Edgelands of practice
Humphris, Imogen; Rauws, Ward

Published in:
Landscape Research

DOI:
10.1080/01426397.2020.1850663

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the “Taverne” license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment.

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Download date: 29-09-2023
Edgelands of practice: post-industrial landscapes and the conditions of informal spatial appropriation

Imogen Humphris & Ward Rauws

To cite this article: Imogen Humphris & Ward Rauws (2021) Edgelands of practice: post-industrial landscapes and the conditions of informal spatial appropriation, Landscape Research, 46:5, 589-604, DOI: 10.1080/01426397.2020.1850663

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2020.1850663

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 06 Dec 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 711

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Edgeland of practice: post-industrial landscapes and the conditions of informal spatial appropriation

Imogen Humphris and Ward Rauws
Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT
Do-It-Yourself urbanism has often been attributed with the capacity to revitalise urban environments in the absence of formal planning activity. However, there is still limited understanding of the ways in which such practices emerge and establish agency within their respective environments. We bring a relational lens to the debate, presenting a framework for identifying how the socio-spatial conditions within the urban landscape enable and constrain citizen-led spatial appropriation. Using a visually oriented, multi-modal approach, the framework is applied to five sites in Glasgow, Scotland, which we conceptualise as Edgelands in a post-industrial city. Findings reveal that informal citizen practices adaptively come into being through a process of negotiation with their social and material context. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for fostering citizen agency in revitalising the post-industrial city and other urban settings that include wastescapes.

Introduction
In the latter half of the twentieth century, the shift in global geographies of production caused a crisis in Europe’s industrial cities. For former working neighbourhoods, the rapid process of deindustrialisation that occurred amounted to a catastrophic dismantling of community networks and dramatic transformation of the local landscape (High, 2013; Tovar et al., 2011). In numerous cities, such as Glasgow (Scotland), Halle (Germany) or Łódź (Poland), the process of recovering from the loss of major industries and transitioning to new urban economic models remains slowed or stagnant (Doucet, 2010; Richardson & Chang, 2014; Wójcik et al., 2019). Accordingly, we draw attention to the myriad of unauthorised citizen activities occurring across the weathering terrain of post-industrial brownfields. While they might not be intentionally ‘agenda-setting’, by enacting their own agency, these practices of spatial appropriation demonstrate the capacity and desire of citizens to reclaim and incrementally shape trajectories in the remaking of the post-industrial city.

The current debate on citizen-led spatial appropriation is commonly found in literature exploring Do-It-Yourself (DIY), guerrilla or tactical urbanism (Hou, 2010; Iveson, 2013; Talen, 2015). While acknowledging the legal and political complications that these commonly unsolicited DIY actions present (Mould, 2014), studies attribute them with the capacity to revitalise urban environments where planning authorities have been unwilling or unable to act (Finn, 2014; Talen, 2015) and the ability to improve and diversify citizen engagement in decision-making processes (Finn, 2014; Hou, 2010). These analyses deliver useful insights into the outcomes of initiatives, including their political, organisational and legal implications. Yet, only limited attention is given to the contextual settings in which DIYS emerge and establish. Existing studies do touch upon how transformations and tensions

CONTACT Imogen Humphris i.t.humphris@rug.nl
© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.
at the city- or district-wide scale, such as economic recession (Talen, 2015), privatisation (Volont, 2019) or exclusion from decision-making (Fabian & Samson, 2016), may spark civic initiatives. However, as studies such as Corijn and Groth (2005) allude to, citizen action can very well be kindled by the cultural and material nature of their immediate settings. Thus, there is a need for fine-grained comprehension of the favourable socio-spatial conditions that foster citizen appropriation at the scale of the site. Consequently, understanding of critical aspects pertaining to the emergent and adaptive nature of such citizen-led practices is limited. This is acutely problematic in the post-industrial context where knowledge of how citizen agency is reclaimed and enacted is vitally needed for the democratic revitalisation of the city in the wake of deindustrialisation.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the socio-spatial conditions that enable citizen practices of spatial appropriation to emerge in post-industrial brownfields. The analysis focuses on Glasgow, Scotland, as the impact of deindustrialisation has been notably widespread in this city, affecting previous locations of industrial production as well as areas of former housing and civic amenities resulting in a broadly differentiated array of socio-spatial conditions (Scottish Government, 2018). Our study selects five sites in the city covering a variety of scales, locations and activities. We employ a multi-modal approach to analysis that brings together notation, drawing, photo and archival evidence.

In response to the limited attention given to social and material settings in DIY literature, the paper provides three contributions to the field. Firstly, we introduce a relational lens that pitches these citizen practices as embedded within their immediate context, allowing for an unpacking of social-spatial interdependencies between place and practice. Secondly, we expand the horizon of study beyond individual DIY projects to assess the wider landscape of appropriating practices as they operate in relation to one another. Hence, our study additionally encompasses more temporal, illusive and informal notions of appropriation (e.g., the walking of desire lines, den making and bird watching). To this end, we employ the term Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) to cover all these activities from the calculated to the serendipitous. We argue that such an approach furthers understanding of how the agency of citizens is established in the reshaping of the post-industrial city through a bricolage of both coordinated and uncoordinated actions. Finally, we will highlight the need for policymaking which is capable of acknowledging the broader spectrum of contributive place-making efforts and acting with sensitivity in locations that come to hold multiple, shifting meanings for citizens.

Utilising Marion Shoard’s (2000) notion of the ‘Edgelands’, we first conceptualise post-industrial brownfield sites in an operationalised framework for their empirical investigation using the themes of the unseen, the unregulated and the unplanned. This framework is then employed in the investigation of the five sites in Glasgow, analysing how these themes create beneficial and detrimental conditions in which practices of spatial appropriation may emerge. The paper concludes with a reflection on how practices of spatial appropriation adaptively and tactically position themselves within spaces of possibility and, subsequently, implications for policymaking.

The post-industrial landscape and its informal production: a framework for investigation

Defining the Edgelands in a post-industrial context

In an effort to conceptualise the socio-spatial characteristics of post-industrial brownfields, we take the term ‘Edgelands’ as our point of departure. This term is frequently deployed to describe waste landscapes absent of institutional programme and lacking in regulatory mechanisms (Farley & Roberts, 2011). First coined by Shoard (2000), the uncertainty surrounding formal uses in the Edgelands can create opportunities for a haphazard and unruly mix of activities (Farley & Roberts, 2011; Franck & Stevens, 2007). Through a literature analysis of this field of writing, we here define three key conditions of the Edgelands pertinent to unpacking the post-industrial landscape.
One of the most immediately evident characteristics of the Edgelands is their tendency to be unseen. In Shoard’s (2000) analysis, the physical distance of the Edgelands from urban centres is interwoven with their failure to find recognition within the imagined urban-rural landscape. We make a habit of speeding past them when travelling between cities or making recreational journeys to the countryside, often overlooking their presence. However, while Shoard’s work is concerned with the city’s external edge, Berger (2006) offers a useful interpretation for the post-industrial context with his framing of the internal frontier: ‘the composite of many landscape fragments within the local urbanized area: strips, lots, and unbuilt or unbuildable properties … increasingly marginalized in-between architectural objects’ (p. 26). This continual fragmenting of the urban fabric through redevelopment results in site conditions that occur close to centres of activity but remain disconnected from the ‘rush and flow’ of the city (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p. 8). In such instances, unseen space may occur in close proximity to that which is clearly visible, creating an array of concealed locations throughout the urban fabric that exist outside the day-to-day consciousness of citizens. In short, they are places where nobody is looking and nobody cares either.

As Edgelands sites are partly defined by their struggle to attain recognition, a further key condition is their tendency to be unregulated. Mechanisms of control, employed to moderate daily use of the built environment, are not completely absent in the Edgelands, rather they begin to break down as Farley and Roberts (2011) describe: ‘regulatory frameworks tend to slacken and all forms of surveillance and policing are patchier’ (p. 58). Given that the Edgelands are often also unseen, this can bring about a diminishing of social surveillance mechanisms used for the subtle self-regulation of populations and exercise of power as described by Foucault (1975). As observation constitutes a critical regulatory mechanism in the built environment, its absence can lead to a degrading of established power relations, evoking qualities of lawlessness and contingency. Along similar lines, Berger (2006) draws attention to the liminality of ‘wasted’ spaces; sitting somewhere between one established set of regulatory controls and the next, ‘awaiting a societal desire to inscribe them with value and status’ (p. 29). As the Edgelands are stripped of the protocols surrounding their former use, giving way to a temporary instability, an ever shifting and transforming array of regulatory ‘voids’ is left. It is this consequential ambivalence that allows them to become ‘reservoir[s] of meanings’ (Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007, p. 458). Hence, unregulated spaces are open to the inscribing of multiple values by multiple users outside of established power structures.

A third condition of the Edgelands that can be distinguished is their unplanned nature, as strategic oversight from policymakers is often lacking. The inevitable generation of surplus spaces across the post-industrial landscape is attributed not only to the obsolescence of former industrial sites, but further the by-product of succeeding infrastructure projects as they are worked into the existing urban fabric (Franck & Stevens, 2007). The sidelined priority of the Edgelands often leaves them with unfixed function where the ‘tightness of planning suddenly unravels’ (p. 7) despite their proximity to highly programmed spaces. Dembski (2015) further clarifies the challenges of this unplanned arena, placing emphasis on the institutional uncertainty surrounding their purpose and management. In contrast to metropolitan centres with ‘powerful, embedded planning concepts […] in place’ (Dembski, 2015, p. 1649), transitional zones offer a conceptual looseness and are often dynamic in their institutional treatment as a result. Away from the dominant narratives of the city, the Edgelands represent an alternative ‘planning space’ in which unexpected development may take place introducing new trajectories into the city. While Dembski’s analysis is focussed on sites at the urban periphery, such mechanisms may also be found operating across the post-industrial landscape, as locales of new possibility emerge in the avenues where institutional arrangements retreat. If the Edgelands are the areas of loosened planning frameworks then they also offer liberal test beds for experimentation and appropriation.

In all of these situations, opportunities are created for Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) whereby citizens introduce unintended uses, and thus inscribe alternative narratives, into the urban landscape. In the context of a transitioning deindustrialised landscape, these practices can be read as actions and manners through which the meaning, ownership and structure of public space can be
temporarily or permanently suspended’ (Hou, 2010, p. 13). They may emerge as simple, everyday practices such as walking desire lines and the daily routines of resistance as described by De Certeau (1988), or they can be more consciously intentional actions that find current definition in ‘DIY urbanism’. To ascertain how such practices establish themselves relationally within the post-industrial landscape, we present below an operationalised framework for analysing the socio-spatial conditions offered by the Edgelands.

**Operationalising the unseen, unregulated and unplanned**

In the above exploration of the literature on unseen (Berger, 2006; Franck & Stevens, 2007; Shoard, 2000) conditions point to a landscape typology predominantly outside of common civic consciousness with sites marginalised within a disordered urban landscape. To operationalise the Edglands as unseen space we discern three key factors:

- **Distanced**: sites away from any centres of civic activity.
- **Disconnected**: sites with limited linkages to networks of movement as a consequence of the fragmentation of the post-industrial urban landscape.
- **Disguised**: sites intentionally or unintentionally concealed from view.

The review of literature on unregulated (Berger, 2006; Farley & Roberts, 2011; Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007) conditions highlight a dissipating of mechanisms for regulatory control of behaviour which are typically employed in the city. To operationalise the Edglands as unregulated space we discern four key factors:

- **Policing**: sites with absent or inconsistent police presence.
- **Surveillance**: sites with absent or disrupted observational mechanisms, e.g., CCTV or casual, social surveillance.
- **Signage**: sites with absent or ineffective graphic communication of regulations.
- **Barricades**: sites with absent, inconsistent or ineffective use of physically obstructive mechanisms.

When considering an institutional perspective, literature points towards the lack of strategic oversight in Edgelands spaces (Dembski, 2015; Franck & Stevens, 2007). To operationalise the Edglands as unplanned space we discern two key factors:

- **Local planning activity**: sites with periods in which formal plans for use are absent or remain unimplemented.
- **City Planning Policy**: sites that are given low or poorly defined strategic priority in the realisation of long-term, city-wide policy objectives.

**Methodology: a multi-modal exploration**

In this study, we aim to systematically explore the unseen, unregulated and unplanned by ‘mapping’ their manifestations across a series of sites. Given the diverse, marginalised and typically unrecorded nature of the Edgelands, their analysis requires a creative approach. As Kester (2013) and Lucas (2016) describe, methodological thinking in the arts and architecture holds the capacity to re-contextualise understandings of place, outside of traditional frames of reference. Further, Palipane (2019) highlights the need for multi-modal forms of analyses, arguing that traditionally singular frames of observation risk ‘overlooking […] nuanced and layered place-making practices’ (p. 92), particularly in marginalised spaces. In order to make the socio-spatial conditions of the Edgelands evident, we employed such a multi-modal approach to data collection, triangulating evidence from
a mix of sources. Through site observations, recordings of material traces, discussions with site users and the use of planning archives, we were able to establish current physical conditions, historical and planned developments, informal activities present and physical changes made during vacancy. Notation, drawing and photo were utilised to generate a body of research objects including pathway illustrations (Lucas, 2016), lists and photographic models (Godoy, 2019) (Figure 1). Layering this varied content together allowed us to juxtapose information that customarily sits separated in different domains thus revealing new points of intersection, allowing us to analyse the relationship between them.

Five Edgeland sites were selected in the deindustrialised city of Glasgow, Scotland. Locations were chosen based upon variety with the intention of drawing conclusions from a broadly illustrative, cross-section of cases. Variance was sought in: scale, length of vacancy, positioning within the formal active landscape, relationship to other nearby Edgeland sites, and intensity of spatial appropriation present. Other practical limitations were considered such as accessibility and researcher safety.

Two rounds of site visits were made during February and July 2019 with multiple visits made for every site covering different times of the day (between morning and evening depending on daylight hours) and both weekdays and weekends. This allowed us to monitor variances in activity level and changes in site conditions over shorter and longer time frames. The total time spent on each site ranged from 5 to 10 hours. An iterative process of collecting data, processing, reflecting and returning to site again was used to progressively enrich the analysis. Below we provide a brief contextual overview for each of the five sites.

**Govan**

This very large site, sitting on the south bank of the Clyde river, was formerly a part of Glasgow’s shipbuilding industry. Despite its vacancy of over 30 years and several clearances, some architectural remnants are still evident, most notably a series of dry docks. Govan remains a predominantly working-class residential community, but the site also sits adjacent to a growing riverside development project focussed on media, entertainment and tourism. The site is used for many informal purposes including dog walking, graffiti writing, wildlife watching and drug use.

**Drumchapel**

This location is one in a series of former housing and education sites in this suburban area. Positioned centrally in the neighbourhood, it is within close proximity to both housing and civic amenities. Cleared in the early 2000s, the only remains left are several blocked roadways with the rest of the site becoming verdant grassland. The predominant citizen activity on the site is walking with little evidence of any, more substantial appropriations.

**Parkhead**

This is the smallest site in our selection but previously part of a much larger site that has recently been developed into new housing. A former railway embankment, this site has been vacant since the 1960s and is an entirely grassed area with a thick boundary of overgrowth concealing it from the road. One citizen user was found appropriating this site intensively for an extended period of time for pigeon keeping and was previously a part of a larger local network of pigeon keepers, which has now mostly been eradicated by demolition.

**Kinning Park**

Situated alongside a busy motorway in an inner-city industrial area, this large site previously hosted an abandoned factory but is now open and exposed with challenging terrain and a large rubble pile.
Figure 1. A selection of multi-modal research objects produced: 1. Illustrated site map with observation and discussion notations; 2. List of observed activities; 3. Photographic models of barricades; 4. Satellite image timeline of clearance process; 5. Pathway illustration; 6. Historical planning activity arrangements. Source: Author.
While the former factory was a well renowned and popular location for graffiti writing, activities on the site have significantly decreased since the demolition.

**Port Dundas**

This medium-scale site was cleared 14 years ago and is bounded by a series of high brick walls left after demolition. The internal area is split into a high and low level both with concrete floors resulting in a highly architectural site. A wide range of activities have appropriated this space since demolition with current uses including a DIY skatepark, the burning of tyres and other available materials, graffiti writing and a cocktail party.

**The unseen, unregulated and unplanned in action: an empirical assessment**

In this section, we present our empirical findings from the five case study sites by assessing the influence of the three conditions upon the emergence of Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) in each location.

**Unseen: social surveillance—as mediated by disguise and disconnection**

In general, the *unseen* is an evidently influential factor throughout all five of the sites studied. However, *distance* does not appear to be a significant factor in the emergence of Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) as all sites are situated close to centres of activity yet still feature appropriation activities in some form. To understand how these locations may still be *unseen*, we focus our analysis on the other two dimensions, namely *disconnection* and *disguise*.

Some of the study sites demonstrate the important influence of *disconnection* from the main flows of movement through the city. Port Dundas floats in a quiet zone between main tributary roads connecting to the centre, while Govan is bounded by a main road to one side but the under-used river to the other which effectively sidelines this area. Despite their close proximity to busy traffic, these quiet ‘pockets’ allow the many SAPs occurring within them to go unnoticed. Conversely, a site like Drumchapel sits at the centre of a residential neighbourhood. Flanked by several key community amenities, it witnesses high footfall and indeed the most common SAP here is the daily meandering of pedestrians commuting across the site suggesting this brownfield could instead be described as a very wild urban common (*Figure 2*). The degree of *connection* or *disconnection*, in this sense, appears to generate opportunities for different types of SAPs, be they those that occur as part of ‘passing through’ the landscape or those that intentionally select a site in which to enact practices without being disturbed.

When considering the dimension of *disguise*, where overlooking passers-by are commonplace, in general activities tend to be limited. At the Kinning Park site, overlooked by the adjacent M8 flyover, and the highly exposed Drumchapel site, few SAPs emerge beyond dumping, dog walking and commuting. Such ‘passing through’ SAPs may alternatively be framed as external onlookers penetrating the site, furthering exposure to social surveillance.

However, Edgeland sites may not be uniformly *disguised* with many offering locations within them that are more greatly concealed creating ‘Edgelands within Edgelands’. It is also critical to look at the three-dimensionality of sites in this regard. Govan is an excellent example: this is the largest of the five sites examined but also presents height changes, different boundary qualities and even a small, remaining structure. In those areas most exposed to passer-by observation, we find more temporal, less illicit activities: dog walking, reminiscing, wandering, learning to ride a bike. Those looking for a little more privacy head for the opposite side of the site along the river’s edge— tai-chi, guitar playing, arson. The concealment offered by the remaining building structure and out of sight corners attract those requiring the most extended periods of privacy and perhaps slightly more illicit activities: drug-taking, graffiti writing, mural painting. We see here that parallels can be drawn between hidden or exposed locations and variations in the temporal or enduring, illicit or non-
illicit nature of different SAPs. Given the variety of conditions offered by a site like Govan, it is clearly possible for diverse and contrasting citizen activities to emerge ‘side-by-side’.

We, further, find these ‘visual screens’ appearing in a variety of forms. The most prevalent are those created unintentionally by remnant, post-demolition ‘architecture’. Natural screening from invasive plants also occurs, particularly if the site is left unplanned for extended periods of time. There is also some evidence of screening structures created by SAPs themselves. So we find that SAPs are consistently positioning themselves within locations that match their tolerance for exposure and, when not met, further manipulating the site to create the optimum conditions for themselves.

**Unregulated: symbolic boundaries and the liminal uncertainty of stepping off radar**

When analysing sites using the lens of the *unregulated* as described in the framework, we find that patchy applications of regulatory mechanisms are evident across all five locations. While the sites analysed present inconclusive evidence for the use of *surveillance, policing* and *signage* in relation to the emergence of Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs), the factor emerging as significantly influential is the treatment of *barricades*.

Barricades are present throughout all our selected sites, but the extent to which they have been implemented, their material form and their maintenance varied greatly. What is consistent across the sites, is the altering or tampering of these barricades by SAPs, local authorities and site owners alike. In Port Dundas brick walls are pulled down, while in Govan entire sections of reinforced steel fencing are found bent out of shape and uprooted. The presence of repair by owners or authorities and the placement or rearrangement of temporary barricades can communicate the proximity of site clearance and the reimposition of formal uses. In Park Head, Heras fencing is used to section off neighbouring vacant land, marking the perimeter of an imminent housing development and signalling the wholesale regeneration of the area. Meanwhile, in Govan, planning permission for the site to be used as a film set has led to a reinstatement of barricades and sealing off of informal entry points, preparing the site for a new narrative to be inscribed formally. This kind of intermittent

![Figure 2. Drumchapel. Source: Author.](image-url)
regulation and its counteraction can be read as a material communication of the *intention* to narrate the space (See Figure 3).

Given this tendency for SAPs to act in spite of formal barricading we find that the relationship between the two is the inverse of what might be expected; once broken into, well-established barricades seem to be a positive, contributing factor for some SAPs to flourish. A substantial barricade can effectively filter access to the site by clearly defining its symbolic boundary, deterring those less intent on transgression. In Drumchapel, where SAP presence is low and pedestrians freely cross the site, barricades are present but used inconsistently, not marking the perimeter and so poorly maintained that they fail to define what is ‘in’ or ‘out’. In contrast, sites more abundant with appropriating activities such as Port Dundas, Govan and Park Head feature well defined, less penetrable boundaries (brick walls, vertical bar steel fencing and thick hedgerow). While it is evident from outside that the space within is ‘off limits’, once this borderline has been crossed, these same barricades create a sense of containment and even protection. These symbolic boundaries can isolate SAPs from the social surveillance of other members of the public wandering across the site, and safeguard against active, institutional regulation such as policing. While owners and institutions may intend for barricades to offer regulatory control over a site, analysis demonstrates that SAPs have the capacity to both manipulate their physical form and appropriate their symbolic meaning to further support their own narrative inscribing process.

**Unplanned: overlooked and unrealised**

The unplanned condition of the framework intends to assess how planning activity and policy manifest on the ground and their consequential relationship to the emergence of Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs).

Far from being absent of planning activity, for the majority of our sites, Glasgow City Council records present a history of planning applications being rejected, withdrawn or simply unrealised. As demonstrated in the City Plan 2 (2009) and City Development Plan (2017), planning policies outlining...
development priorities assign no or only low-priority policy designations on most sites during the previous 10 years. The Port Dundas site, having lain empty since 2006, offers a critical example of vacancy driven by ambiguous and low-priority planning policy. Significantly, the site itself sits just outside of a major Master Plan area and a Transformational Regeneration Area—currently one of the city’s largest development projects. This intensive zone of focus seems to have left the adjacent area of our site sitting on a liminal, uncertain edge by comparison and consequently overlooked. Conversely, we find that the continued vacancy on the Govan site can be attributed, in some part, to ‘excessive’ policy focus as multiple policy objectives surrounding heritage, housing and environment collide, effectively ‘raising the bar’ for hopeful developers. As SAPs often remain unaffected by planning policy until physical intervention on the ground occurs, such constraints to development at the institutional level as policy ambiguity and heritage conservation can indeed bolster the conditions in which spatial appropriation may occur.

Among our study sites, we find these variances in planning activity affecting the emergence of SAPs in a number of ways. One recurring factor we find lies in the surrounding vacancy context beyond the sites themselves. As illustrated in the case of Drumchapel, where many more SAPs can be found in other neighbouring Edgeland locations, our analysis indicates that where the supply of vacant sites is high, the potentiality of one site to attract SAPs may be eclipsed by other, nearby locations.

Stalled planning activity also appears to create more favourable conditions for SAPs when it leads to excessively long periods of vacancy. Govan, Port Dundas and Parkhead, having all been vacant for at least 13 years, demonstrate a wide range of SAPs appearing over the course of their vacancy with some becoming more permanent and making more significant, physical alterations to the site (Figure 4). One site hosts a doocot (a pigeon keep) which has stood for approximately 30 years with an ancillary structure being added more recently to support additional socialising activities. Clearly, this type of extensive and long-term appropriation is only possible in the long-term absence of formal land use.

Finally, these longer periods of vacancy can contribute to the breadth of activities we find emerging as pioneering SAPs pave the way for other practices. We have found a wide variety of individuals approaching Edgeland sites among which some find a greater degree of comfort in stepping outside of legal frameworks and making physical alterations to untouched territory. In doing so, they ‘pioneer’ the appropriation of a site with actions such as removing barricades or being the first to inscribe graffiti on a wall, initiating the transformation of the site into a liminal space that is neither off limits nor part of the public realm. This, in turn, opens new opportunities for other curious SAPs less intent on explicit violation but keen to find a quiet spot or shortcut. In the long-term absence of planning activity in the Edgelands, SAPs may be read as ‘emergent ecologies’ (see Lathe Gilbert, 1989) whereby one activity may create the conditions for a succession of others to flourish. Evidently, stalled development processes offer significant opportunities for SAPs to emerge, sustain and evolve. However, as the case of Govan demonstrates, such stagnation can be attributed not only to the slackening of policy mechanisms (as in Dembski, 2015) but also, perhaps paradoxically, to their tightening.

**An additional condition: the material present**

During the time spent making observations in all five locations, a fourth prominent theme emerged as an important socio-spatial condition of the Edgelands pertaining to their materiality.

As informal practices, limited in their ability to prepare groundwork, Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) are reliant upon finding pre-existing material conditions that meet their physical requirements for practice. The differences in SAPs emerging at Port Dundas and Parkhead demonstrate this well. At Port Dundas graffiti writers take advantage of the ample, uninterrupted, vertical surfaces positioned at appropriate height for painting, while DIY skatepark builders are drawn to the smooth concrete footings that allow them to roll freely from one side to the other and retaining walls stable enough to build concrete skatepark formations against (see again Figure 4). Parkhead, on the
other hand, presents a very different material context. Here, on a former railway embankment, hard concrete surfaces are replaced with a gently sloping grassy verge—optimal conditions for the doocot and shed that occupy the site. The substrate provides an ideal penetrable surface for securing a timber frame structure into (Figure 5). Meanwhile, some material constraints make for generally less favourable conditions all round. A prime example is found at Kinning Park, where the recent demolition has left an uneven and rutted ground surface making it challenging to cross on foot.
Hence, the materiality of a site has a clear impact on its suitability for particular types of spatial appropriation dependent on their nature.

However, favourable material conditions are not simply the sum of material arrangements available on site in the present. The material conditions of the two most active sites, appropriated consistently by diverse groups and individuals, are largely formed by the built remnants of their past industries. In a city that has demolished its industrial, architectural heritage so extensively, historic narrative remains embedded in these weathered compositions of brick, stone, timber and concrete. In Govan, one man we encountered had come specifically to ‘reminisce’ about his former working years on the site and, in Port Dundas, the DIY skatepark weaves its design into the ornamental brickwork left behind. Even the naming of the skatepark draws upon the prominent architectural formations that survived the demolition. Further still, the materiality of past and present moments do not exist in isolation from one another, rather these sites exhibit a continual flow of materials and processes in constant interaction (Ingold, 2011). Asphalt becomes incrementally disguised by moss, persistent rain dissolves brickwork and oxidises steel rail lines, the pacing out of desire lines wears away encroaching vegetation back to the cobblestones below (Figure 6). The narrative inscribing of SAPs works within this continual flow of material heritage, responding not only to remaining architectural forms but so too to the ongoing natural transformations of them and even the succession of prior SAPs. In Port Dundas, Govan and Kinning Park, graffiti writers inscribe not upon bare walls but rather they interact with a palimpsest of past artworks and layers of council cover-up paint jobs, all continually transforming the nature of the original surface.

While an agglomeration of SAPs can enable some forms of appropriation, in other instances we also see SAPs creating conditions that hinder one another. In Parkhead, one individual has established such a dominant presence on the small site that it would be difficult for any other SAP to establish without confrontation over space ‘ownership’. On other sites, some practices have suffered from other SAPs drawing attention from authorities who have subsequently reinstated barricades or threatened their ability to remain ‘under the radar’. This interaction between the inscription of
multiple narratives onto a site can, at times, be symbiotic and, in other moments, resemble more of a competitive relationship where the narrative of one SAP begins to dominate over another.

**Socio-spatial insights on post-industrial brownfields**

Having investigated the socio-spatial conditions of Edgelands, this discussion section reflects on how Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) operate and inscribe alternative narratives within a deindustrialised landscape.

**Post-industrial brownfields as the confluence points of interdependent conditions**

Despite the somewhat distinctive theoretical origins of the themes *Unseen, Unregulated* and *Unplanned*, in bringing them together, the framework draws attention to the points at which the boundaries between them blur and intersect one another. This is particularly apparent where different dimensions of the framework may focus on the same physical object in the field. For instance: a barricade may be analysed both as a device for the regulation (as in the *unregulated*) and the concealing (as in the *unseen*) of a site. The concept of social surveillance is also one that permeates both the *unseen*—in its concern for sight lines and proximity—and the *unregulated*—as a mechanism of social control.

This duality points to an interdependent co-evolution of relationships between the three thematic conditions, whereby a change in one condition may trigger further changes in another leading to a wholesale shift in the characteristic of an Edgeland site. To illustrate, if an area surrounding an Edgeland site were to become highly prioritised within city policymaking, uncertainty surrounding planned function here is likely to decrease as planning proposals are successfully realised. New construction activity is likely to usher in an increase of regulatory devices. These, in turn, may further expose or conceal a site resulting in a significant shift in conditions within the site that have spiralled down from the scale of the district. As such, the socio-spatial conditions of post-industrial brownfields may be read as an enlarging or constraining of ‘opportunity spaces’ where shifting, interrelated configurations create situations in which SAPs may act. The consequences that a change in conditions may bring about is something public planners should be sensitive to. Our cases show that, while planning action may contribute to the emergence of suitable conditions for SAPs, by the same hand they may also usher in financial forces that remove or disrupt them and so eradicate their place making capacity.

**Post-industrial brownfields as the palimpsests of material heritage**

As outlined in our findings, through our analysis of the *Unseen, Unregulated* and *Unplanned*, we found material conditions to be highly influential factors in their own right. Many Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs), are materially sensitive practices where physical conditions also become a critical dimension of the ‘opportunity spaces’ offered by post-industrial brownfields. Further, despite their evasion of formal city making processes, many evidently hold some concern for materially embedded heritage. Observation of material heritage in this way adds breadth to the socio-spatial analysis of brownfields by considering not only what SAPs seek to avoid (observation, regulatory control and formalised land use) but, equally, what resources they are *drawn* to. By placing emphasis on the effort of SAPs to sensitively negotiate and rework the material landscape, we draw attention to their capacity to contributively enact transformations in the post-industrial city that engage in active discourse with material heritage.

**Post-industrial brownfields as time bound and unstable**

Between the two ‘moments’ of observation in this study (winter and summer), notable differences were found occurring on every site with implications for the favourability of conditions for Spatially
Appropriating Practices (SAPs). In several locations, the flourishing of overgrowth concealed the sites in new ways or hampered access and one site in particular had become overshadowed by the shell of a new apartment block. Planning records revealed that some of the sites themselves stood on the precipice of transformation while another had undergone dramatic change only 2 years prior. These instances, occurring over short- and long-term timescales, demonstrate the ever-shifting nature of the Edgeland and the tendency for ‘opportunity spaces’—those favourable configurations of conditions—to appear and disappear again just as quickly.

Given these ‘flows’ of continually changing circumstances, the possibility for SAPs to freely inscribe alternative narratives comes with the challenge of navigating fluid physical conditions and other competing narratives. This points to the adaptive capacity required of SAPs and suggests that the informal place making practices of those more successful SAPs may possess capabilities that enable them to make spatial interventions where formal place making systems are constrained. This is a valuable capacity in the context of a post-industrial city struggling to reattribute formal uses across its many Edgeland spaces.

Conclusion

This study explores the socio-spatial conditions that enable citizen practices of spatial appropriation to emerge across post-industrial brownfields sites. The framework developed in this study brings together dimensions of the unseen, unregulated and unplanned with material conditions to allow for a fine grain analysis of how citizen place-making activities establish themselves. Findings reveal that Spatially Appropriating Practices (SAPs) do not set preconceived ideas out upon an ‘empty’ site, as one would on a blank sheet of paper. Rather, the shifting, intersecting conditions of post-industrial brownfields, cause them to negotiate their way, seeking out and exploiting ‘opportunity spaces’ that, in turn, influence their evolution. While some practices are more explicitly destructive, the tendency for most to operate with a sensitivity to their material setting, suggests that they may be an important asset in the social struggles over the treatment of cultural heritage (see also Connolly, 2017).

These insights also hold value for the many other wasteland typologies found in cities everywhere, such as those surplus spaces in, under or around large infrastructure developments or gap sites left from wartime destruction. Here too, many SAPs evolve into being, sensitised to the unseen, unregulated and unplanned and working dialogically with their material environment. Hence, adopting this framework more widely could facilitate recognition of the full bricolage of planned and unplanned actions at work and, as such, their role in the rebalancing of citizen agency in urban environments. This would of course require further research, in which we would also like to complement our methodology with ethnographic study to investigate the socio-material processes by which SAPs generate agency within the landscape. Such future studies are needed as, in both research and policymaking, the current incomplete picture of citizen place-making requires addressing; overlooking more loosely organised, ephemeral practices in favour of well-organised DIYs, risks undermining this collective, transformative capacity, even reinforcing neo-liberal agendas—the very mechanisms they set out to resist (see also Mould, 2014; Talen, 2015).

As the cases presented show, policymaking can directly disrupt or aid socio-spatial conditions for SAPs, as a result of absence, excess or changes in planning control. Tracing such conditions would allow policymakers to recognise the broad diversity of unexpected actors establishing their own agency and positively contributing to the development trajectories of the city before they are eradicated by formal planning mechanisms. This could open the door to possible new coalitions or spaces of tolerance for experimental and spontaneous citizen appropriations. However, such decisions should be made with sufficient awareness of the fact that SAPs are often partially fuelled by the desire of citizens to enact their own agency in the city independent of planning authorities.
Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Prof. Dr. L.G. Horlings who provided useful comments on a previous version of this paper and artist Dr Mitch Miller for helpful discussion on the visually-oriented research method.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

I. Humphris was funded by the RECOMS project within the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement No 765389.

Notes on contributors

Imogen Humphris is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen and fellow in the Marie Curie RECOMS ITN. Her work addresses post-industrial landscapes and citizen-led modes of production in the city, particularly those occurring outside of legal frameworks. Her research practice draws upon art production and creative methods in an effort to simulate new directions in conversation.

Ward Raafs is Assistant Professor at the Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands). His research interests include urban self-organisation, adaptive planning and governance, local initiatives and active citizenship, and complexity theories of cities.

ORCID

Imogen Humphris  http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5816-496X

References


