

TEMPORARY COMMERCIAL SPACES IN SOFIA: TYPES AND POTENTIAL

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the phenomenon of temporary commercial spaces as a dynamic and increasingly popular format in the modern urban environment. The introduction presents the essence of these spaces, their main characteristics and functions, drawing on existing research and perspectives of leading authors in the field. Based on the literature review, the article offers an author's classification of the types of temporary commercial spaces, consistent with their functions, duration and form of implementation.

The empirical part includes an analysis of two different types of bazaars in Sofia, studied through personal observations and interviews with organizers and participants.

In conclusion, possible improvements for the future development of temporary commercial spaces in Sofia are formulated.

Key words: temporary commercial spaces, bazaar, pop-up, Sofia.

INTRODUCTION

Temporary trading spaces have established themselves as an important part of modern trade. They are generally called bazaars and reflect the growing need for flexibility in terms of consumption and interaction between traders, brands and consumers.

The reasons for their appearance may be different. The author Boustani (2019) in his book considers some of them as: the opportunity to test new concepts, increase international popularity and direct interaction with users. These spaces have a more direct way of selling, because manufacturers can get to know consumers and best advertise their goods.

In addition, temporary stores sometimes are seen as marketing tools that can be used to analyze in detail the reactions of consumers when interacting with products. They can also be experimental in nature – the ability to track customer reactions when a new product is launched on the market or a new brand. Temporary retail spaces are also often designed with the aim of reinforcing brand identity, creating an emotional connection, and causing "noise" through limited availability (de Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014).

The specifics of their appearance and existence are reflected in the term "pop-up" or literally – "I appear out of nowhere". "Pop-up" has become a ubiquitous expression over the past decade and is increasingly influencing the imagination, for example in cities in the global north. Although it is used to describe a diverse range of practices (Ferreri, 2015), the term usually refers to places that occupy an object for an intentionally short, precisely limited period (Harris, 2015).

The benefits and factors for building them can be economic, social and cultural.

First of all, they can support small businesses, providing a cheap opportunity to present goods for a certain time. They also concentrate more visitors and enthusiasts on the topic, which can lead to a more secure profit. In the context of the economic plan, such initiatives temporarily compensate for socio-economic deficits (Harris, 2015).

Secondly, sometimes temporary commercial spaces manage to build an internal community between merchants among themselves, as well as between merchants and buyers, which helps to create a friendly atmosphere and predisposes visitors to tour, browse and buy goods.

Culturally, these spaces often function as stages for the presentation of local traditions, crafts and creative production. They provide an opportunity for independent artists, authors and designers.

In addition, temporary commercial spaces often become carriers of local cultural identity – reviving artisanal traditions and local aesthetics. They could also serve as open spaces for cultural dialogue, hosting workshops, presentations and educational events accessible to a wide range of people. In multicultural neighborhoods, these formats support intercultural exchange and promote social integration through culture and creativity (Harris, 2015; Boustani, 2019).

The phenomenon of "temporary commercial spaces" is not unknown to the history of urban culture as a whole, but in recent years it has been gaining more and more popularity. The article follows these pop-up areas used the beginning of the 21st century in Bulgaria. The most common commercial spaces on the country territory were farming, building on Bulgarian vernacular traditions; art bazaars, developing and helping small businesses; and seasonal ones such as the Christmas and Spring Bazaars.

As a part of the research framework, I will also mention Fran Tonkis' article "Austerity urbanism and the makeshift city" where the possible benefits and problems of temporary commercial spaces in relation to urban development were discussed. The following aspects were analyzed:

- Economic and social: temporary stores often appear in territories affected by economic downturns, empty spaces or lack of investment.
- Organizational and political: territories with permits or positive planning policies can facilitate temporary shops by offering temporary leases, legal protection, or cheap access to underutilized spaces. Conversely, territories with prohibitive or abandonment policies may hinder such initiatives through criminalization or lack of support.
- Temporal aspect: The temporary nature of temporary stores reflects the transient nature of the territories they occupy. These spaces often exist in 'cracks' or intermediate areas, such as urban outskirts or built-up areas, and are subject to rapid change driven by investment cycles or urban planning decisions.
- Market aspect: While temporary shops can provide local services and activate underutilised spaces, they can also serve as substitutes for future development, in line with austerity programmes that prioritise low-cost, temporary solutions over long-term public investment.

SOFIA EXAMPLES

As a short field study, two examples of currently held bazaars on the territory of Sofia were considered: one with a private and one with a municipal organization. Interviews and conversations were held with the organizer of the event "Bright & BOLD" and with the participants of the "Bazaar of Arts and Creative Crafts".

Each of them has a different character and way of organization: "Bright & BOLD" was a smaller and non-standard format, and the "Bazaar of Arts and Creative Crafts" was a larger format with more than 20 stalls organized with the participation of the municipality.

Bright & BOLD | SIMPLE Pop-Up Bazaar was a bazaar for designer goods by 15 different artists. It is organized by Simple Events, who organize many other pop-up bazaars and similar venues. Their locations and formats have been different: the goods are always present

under one type: stalls, but sometimes the sale is accompanied by a lecture (for example, about the "sustainable development of fashion") or a fashion show (as in Fashion Dreamland).

An interview was conducted with the main organizer of the bazaar Camellia. She admitted that her aim is to organize more future non-standard bazaars, where artists with creations that meet the general vision of the events can participate.



Figure 1: Sign at the entrance of the venue. (Author's photo).

The format of "Bright & BOLD" targets a younger audience. The style is artistic and non-standard "Bold" in unison with the chosen location. The bazaar is held in L44.space – a creative center made by artists for creators, which is divided into: a coworking space, an exhibition hall and an event venue, and a place for screen printing training.

The stands with the exhibited goods are arranged according to the size occupied by the equipment and according to the "feel" of the organizers and there are no restrictions on the placement of the goods.



Figure 2: Stands of the participants in the event. (Author's photos)
A – Stand with different kind of illustrations from the L44.space; B – Stand of the Eclect.me store;
C – Beton's stand with their products; D – Stand with accessories for dogs.

The duration of the event is two days – weekend bazaar category. Due to its small duration, the branding and marketing strategy was crucial.

The branded materials were set by the place where the event is held. In some places there were signs informing about the games (raffle) or the accompanying events that take place (the Jimmy Turrell exhibition).

“Bazaar of Arts and Creative Crafts” often takes place in famous locations in Sofia such as the park space in front of the National Palace of Culture or on Slaveykov Square. This one can be held both independently and as a part – a module of seasonal events such as: "Christmas fest" or "Spring fest".



Figure 3: Branded arch of the event. (Author's photo).

Different types of artists with different categories of products participate. The duration of the bazaar varies: from a few days (e.g. May 15-18) to a whole month (April 11 to May 11). Participants can rent a stand for a different period – they can participate for several days or take their place from the beginning to the end of the bazaar.

The stands are arranged in a row and form paths for the peaceful passage of visitors.



Figure 4: Arrangement of stands. (Author's photo).

There is no distribution by category. The brand of the event is present through the presence of the logo on them. Each participant receives the necessary equipment for the presentation of the

goods. The stands of S&P are "decorated" at the request of the artists and reflect their personal brands (Figs. 6 A and B).



Figure 5: Branding of the bazaar tents. (Author's photo).



A)



B)

Figure 6: Decorated stands and their personal brand. (Author's photos).

A – Stands with a more colorful approach; B – Stand with a simple and minimalistic brand's approach.

The two bazaars visited show great future potential but also reveal planning and organizational problems. Pop-up bazaars are still a novelty for the Bulgarian market, for this

reason it is difficult to find studies and analyses showing the full statistics (economic or marketing) of participants and clients in this trading format. There is no full data on the impact of this kind of temporary events on the neighborhood and the traders. For me, their execution is a bit complicated, they exist too much on the spur of the moment. Still the theme has a high potential for boosting and great opportunities for development in terms of design. And as first steps to a better organization of the “pop-up” spaces, the next typology could be used.

TYPES OF TEMPORARY COMMERCIAL SPACES

Following the bazaar content, for me temporary commercial spaces can be classified by the following criteria:

- By function: form of sale with or without a customer test. The goods are put up for sale and there are two options: it can be tested, or it can only be examined.
- By type of participants: business owners, volunteers (with a cause). or corporations. The owners include individual traders, start-ups, and craft producers.
- Bazaars with a charitable or social cause (e.g. initiatives for children or animals) involve volunteers and employees of corporations.
- By topic: food and drinks, books, arts and crafts, fashion and accessories, antique products, cosmetics and natural products, technologies and innovations, causes and social projects, seasonal (Christmas, spring, etc.), as well as mixed offers.
- By location: they can be divided into two categories: outdoor and indoor. To the first category for outdoor retail outlets can be located on a square, street, park or garden or indoors: in a mall, shopping center, industrial site such as a hall, gallery or other cultural space, in the common areas of coworking. Here, we can bring also out another subcategory: static and mobile. All the above can be static, and mobile can be minibuses, containers and kiosks.
- By duration: according to the duration, they are: one-day – related to an event, weekend bazaars, weekly or monthly performances. They can also be repetitive, such as: “Every Friday of the month”. According to the planned organization of the space: according to the location of the stalls and other objects in the selected environment. In general, stalls can be fixed and movable. For the exposition and presentation of the goods, several planning solutions can be distinguished, with arrangement in a linear order, a grid (in rows and columns), around a central object, to form a circle or to be scattered.
- By category, where stalls can be arranged thematically: food area, cosmetic products area, toy area, etc.
- By thematic organization or functional grouping: then the stalls can be arranged by category, mixed, conceptual or alternative. With a mixed arrangement, there is no pronounced distribution of stalls, different products alternate. The conceptual placement is dictated (as the name implies) by the pre-prepared concept (one style, color palette, etc.). The alternative arrangement refers to the placement of the stalls in such a way as to form a specific route such as the "Alley of Taste".

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The construction of such spaces depends on many factors: location, regulations, access to logistics and design flexibility. Their successful implementation is often conditioned by the

availability of unused spaces, high pedestrian traffic and accessibility (Boustani, 2019, p. 57). Urban austerity policies and liberalization of the use of public space also play a key role (Harris, 2015). That is why the results and conclusions of the article are of course conditional.

Still, based on the interviews conducted and the classification made, an organization system can be created that stimulates the flow of customers, creates order among the participants, but also helps the visitors to orient themselves correctly. Clear branding and grouping into categories can help with this.

Another important aspect of this kind of commercial spaces reinforces the city's tourism by creating another attraction for foreigners with its creative atmosphere. That is why there is room for improvement: it needs more advertising, combined with other touristic attractions and reinforce the brand.

The proposed classification of temporary retail spaces offers a practical framework for understanding and developing diverse models of ephemeral commerce. By aligning the typology with strategic brand objectives and contextual factors, this framework can serve as a valuable tool for both brand development and urban activation. Temporary retail formats not only support brand experimentation and visibility, but also contribute to the vibrancy and identity of the local environment they inhabit. As such, they hold potential not merely as commercial strategies, but as catalysts for cultural, economic, and spatial engagement within the city.

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