

# EXPERT INTERVIEWS

## JAN KATTEIN MARTYN EVANS ROZÁLIE KAŠPAROVÁ

### MEANWHILE PROJECTS SHOULD NOT BE DRIVEN SOLELY BY MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Interview with Jan Kattein

try and fail and tweak and fix and adapt and adjust. You can't just build them and hope that people will come. It's about having an open design process because the sooner these projects can provide a civic benefit, the better. Ultimately, the delivery process becomes part of the experiment.

What are the long-term advantages of meanwhile projects for local councils and developers?

Anybody who builds housing or mixed use, for example, is interested in a coherent community that likes to live with each other. They are also interested in a community that might be active and engaged in shaping and maintaining the spaces around the places that they built. They also probably are interested in a community that's got skills and a vision, and is educated. These are all benefits that make a good place and a good town. Meanwhile projects can certainly advance these objectives.

Who is usually your client? Is it councils or developers? Or is it half and half?

We mostly work for the public sector, because, I suppose, they are slightly further ahead in their thinking and objectives than the developers. With a meanwhile project, we can quite often tick quite a few of their boxes that aren't just about providing a space, they are about wellbeing, community cohesion, economic development, greening, and supporting community organisations. So for a local authority, it's a no-brainer to work with us on these sorts of projects because they are delivering a huge number of objectives across departments. A lot of developers are starting

fully. If it's only seen through the channel of communication and marketing, a lot of clients don't really see why they should invest that much money in a campaign. I mean, meanwhile projects are not particularly expensive, but there's sometimes this view that because they're temporary, they should be a lot cheaper than permanent projects. Well, they aren't. First of all, they still have to comply with the same rules and regulations as permanent projects. And second, they need programming that needs to be paid for in one way or another. I think they're very good value for money in terms of the stories that they provide. But you do need to invest in that. The developer needs to appreciate the manifold benefits that these projects bring. They need to see beyond marketing and realise that by delivering social value they increase their reputation as a company, that they improve their chances of getting planning permission, that it will improve their future capacity to work in partnership with the public sector. Once you realise all these things, it suddenly becomes incredibly cheap to do meanwhile projects.

People often dislike changes. Are temporary projects also a way for the developer to build a relationship with them?

Yes, meanwhile projects establish a forum for dialogue and discussion. But they are not a means by which anybody pursuing a legacy development can get away with no dialogue or discussion. Our Ebury Edge project, which we delivered recently for Westminster Council, is a good example. Westminster had on three occasions tried to get residents on board to redevelop an estate that was

who's the community? Some projects are on sites that don't yet have an established resident community because they're just being evolved and developed. In that case, you might want to attract and engage surrounding communities. On other sites you've got a really, really engaged local resident community that's very passionate about their environment and has an opinion and wants to shape that environment. Leveraging existing networks is a really good way of engagement, whether they're business improvement districts, residents associations, community interest groups, or forums. There are people around almost everywhere who have access to contact files, newsletters, distribution lists or established social media networks.

At the outset of each project, we put together an engagement plan that looks at who we engage, what are the means to engage with them, what the objectives of engagement are, and what are the particular outcomes that we're hoping to attain by engaging communities. It is very important to have an open mind and be prepared to have a bespoke approach depending on the local circumstances.

Do you also work with communication agencies? There is a lot of communication that has to happen within the community.

Absolutely. In terms of community engagement, we're putting real effort and emphasis on having a direct dialogue and being heavily involved in shaping what the dialogue is, but a communication agency can

is the operational concept. If a meanwhile project can encourage cultural activity, support businesses, and galvanise communities to work together for greater coherence, then that's the legacy which one hopes and aspires to maintain after the project is dismantled. For small businesses, that might mean working very closely with the developer on how small businesses could move into the permanent development or these projects can establish formal collaborations between charities, communities and existing organisations that outlast the development, too. And finally, environmental issues are really, really, really key. It's no longer acceptable to just build something that's scrapped after a limited period of time. So we have to think very hard about what we do with every single component after our project is dismantled and taken away. What is great about this is that we can be super inventive and hopefully provide inspiration and knowledge that can be applied to permanent projects, too. Ideally, you move off site and you leave skills behind, you leave inspiration behind, and you leave no trace at all on the environment.

How do you make short-term projects environmentally friendly?

For example by using generic components. We've done a couple of projects recently where the structural system largely relies on scaffolding. It is ideal, because scaffolding never gets outdated. Once the building is taken down, the scaffolding becomes scaffolding. We've also done a series of small prefabricated buildings that will be



### How temporary interventions create welcoming places with a strong identity

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Jan Kattein Architects specialise in sustainable and collaborative temporary urbanism. We spoke to Jan Kattein about his experience of how meanwhile projects empower local communities, improve the relationships between the developer and local authorities, and accelerate important changes.

What first attracted you to meanwhile projects or how did you start working on them?

Before I started working in architecture I worked in theatre design, which is temporary by its very nature. The great thing about temporary projects is that once they finish, there is space for something new. They also give you the opportunity to be experimental and to try out really rather radical, new ways of doing things. Skip Garden, for example, was a self-built student project. I don't think that would have been possible as a permanent project. I also really like how quick meanwhile projects are. Their delivery is something that needs to happen with expediency, otherwise you're eating significantly into the lifecycle of the project. It galvanises communities and professional teams to be really focused on delivering a project. I like to design through making — some people call it the 'action research' approach to city making. Meanwhile projects allow you to

to also develop objectives that go across sectors because they're interested in the wellbeing of their communities and those also come to us.

How common would you say these projects are?

They are becoming an integral part of the process. Still, they are sometimes misunderstood by the private sector. There are different types of meanwhile projects. Meanwhile projects that are purely driven by marketing objectives are challenging to make work because the objectives shine through. It's no problem to have some marketing objectives when embarking on a project, but if that's your exclusive objective, then you set yourself up to fail. You have to have the ambition to deliver more and to deliver for people. A marketing team is unlikely to deliver on some of the more civic objectives of these projects. And I think that sometimes is where the challenge lies for the private sector, which is starting to get involved in these sorts of projects. If a marketing team runs a project, it turns into a marketing suite that just happens to be temporary — and marketing suites tend to be temporary in any case. So you know, you've got to integrate the spatial concept and the operational concept and make sure that the two of them deliver the civic objectives that are at the heart of these sorts of projects.

Why do you think some developers are still hesitant to incorporate meanwhile uses into their projects?

I think that to do this sort of project, you need to understand and endorse its purpose

needing significant works and the buildings were beyond repair. On previous occasions, the council had committed to rehouse everybody. But nonetheless, residents were very reluctant to agree because they said: "We don't really want to be on a construction site for ten years. We understand the regeneration benefits, but there's very little benefit for us if half of our life as a family is impacted by the works." So the council came to us and said, "What can we come up with that will address this?" And our Ebury Edge project provided the exact answer. The concept was developed with the residents and it's really interesting how that tipped the balance — all residents voted in favour of the estate redevelopment after we realised some of the regeneration benefits for them in advance of the redevelopment happening. So yes, it does matter. It still requires you to genuinely engage and consult with residents, but it proves that as a local authority or as a developer, you've really got their concerns at heart. And it also proves that you're willing to deliver things that people would like to see. In a way, developing a project is also about capturing a narrative about the desires and aspirations of communities and a narrative about how we use and govern public spaces. Our clients need a design, but also a really carefully conceived justification why that design is happening, who wants it, why they want it and how it benefits those that are affected by it.

How do you find and engage the local community?

There isn't a really easy answer because it's different for every place. First of all,

Do you consider the legacy of meanwhile projects as you create them?

Designing the legacy alongside a temporary project is incredibly important. It's not so much of a concern when you do a permanent project because its afterlife is 50 or 100 years away, but if you do a meanwhile project, you've got to think very carefully about what benefit is left after the project is gone.

How do you plan for legacy?

There are four ways we can build a legacy. First of all, we think about educational benefits — how we can inspire and teach young people, or anybody really, with parts of our projects. Hopefully, they can learn some skills that stay with them for life. Second, inventive and inspirational design is really important. A design solution that simply satisfies a purpose is unlikely to leave a legacy that goes beyond the project's life. All our clients have great design aspirations, and I totally agree with them. It's not an added extra, it's the left, right and centre of the project. A third thing that leaves a legacy

be really helpful in establishing the dialogue in the first place, inviting people to it and facilitating it. They have also been really helpful at extending and expanding the dialogue beyond the neighbourhood. Lots of our clients' objectives include that their site or development becomes a destination or an established place that differentiates itself beyond site boundaries. It is mutually beneficial — by working with us, they have a much more compelling story to tell that involves genuine people.

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There is a developer who would be interested in meanwhile use of their land, how should they start?

The first thing is to do a feasibility study, which often helps to define the brief. We look at site constraints and opportunities, timescale, and budget. We put those down as parameters and then decide on what shape or form the project might take. We spend quite a lot of time thinking about who would be the right sort of organisation to operate this. Is it going to have a cultural focus? Is it going to have a community focus? Is it going to have a business and economic focus or an environmental focus? And then you need to put the time in to find the right people to design and run the project for you afterwards.

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