligns with Graham’s (2012) argument that security in urban environments is as much about shaping perceptions as it is about physical control mechanisms. It therefore raises questions about how security discourses are mobilized to delegitimize certain urban practices and how intermediary spaces might resist these framings by reclaiming their role in urban governance. Taken together, the existing literature emphasizes that security in intermediary spaces is shaped by a spectrum of governance models, from informal, community-driven approaches to institutionalized regulatory frameworks.

5. Conclusion. Security in the Intermediary Urban. Charting a Research Agenda

This literature review has addressed the four guiding research questions by examining how intermediary urban spaces intersect with questions of urban security. The review begins by conceptualizing intermediary spaces as spatial and governance configurations that, due to their fluidity, temporariness and contested use, may diverge from or complicate conventional security logics. It then synthesizes existing scholarship to outline a range of definitions and conceptual framings. Building on this foundation, the review proposes a typology of intermediary spaces based on degrees of temporality and institutional integration, offering a basis for comparison across diverse urban contexts. The review then explores how urban security is theorized in relation to these spaces, outlining key perspectives that frame security as a spatial, social and political construct. It further examines informal and community-based practices that support safety where formal mechanisms are limited or absent and discusses how design-oriented approaches such as CPTED have been selectively adapted to flexible, transitional environments. Finally, it analyzes the governance mechanisms and discursive dynamics that shape security in intermediary spaces, showing how these intersect with broader issues of control, inclusion and participation. Intermediary spaces thus offer analytical value for understanding how urban security is co-produced, negotiated and contested—spatially, socially and discursively.

The review identifies core tensions between governance, spatial form and societal structures. Existing research suggests that intermediary spaces cannot be fully understood through conventional urban security frameworks. Unlike permanent urban environments, they require hybrid strategies that combine informal governance—based on community trust and social interaction—with context-dependent degrees of formal mechanisms such as surveillance or controlled access. Their resistance to permanence complicates the implementation of security interventions without reproducing exclusionary effects. A central concern is the balance between formality and informality in security governance. While authorities and developers often implement top-down security controls, intermediary spaces rely more on bottom-up practices shaped by local users. The literature examines how CPTED and defensible space theories have been adapted to urban settings, though their application in temporary and flexible contexts remains insufficiently explored. The extent to which these frameworks support inclusive, adaptive security in intermediary environments remains an open question.

Another important finding is the persistence of temporary security measures. Research shows that interventions intended as short-term—such as surveillance or policing during events—can transform to permanent in some cases, thus shaping long-term spatial dynamics. These 'security legacies' may restrict openness or, alternatively, support inclusive practices—particularly when grounded in community-based approaches. Conceptions of security problems, causes and beneficiaries in the intermediary urban also diverge strongly, reflecting the diversity of users, governance arrangements and temporal conditions. Unlike regulated urban environments, these spaces accommodate multiple and often conflicting notions of safety. This raises questions about how security is defined, by whom, for whom (or what) and to what ends. Intermediary spaces thus offer a valuable lens for investigating democratic security governance and the negotiation of safety across different stakeholder perspectives. Furthermore, the reviewed literature shows that intermediary urban spaces are defined not only by their spatial and temporal characteristics, but by the complex negotiation of governance through layered, contested and often improvised arrangements. Their in-betweenness—between formality and informality, permanence and temporariness—makes them uniquely revealing for studying how urban security is co-produced beyond conventional models.

While algorithmic and smart security technologies are increasingly discussed in urban studies, the literature reviewed here offers little insight into their application in intermediary contexts. Future studies could explore how such technologies interact with informal or flexible governance arrangements and whether they alter the participatory or adaptive qualities of these spaces.

The literature review further identifies a gap in empirical research specifically focused on intermediary spaces. While much scholarship addresses formal public spaces or informal settlements, intermediary spaces—operating in zones of legal and spatial ambiguity—remain underexamined. Comparative case studies could clarify how security practices evolve in these environments. Moreover, the findings point to opportunities for bridging North-South divides, as intermediary spaces in the Global North may exhibit governance patterns similar to informal areas in the Global South. Understanding these parallels may foster more integrated debates in urban studies.

Methodologically, future research could combine ethnography, spatial analysis and policy evaluation to better understand how security is negotiated over time. Engaging with urban practitioners and community actors would clarify how interventions are implemented, challenged and adapted. Design thinking methodologies—focused on prototyping and iteration—could help interpret security interventions as governance experiments. Overall, the study of intermediary urban spaces remains underexplored, suggesting the need for further empirical and conceptual engagement.

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