

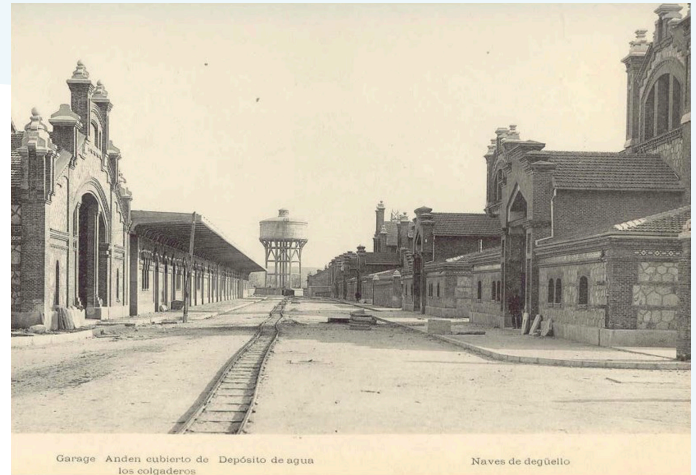
Revitalizing Underutilized Areas for Social, Environmental & Economic Transformation



Cities around the world face the challenge of underused and abandoned spaces, from vacant buildings to disused industrial sites which contribute to urban decline, social segregation, and environmental degradation. However, when strategically transformed, they can become engines of cultural, economic, and environmental regeneration.

1. Identifying and understanding the problem

- The first step in any transformation process should be to recognise the specific characteristics and challenges of the underused space, considering the local context. Each of the cases showcased, highlighted a different typology of area which will require a tailored strategy. "Matadero" in Madrid was a large-scale industrial site, once a slaughterhouse, that became obsolete due to urban expansion and public health concerns.
- Dublin struggled with high commercial vacancy rates, leading to economic stagnation and urban deterioration.
- Rome's community gardens were a response to abandoned urban lands and lack of green spaces, particularly in peri-urban areas.
- Toronto's Downsview Runway was a massive, single-purpose infrastructure, whose closure created an urban void.
- Pavlos Melas Military Camp became a safety and environmental hazard after being abandoned, requiring intervention for sustainable redevelopment.



Garage Andén cubierto de los colgaderos Depósito de agua Naves de degüello

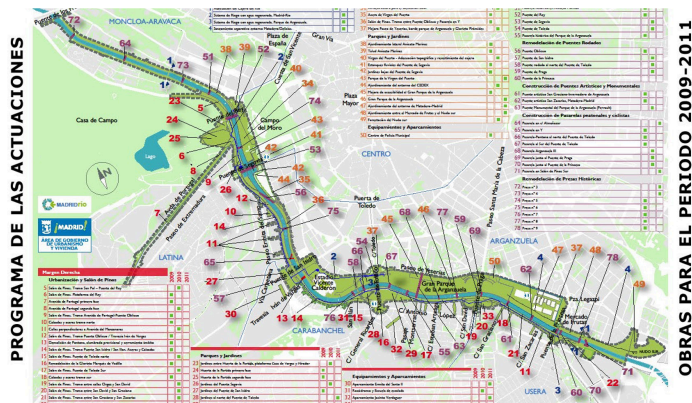


2. Strategic approaches to transformation

Once an underused space is identified, a strategic plan must consider urban planning principles, stakeholder engagement, and financial viability through an integrated approach. These strategies illustrate how adaptive reuse projects must align with broader urban policies and initiatives such as the New European Urban Agenda or the New European Bauhaus, while ensuring economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

- Policy and regulatory frameworks**

- Dublin's Adaptive Reuse Programme required municipal policies to facilitate the conversion of commercial buildings into housing.
- Rome's citizen-led projects were strengthened by the introduction of urban garden regulations in 2015 and 2024.
- Matadero Madrid's transformation was enabled by a municipal commitment to cultural infrastructure development.



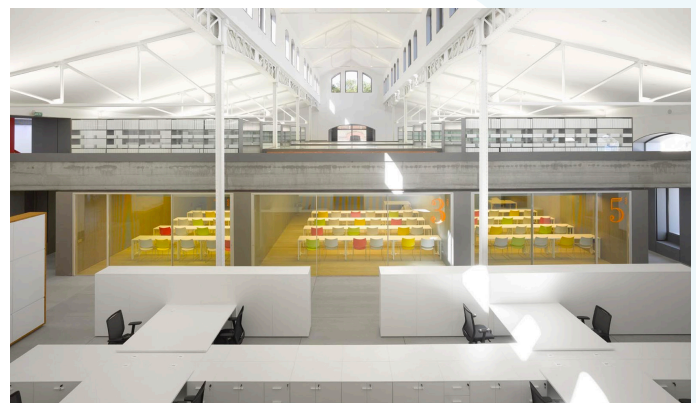
- Stakeholder engagement and innovative governance models**

- Rome and Pavlos Melas demonstrated the power of bottom-up advocacy, where citizen-driven projects played a central role in re-shaping transformation.
- Matadero Madrid and Toronto involved extensive consultations with artists, planners, and cultural organizations to define the vision for these spaces.
- Dublin's model relied on public-private collaboration, engaging architects and conservationists in feasibility studies before acquisition.



- Temporary activation and phased development**

- Toronto's Downsview Runway will employ a gradual, 30-year approach, using temporary activations like cultural events and sports activities to generate public interest and investment attraction.
- Matadero Madrid allowed for a step-by-step transformation, ensuring that renovations matched evolving cultural needs while ensuring environmental integration in the new Madrid Río Park.



- Heritage preservation and sustainability considerations**

- Matadero Madrid and Pavlos Melas prioritized heritage conservation, balancing historic integrity with modern urban functions.
- Dublin's adaptive reuse strategy aimed to reduce embodied carbon emissions, aligning with climate action and energy targets.
- Rome's urban gardens demonstrated environmental rehabilitation, restoring contaminated soil and improving air quality, while fostering local food production.

3. Impact and outcomes of transformation

The successful revitalization of underused spaces is an opportunity to transform cities and communities **creating new centralities, connecting neighbourhoods or enhancing solid participatory structures.**

- **Social inclusion and community engagement**

- Rome's urban gardens provide social integration, engaging diverse communities in environmental management.
- Matadero Madrid's cultural spaces is a new meeting point for artists, residents, and tourists, redefining the cultural map of the city and reactivating the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Pavlos Melas Metropolitan Park fosters community well-being by creating inclusive green spaces.



- **Economic revitalization and real estate value**

- Dublin's commercial-to-housing transformations contributes to cost-effective urban density, making housing more accessible.
- Toronto's Downsview project aims to create a mixed-use neighbourhood, combining housing, retail, economic development and recreation.
- Matadero Madrid's cultural-led regeneration increases real estate values and boosts local businesses, while establishing new synergies with other local, national and international initiatives.



- **Environmental and climate benefits**

- Dublin's reuse model reduces carbon footprint by converting existing buildings instead of constructing new ones, while promoting the 15-minute approach.
- Rome's green spaces and Pavlos Melas Park improve biodiversity, air quality, and urban cooling.
- Toronto's pedestrian-focused development promotes low-carbon mobility and active transportation.



4. Lessons learned for replicability

Based on these different case studies, several overarching **best practices** emerge for cities seeking to revitalize abandoned spaces:

1. Engaging citizens, policymakers, and private sector players ensures long-term project success.
2. Clear policies and incentives, such as adaptive reuse programs, urban garden regulations, or cultural funding, drive implementation.
3. Spaces should serve multiple purposes, integrating housing, culture, recreation, and sustainability.
4. Temporary and phased approach activations allow for better implementation, adaptation, engagement and continuous improvement.
5. Projects should reduce environmental impact while preserving cultural identity.



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