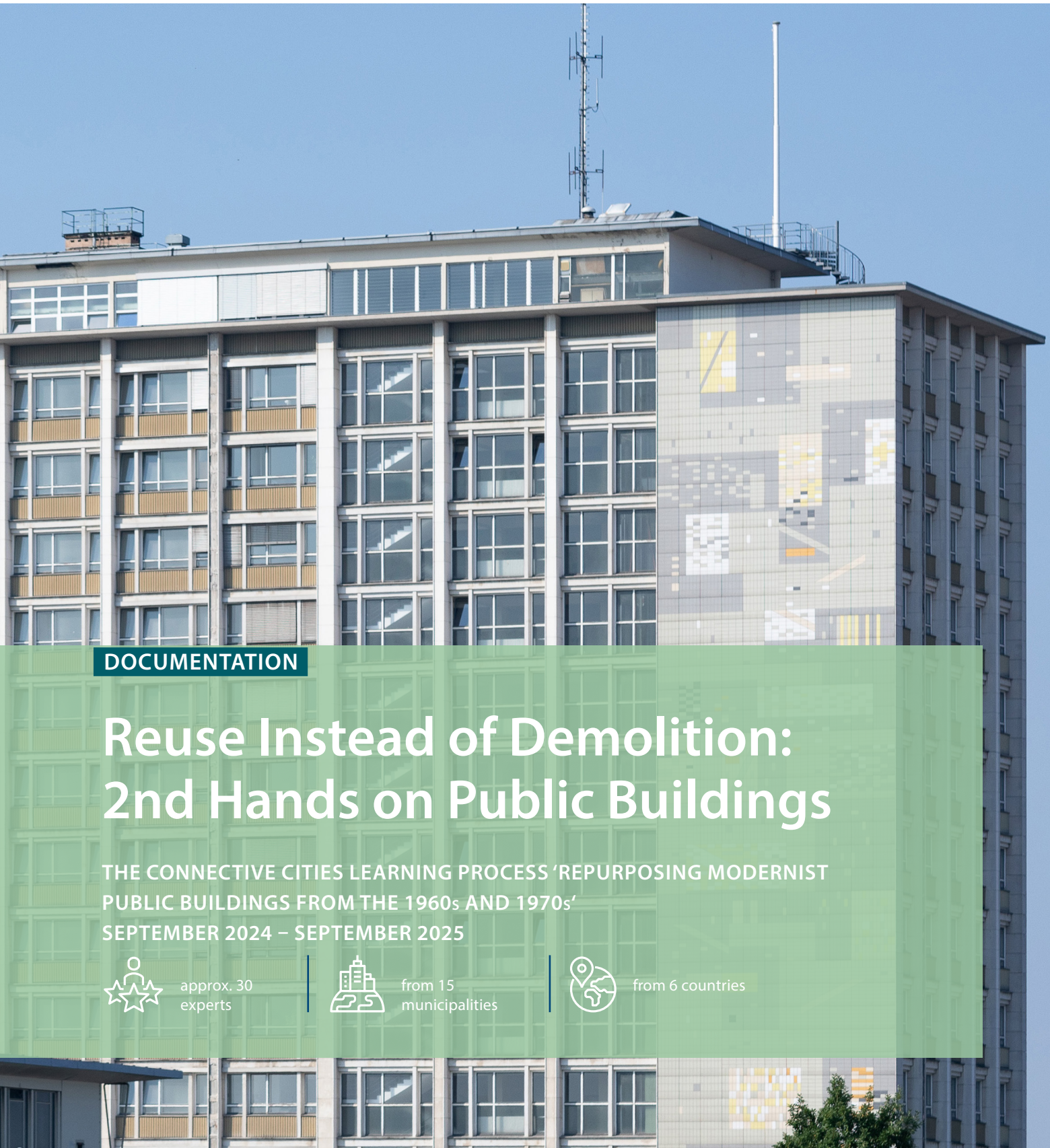




DOCUMENTATION

Reuse Instead of Demolition: 2nd Hands on Public Buildings

THE CONNECTIVE CITIES LEARNING PROCESS 'REPURPOSING MODERNIST
PUBLIC BUILDINGS FROM THE 1960s AND 1970s'
SEPTEMBER 2024 – SEPTEMBER 2025



approx. 30
experts



from 15
municipalities



from 6 countries

Commissioned by



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Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Introduction

For over a year, more than 30 experts from six countries worked as part of Connective Cities' learning process '2nd Hands on Public Buildings. Repurposing Modernist Public Buildings from the 1960s and 1970s' on solutions for aging public buildings from the 1960s and 1970s. How can they be sustainably reused or repurposed instead of being demolished? At four events and two working meetings between September 2024 and September 2025, they learned about current trends in this area, deepened their knowledge, heard details about possible solutions from external experts, and inspired each other with their respective experiences, approaches, and ideas.

'The climate crisis will be decided on the construction site.'

Dominik Campanella, co-founder of Conclular

But the participants didn't just exchange ideas, they also took action. They further developed the project ideas they presented at the dialogue event in Berlin in September 2024 or, in some cases, implemented them directly, taking up suggestions from the other participants. The innovative and very diverse projects impressively demonstrate the potential of the paradigm shift away from rapid demolition toward well-thought-out reuse and conversion.



Participants at the dialogue event in Berlin in September 2024 exchanged views on many practical examples, such as the Haus der Statistik building shown here.

© Raquel Gomez Delgado

The learning process at a glance

1. September 2024: Dialogue event in Berlin
⇒ Exchange of good practice examples from 9 municipalities in 6 countries and development of project ideas
2. October 2024: Online event
⇒ Expert discussion on sound planning for reuse
3. March 2025: Online working meeting
⇒ Expert discussion on the temporary use of buildings
4. May 2025: Online working meeting
⇒ Expert discussion on participatory planning
5. September 22, 2025, online event
⇒ Review event and outlook

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2nd Hands on Public Buildings: The great potential of the reuse of buildings

Many of the world's public buildings from the 1960s and 1970s have reached the end of their planned life span and no longer meet current technical, energy, and aesthetic requirements. As a result, they are often demolished. However, they offer great potential for reducing emissions in the construction sector and creating added value for society. This paradigm shift is gaining increasing attention worldwide.

THE REUSE AND CONVERSION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS IS

- **Climate- and environmentally friendly:** The construction industry is responsible for around 60 percent of CO2 emissions and 30 percent of global waste worldwide.
- **Economically:** Municipalities can save up to 15 percent compared to the costs of demolition and new construction.
- **Socially:** Innovative reuse and conversion concepts create spaces for encounters, culture, and education.

With their projects, the participants drew the attention of local decision-makers to the necessity and potential of reuse and, in some cases, achieved far-reaching political effects. In Kenya, for example, based on the learning process, legislation for the creation of housing was amended to explicitly promote the reuse of existing buildings.



The **Haus der Statistik** building complex in Berlin, built between 1968 and 1970, had been vacant since 2008 and was scheduled for demolition. A local initiative succeeded in preventing this. The building is to serve as a venue for art, culture, social activities, education, administration, and housing.

© Werner Spremberg, Shutterstock



The **Berlin Tempelhof Airport**, built between 1936 and 1941 but never completed, was closed in 2008. It is to be developed into a place of experimentation and a new urban quarter for art, culture, and the creative industries.

© philip1234 Shutterstock



The headquarters of the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, Construction, and Housing, a high-rise building constructed between 1954 and 1956, underwent extensive renovation between 2020 and 2024, with a focus on preserving the original features and conserving resources.

© Martin Kraft, Wikimedia



During the [dialogue event in Berlin](#), the group of participants explored how these three buildings have already been renovated, what repurposing is planned or currently being carried out.

© Raquel Gomez Delgado

The importance of participation

Residents, the affected neighbourhood, and civil society actors should be involved in planning for subsequent uses so that their needs and concerns are taken into account as much as possible.

EXAMPLE: HAUS DER STATISTIK IN BERLIN

The future use of the Haus der Statistik in Berlin is largely due to civil society engagement, which originally prevented the building from being sold to an investor. Since then, politicians, administrators, civil society, and arts and culture stakeholders have been pursuing the common goal of ensuring that the future use of the Haus der Statistik meets the interests of various stakeholders in terms of its construction.



The House of Statistics is also a space for civic engagement, for encounters, exchange and information.

EXAMPLE: TOWN HALL IN HEBRON

The city administration of Hebron supplemented its renovation plans for the city hall with the construction of a multifunctional hall, which is intended to enable civil society engagement and generally more interaction within the urban community. Citizens are to be closely involved in the construction planning process.



At the dialogue event in Berlin, Alewawi Khaldoun from the Hebron municipal administration presented plans for the renovation of the town hall there. © Raquel Gómez Delgado

Well-founded planning as the basis for successful repurposing

The decision as to whether a building can be renovated and repurposed or should be demolished depends on many criteria, including structural integrity, local building regulations, economic viability, and usage requirements.

The participants in the learning process felt that a tool would be helpful in supporting such decision-making processes by standardizing them, thereby speeding them up and making them more transparent. Such a tool could also serve as a basis for argumentation, for example, vis-à-vis politicians or the general public, in order to communicate the pros and cons, technical facts, and assessments of experts.

EXAMPLE: PARKING GARAGE IN BREMEN (GERMANY)

The operation of the Katharinenklosterhof in Bremen, built in the 1970s, will no longer be economically attractive in the long term. How the building could be used sustainably in the future was examined in a workshop process involving the municipal owner, two architectural firms, and the 'Sustainable City Centers and Town Centers' project. Among other things, the building was analyzed in terms of the load-bearing capacity of the structure, fire safety, and the building fabric, and calculations were made to determine whether renovation and reuse would be economically viable.

EXAMPLE: 'HOME OF REVOLUTION' IN NIKŠIĆ (MONTENEGRO)

Construction of the brutalist 'Home of Revolution' building complex in Nikšić (Montenegro), which began in 1978, was never completed until plans to use the 22,000 square meter space emerged in 2021. The municipality proceeded step by step: First, studios for a TV and radio station were planned for the northern part of the complex and opened in 2024. Next, the municipality is planning a state-of-the-art multimedia event hall. Less than 10 percent of the building has yet to be rebuilt.

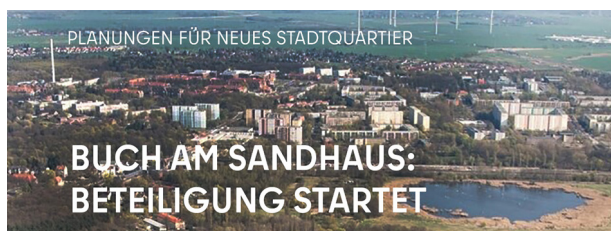
Tips: Stakeholder analyses provide a good overview of all relevant actors. In addition, transparent communication in all directions helps to gain support and reduce potential resistance.



The brutalist building complex 'Home of Revolution' in Nikšić (Montenegro) is filled with life after many years of standing empty.
© Nevena Delibasic

EXAMPLE: PLANNING THE BUCH – AM SANDHAUS URBAN DISTRICT IN BERLIN (GERMANY)

The new Buch – Am Sandhaus urban district was to be built around a former hospital on the outskirts of Berlin. From the outset, the plans envisaged multiple uses for the hospital building and the former canteen. Rooms could be used for the music school in the afternoons and for civil society events in the evenings. This not only makes sense for economic reasons, but also strengthens the sense of community among residents. .



© Municipality of Berlin

'Because existing buildings tie up a lot of gray (or golden) energy, reuse or conversion is almost always preferable to demolition.'

Moritz Theloe, Policy Officer for Mobility, Transport, Climate Protection, the Environment, Urban Development, Construction and Housing, Berlin Senate Chancellery

Interim use: avoiding vacancy, creating space

Buildings often stand empty for a long time until a decision is made about their future use and they are ready for conversion. During this time, numerous problems can arise, such as vandalism, accumulation of rubbish, or damage to the fabric of the building, for example due to water ingress. The buildings are at risk of falling into further disrepair. However, in the course of the learning process, numerous innovative approaches to temporary use were identified that not only require little investment but also contribute to the preservation of the buildings:

EXAMPLE: TOWN HALL IN REGENSBURG (GERMANY)

The city of Regensburg is temporarily making a building from 1980, which it will use as a town hall in the future, available to the fire department and police for training purposes. This selective use leads to significantly less damage because the building does not appear abandoned.



Interim use prevents damage until construction work begins on the renovation of the future town hall in Regensburg
© Stadt Regensburg

EXAMPLE: FORMER HOTEL IN NAIROBI (KENYA)

The 25-story former Hilton Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, has been vacant since 2022. The Nairobi city administration discussed several conversion options with experts from the German associations Transiträume e.V. and ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen: housing for students, singles, or small families; office space; and short-term 'quick-win' temporary uses. Although these ideas could not be implemented because the building was later sold to a Chinese investor, they provided the city administration with valuable starting points for future projects.

Tips: Any consideration must begin with an examination of the building structure, possible forms of reuse, the cost-benefit ratio, and an assessment of energy efficiency. If the complete renovation of a large building complex is not possible, only parts of it can be piloted initially.

Tips: To determine the interim use precisely, city administrations should gather ideas from various stakeholder groups such as the population, politicians, and private investors, and delegate responsibility. It is also worthwhile to consult external experts (e.g., the German interim network 'Netzwerk Zwischennutzung') in order to design the administrative structure of the building in question in a sustainable manner.

How to finance the reuse and repurposing of buildings?

Financial support for climate-friendly initiatives: Because energy-efficient building reuse is climate-friendly, funding can be applied for in DAC countries in particular. But money is not everything, because projects must first be well planned before they are ready for financing. The City Climate Finance Gap Fund offers support here, for example for capacity building, strategy development, data collection, or feasibility studies.

Financial support with regard to social benefits: Through the planning, financing, and implementation of a pilot project to establish family and social centers, which was finalized during the learning process, the Lusaka city administration succeeded in attracting the interest of other donors and local organizations.

‘Our clear vision and well-thought-out planning for the future family and social centers convinced the donors and the population. By the end of 2025, we want to have converted five buildings for their new use.’

Evelyn Musonda, Lusaka City Council

Financial support for partnerships: On behalf of the German Federal Government, the Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) supports projects in the field of municipal sustainability and development work. Municipalities from Germany that are loosely or firmly linked by partnerships with local authorities in the Global South can apply for funding from the low-threshold Small Projects Fund (KPF) or, for projects up to 500,000 euros, from the Sustainable Local Development through Partnership Projects (Nakopa) program.

EU funding for energy-efficient renovations: Because the Ukrainian city of Drohobych, for example, lacks the financial resources to modernize many residential buildings from the 1960s and 1970s to make them energy efficient, it receives funding from the European Union’s Energy Efficiency Fund, which covers 60 percent of the costs of energy-efficient renovation.

Affordable housing: Many buildings that were previously used for other purposes are (in part) suitable for use as affordable housing in inner-city locations. There are numerous financing instruments available in Germany for such conversions. Participants from the Global South were able to exchange their ideas and suggestions in the Connective Cities working group ‘Sustainable and affordable housing in sub-Saharan Africa’.

Reuse of building materials: Software from the Berlin-based company Concular can be used to inventory materials in existing buildings and then sell them via a platform. In a large renovation project in Düsseldorf, 70 percent of the materials were reused. This also saved 35 percent in CO2 emissions.

Key takeaways:

- Feasibility studies provide clarity on whether reuse and conversion are economically viable, for what purposes, and with what objectives.
- For sustainable reuse, it is necessary for a building to meet high standards of energy efficiency.
- Interim use, for example by the cultural scene, is better than leaving a building empty.
- When planning the reuse of older public buildings, ecological, economic, and social interests must be reconciled.
- The construction sector urgently needs to be transformed in terms of resource consumption and waste volumes, including through the recycling of building materials in a circular construction and building industry. This is possible for many building components in the context of conversion and reuse.



If the dimensions are suitable, many building materials can be reused.

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Connective Cities – International Community of Practice for Sustainable Municipal Development

Since 2013, Connective Cities has been promoting the worldwide exchange of municipal expertise. Within the framework of structured learning processes, the platform disseminates proven-practice solutions for sustainable municipal development and supports peer learning between German and international municipal experts, as well as the joint development of project ideas.

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Further information can be found here:

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