

## THEY DIDN'T PAVE PARADISE: GRASSROOTS URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN SWITZERLAND

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**ABSTRACT:** *Urban redevelopment is a significant challenge facing cities of the Global North in the post-industrial era. As cities deindustrialize, former industrial sites frequently fall into a state of disrepair and neglect. The redevelopment of these sites is often driven by a top-down approach, led by a coalition of large-scale real estate developers, city level government agencies, and larger corporations. Often, this results in a gentrified landscape accompanied by displacement of the original residents of the neighborhood. Such a top-down approach tends to think of urban development at a regional or city-wide scale and fails to address local interests or context in their plans. Frau Gerold's Garten, in the Züri West region of Zurich, and Terrain Gurzelen in Biel/Bienne provide contrasts to the top-down development standard in many cities. Initially conceived as temporary solutions for abandoned sites, both have persevered, one as a trendy leisure destination and the other as a local community gathering center. In Frau Gerold's Garten, the use of shipping containers as commercial structures provides a unique nod to the temporary intent for the region, and many small-, owner-operated businesses have found a home there. In Terrain Gurzelen, the repurposing of a soccer stadium provides locals a chance to develop small-scale businesses focused on the local community. Both Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen demonstrate the effectiveness of small-scale, grassroots development in a large post-industrial city providing opportunities for small businesses to gain a foothold in a large, expensive city, but also provides development for the surrounding regions.*

**Keywords:** *Grassroots Development, Deindustrialization, Urban Renewal, Gentrification, Switzerland*

### INTRODUCTION

Urban redevelopment is a significant challenge facing cities of the Global North in the post-industrial era. As cities deindustrialize, former industrial sites frequently fall into a state of disrepair and neglect. The redevelopment of these sites is often driven by a top-down approach led by a coalition of large-scale real estate developers, city-level government agencies, and larger corporations. Usually, this results in a gentrified landscape accompanied by displacement of the neighborhood's original residents. Such a top-down, gentrified approach tends to think of urban development at a regional or city-wide scale and often fails to address local interests or context in their plans.

Frau Gerold's Garten, in the Züri West region of Zurich, and Terrain Gurzelen in Biel/Bienne provide interesting contrasts to the top-down development scheme standard in many cities. Two sites, intended to be temporary solutions for abandoned areas, have persevered as a trendy leisure destination and local community gathering center. In Frau Gerold's Garten, the use of shipping containers as commercial structures provides a unique nod to the temporary intent for the region, and many small scale, owner-operated businesses have found a home there. In Terrain Gurzelen, the repurposing of a soccer stadium provides local citizens a chance to develop small scale businesses and services focused on the local community.

Both Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen demonstrate the effectiveness of small-scale, grassroots development in a large post-industrial city. Not only does the development project provide opportunities for small businesses to gain a foothold in a large, expensive city, but it also provides development for abandoned spaces that is appropriate and desirable for the surrounding regions. This creates a powerful symbiosis that generates growth in regions that suffered dramatically due to deindustrialization.

## **URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1980s**

### **Deindustrialization**

The 1980s represented an era of dramatic economic restructuring for both the United States and Western Europe. This redevelopment took place in parallel with the global restructuring of the economy that led to deindustrialization in former industrial centers of Europe and North America. Among many other defining characteristics, globalization represents a significant growth of global interconnectedness in terms of production, marketing, and employment. Peter Dicken (1986) refers to this reorganization as a “global shift” in economic production, as businesses develop competitive advantages on a global scale. In the global north, one of the major consequences of this global shift is deindustrialization. Van Neuss (2017) shows the decline in industrial employment across most global north countries since 1970. This decline in industrial employment is the result of automation and the movement of jobs to other locations, often outside of the country. This results in the closing of factories and the decline of the physical conditions of these former factories and an overall decline in conditions in industrial neighbors.

As cities redeveloped, the redevelopment often followed the traditional practices of urban renewal and gentrification. The urban decline and redevelopment led cities to follow similar developmental trajectories. Europe's cities and rural areas suffered as inefficient economic activities were forced to downsize or close. Bluestone and Harrison (1982) see deindustrialization as the “widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity” (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982). This deindustrialization has had a major impact on the employment structure of the United States (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982) and Europe (Kandzija et al., 2017). The goal of deindustrialization is to free workers from unproductive jobs to put them to work in more productive jobs (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982). However, the result indicates that people are often forced into either lesser-paying jobs or become chronically unemployed. This process of deindustrialization significantly impacts urban landscapes as former industrial sites fall into a state of disuse and are often repurposed for the post-industrial city.

In terms of urban development, the deindustrialization process generates the need to reexamine urban land use. As industrial spaces are no longer used for their intended purposes, they often fall into a status of neglect and misuse. The neglected spaces of deindustrialization often become the focus of urban renewal programs as cities begin to reorient themselves towards a post-industrial development scheme. In the case studies discussed in this paper, Frau Gerold’s Garten and Terrain Gurzelen, the government did not develop an urban renewal program for these two areas which led to the community to develop their own urban renewal of the area to revitalize it.

### **Urban Renewal**

Lifting impoverished industrial and downtown areas out of poverty has long been a focus of urban policy and has been mostly unsuccessful (Carmon, 1999; Murray, 1984, Rerat and Lees, 2011). Urban Renewal, the term given to efforts focused on combating urban decline, has existed in various forms throughout urban history, with Hausmann’s reconstruction of Paris (Harvey, 2017) seen as one of the first examples of modern urban renewal. Urban renewal became increasingly popular in the 1940s, with the popularization of the suburbs in the late 1940s and early 1950s, inner city areas in the US became economically and socially stressed and riddled with urban blight. Carmon (1999) argues that there are three generations of policies focused on urban renewal: 1) the era of the bulldozer, 2) neighborhood rehabilitation, and 3) revitalization, focusing on economic development. During the 1970s, there was a shift in focus towards the third stage as the economy slowed down. There was a growing consensus that large social programs needed to be reformed. Additionally, the low price of land in inner cities started to attract entrepreneurs.

Gentrification, a component of the third wave of urban renewal, is a leading concern in large and small cities. Gentrification is “a process that changes the character and composition of a neighborhood, resulting in the direct and indirect displacement of lower-income households with higher-income households” (Papachristos et al., 2011). Largely driven by a top-down approach, gentrification is the in-migration of wealth and the outmigration of poverty, which most often results in increases in median household incomes, property values, and the presence of lifestyle amenities that appeal to the tastes—and meet the demands of—the wealthier residents (Halasz, 2018). More concisely, gentrification is directly observable in urban space as the contest between the haves and have-nots (Finio, 2022) and is often visible in urban areas through the food landscape. Higher-end grocery stores and restaurants enter the neighborhood and compete with the existing establishments. In addition, gentrification is associated with reduced crime rates, and improvements to education, sanitation, green space, and neighborhood aesthetics are often associated with rising rents that displace lower-income families (Finio, 2022; Golash-Boza and Oh, 2021; Halasz, 2018;

Papachristos et al., 2011). Schaffer and Smith (1986) emphasize the top-down nature of gentrification in their review of the causes of gentrification. In their review of previous research, Schaffer and Smith (1986) see the interaction of the state and capital as a prime catalyst in creating potential landscapes for gentrification. This is through the development of the real estate market and city zoning laws. Schaffer and Smith (1986) identify federal grants for condominium development and city zoning laws (Smith, 1986) as critical influences on the gentrification of Harlem. In addition, they (1986) note that the city placed minimum income requirements on all bids for foreclosed properties in Harlem. All of these aspects demonstrate how the city and real estate developers created and managed the redevelopment of Harlem from a top-down perspective. Similar examples of top-down development are seen in London (Williams, 1976) in which building societies acted as lenders, helping to redevelop the Islington neighborhood. It is significant to note that Williams observed that most of the building societies had limited experience in the local neighborhoods, Islington in particular for his study. Williams (1976) also notes that the role of government increased to provide more money for loans to redevelop neighborhoods, emphasize the top-down nature of gentrification and urban development in both Europe and North America.

Gentrification often harms marginalized groups when not properly managed, leading to displacement and social exclusion. Effective policies, such as preserving affordable housing and improving residents' social and political capital, can mitigate these adverse effects and promote racial and economic diversity (Gerber and Debrunner, 2022; Ellen et al., 2018; Halasz, 2018; Lloyd, 2014; Ellen and O'Regan, 2011; Ellen et al., 2011; Keil and Young, 2011). When top-down gentrification occurs without policies to constrain its adverse effects, it often harms marginalized groups. The case studies presented in this paper largely go against the status quo of a top-down gentrification approach as it is the community that has decided to gentrify the area. Gentrification driven by the community, rather than the government, often manifests through grassroots initiatives that prioritize local culture, heritage, and socioeconomic diversity. In situations like the grassroots urban development analyzed in Switzerland, residents take the lead in revitalizing neighborhoods by investing in small businesses and fostering inclusive development projects aiming to enhance the quality of life without displacing long-standing residents (Hakansson, 2018).

In the late 1990s, as urban renewal processes accelerated in Europe, several key policy aspects began to emerge. Nussli and Schmid (2016) identified five characteristics of new urbanization in Europe. These include:

- (1) Dense urban structures, diverse urban functions and more qualified economic activities
- (2) New forms of governance: politically fragmented
- (3) New spatial scales of governance
- (4) Qualitative change to make areas more pedestrian friendly, more public and more connected
- (5) Symbolic change. No longer peripheral, now urban in their own right. (Nussli & Schmid, 2016)

Similarly, Kunzmann (2008) identifies the Rossini approach to gentrification in development, which focuses on the redevelopment of Brownfields and neglected sites. These are redeveloped incrementally with local involvement and considering local characteristics. These studies suggest a fundamental change in urban development schemes, from a centralized, monolithic, central business perspective to a diffused governance model that focuses on the transition and in filling of urban regions within and around European cities that focus on local characteristics and local involvement. Nussli and Schmid (2016) see this as the New Urban Aesthetic. This new aesthetic focuses on the gap between lived experiences of the people who use spaces and the intention of architects, designers and planners who conceive the space. This approach can create a tension between profit-oriented development, that tends to operate at a larger scale and local cooperative development focused on local characteristics.

This new model of development tends to operationalize around three key aspects that influence modern European urban development. First, densification is a critical paradigm of urban redevelopment (Peric et al., 2023). This is the opposite of urban sprawl as development focuses on filling in regions within an urban region as opposed to expanding the metropolitan region outward. Often, this growth occurs along major transportation routes, which is the second key aspect of modern urban development in Europe. Gospondini (2005) and Sturzenegger (2022) emphasize the importance of development along transportation lines.

The third critical aspect of contemporary European urbanization is a shift towards green, sustainable models of development. Tappert et al. (2018) emphasize that urban gardening promotes social inclusion, community, cohesion, and collective empowerment. While Gerber and Debrunner (2022) see new urbanization as basically a synonym for the sustainable city, focusing on new urbanization as a reaction against urban sprawl, land consumption, resource

waste, air pollution, and social exclusion. Peric et al. (2023) identify *Kurze Wege* (short walk) as a sustainable development approach that provides services, amenities, facilities, and green spaces within a short walk of residences.

Theurillat and Crevoisier (2013) identify the primary challenge of sustainable approaches to urban development as the social construction of sustainability. The idea of sustainable development is subject to power relations within a specific region and often evolves through a series of negotiations between different actors involved in a project. One key result of this negotiation, identified by Theurillat and Crevoisier (2013), is the financialization of sustainable development in urban regions. As financial actors enter the negotiations, they have a significant influence on the development process and utilize the ideas of sustainability to potentially manipulate the development process to their advantage. Similarly, Peric et al. (2023) address the power relationships in planning by identifying the power relationships in cooperative planning. They challenge the population conception that collaborative planning includes meaningful participation of weaker parties in the negotiation process, showing that significant aspects of Zurich's urban planning process are negotiations between powerful parties with some minor inclusion of less powerful actors.

Non-policy attempts at urban renewal have succeeded in large cities but may not help existing residents. Consequently, upgrading attempts fell into three classes: 1) gentrification, 2) upgrading by veteran residents, and 3) upgrading by immigrants from cities in the Global South, many of whom are skilled workers hoping to become members of the middle class (Carmon, 1999). Third-generation urban renewal projects have resulted in the rapid improvement of many blighted inner-city neighborhoods. However, it is questionable if the rise of neighborhood status has helped the veteran residents, and much of this improvement occurred in large cities. In contrast, many smaller cities have continued to remain economically depressed (Ocejo et al., 2020).

## **DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT IN SWITZERLAND**

As with most Western European countries, most Swiss cities went through a process of deindustrialization and urban redevelopment starting in the late 1980s. Deindustrialization was the catalyst for the transition of Swiss cities towards a post-industrial landscape. The Swiss economy struggled during the 1990s, Stucki and Thomet (2021), chronicled the significant stagnation of the economy from 1993-1996. During this time, Stucki and Thomet (2021) reported that the Swiss economy grew by only 1%, with annual per capita growth rates of .3%. The decline in industry was a major influence on the stagnation of the Swiss economy. Swiss industry's value added to GDP dropped from approximately 30% in 1990 to around 25% ten years later (Trading Economics). This decline in contribution of industry to the GDP of Switzerland is consistent with declines seen in other European and North American economies. This decline in industry causes industries to abandon factories, creating abandoned spaces. These abandoned spaces become prime locations for urban redevelopment. Often this development is top down, driven by a coalition of government and capital with little influence from the local population.

One specific industry had a significant impact on Biel/Bienne. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the watch making industry was a significant employer in Biel/Bienne. Rolex, Omega, and several smaller watchmakers were major employers in Biel/Bienne. The "Quartz Revolution" (Young, 1999) led to a significant decline in the Swiss watchmaking industry as Japanese companies were quick to embrace the quartz technology in contrast to the Swiss. The result was a catastrophic decline in Swiss watchmaking, with exports dropping from 40 million in 1973 to three million in 1983 and employment dropping from 90,000 employees in 1970 to 47,000 in 1980. (Young, 1999). This had a dramatic impact on Biel/Bienne which saw significant demographic and economic losses (Morrison et al, 2021).

### **The Uniqueness of Swiss Political and Economic Systems in Urban Redevelopment**

The decline in industrialization led to the abandonment of many industrial sites in Switzerland. While the connection between deindustrialization and urban redevelopment is not unique to Switzerland, Switzerland did not always follow the top-down approach to urban renewal seen in other North American and European cities. This is due to the uniqueness of the Swiss political and economic systems that created peculiarities in the redevelopment of Swiss cities when compared to other cities of the Global North.

In 2002, the diversity of the Swiss economy helped minimize the impact of global recessions and reduced the effects of deindustrialization on Swiss society. (Rerat and Lees, 2011; Hermann and Leuthold, 2002) Additionally, Switzerland experienced lower immigration volume compared to other European countries. These factors collectively

contributed to the relatively small number of slum settlements in Swiss cities. As slums are often the primary areas targeted in redevelopment schemes, urban development in Switzerland took a different path.

In addition, the unique nature of Swiss democracy and federalism impacted urban development. The influence of federalism is seen throughout Swiss society and urban redevelopment is no exception. The federal government sets general themes of urban redevelopment, and those themes are implemented at Canton and city/municipal level (Gerber and Debrunner, 2022; Schmid et al., 2021; Tappert et al., 2018). Therefore, Swiss cities experienced diverse paths of urban redevelopment which, has resulted in different trajectories of growth and development across these cities.

In addition to federalism, Swiss direct democracy implies that planning decisions and urban development projects can be contested by Swiss citizens (Peric et al., 2023). This promotes more cooperative planning in the country. While cooperative planning is the ideal, the process of cooperative planning is not perfect in Switzerland. It is met with many challenges and different stakeholders who look to exert their influence on the development process and therefore significantly prolong any new developments (Peric et al., 2023). As a result, most agreements in urban development happen outside the formal Swiss political process because stakeholders have found that it is easier to work outside the current Swiss political structure. Once development plans are agreed upon, they are then gradually introduced into official practices (Nussli and Schmid, 2016).

The unique nature of the Swiss housing market is another challenge for Swiss urban redevelopment. According to Reral and Lees (2011), Swiss tenant rights act as a negative influence on traditional models of gentrification, especially the displacement aspect. The eviction process is extremely challenging and lengthy in Switzerland. As a result, development associated with traditional aspects of gentrification is extremely time consuming and challenging.

Balancing green spaces versus housing demand is a final critical aspect of Swiss urban development. Tappert et al. (2018) looks at the contradiction between community benefits and urban greenspace development. The main challenge to green space development is that only the local citizens benefit from urban greenspaces, especially urban gardening. There is a strong interest in parks with varied uses and activities, with public access and linkages (Sturzenegger, 2022). According to Sturzenegger (2022), the Swiss value public spaces with shops nearby. There is little benefit for citizens from outside of the immediate community around the private greenspace. Balancing greenspaces with housing is especially important in places like Zurich where the housing market is very tight.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF ZURICH AND BIEL FROM INDUSTRIAL TO POST INDUSTRIAL**

### **Redevelopment in Zurich**

Zurich, previously known as an industrial city, underwent a significant transformation during the urban revolution of the 1980s, evolving into a prominent global city. Historically rooted in its industrial skill, the 1980s marked a pivotal period where Zurich transitioned from traditional industrial activities to embrace finance, technology, and innovation. The city's economic landscape evolved, attracting multinational corporations and fostering a robust financial sector. In 1986, General Motors moved its European Headquarters from Frankfurt to Zurich and other corporations, such as Kraft, Hewlett-Packard, and Proctor and Gamble followed suit with establishing a regional headquarters in Switzerland (New York Times, 2007; New York Times, 1986). This shift not only elevated Zurich's global standing but also led to the development of a sophisticated urban infrastructure including cultural institutions, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The urban revolution of the 1980s in Zurich exemplifies the adaptability and resilience of cities in the face of economic and social change, propelling the once-industrial hub into the ranks of influential global cities.

Zurich's trajectory of new urbanization is exemplified by the deliberate process of deindustrialization, where the city strategically shifts away from its industrial roots towards a more service-oriented economy. As part of this transformation, office towers are increasingly relocating to the urban periphery, signifying a departure from the traditional industrial core. Across Zurich there are several examples of these projects at the urban periphery including Zurich North, Zurich West, and Sihlcity. This spatial reorganization not only marks a physical redefinition of Zurich's

skyline but also reflects a broader trend in urban planning that prioritizes sustainability, accessibility, and efficient land use. By moving office spaces to the edges, Zurich aims to repurpose former industrial areas (brownfields), fostering a more dynamic and diversified urban environment. Theurillat and Crevoisier (2013) refer to this brownfield development in Zurich as “building the city on the city”. This strategy not only aligns with the global shift towards post-industrial economies but also emphasizes the importance of creating vibrant, mixed-use urban spaces that cater to the evolving needs of a modern, knowledge-based society. The deindustrialization process, coupled with the strategic relocation of office towers, underscores Zurich's commitment to embracing the challenges of the future while preserving its cultural heritage and promoting sustainable urban development.

The establishment of the Zurich Verkehrsverbund (ZVV) played a pivotal role in shaping the transportation landscape and fostering a distinct regional identity for Zurich. The creation of a standardized transportation system, overseen by ZVV, streamlined connectivity across the region, integrating various modes of transportation. This initiative not only enhanced the efficiency of daily commutes but also promoted sustainable practices, contributing to Zurich's reputation as an environmentally conscious city. Establishing a well-organized and reliable transportation network facilitated intra-city movement and strengthened the connection between Zurich and its surrounding areas. As a result, ZVV not only became a symbol of efficient urban planning but also played a key role in shaping a collective regional identity, where citizens and visitors alike could navigate the city and its surroundings with ease, further solidifying Zurich's identity as a dynamic and interconnected hub (Nussli and Schmid, 2016).

### **Zurich West Redevelopment**

Zurich West was once a gritty, industrial neighborhood characterized by warehouses, factories, and rail yards. It had fallen into disuse and disrepair by the late 20th century, with many of its industrial facilities abandoned or underutilized. The redevelopment of Zurich West began in the 1990s through a combination of public and private investment. The city of Zurich and private developers collaborated to transform the area into a mixed-use, post-industrial district. Rerat and Lees (2011) identified four classes of investors in Zurich West: institutional investors, stock market listed property funds, newly founded cooperatives, and former industrial companies.

The transformation of Zurich West was guided by a comprehensive plan that aimed to create a vibrant, sustainable, and diverse urban environment. This plan included zoning changes, infrastructure improvements, and urban design guidelines. An area with mixed-use spaces, green spaces, architectural innovation, connectivity, and cultural attractions. The accessibility to the area benefits from transportation connections, including train and tram stations. The redevelopment of Zurich West has not only revitalized a previously neglected area but has also become a cultural attraction in the city known for its creative energy, attracting artists, designers, and entrepreneurs.

The Langstrasse neighborhood in Zurich, Switzerland, used to be a residential area for workers from the Zurich West region. However, in the 1950s, suburbanization caused the population to decrease by around 50%. In the 1980s, Langstrasse became a popular destination for immigrants arriving in Zurich, making up approximately 50% of the population. During the 1980s and 1990s, Langstrasse also saw an increase in drug and red-light activities. In 1998, the newly elected city government, which was largely made up of a social-liberal coalition, made it a priority to improve the quality of life in distressed neighborhoods like Langstrasse through legislation. From 1998-2006, Zurich focused efforts in Langstrasse to eradicate drug use and red-light activities. The result of this focus on Langstrasse was a traditional gentrification of the neighborhood, which increased property values in the neighborhood and displaced the immigration population.

### **Frau Gerold's Garten**

Frau Gerold's Garten (Figure 1) provides an example of a public space in the urban environment that offers a green area for relaxation, social interaction, and recreation, which is an essential element in urban planning. Urban planners often emphasize the importance of green spaces to enhance the quality of life in cities and promote community well-being. The site of Frau Gerold's Garten was once an industrial area and its transformation into a thriving urban garden demonstrates the concept of adaptive reuse and urban regeneration through community development and a grassroots initiative. This project was not driven by large corporations or government entities but by local residents and entrepreneurs who had a vision for their community. Frau Gerold's Garten began as a grassroots initiative, initiated by a group of local individuals who saw the potential of transforming an underutilized industrial area into a vibrant urban garden and social space. Grassroots community development initiatives typically aim to improve the quality of life in a community. Frau Gerold's Garten enhanced the area by creating a more attractive, green, and social space, thereby contributing to the community's betterment. Locals are not the only people embracing

the project but tourists and businesses as well. By attracting visitors and businesses, it has created job opportunities and stimulated the local economy. The success of Frau Gerold's Garten is heavily reliant on community engagement. It has become a gathering place for the community, encouraging social interactions, events, and cultural activities. It demonstrates how a small, locally driven project can have a significant impact on a community by fostering community engagement, economic growth, and cultural expression. Frau Gerold's Garten serves as a model for how grassroots efforts can transform and revitalize urban spaces.



Figure 1: Frau Gerold's Garten (Courtesy of the author).

Frau Gerold's Garten was developed in 2012 by Miteinander, GmbH, a local Zurich company with a strong focus on the gastro industry in Zurich (About Frau Gerold's Garten). In addition to gastronomy, Frau Gerold's Garten is also a platform for young designers and independent labels (Bukhard, 2019). The redevelopment of Frau Gerold's Garten follows the themes of redevelopment in Zurich West, referred to as the "Tendquartier" by Rerat and Less (2011). Frau Gerold's Garten is organically integrated into the redevelopment process, using industrial themes and artifacts. Most of the businesses in Frau Gerold's Garten use shipping containers for their businesses. In addition, Kraut and Quer, a company specializing in urban gardening, gardens a quarter of Frau Gerold's Garten, growing 15 edible flowers, shade plants, herbs, spices, and perennials. They keep the industrial heritage of the region by upcycling old tires, SBB wooden boxes, and oil drums which they use as planters for the Garten (Frau Gerold's Garten Zurich). All these activities maintain the historical context of Frau Gerold's Garten as a brownfield development program.

Another example of maintaining the spirit of the quarter is the flagship store for Freitag. In 1993, Freitag, owned by the Freitag brothers, started their business by creating a line of messenger bags made from used truck tarpaulins, discarded bicycle inner tubes, and car seatbelts (Freitag). Their sustainable and environmentally conscious approach to design gained attention and quickly became popular. As the business grew, the Freitag brothers recognized the need for a flagship store to display their products and communicate the brand's philosophy. The challenge was to create a store that embodied their ethos of recycling and reusing materials. The Freitag Tower (Figure 2) is 26 meters tall, made up of 19 old shipping containers stacked on top of each other and is one of the first retail stores in the world constructed using shipping containers. The tower's unconventional design aligns perfectly with the brand's focus on recycling and sustainability, serving as a symbol of their dedication to environmental responsibility. The materials used in the tower's construction, such as the recycled shipping containers, fit well with the company's mission to create high-quality, eco-friendly products. The tower has a rooftop space offering panoramic views of Zurich and as an iconic building in the city's landscape serves as a destination for locals and tourists interested in the unique design, opportunity to shop and purchase upcycled products, and explore Frau Gerold's Garten.





Figure 2: The Freitag Tower (Courtesy of the author).

Located next to Frau Gerold's Garten is a viaduct used by Swiss railways (SBB) built in 1894. By the late 1980s, the SBB needed to increase capacity on the Zurich Central Train Station-Oerlikon line. The plan they proposed, called "Fil Rouge" would have increased noise and train traffic in the local neighborhood and was opposed by the local residence who created an association called "Verrückt das Viadukt" (Crazy Viadukt) that collected formal objections to the project. The end result was the construction of an underground station at Löwenstrasse and the Weinbergtunnel. (History | Im Viadukt, Zürich). This achieved the goal of reducing rail traffic for the local community but left an underutilized space in Zurich West.

In 2004, a 500-meter line of stores were built into 36 openings from the original bridge (Figure 3). This was finished in 2010 (Dale, 2010). The emphasis is on small and trendy fashion labels, studios, and concept stores rather than the big luxury brands. In the market hall, more than 30 vendors offer their goods, like fresh food and cured meats (History im Viadukt). This conversion of the Viadukt fits with themes of Zurich West by redeveloping an industrial site while keeping the themes of industrialization prominent in the new design.

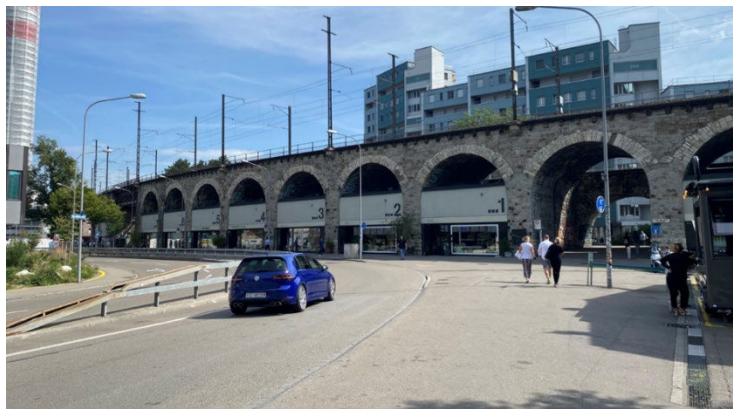


Figure 3: The Viadukt (Courtesy of the author).

### **Terrain Gurzelen**

Terrain Gurzelen is a community gathering site in the city of Biele/Bienne. The space is on the former site of Gurzelen Stadium, former home of the FC Biel/Bienne soccer club. The stadium closed in 2015 when FC Biel/Bienne moved to their new stadium. The stadium was scheduled for demolition in 2016. However, the stadium was never



demolished. Since 2017, Terrain Gurzelen has acted as an interim use of the space, acting as a Cultural Center for the local community. According to the city of Biel-Bienne, Terrain Gurzelen was established as a center for the “realization of innovative and sustainable ideas in sports, culture, sustainability and joint activities and to create offers and opportunities for the local population, for children and families, recreational athletes, artists and other creative forces and to let them participate in this temporary free space” (Zwischennutzung ehemaliges Fussballstadion Guerzelen in Biel-Bienne). This approach of urban development produces an organic, evolving space. One that is controlled at the hyper local level by residents of the local community.

The city also emphasizes the interim nature of the site. According to the city, temporary uses have the potential to revitalize "dead" places; they create free spaces in a densely packed environment that enable participation and involvement. Residents produce a "piece of the city" in a quasi-self-organized manner that allows conclusions to be drawn about the use of public space and the needs of the residents. This experience is also extremely valuable for the city of Biel/Bienne (Temporary use of the Gurzelen site – City of Biel (biel-bienne.ch)). This approach has important implications for urban development. With the local community's involvement, there is a sense of pride in the development of the space. While the space is interim in nature, the ability to use the space prevents the space from falling into a state of disuse and misuse.

Such a hyperlocal, democratic approach to urban development allows for a diverse set of development initiatives on the site. Activities at Terrain Gurzelen include food trucks, a community center, urban gardens, and a grass tennis court (Figure 4). In addition, concerts and outdoor festivals are held on the site.



Figure 4: Urban Gardens and Food Trucks at Terrain Gurzelen (Courtesy of the author).

Two other activities demonstrate the hyperlocal and community focus of Terrain Gurzelen. The city maintains a program for disadvantaged children to learn construction skills in an afternoon program referred to as *Kinderbaustelle* (Children’s construction site) (Figure 5). This provides children from distressed neighborhoods with a structured after school and summer program.



Figure 5: Kinderbaustelle (Courtesy of the author).

In addition to children's programs, Terrain Gurzelen provides opportunities for immigrant communities to establish small businesses in the region. Within the grounds of Terrain Gurzelen, a group of Eritrean immigrants established a bar (Figure 6). The establishment of the bar here provides a first step to establishing a more enduring business presence in the community moving forward.



Figure 6: Immigrant businesses in Terrain Gurzelen (Courtesy of the author).

## **FRAU GEROLD'S GARTEN AND TERRAIN GURZELEN AS CASE STUDIES OF SWISS URBAN REDEVELOPMENT**

Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen are two very different examples of small-scale urban development in Switzerland. The first difference between the two regions is the specific history of the site. Frau Gerold's Garten is a former industrial site, on the grounds of a major SBB facility. As a result, there was no historical place attachment for the local residents of Zurich West and Langstrasse. This is a classic example of brownfield development, with commercialization being the only plausible development scheme for the location.

In contrast, Terrain Gurzelen was the former soccer stadium for the city's primary football club. The location of Terrain Gurzelen is in a neighborhood setting where the local population has a significant emotional attachment to the space. Also, as a sports facility, it would not be a brownfield development project, which means there is no need for significant environmental remediation on the site. This opens various options for the region, including residential development.

The housing market in both cities provides a second difference between the two sites. As mentioned, Frau Gerold's Garten is in a region not suited for residential development due to its former industrial status. While the housing market is exceptionally tight in Zurich, the site is inappropriate for residential development.

Terrain Gurzelen is an ideal location for residential development as it is situated close to major employment centers and surrounded by residential neighborhoods. Given that Biele/Bienne is increasingly becoming a commuter city for neighboring cities, there is a proposal to add new housing to the area. However, the housing market in Biele-Bienne is not as tight as Zurich, consequently, adding new housing to the surplus is a controversial issue. Many community members argue that the site is better used as a permanent community recreation space, while city leadership considers Terrain Gurzelen as an interim solution for the space. This has led to stakeholder conflicts between some community members and city leadership.

Nonetheless, it is essential to note that Terrain Gurzelen is a hyperlocal development program led by residents, with community empowerment and opportunities as its primary goals. This highlights the third major difference between the two sites. This is a region with a strong need for community empowerment as Biele-Bienne went through a significant economic downturn in the 1980s due to the deindustrialization of the watch industry. Terrain Gurzelen symbolizes the underdog nature of Biele/Bienne, coming back from the economic decline and deindustrialization of the 1980s. This underscores the need for community members to be involved in the decision-

making processes surrounding urban development in their neighborhoods. In contrast, Frau Gerold's Garten is primarily a commercial space. With no history of residential development, therefore there are limited opportunities for local attachment to the space. Most of the development came from outside of the region, with Zurich companies in the lead, but not from Zurich West or Langstrasse. While the developers of Frau Gerold's Garten emphasize the opportunities for small scale, independent businesses as opposed to larger corporations, they are primarily not local companies from the existing Langstrasse community. Frau Gerold's Garten also does not have the community outreach programs, like Kinderbaustelle, but primarily focuses on commercial development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen provide examples of a public space in the urban environment. They offer a green area for relaxation, social interaction, and recreation, which is an essential element in urban planning. Urban planners often emphasize the importance of green spaces to enhance the quality of life in cities and promote community well-being. The site of Frau Gerold's Garten was once an industrial area and its transformation into a thriving urban garden demonstrates the concept of adaptive reuse and urban regeneration through community development and a grassroots initiative. Both Terrain Gurzelen and Frau Gerold's Garten began as grassroots initiatives, initiated by a group of local individuals who saw the potential of transforming an underutilized area into vibrant urban gardens and social spaces. These projects are not driven by large corporations or government entities but by local residents and local entrepreneurs who had a vision for their community. Grassroots community development initiatives typically aim to improve the quality of life in a community. Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen enhanced the areas by creating more attractive, green, and social spaces, thereby contributing to the betterment of the community. Locals are not the only people embracing the project but tourists and businesses as well, especially in the case of Frau Gerold's Garten. By attracting visitors and businesses, it has created job opportunities and stimulated the local economy. The success of Terrain Gurzelen and Frau Gerold's Garten are both heavily reliant on community engagement. They have become gathering places for the community, encouraging social interactions, events, and cultural activities. Both demonstrate how a small, locally driven project can have a significant impact on a community by fostering community engagement, economic growth, and cultural expression.

With such a reliance on community initiatives, this study could be expanded further by including additional case studies from different regions, both in Europe and outside of Europe, showing commonalities in grassroots approaches to urban redevelopment. In addition, a qualitative component could be explored which would add to the understanding of community involvement through participatory research. Further participatory research of the political, economic, social, and environmental impacts of grassroots urban redevelopment would further the understanding and explanation of the effects on the local communities involved. These strategies collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of bottom-up gentrification and grassroots urban renewal, its drivers, and its impacts on urban communities. Frau Gerold's Garten and Terrain Gurzelen both serve as models for how grassroots efforts can transform and revitalize urban spaces.

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