The Power of Radical Place-Making Practices: Lessons Learned from ufaFabrik in Berlin

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Abstract: This article investigates ufaFabrik's practice within Berlin's urban context, which emerged from an occupation of an abandoned site and evolved into a long-term experiment in radical place-making. Through this case study analysis, it explores the role of radical place-making in shaping urban policy, focusing on the dimensions of decision, place and policy. Drawing on an expanded conceptualisation of place-making that embraces a radical perspective, the study is based on a Ph.D. programme and on extensive field research. ufaFabrik has given place-making a political meaning, challenging conventional urban planning in relation to 'undecided' spaces. This paradigm of place-making represents grassroots activism and insurgent action and it can catalyse both local and urban transformations. Through a critical analysis of the limits and possibilities of radical place-making practice, the article argues that the ufaFabrik offers valuable insights into the potential of participatory and community-led approaches to reshape urban spaces and promote more inclusive and sustainable forms of urban governance. The study highlights how the re-politicisation of urban issues emerges from conflict and challenges established power dynamics. It highlights the interconnection between 'place' and 'making', weaving experiential and generative elements into the urban discourse, highlighting its transformative potential and reconfiguration of decision-making dynamics.

Keywords: place-making; decision making; policy making; radical urban practices; ufaFabrik; Berlin

1. Introduction

This article focuses on the radical place-making practice [1–8] of the ufaFabrik [9–13] in the context of Berlin. Through case study analysis, the aim is to investigate how the advocacy role of radical place-making practices in the field of urban policy works, with particular attention to the different dimensions of making: decision, place and policy. The radical practice of ufaFabrik has used the concept of place-making and transformed it into a political claim [14] to challenge traditional principles of urban planning for the 'undecided' spaces [15,16].

This radical place-making practice elucidates the emergence of a distinctive paradigm of place-making, distinguished by its radical tenets, grounded in insurgent action [17] and grassroots impetus. At the local level, it has been characterised by a radical performative action [3], through the occupation and renovation of a void and disused site [18]. Its confluence of actions provides a vehicle for the creation of urban experiments and grassroots initiatives, thereby lending a dynamic dimension to the spatial discourse. Concomitantly, at the urban level, this radical model of place-making assumes a central role in shaping the trajectory of area transformation. Such influence is accelerated by the legitimising agency that activists provide, arising from their skill in institutional engagement. Moreover, the ability to promote and consolidate urban and transnational networks is an integral part of this process. By harnessing these multifaceted strategies, the radical practice of place-making manages to permeate decision-making levels, producing transformative consequences for urban spaces. Integrated into this radical place-making paradigm is the phenomenon of the re-politicisation of some urban issues, driven by urban conflicts [19]. In

this way, the conventional monopoly on the governance of urban transformations is openly challenged, giving rise to a reconfiguration of the power dynamics that shape the decision, place and policy making.

The radicalised approach to place-making is a product of insurgent action and grass-roots mobilisation. Operating effectively both at the local and urban levels, its influence is magnified through adept institutional interfacing and the strategic cultivation of expansive networks. In this way, a more democratic urban metamorphosis is initiated, not only by reshaping urban transformations but also by promoting the revitalisation of marginalised interests and stakeholders.

The case of ufaFabrik Berlin is considered a political project expressed by cultural niches [20], which can be considered a challenge to the fundamental principles of urban planning and the city's transformation driven by unitary decisions from the plan or the market. This assumption raises important questions about the role of place-making practices in urban transformation and their impact on existing urban policies.

What potential do radical place-making practices [5] like ufaFabrik have? Starting from a conflict, what kind of dialogue and attitudes has it generated [13,20] with institutions in order to enable the acquisition of decision-making power?

In this context, the place-making concept is not used in the traditional way like an urban co-design tool—generally used as a notion related to management techniques, it is aimed at fostering community participation in transformative processes of public spaces such as squares or streets [21–23]. This article, instead, focuses on the European version of the concept, distinguishing it from the American version, (the sphere in which this notion was coined), highlighting significant cultural differences due to the type of meaning and value of public space [24], historically characterised, in Europe, by a dimension of conflict, of public space that is also political space of re-appropriation of voice and decision-making [25]. The use of the term place-making is justified by its etymology (with the words "place" and "making" joined by a dash), and this study wants to offer a different perspective on radical urban re-appropriation practices that are closely connected to the dimension of making [26]. In this interpretation, the article's core is the ability to activate decision-making and policy-making processes through place-making, capable of creating physical and conceptual spaces dedicated to expressing grassroots actions [3,7]. In this context, the relationship between "place" and "making" refers to the use that is made of these places [27] and to the abilities of actors to activate themselves for the enhancement of places deemed significant [28].

The term "place" refers to the spatial and symbolic dimension of a location and can include neighbourhoods, areas, small urban spaces, or buildings. Depending on the discipline, this term can have different interpretations and variations. "Place" is different from "space" [29] because the latter is static and measurable, with defined boundaries [30,31]. Instead, "place" refers to the experiential dimension, which is manifested through processes that develop outside of defined boundaries [3,32]. Within a place, different co-presences of uses, social groups, or actors [27] can occur, contributing to the construction of interpretations, readings and narratives of the surrounding reality, including conflicts or convergences [33]: it can represent an *unstable stage for performances* [3] where conditions are created for different types of use or non-use, characterising the space through flexibility. Using the concept of "plural territory" [27,34], practices of non-stationary use, but in continuous movement, are intended. The place represents the experiential and individual dimension, closely connected to daily life, which provides a sense of continuity and belonging over time [35].

The term "making" [26] refers to the act of creating, which includes a series of tangible and intangible activities and actions aimed at producing something. It expresses a concrete dimension directly on the place. In this context, 'making' presents as a concrete way of relating the mode of implementation to the object of intervention. It can be interpreted as an action of correlation towards a space, seeking to bring out or realise implicit potentialities.

According to Cresswell [3], places are closely related to the social practices that take place in them. "Making" can generate different imaginaries and patterns of use, including non-use, as possibilities for urban space [36]. The concept of "making" refers to the performative action of civic activists, highlighting the centrality of the action of local actors in the re-signification of "undecided" spaces [15,16] through active participation and the collective construction of a sense of belonging and recognition, for which "making" is able to emphasise the importance of a pragmatic and action-oriented approach.

The radical dimension is related to the conflicting nature of the decision-making process in urban transformation within the different seasons of urban policy in Berlin. ufaFabrik is interpreted as a radical place-making practice in an "undecided" space, read through the transcending of formal planning and decision-making schemes [37].

The declination of the concept of place-making in the Berlin context also provides elements of analysis on some urban issues that manifest themselves in an extreme way in this context and, for this reason, can be put in tension with each other: the relationship between the demand for places and the supply of spaces, the conflict–negotiation–collaboration transition between civic activists and institutions and the distinction between undecided and planned spaces.

The first part of the article presents the materials and methods, with a focus on the adopted approach and methodologies by the research. An overview of the theoretical framework of the place-making concept is presented in its radical dimension, through the declination of this notion as performative action.

The connection between radical place-making practices in relation to "undecided" spaces is also explored.

The second part is dedicated to the case of ufaFabrik Berlin. It describes the analytical framework of the case study: from the different steps taken in the process and consolidation, to the three dimensions of decision making, place-making and policy making.

By employing the temporal dimension as a pivotal lens—an element of pronounced relevance within the ambit of this case study—this article comes to the description of the ufaFabrik site and its different practices and uses within it. The last part described the process, negotiation skills of the activists and networking skills.

Ultimately, the concluding part accentuates the mechanisms underpinning the process of the case study, extracting conclusive lessons and insights drawn from the Berlin context and the specific case under examination.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Approach and the Methodologies

The approach and methodologies used were fundamental to the development of the whole research. This article is part of a PhD programme. The qualitative research methodology [38] adopted an inductive approach, i.e., a method of investigation that relied on the observation, exploration and evidence of data to identify and investigate patterns and trends to reach generalisable conclusions from what was gathered in the fieldwork.

The present study employed fieldwork [39], a widely utilised method of investigation in urban studies, which facilitated the direct observation and analysis of urban phenomena within their contextual settings. This approach gathered comprehensive data on configurational, social, economic and cultural patterns. The fieldwork provided a valuable opportunity to delve into the Berlin context and the Tempelhof neighbourhood, aiming to comprehend the urban dynamics and policies that have evolved over the years. This contextual examination involved a thorough exploration, enabling the case study to be analysed by discerning its discernible patterns, various stages of legitimisation and structuring of radical action and the interactions with institutional entities. A collection of qualitative data was analysed through various techniques, such as thematic, spatial and categorisation analysis.

The field research method exhibits distinctive features in its implementation:

- Context direct observations: The field research took place in the 'natural' context in which the phenomena under study occurred. Through direct observation and the study of annual reports and the historical archive, it was possible to analyse and verify the dynamics directly in the environment in which they occurred. The observation in the analysis of the collected data took place through participation in the life of the communities or interest groups, in an immersive mode.

- Stakeholder engagement: some of the stakeholders are directly involved in the research process through interviews with case study activists, to build an understanding of their experiences and perspectives concerning the object of study. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted during the visiting period (in 2022) with some of the activists, some of the founders of the ufaFabrik and other members or workers of the different organisations and groups: the cultural centre, the neighbourhood centre, the circus school, the free school, the ecological and environmental projects and the guest house. The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured scheme which was divided into two sections. The first section was a general introduction by the author that described the topic, research questions and hypothesis; the second section referred to people interviewed about their background and skills, their relation and story with ufaFabrik practice, their interactions with the local communities (e.g., inhabitants, other associations, local authorities, enterprises or business activities, etc.), the governance of the different organisations (in terms of employees, expertise, and numbers), the networking activities and the projects, the connections with different organisations of ufaFabrik and future prospectives and critical issues.

The research adopted a single case study [40,41], which made it possible to examine the characteristics and results obtained from the fieldwork activity. The case study analysis represented a substantial activity of reflection [42]. Using this method, it was possible to provide more detailed descriptions and interpretations, which were also able to capture nuances, patterns and elements that other research approaches might not have considered, allowing for an understanding of the interactions of its significant factors within the real context, through the fieldwork approach.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: An Overview of the Place-Making Concept and the Declination in the Radical Dimension

In the literature on place-making, the term is referred to in different ways, and it is used as a catch-all term to describe a variety of interventions, spaces and also player promoters. This study took a position by identifying the bottom-up radicality of place-making practice as its main characteristic, rather than attempting to be exhaustive of the complexities of the term.

The concept of place-making has its origins in the 1960s in the United States. At that time, certain fundamentals of the modern city began to be questioned. The question of their effectiveness in solving the increasingly complex problems of large cities was one of the first criticisms of urban planning theories. "Modern orthodox urbanism", as described by Jacobs, limited itself to addressing functional aspects and neglected the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of urban dynamics. In this context, planning interventions were mostly structural, not sufficiently considering the relationship between local communities and urban spaces. In fact, it was believed that the interaction between people and the urban environment could produce significant outcomes on individual and collective behaviour [7].

In order to respond to the needs of a constantly evolving society, some authors such as Jacobs [43,44], Whyte [45] and Lynch [46] argued that the design of urban transformations should consider the social behaviour of the inhabitants, local economic dynamics, travel flows and use practices. The planning rules of those years were limited by standardised operational codes, unable to capture the real dynamics of the city and its communities, the everyday relationships that formed its social structure. This is the problem that the place-making approach wanted to address: can a bottom-up approach respond to the needs of the local communities?

Early studies and research on the relationship between urban space and community focused on the concept of people's perceptions [46] and the different uses of public spaces, in particular the behavioural aspects [45].

Lynch's perceptual dimension of urban space [46] suggests that the city assumes a personalised visage contingent upon the manner in which its urban spaces are both apprehended and engaged with. There are some key elements (e.g., pathways, boundaries, routes, etc.) that create links and relationships between the city and society. The perception of these aspects represents the user's awareness, ability to move, orientation and use.

Within this contextual milieu, the established paradigms inherent to the urban planning tradition have encountered scrutiny, notably for their perceived detachment from the prevailing milieu. These traditional schemes have come under criticism for their inherent tendency to neglect the nuanced context.

The research and experimentation on human behaviour in urban spaces began in the early 80s [45]. For the design of the New York City Plan in the 1970s, the New York City Planning Commission commissioned a study to identify the social dynamics and functioning of urban spaces to define the elements and issues that determined their use and the possible ways of intervening to improve their usability. According to these studies, the hypothesis was that social life significantly contributes to the quality of life of communities, as well as to the quality of urban spaces themselves. This reversed the perspective practiced and studied in previous years, which did not consider the social dimension of urban spaces.

The issues relating to the urban environment and the use of public space take on different shades in the European context, particularly in relation to the value and importance attached to public space as a place of reclaiming voice [25] and decision making. This aspect brings out the radical dimension of place-making that is addressed in this study. The reclaiming of urban spaces is linked to the claim of the 'right to the city' (ibid.), that is the public demand for spaces and the will to reconfigure or redistribute decision-making power, challenging the monopoly (public or market) on decisions about urban transformation. The place-making practice of ufaFabrik was promoted by civic activists who, through direct action, reclaimed the use of abandoned space, rescued them from neglect or speculation and returned them to the city. The social value and impact have been recognised over time, generating processes of legitimisation and structuring, and supporting the rebalancing of decision-making power over urban transformations.

The radical dimension inherent in the place-making practice is construed as a series of performative actions [3]. This performative dimension operates as a mode of activation, engendering actions that are deeply interwoven with the pragmatic sphere of activist communities. Their skills have been applied to the places' knowledge production [47] and the creation of content through the enhancement of tangible and intangible resources.

Concomitantly, the notion of performance encapsulates an agonistic manifestation of conflict [48] that involves communities of activists with a generous commitment; the declaration of intent and direct action are central elements in the construction of tensions that can generate innovative ways of consolidating of bottom-up urban regeneration process.

The dimension of temporality and experimentation [18,20] is central to the process of radical place-making practice: small but systematic performative actions for the enhancement of spaces have attempted to strengthen the experience of use, in a perspective in which the transformation adapts to its uses or even triggers new ones. These actions become means of configuration and design, enhancing the experiential relationship and also defining possible ways of care and management through the use of available resources. The project is not understood as a final product, but rather as a set of actions that can guide its design over time [26].

2.3. Radical Place-Making and the Relationship with "Undecided" Spaces

The key to understanding radical practice as ufaFabrik lies in the notion of place-making in its semantic dimension: the place is intended as a space of process, a product of different imaginaries, of practices of using urban space [36]. The making dimension is

expressed through radical transformative action, as a form of a practical dimension linked and related to place, through experience, defining spaces of expression and interacting knowledge [47] and skills within spaces to be signified.

The phenomenon of the re-appropriation of 'undecided' spaces [15,16] by activists is an important element of the radical perspective: the action can be interpreted as spontaneous and unplanned [16] where "micro-political" [49] actions are carried out. This form of intervention, defined as "insurgent urbanism" [17], acts outside the institutionalised context of planning and urban policy, intervening in uncertainty as a space (physical and conceptual) of radical openness that fosters a culture of experimentation. These spaces become places where different values and identities are confronted [50]. They are urban spaces that are the result of radical place-making practices and a field of political and cultural confrontation and conflict. These spaces represent an opportunity for activists and local communities to construct and express values from the density of active or activatable social energies expressed within them.

Direct action in these spaces brings back the key elements of Lefebvre's reflections on space [50] as a product and guide of everyday experience. In Lefebvre's space, experiences, stories and contradictions constitute urban life. This perspective offers a more complex vision of urbanism than traditional planning.

These undecided spaces can also be defined as 'third space' [51], which represents a place of social creation where physical and representational factors meet and influence each other. The third-space theory emphasises that urban space should be understood not only as a physical representation but as a complex and articulated social production. This interpretation also provides space with a political dimension and becomes a platform for developing a radical approach based on the notion of instability and non-definition.

Urban spaces can thus be understood as sites of experimentation and resistance to meaninglessness and institutionalised use, offering a new vision of the transformation of the city that goes beyond orthodox planning [44].

### 3. ufaFabrik Berlin Case Study

ufaFabrik is a radical place-making practice. It was born in 1979 and has been able to build its own legitimacy over time, starting from an initial phase of conflict and occupation of the "undecided" space [15,16] of the former UFA Studios. Through its capabilities to negotiate while maintaining an agonistic attitude [48,52] towards urban policies, ufaFabrik has created paths of collaboration with institutions, generating new policy-making strategies.

Concerning the case study, place-making can be interpreted as political rhetoric, a part of a claim of self-assertion, of a discursive and narrative repertoire of political empowerment in support of forms of re-politicisation of certain urban issues.

This practice was analysed through a diachronic reading. In a contemporary dimension, it is understood as a laboratory, a physical and conceptual space for exercising a form of the re-politicisation and reconstruction of political subjectivities, evolving in its relations with the institutional political system. The case study of ufaFabrik makes it possible to read this relationship and this evolution also through a historical interpretation of the process and it has been analysed through three propaedeutic steps of the process: from the initial squatting to urban experimentations, until the long-term strategy definition. These steps are linked with three making dimensions (Figure 1).

Decision making: The radical practice demonstrated the ability to anticipate and make decisions. This practice acted on an "undecided" space, characterised by the absence of a decision about its transformation. The absence of a decision created unplanned space that escaped the rules of planning or was waiting to be included in some public–private buying and selling schemes. Within these voids, the group of activists have been able to identify opportunities capable of accommodating different needs. From this perspective, indecision removes these spaces from planning. Radical practices anticipate a decision through experimental practices, places of strategies rather than spaces of planning. Con-

sequently, these practices were not the effect of a pre-existing decision, but rather a form of creative anticipation in conflict with decisions or indecisions coming from public or private institutions. The dimension of activation plays a central role in this approach as a practice of overcoming conflictual contestation through concrete and factual action, directly intervening in spaces and using them as objects of performance. In this form of activism, a decision is expressed by taking responsibility for the management of undecided spaces, by occupying them.
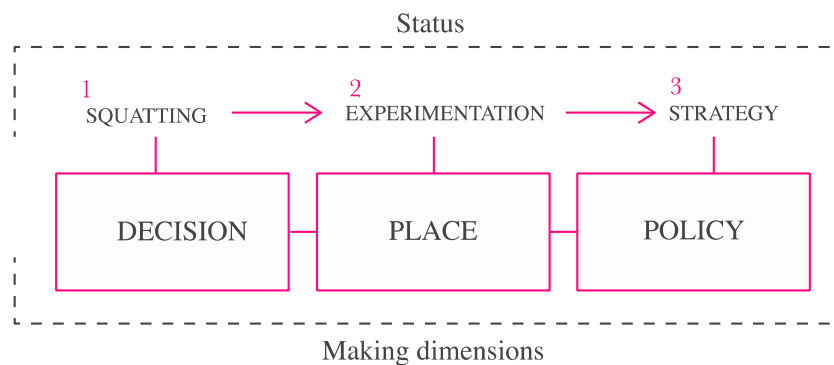
Figure 1. The case study analytical framework (Source: scheme by the author).

Place-making: The re-appropriation of abandoned spaces through radical practices represented both a physical and political process by which these spaces were rescued from abandonment through experimental actions aimed at defining possible uses. This process made it possible to transform spaces into places of design and expression of skills, creating new social and cultural opportunities. In addition to its concrete dimension, the re-appropriation of these spaces has, over time, also taken on a symbolic meaning, representing an opportunity for activists and local communities to contribute to decision-making on the site and its transformations. Place-making was a learning-by-doing process [26]. These spaces have been the subject of temporary experiments [53], deeply connected to the surrounding environment, in which practices have come into contact and dialogue with it, constructing responses to specific needs of the local context. The experiments within these places also define their temporality [54], in terms of different uses, dynamics and openness, creating a tension of unpredictable interventions and possibilities.

Policy making: Through a radical and agonistic approach to decision making, ufaFabrik has been able to influence urban policies related to the transformation of the site and the neighbourhood.

It is the result of an evolutionary process that defines not only the uses and relationships but also the rules and norms by which the practice is understood [53]. Place-making can be a political tool that provides a mechanism for extending democracy by opening up decision-making processes. It can be an instrument of interactive knowledge production [47], i.e., the environment of interaction created in the reciprocity between different forms of knowledge, the scientific, the ordinary and the tacit [55]. Place-making practices like ufaFabrik become important when they can anticipate evolutionary possibilities, identify and address critical issues related to broader policy issues in innovative ways and enhance local capabilities by creating knowledge spaces to support them. The use of knowledge openly and creatively to explore new solutions is one of the main implications of these radical practices in different contexts and becomes central to policy formulation and policy making.

3.1. The Relevance of ufaFabrik and the Value of the Time Dimension

ufaFabrik is a relevant case within Berlin's urban policy for several reasons [9–11,13]. First of all, ufaFabrik is an example of how place-making can be used as a political claim to experiment and promote, through the practice dimension, a different lifestyle. Secondly, starting from political claims, the performative dimension of activism has generated radical

action through occupation, which allowed the reactivation of an abandoned site with important historical relevance, and gave it back to the neighbourhood and the city, through its reconversion into an ecology, aggregation and cultural place. Thirdly, ufaFabrik is a practice connected to the urban movement born between the early 1970s and the early 1990s and is a reference case for contemporary urban policies that aim to promote participation, social inclusion and environmental and ecological sustainability, interpreting urban regeneration as a way to enhance existing urban resources and improve the quality of life of local communities.

Time is one of the central elements in the process of this urban place-making practice. ufaFabrik is a historical experience, useful because it allows a review over a long period, highlighting some key elements in its evolution over time.

The element of the time supports the argumentation of the relationship that has been established, evolved and structured with institutions at various levels (from local, to urban, to international networks in which ufaFabrik is involved), but also of the process of evolution as a practice, in the consolidation of services and activities of public interest and, finally, in the economic, social and environmental sustainability built up over the years.

The temporary character of the initial legitimisation phase (1979 to 1980) was useful for the institutions to verify the reliability of the ufaFabrik activist collective. The time allowed for negotiation led to a long-term contract and the experimentation of a new administrative tool. The time was needed to build strategic perspectives, not just to realise the initial vision. The time was needed to have sufficient guarantees to be able to refer to banks or investors, to be able to accept investments or take out loans for the renovation and regeneration of the spaces, built in 1920. The time allowed for a further 40 years, thanks to the negotiation and extension of the contract (until 2067) that took place in 2019 with the Land of Berlin in the prospects for the development and sustainability of this practice.

3.2. The Place and Its Uses

ufaFabrik is a community hub covering an area of over 18,500 sqm. It is located in the southwest quadrant of the Tempelhof district, on the banks of the Teltow Canal (Figure 2).
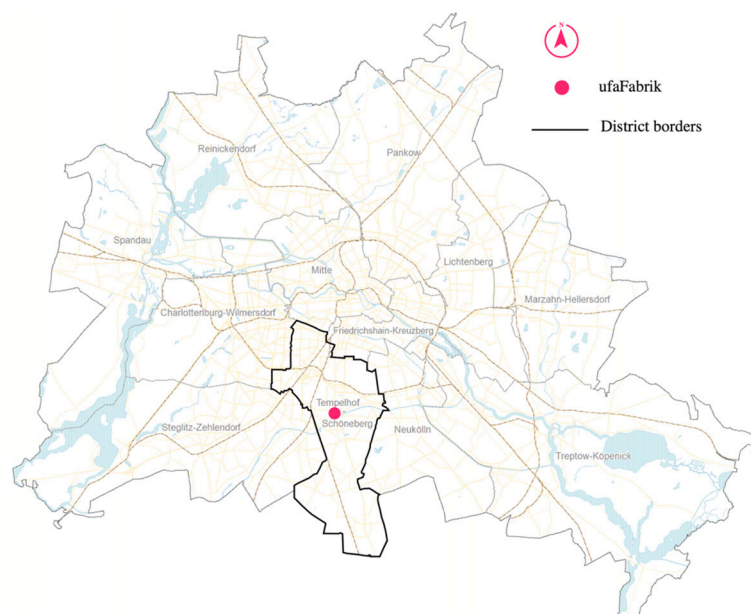

Figure 2. The case study location (Source: map by the author).

The ufaFabrik area is easily accessible from the Ullsteinstrasse U-Bahn 6 stop and is located between Viktoriastrasse and Wolframstrasse. The area presents eight buildings (Figure 3) that develop along a central pedestrian street called "Straße des 9. Juni", from

where it is possible to access the different spaces and where it is possible to stay outside the café.
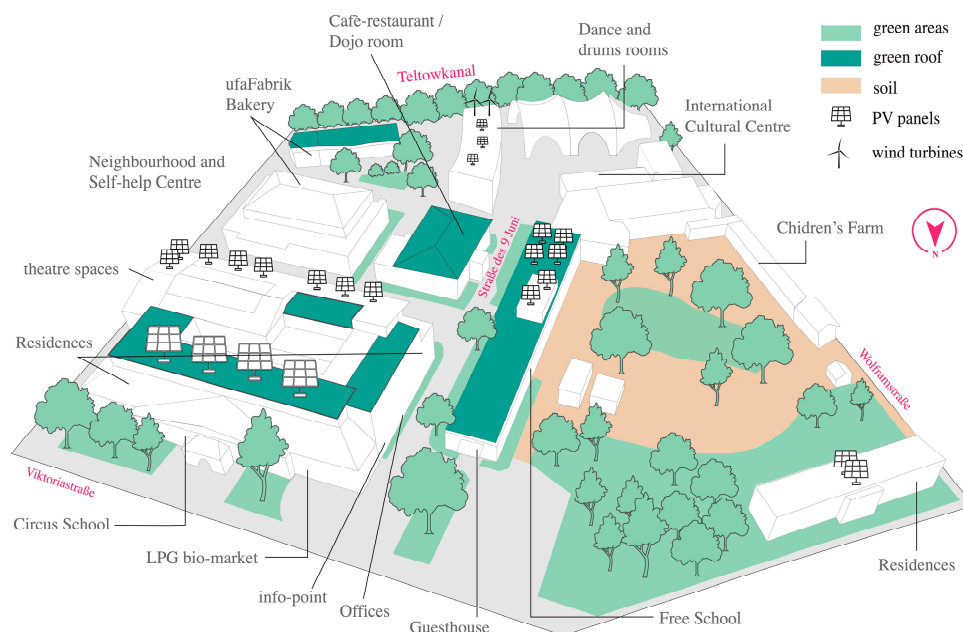
Figure 3. The site of ufaFabrik (Source: map by the author).

The first building contains the Circus School. It was formally established in 1982 with the installation of the circus tent set up in an empty area of the former UFA factory and the organisation of the circus company's first tour. Dedicated to children discovering circus arts, in 1987 the Circus School was involved in the first Children's Circus Festival, where circus practice also became an educational method of movement, control and discipline. In the same building, there is a part of residences, offices and an info-point close to the main entrance. On the street side is the LPG bio-market and on the basement floors, there are also spaces dedicated to art education, in particular the International Photography School and the Jazzschule Berlin.

In the second building the Guest House is located, with some private rooms, dormitories and some shared spaces such as the kitchen, bathrooms and laundry room. In the same building, there is the Free School of ufaFabrik, an alternative school that follows a learning approach based on the philosophy of free education, which seeks to develop the personality of the individual through self-determination, freedom of thought and learning through collaborative projects that value diversity and creativity. The school community, defined as the educational community, is made up of students, parents and teachers who work together to create a stimulating and inclusive learning environment (inside and outside the school).

Behind this second building is the Children's Farm, dedicated to the Free School and the children of the neighbourhood, where there are various animals (including horses, ducks, rabbits, etc.), a playground and didactic rooms. In particular, there is a straw house in the middle of the farm, built during an important residential workshop dedicated to ecological construction, in which there is some technical equipment for small experiments by the Free School's children.

A third building is dedicated to the ufaFabrik International Cultural Centre, renovated about ten years ago. The Cultural Centre began in 1981 with the reopening of the historic cinema of the former UFA studios. It was renamed the "UFO Cinema". Over time, the centre's spaces were renovated and its activities expanded. The Cultural Centre hosts national and international productions, residencies and workshops, works with schools and collaborates with artists from the Berlin, German and international cultural scenes. The Cultural Centre is composed of two theatres, a foyer, some artists' residences, rehearsal

rooms, a conference room, dressing rooms, a bar and an open-air theatre where, in the summer season, various events are organised and where much of the summer cultural programme takes place. Near the open-air theatre, there is a fourth building with spaces dedicated to dance and drumming.

There is a fifth building dedicated to food and drinks: Café Rudi und Rosa is a meeting point, where it is possible to stay, eat and drink all day long, from breakfast to dinner. Part of this building is also dedicated to the Dojo, a room for martial arts.

Behind this, in a sixth building, is the Neighbourhood and Self-Help Centre, which has grown out of the expertise, interests and needs of activists and local communities. Since its establishment, its activities have included a social and community welfare dimension. In 1987, NUSZ became an independent organisation and today it has more than a hundred employees and many projects in the ufaFabrik area and the whole city. The centre is dedicated to different services and activities for diverse groups of inhabitants: from families to children, young mothers and the elderly. It is also the organisation that manages the Children's Farm, the Dojo and other projects and services in the whole city.

In the area, there are two other buildings reserved for ufaBäckerei's food production which distributes its products to various bakeries and weekly city markets, as well as LPG's small chain of bio-markets. UfaBekeräi is one of the oldest organic bakeries in Berlin: the food craft business is known throughout the city and was founded in 1980. In addition to the bakery, the brand also includes a pastry laboratory and an organic market. The latter was opened in 1981 and was the first organic shop in the city, selling fruit and vegetables, handmade clothes, cosmetics and books, as well as bakery products. In 2014, due to financial problems, UfaBekeräi had to hand over its activities to LPG Health Food Stores, which retained the laboratory space, the recipes, the quality of the products and the employees of the bakery.

The entire area is characterised by the presence of rainwater treatment, as well as systems for the production of energy from renewable sources such as solar panels and micro-wind turbines, green roofs and walls for the building's thermal isolation. Finally, there are information panels throughout the site that describe the history, the activities at ufaFabrik and how the ecological projects operate.

3.3. Process, Negotiation Skills, Networking

The site where ufaFabrik is located today once hosted the facilities for film processing, including development, editing, copying and showing. Founded in 1921, it was acquired by Universal Film Studios (UFA) in 1927, a German film production and distribution company. When production stopped in 1965, UFA Studios decided to move its offices to another location. After the closure of its factory, the site was transferred to the ownership of Deutsche Bundespost, who attempted to negotiate with the Senate of Berlin to reorganise the site for the necessary logistics. The conformation of the area and the narrow streets that passed through it did not allow Deutsche Bundespost to use the site (Summerer, 2010) in the most efficient way for the type of logistics service. The estimated costs of the reorganisation of the area outweighed the benefits for the company and it was decided to enter into negotiations with the Berlin State Department of Finance that then decided to take over the site, which, however, remained abandoned until the late 1970s.

The ufaFabrik is closely linked to the squatting movement of the 1970s. One of the main factors that led to the development of these civic movements was opposition to property speculation and the housing situation in West Berlin [56], where there was a lack of affordable housing for young people and low-income groups. Many groups organised themselves to squat in empty and abandoned buildings, creating various communes. These included the initial ufaFabrik project, the 'Fabrik für Kultur, Sport und Handwerk' (Factory for Culture, Sport and Handicraft). The activists were carriers of demands for change against the political–institutional system, in the fields of civil rights, pacifism, feminism, anti-racism and anti-nuclearism [13,57]. In those years, the alternative activist scene in West Berlin reached an estimated 100,000 people [58,59].

However, the spaces of the former UFA provided the necessary place to support the skills and aspirations of a community of activists[1] already active in a nearby context:

- An alternative living project that combines social, cultural and environmental sustainability, claims that have been taken up by sub-cultural movements since the late 1970s in Berlin that in those years began to host the first public debates on these issues. This project operated in a dimension of decision making in relation to the "undecided" space of the former UFA site.
- A transformation from space to a place, characterised the action not through protest but through a practical dimension, linked to creativity, the sharing of community values and ecological lifestyles,[2] acting on a place-making dimension.
- A definition of the development strategy of both the ufaFabrik collective and the urban area, finding support from the political–institutional system, also acting on the dimension of policy making.

Regarding the decision-making dimension, the history of ufaFabrik began outside the former UFA. It grew out of the "Fabrik für Kultur, Sport und Handwerk" (Factory for Culture, Sport and Handicraft), a self-organised living commune and cultural centre that developed in the early 1970s[3] in a former factory on Kurfürstenstraße in the Schöneberg district. In those years, the city was an ideal setting for radical projects, a ground for the expression of forms of a political sub-culture. The spaces of the former factory were made available to anyone interested in leisure activities, sports, events, discussions and public debates. During this period, the birth of Berlin's first food cooperative (in 1977), dedicated to healthy lifestyles and healthy food, was formalised in the ecosystem of the "Fabrik für Kultur, Sport und Handwerk".

The Kurfürstenstraße spaces were no longer sufficient to accommodate the people and activities that developed during those years. In 1979, part of the group explored other areas of the city to look for a space large enough to host the life project that was becoming larger and more structured. The collective discovered the former UFA factory site in Tempelhof, a district close to the city border at the southern end of West Berlin. The neighbourhood was known mainly for its airport. The neighbourhood was deprived of cultural and social activities for the local communities and had various social problems such as increasing unemployment and inadequate services. The demands of the activist collective concerned issues that had not been addressed by the politics of the time. These included housing and the reuse of vacant factory buildings.

In a peaceful initiative,[4] the spaces of the former UFA were occupied on 9 June 1979 by a group of one hundred activists. From the first day of the occupation, the space became a platform and laboratory for collective experimentation, in which the activists and part of the local communities began a process of place-making, matching needs with the skills and capacities available in the local context. The former UFA factory became the ufaFabrik, from an abandoned and "undecided" space to a place for radical actions dedicated to the territory and linked to social, cultural and environmental issues.

About 45 of the original 100 occupants decided to start a community living project, sharing space and income.[5] In the initial phase, various renovation and care activities were carried out, as well as the organisation of the first public initiatives, such as circus shows, music and theatre. The initial efforts led to great visibility and exposure, which generated the support and interest of many of the neighbourhood's residents, the local press and public opinion: a few months after the occupation, the group of activists decided to go to the institution that owns the area to negotiate the possibility of making their position and actions official on the site. At the end of 1979, through intensive public relations work, the community obtained its first temporary agreement for the use of the spaces: by paying rent and producing and providing services and activities in the public interest, the collective began to build its legitimacy.

In terms of the place-making dimension, the issue of temporary status was crucial in the consolidation phase of the process. It is important to note how this opportunity

represented a test for the collective to verify its reliability and management capabilities. The community of activists, while trying to carry out the process and the imagined strategy, was burdened with the responsibility and necessity of dealing with ordinary rent and utilities. The most complex challenge in the early stages, therefore, was to link site-specific issues with wider social and political issues that were also crucial to the site occupation and the legitimacy of the practice.

Until the mid-1980s, the ufaFabrik was based on a shared economy with no personal income, and all internal decisions were brought to the collective decision-making process of the plenum. The first years were marked by intense daily debates, necessary to coordinate different interests and practices. The ufaFabrik had decided to develop without public funding: the strategy was to work with available resources through volunteer support, alternative credit networks and self-organised lending initiatives. The necessary skills were quickly developed among the participants, and the old buildings were gradually renovated as time and resources allowed.[6]

At the end of the 1980s, the tangibility of the actions tested, the engagement of the local communities and the ability to negotiate with the institutions led to the consolidation of a long-term agreement (until 2019) for the transformation and management of the site. Through the "Heritable Building Right" agreement [60], the land remained in public ownership, while the buildings became the property of ufaFabrik Berlin e.V.[7] This provided greater financial security and the opportunity to attract resources and investment for structural redevelopment. At the same time, the ufaFabrik provided a cultural offer and a wide range of free or low-cost services and activities for the local communities. This agreement led to an equal position with the owner in terms of decision-making power, and ufaFabrik took responsibility for all aspects of the project's development and financing. Over the years, ufaFabrik was able to carry out various fundraising initiatives.

As far as the policy-making dimension is concerned, the squatting of spaces and the path—which is still ongoing—triggered a process of urban regeneration from the grassroots, creating the conditions for a path of conflict mediation with the political–institutional system, a relationship that was initially compromised because of the climate of conflict that characterised the occupations of those years.

In addition, the process allowed the expression of negotiation skills and capabilities for the construction of the agreement on the spaces' management. Small and gradual actions have been taken over time to renovate the spaces. A process was designed and a local, urban and international network of project actors and supporters was established and consolidated, involving many of the neighbourhood's inhabitants.

From a networking perspective, ufaFabrik was able to consolidate networks and relationships with various local and non-local organisations from the cultural, social and environmental world, as well as local, urban and regional institutions (from the Berlin Senate to the Tempelhof-Schöneberg District).

Beyond national borders, it also networks with different realities in a number of international networks, such as the Global Ecovillage Network on ecological issues,[8] which the promotes cooperation and exchange of good practices among the ecovillage movement through education,[9] awareness raising and innovation projects. Trans Europe Halles,[10] a Europe-wide network on cultural and creative issues, includes more than one hundred independent and multidisciplinary creative centres located in former buildings and industrial sites. The creation of a harmonisation process in Europe, bringing together civic activism and the reactivation of disused heritage, is one of the main objectives of this European network.

The network's work at the international level has not only project and networking objectives but also policy advocacy [61] objectives. The coordinated actions of the group seek to exert pressure on the European political–institutional system and individual member states.

4. Discussion

In the academic debate on issues related to civic activism and its relation to urban transformations, the focus is often on these bottom-up practices, which are very often overestimated [13,20]. The city is not only a product of these practices but also a complex system of interconnected elements with a wide range of urban actors with different interests and goals. Moreover, these practices are often promoted with a rhetoric that is not always driven by public interest in general, but can also be influenced by private interests or those of specific communities, adopting a private perspective.

From the case study analyses emerged some relevant issues that support the critical reading about this type of practice. The first aspect of the critique concerns the need for ufaFabrik to address issues related to the contemporary tension between economic and social interests, efficiency and environmental sustainability, within the processes that characterise the current historical and economic phase. The idealism on which ufaFabrik was founded must deal with the financial realism it demands. The partial dependence of the ufaFabrik on public funding, particularly for the Neighbourhood Centre and the Cultural Centre, for the implementation of some activities and the provision of some services, is highlighted. This dependence has sometimes limited the organisation's freedom of action. Sometimes it has to respond to the demands or requirements of the funding bodies. In addition, the cooperation and negotiation between ufaFabrik and the institutions may have led to a state of semi-cooptation of practices by the institutional system [20].

Furthermore, the local dimension and ufaFabrik's impact on the neighbourhood should not be overlooked. Indeed, there is a tension between local, urban and global issues: although ufaFabrik is part of international networks and is able to take its expertise beyond national borders, the local and urban scale remains a priority in terms of both spatial and relational space. Although ufaFabrik is involved in a number of initiatives at an international level, the organisation must maintain a strong connection to the local scale and its impact on the neighbourhood is a key element of its activity. However, the impact of ufaFabrik operates on a local, urban and international scale, at different intensities. On a local and urban level, this practice is an important place for both local communities and the Tempelhof–Schöneberg District, through, for example, the services and activities provided by the Neighbourhood Centre and the Cultural Centre. ufaFabrik has a strong connection with other similar organisations and initiatives in Berlin, with whom it participates in projects and initiatives to promote culture, sustainability and share knowledge and resources. In addition, ufaFabrik is involved in several international networks, such as Trans Europe Halles, which brings together more than 120 independent cultural spaces in Europe, including several important cultural and artistic production centres in Berlin, with which advocacy processes are carried out on a European level.

Other critical points, encountered through direct observation, include the fragmented perception of the ufaFabrik ecosystem, both in terms of external communication and overall understanding of its functioning. Although the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,[11] each organisation seems to act independently, giving rise to some critical issues in terms of commercialisation and development of the different activities and organisations. It is important to emphasise that the juridical independence of each organisation inside the area, should not compromise the political and local project underlying ufaFabrik. Another critical theme focuses on legacy, highlighting some limitations. The criticism raised concerns about the strong link between place-making practice and specific individuals, particularly the founders of the initiative, which can lead to difficulties in delegation and generational change. The organisation's ability to evolve and generate new ideas and initiatives may be limited by the focus and concentration on the individual or group of individuals. It can also limit the organisation's ability to adapt to change and continue to make a positive impact and can lead to problems in addressing future challenges and opportunities.

However, it is important to highlight the positive aspects of this case study in terms of local, urban and international levels. The decentralised urban governance model of the

ufaFabrik [62,63] was built over time through the construction of local economic, social and ecological systems that created a sustainable urban community development process.

The reconstruction of the former UFA factory, using advanced ecological methods and materials, is a significant example of the preservation of architectural heritage, the improvement of the quality of urban life in terms of the provision of services and cultural activities, and the creation of local economic and energy systems. These aspects are interesting for contemporary cities in transition. The whole development of the ufaFabrik combines the local dimension with issues of wider interest, where change is promoted through the development of people's aspirations and attitudes, through collective and ecological values. A decentralised urban governance model promotes an approach to managing parts of the city based on the decentralisation of decision-making power and the promotion of local initiatives, proposing more democratic urban transformations in 'undecided' spaces.

The urban regeneration of the area was realised through a process which was implemented in different phases. Starting from the occupation, passing through the experimentation and consolidation of a strategy, ufaFabrik's radical action generated the redevelopment of spaces, the conception, organisation and delivery of cultural activities and social services, promoting learning and the valorisation of local skills and knowledge, integrating public interest practices and some niche actions. Moreover, the issue of time was a central element in this radical place-making practice. The process guided the shape of the imagined project and found its place within an "undecided" space [15,16] and re-balanced the decision-making power.

ufaFabrik represents a practice that has created opportunities for social learning [64], redefining the relationship between places and local communities, generating transformative mechanisms from a decision-making and political perspective, and a mutual learning process between activists, institutions and local communities. This has been possible due to the enhancement of different capabilities and skills that have generated interactive knowledge [47] that goes beyond the sum of individual knowledge.

5. Conclusions

The three dimensions of making and the status of the ufaFabrik radical practice followed a processual logic and it is possible to identify three different states about the three dimensions of place-making expressed by the practice: the ability to counter or anticipate a decision, the ability to experiment with the use of space, and the ability to produce and consolidate strategies for urban policy.

Through a reading of the process, the three statuses were identified, reconstructing in a non-dichotomous way the evolutionary framework in terms of legitimation and relationship with institutions. The first state of squatting is understood as a peaceful radical action that initiated a process and anticipated a decision about the transformation of spaces and the definition of what matters. Acting outside the traditional institutional framework, this practice had to construct the conditions for legitimation and self-assertion, operating on the dimension of decision-making and weakening the monopoly of the single centralised decision about the space transformations.

Legitimation-building activities refer to the status of experimentation. Through temporary uses, activities and projects, often as well as expressions of cultural, the place has been constructed. The place is, on one side, the stakes, but at the same time, it is also a platform for experimenting with possible uses and solutions to local needs and specific populations while maintaining a close relationship with social and political claims. The capacity of this practice to reinforce experimental paths is reflected in its strategic dimension of urban transformations. The practice has taken on a strategic dimension in the re-politicisation process, with the redefinition of decision-making powers reflecting its capacity to contribute to urban policies.

As a result of the processes generated, the practice has consolidated models and experiences that today form part of a common heritage of knowledge. This has led to an

increasingly strong recognition by the political–institutional system, which has also raised some critical aspects related to possible de-politicisation and attempts at semi-cooptation.

The issue of civic activism and conflict in the Berlin context [13,65] is crucial in this radical declination of place-making. Berlin has always been a context in which conflict [66,67] has driven the city's development, morphology and culture. From the presence of the Wall, which materially and symbolically re-established the geopolitical framework between the Western and Eastern fronts, to the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by the first movements of urban struggle, driven by groups of activists who led the squatting of "undecided" spaces [15,16] and abandoned buildings [58,59], and continued to redefine an ever-changing social and cultural geography.

The ufaFabrik radical place-making practice presents different forms of connection and negotiation between activists and institutions, and the advocacy strategies that resulted. This practice took an agonistic approach, where conflict represented an opportunity for tension and re-politicisation: from the experimentations to the consolidation of housing, cultural, social, environmental and ecological practices.

The urban policies developed in Berlin were able to consolidate different kinds of collaboration with activists and different-scale institutions [13]. Politics and policy, in some cases, have shown a propensity for innovation in urban transformation processes. The radical place-making practices, developed in Berlin today, are often the legacy of previous policy cycles or past experimentations.

Civic activism plays a fundamental role in influencing public policy and it is an expression of vocality in public debate through the capacity of actions and negotiation. The case study analysed refers to bottom-up actions that have gradually become part of the cultural repertoire of urban policy. ufaFabrik has been able to experiment and generate urban policy by overcoming "orthodox planning" [44], starting from a conflict dimension, and developing a regeneration process at the local level, from the interaction in and with the place, while maintaining a focus on social and cultural claims.

Through ufaFabrik's experimental actions, greater awareness and shared knowledge of the radical practices of care for spaces, the environment and people have developed, through the ability to connect with institutions and the practical ability to work on the territory, impacting on a double level, local and urban, but also institutional and community (the inhabitants of the neighbourhood).

The strategic dimension pursued the following objectives: the creation of economic initiatives to create fair employment and support social, cultural and ecological work; the promotion of social opportunities to support and empower people (from women to young people, families and the elderly); the provision of a wide range of free or affordable cultural activities; and the development of projects related to ecology and environmental technologies [68]. ufaFabrik can be considered a process-oriented place-making practice that has been able to integrate cultural, ecological, economic and community aspects.

ufaFabrik is an important platform space [69] for co-creation and social innovation for the territory, where different actors and practices converge to generate new forms of knowledge [47], creativity and local development. Thanks to its ability to welcome and enhance different experiences and skills, ufaFabrik has contributed to redefining the relationship between spaces and the local communities, promoting engagement and the exchange of ideas and projects.

Place-making with reference to this radical practice, today, becomes political rhetoric and part of a claim of self-assertion, of a discursive and narrative repertoire that is part of political empowerment in support of forms of re-politicisation of certain urban issues. In a contemporary dimension, ufaFabrik can be considered a permanent laboratory, a physical and theoretical space for the exercise of the re-politicisation and reconstruction of political subjectivities, evolving in its relations with the institutional and political system.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   Sigrid Niemer, from an interview with the author in Berlin, June 2022.

2   Werner Wiartalla, from an interview with the author in Berlin, March 2022.

3   Juppy, from an interview with the author in Berlin, July 2022.

4   All of the ufaFabrik founders interviewed use the term "peaceful initiative". This expression, which is also used in various sources (such as newspapers, reports, and so on), emphasises the nature of the squatting approach taken by the activists.

5   See note 1 above.

6   Sigrid Niemer, from an interview with the author in Berlin, June 2022; Fridolin Hinde, from an interview with the author in Berlin, April 2022.

7   Fridolin Hinde, from an interview with the author in Berlin, October 2022.

8   It is a network that was founded in 1996 and has over one hundred eco-villages in more than 25 countries.

9   See note 2 above.

10   Available online: www.teh.net (accessed on 22 August 2023).

11   See note 2 above.

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