

Making Time Matter: Intermittent Urbanism and the Politics of Staying

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Abstract

Contemporary urban life is increasingly shaped by unstable temporal arrangements arising from redevelopment, digital mediation, shifting labour regimes, and ecological pressures. This article proposes *intermittence* as an analytical lens to understand how these temporal dynamics organise the everyday urban experience. Rather than treating intermittence as a marker of precariousness or ephemerality, the article frames it as a *rhythmic form of continuity*, sustained by patterned cycles of appearance and withdrawal that operate alongside more stable urban structures. Drawing upon phenomenological, anthropological, and chronopolitical debates, this article develops a conceptual framework that distinguishes between *temporality*, *temporariness*, and *intermittence*, and introduces a typology of temporal regimes: structural–cyclical, programmed–intermittent, occasional–temporary, and contingent. The methodology combines ethnographic observation, temporal mapping, interviews, and photographic documentation, based on fieldwork conducted within the Intermittent City research project. Four Lisbon-based cases exemplify how distinct temporal configurations shape urban practices and access to shared infrastructures: Fruta Feia (programmed–intermittent cooperative cycles), Renaturalizar Lisboa (structural–cyclical ecological care), Cinema no Estendal (occasional–temporary cultural activation), and Gira (contingent, platform-mediated mobility). The analysis shows that intermittent practices can sustain social, ecological, and cultural infrastructures without relying on permanent spatial occupation, while also exposing temporal inequalities tied to digital systems, ecological rhythms, and public space governance. The article argues that recognising time as a shared, structured, and unevenly distributed urban resource is crucial to understanding how people negotiate presence, continuity, and the politics of staying in contemporary cities.

Keywords

intermittence; Lisbon; politics of staying; temporal regimes; temporary urbanism; urban practices; urban rhythms; urban temporality

1. Introduction

Contemporary urban life is increasingly shaped by transformations that reorganise how people inhabit, navigate, and develop attachments to the city. Processes such as redevelopment, digital mediation, shifting labour regimes, and ecological pressures have intensified experiences of uncertainty and temporal fragmentation. In this context, time emerges not as a neutral backdrop but as a medium through which practices, routines, and relationships are structured.

This article builds on Intermittent City, an interdisciplinary research project developed in Lisbon between 2015 and 2025. Situated at the intersection of urban studies, anthropology, and architectural research, the project investigates shared, temporary, and recurring urban practices that operate without permanent spatial occupation yet rely on repetition, coordination, and return. Through ethnographic observation, temporal mapping, spatial analysis, and visual documentation, the research explores how continuity, belonging, and access are produced in cities marked by instability, acceleration, and uneven redevelopment (Allegri & Ochoa, 2021; Ochoa & Allegri, 2022; Ochoa et al., 2023). Drawing on this cumulative body of work, the present article advances an integrated conceptual framework to analyse intermittent practices through distinct temporal regimes.

Lisbon offers a particularly fertile context for this inquiry. Shaped by successive phases of reconstruction, peripheral expansion, and tourism-led redevelopment, the city combines layered historical trajectories with fragmented spatial conditions. These processes have generated uneven temporal arrangements, in which access to space, infrastructure, and resources is often provisional and contested. Understanding how urban practices endure under such conditions requires attention not only to spatial form but also to the temporal regimes that organise presence, absence, and return.

The article approaches *temporality* as a structuring dimension of urban life. It introduces *intermittence* as a key analytical lens for capturing patterned cycles of appearance and withdrawal that generate continuity without relying on permanence. Rather than a sign of fragility, intermittence is understood as a form of *rhythmic continuity* through which urban practices coordinate action, sustain attachments, and negotiate access over time.

Beyond the literature discussed above, a growing body of research has examined intermittent, temporary, and rhythm-based urban practices, contributing to an expanding field of inquiry into urban temporalities. Seminal works such as “Intermittent Cities: On Waiting Spaces and How to Inhabit Transforming Cities” (Faraone & Sarti, 2008), *Urban Catalyst: The Power of Temporary Use* (Oswalt et al., 2013), “Unpacking and Challenging Habitus: An Approach to Temporary Urbanism as a Socially Engaged Practice” (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014), or European research projects such as TUTUR – Temporary Use as a Tool for Urban Regeneration (Patti & Poliak, 2015) have explored how temporary and reversible uses of vacant or underutilised spaces interact with formal planning systems, highlighting both the opportunities and

limitations of temporariness as an instrument of urban governance. These studies emphasise the role of time-bound interventions in mediating between informality, institutional frameworks, and long-term urban transformation.

Likewise, research clusters and programmes such as Alternative Urbanisms at UCL Bartlett (Wunderlich, 2024) have investigated adaptive, provisional, and experimental forms of urban practice in contexts of uncertainty, crisis, and socio-spatial inequality. While not always explicitly framed through the notion of intermittence, all these initiatives foreground forms of non-linear temporalities, open-ended processes, and provisional arrangements that challenge conventional understandings of permanence, stability, and planning-led development. In parallel, recent theoretical contributions in the field of temporary urbanism have called for stronger engagement with temporal analysis, arguing that temporary practices cannot be fully understood through spatial categories alone. This scholarship underscores the significance of rhythm, recurrence, and temporal coordination in shaping access, participation, and exclusion within cities.

While this body of work has significantly advanced debates on temporary use, adaptability, and urban experimentation, it often remains centred on *temporariness* as a discrete policy tool or condition. In contrast, the present article conceptualises *intermittence* as a *rhythmic mode of urban organisation* that cuts across formal and informal practices, governance arrangements, and everyday forms of social reproduction (Crang, 2001). It thus foregrounds intermittence as a structural—but unevenly distributed—condition of urban life, closely tied to *chronopolitics*, inequality, and the politics of staying.

The article advances this argument by proposing a conceptual distinction between *temporality*, *temporariness*, and *intermittence*, and by developing a typology of intermittent temporal regimes. This framework enables a comparative analysis of how different rhythms structure urban practices and experiences, shaping both continuity and inequality. The empirical analysis draws on four Lisbon-based cases developed within the Intermittent City project, each exemplifying a distinct temporal regime: programmed-intermittent cooperative cycles (Fruta Feia), structural-cyclical ecological care (Renaturalizar Lisboa), occasional-temporary cultural activation (Cinema no Estendal), and contingent, platform-mediated mobility (Gira).

By placing these cases in dialogue, the article demonstrates how intermittent practices generate forms of urban continuity without permanence, while also exposing how temporal inequalities shape the capacity to remain, return, and participate in the city. Recognising time as a shared, structured, and unevenly distributed urban resource is thus central to understanding the politics of staying in contemporary urban life.

2. Time and Urban Intermittence: Conceptual Framework

Time is not a neutral background for urban processes but a constitutive medium through which social life is organised, valued, and contested. Urban life unfolds across multiple temporal layers that shape how practices emerge, endure, and disappear, influencing patterns of coordination, access, and belonging.

Philosophical perspectives have long emphasised that time is not an external container but integral to lived experience. Bergson's notion of *durée* foregrounds the continuity and depth of lived time (Bergson, 1910), while Casey highlights the intimate ties between memory, dwelling, and temporal orientation (Casey, 1993). Together, these approaches situate temporality within embodied experience, showing how urban life is

organised through rhythms of habit, return, and anticipation rather than through linear or homogeneous temporal units. Historical debates further illuminate how societies configure relationships between past, present, and future. Koselleck's concept of the horizon of expectation (Koselleck, 2004) and Hartog's account of presentism (Hartog, 2015) demonstrate that temporal orientations are culturally and historically produced, shaping what is perceived as stable, urgent, or obsolete, and influencing how cities imagine and organise their futures.

These perspectives are complemented by anthropological approaches that attend more closely to the situated and embodied production of time. Classic contributions have shown how temporal orders emerge through social classification and ritual (Durkheim & Mauss, 2017; Evans-Pritchard, 1940), while later work foregrounds how time is socially produced through practice and value (Munn, 1992). More recent scholarship highlights how contemporary capitalism reorganises time through uncertainty, instability, and the anticipation of indeterminate futures (Bear, 2014). Ingold conceptualises social life as an unfolding process shaped by movement and attention (Ingold, 2000); Adam argues that temporal structures condition coordination and inequality (Adam, 1990). Taken together, these contributions position temporality as an active medium through which social life is organised and negotiated, rather than as a passive framework within which action occurs.

Urban studies have increasingly acknowledged these dynamics, recognising that circulation, waiting, repetition, and presence structure everyday forms of sociability (Crang, 2001). Time appears not as a neutral sequence but through patterned experiences of acceleration, delay, synchronisation, and interruption that shape how people inhabit the city. In this regard, temporality aids in characterising the social, economic, and political regimes that traverse urban life and organise its tensions and releases. These include the vulnerable time embedded in experiences of precarity (Barata & Carmo, 2022); the abstract time of labour and economic coordination (Postone, 1993); the time of planned obsolescence and resistance to hegemonic chronopolitical narratives (Agacinski, 2000); fragmented and disconnected temporalities detached from integrative narratives (Han, 2017); and the accelerated time of contemporary social processes (Rosa, 2013). Ethnographic research on lived urban experience further reveals how everyday rhythms emerge through recurring interactions, routines, and shared temporalities (Hannerz, 1980), echoing what has been described as the "everydayness" of cities (Lakić et al., 2024). Yet despite this growing body of work, the temporal dimension of urban practice is still often treated as secondary to spatial analysis, leaving insufficient examination of how temporal regimes shape access, inequality, and the capacity to remain in place.

This article approaches intermittence as a specific mode of temporal organisation, structured through cycles of appearance and withdrawal and capable of sustaining continuity without reliance on permanence. To conceptualise how intermittence operates in contemporary cities, the analysis draws on three complementary theoretical traditions. First, Koselleck's model of historical time foregrounds the coexistence of distinct temporal strata—long-term structural transformations, medium-term social practices, and short-term events—allowing urban change to be understood as a field of asynchronous and intersecting durations rather than a linear process (Koselleck, 2004). Second, Lepetit's notion of social temporalities emphasises how time is produced and experienced through collective practices, routines, and situated forms of knowledge, situating temporality within everyday rhythms of work, celebration, and inhabitation (Lepetit & Pumain, 1993). Third, Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis offers a methodological lens for attending to the sensory and spatial texture of lived time. His conception of rhythm encompasses biological, technological, and

infrastructural cycles, positioning the city as a dense composition of coexisting and often conflicting temporal flows (Lefebvre, 1992). Together, these perspectives allow intermittence to be conceptualised not as an exception or failure, but as a patterned modality of urban time embedded in everyday practice and asymmetries of power. The notion of temporal regimes is used here as an operational concept to describe the structured ways in which time is socially and materially organised in urban life. While Koselleck, Lepetit, and Lefebvre provide the conceptual scaffolding for understanding temporal multiplicity, the term “temporal regime” enables a more situated analysis of how specific patterns of repetition, duration, and interruption become stabilised through urban practices. As Bjork and Buhre (2021, p. 178) propose, temporal regimes refer to “the ways that humans negotiate their temporally situated power relations with each other via discourses, histories, cultures, bodies, and technologies.” This perspective resonates with recent scholarship in urban studies that analyses temporal organisation as embedded in infrastructures, planning frameworks, and spatial hierarchies (Kaun, 2015; Viderman et al., 2023). In this article, the term *intermittence* supports the development of a typology of intermittent urban rhythms, foregrounding how different modes of temporal coordination structure presence and absence in the city.

Lisbon’s urban form is the result of layered historical processes that continue to shape contemporary spatial and temporal dynamics. The city’s topographical constraints and post-1755 earthquake reconstruction produced the Pombaline Baixa as the rebuilt political centre of the city, characterised by rigid orthogonal planning and monumentalism, in contrast to the irregular and compact morphology of older neighbourhoods such as Alfama or Mouraria. In these areas, which still maintain their medieval urban morphology, temporal continuity plays a central role in belonging, sustained through shared routines, festive cycles, street sociability, and long-term co-presence (Fontes & Cordeiro, 2023). Peripheral expansion during the Estado Novo and post-revolutionary periods introduced large-scale housing estates, which were often poorly integrated into the urban fabric. Since the early 2000s, tourism-led redevelopment, public–private regeneration programmes, and infrastructural investment have further transformed the city’s rhythms and accessibility, particularly in historic neighbourhoods and former industrial zones such as Alcântara (Vidal, 2014).

This body of work underscores that urban time is actively governed and deeply unequal. Regulations, infrastructures, and social boundaries distribute durations, delays, and possibilities unevenly across groups and territories. In this sense, intermittence becomes analytically productive not only as a pattern of appearance and withdrawal, but also as a lens through which to examine how power, belonging, and everyday life are shaped through contested temporal regimes. These uneven processes of transformation have produced fragmented spatial conditions that provide fertile ground for the emergence of intermittent practices—ecological, cooperative, cultural, or platform-mediated. Intermittence here is not simply a strategy of adaptation but a response to the historical production of spatial discontinuity and temporal inequality (Roncayolo, 1996).

Understanding the city as a temporal fabric composed of coexisting and unequal rhythms enables a shift away from linear or teleological accounts of urban development. Intermittence, in this framework, is not treated as failure or anomaly, but as a structural temporal logic that enables coordination, recurrence, and adaptability. Urban practices such as cooperative distribution, ecological care, cultural activation, or platform-mediated mobility can thus be analysed through the distinct temporal regimes they instantiate: some cyclical and durational, others episodic or contingent. These regimes operate through shared

rhythms—formalised, negotiated, or unstable—and through spatial arrangements that support return without permanence.

To clarify these distinctions, the article differentiates between three related but distinct concepts. *Temporality* refers to the fundamental condition of lived time, including how duration, sequence, and expectation are experienced. *Temporariness* denotes an administratively bounded duration, typically governed by permits, licenses, or predefined deadlines. *Intermittence*, by contrast, involves patterned cycles of appearance and withdrawal that generate meaningful return. It is a mode of continuity produced through rhythm rather than permanence. On this basis, the article adopts a typology that distinguishes four rhythmic regimes:

- Structural–cyclical: rhythms anchored in ecological, seasonal, or long-term social cycles that unfold slowly and require sustained care.
- Programmed–intermittent: rhythms dependent on regular, predictable schedules that produce stability through repetition without permanent occupation.
- Occasional–temporary: rhythms that recur without fixed programming, emerging through situated activation and community initiative.
- Contingent: rhythms shaped by instability, interruption, or dependence on external conditions such as technological mediation or logistical fluctuation.

This vocabulary sharpens the analysis of contemporary urban practices by shifting attention from duration alone to the patterned relations between presence, withdrawal, and return. From this standpoint, intermittence offers a productive lens for understanding how continuity is generated without permanence, while also revealing how temporal inequalities organise access, stability, and the politics of staying. These distinctions provide a comparative framework for interpreting the empirical cases that follow.

3. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach adopted in this article builds directly on the Intermittent City research project, combining ethnographic observation, temporal mapping, and conceptual analysis (Intermittent City, n.d.). It is adapted here to reflect the proposed typology of temporal regimes and to support a comparative reading of intermittent urban practices. Rather than treating urban practices as fixed or bounded entities, the methodology focuses on how they unfold over time through patterns of appearance, withdrawal, and return. Attention is given to how continuity, interruption, and recurrence shape everyday urban life.

Throughout the article, ecological rhythms are understood as temporalities shaped by cycles of growth, decay, and regeneration, rather than as references to environmental policy frameworks. This distinction allows the analysis to remain grounded in lived temporal experience while remaining attentive to broader urban conditions and governance contexts.

The methodological framework is structured around three complementary analytical dimensions, designed to capture the temporal organisation of practices without reducing them to static categories.

3.1. Identifying Temporal Regimes

Each case study was analysed to identify its dominant temporal rhythm. The analysis focused on how practices organise presence and absence over time, how frequently they recur, and how predictable their cycles are. This step distinguished between ecological rhythms, programmed routines, community-led activations, and technologically mediated contingencies, without forcing cases into rigid or mutually exclusive classifications. The aim was to capture temporal organisation as it emerges in practice, acknowledging that multiple rhythms may coexist or overlap within the same initiative.

3.2. Mapping Spatial Anchoring

Temporal rhythms depend on material and spatial support. Fieldwork documented how infrastructures, informal adaptations, and territorial routines enable or constrain the recurrence of practices. This dimension highlights that intermittent uses achieve continuity not through permanent occupation, but through spatial anchoring—such as streets, hubs, micro-sites, or residual infrastructures—that makes return possible. Spatial anchoring is therefore understood as relational and reversible, rather than as a fixed or exclusive occupation.

3.3. Examining Space–Time–Subject Relations

Intermittent practices are shaped by how participants experience and negotiate time in everyday life. Observations and interviews focus on how individuals anticipate returns, cope with interruptions, maintain routines, or adapt to uncertainty and technological mediation. This dimension foregrounds the lived experience of intermittence, showing how temporal rhythms shape the capacity to stay, return, or participate in urban life, and how these capacities vary across social and spatial contexts.

Together, these three dimensions enabled the construction of comparative temporal profiles for each case. They reveal how temporal regimes intersect with governance arrangements, material infrastructures, and everyday forms of care. In doing so, the methodology frames intermittent urbanism as a relational field in which continuity is produced without permanence, and in which temporal coordination becomes a key site for understanding access, inequality, and the politics of staying.

4. Case Studies: Intermittent Practices in Lisbon

Grounded in the conceptual distinctions outlined in Section 2, the following case studies examine how intermittent practices structure everyday urban life in Lisbon through differentiated temporal regimes. Rather than treating intermittence as a marginal or exceptional condition, the analysis situates it within ordinary urban practices shaped by uneven infrastructures, layered historical development, and contrasting rhythms between historic centres, modernist neighbourhoods, and transitional zones.

To strengthen analytical clarity and avoid overlapping between similar rhythmic configurations, the article focuses on one core case per temporal regime. This approach allows each case to articulate more fully the specific relations between rhythm, spatial anchor, governance arrangements, and lived experience. The cases are not intended to be exhaustive, but exemplary, illustrating how distinct temporal logics operate across different urban domains.

Accordingly, four Lisbon-based practices are examined, each corresponding to a temporal regime identified in Section 2: Fruta Feia, as an example of a programmed–intermittent regime based on predictable cycles of cooperative coordination; Renaturalizar Lisboa, illustrating a structural–cyclical regime grounded in ecological time and long-term care; Cinema no Estendal, representing an occasional–temporary regime activated through episodic cultural gatherings; and Gira, exemplifying a contingent regime shaped by digital mediation and infrastructural instability.

This one-to-one correspondence between empirical cases and temporal regimes facilitates a comparative reading of how intermittence operates across food systems, ecological stewardship, cultural production, and mobility. Read together, the cases show how continuity is produced through rhythm, repetition, and return rather than permanent occupation, while also revealing how temporal regimes distribute stability, uncertainty, and access unevenly across the city.

4.1. Fruta Feia: Cooperative Redistribution (Programmed–Intermittent Temporal Regime)

The weekly operation of Fruta Feia (Figure 1) is structured around a recurring and coordinated routine that shapes both spatial use and social interaction. As described by Ana, one of the volunteers, “Every Monday, the same ritual unfolds: We arrive around five, unpack the fruit, talk about the farmers, and by nine the space is empty again—only the smell of oranges stays.” This account highlights the cyclical and time-bound nature of the cooperative’s activities, in which short periods of intense collective action are followed by the rapid dissolution of the spatial setup.



Figure 1. Fruta Feia. Preparation of the baskets during weekly distribution, Campo Mártires da Pátria Hub – Galeria Monumental, Lisbon, April 2025.

Fruta Feia is a cooperative initiative founded in 2013 with the aim of redistributing fruit and vegetables rejected by conventional market standards due to size, shape, or aesthetic irregularities. In Lisbon, its operations are embedded within the city's heterogeneous urban fabric, intersecting with neighbourhoods shaped by different historical phases of development. Distribution hubs are located in areas such as Alvalade, characterised by its mid-20th-century grid and civic facilities, as well as in former industrial or transitional zones like Alcântara and Marvila, where underused buildings and residual spaces offer opportunities for reversible occupation.

The cooperative operates through a weekly, highly coordinated rhythm that temporarily activates a network of rotating hubs—markets, schools, community centres, former retail spaces, galleries, and other multipurpose venues. These sites are not permanently dedicated to Fruta Feia. Instead, they function as recurrent spatial anchors that support continuity through repetition. For a few hours each week, ordinary interiors are transformed into logistical infrastructures for sorting and distributing food baskets. At the same time, surrounding streets, loading areas, and entrances are briefly reorganised through informal practices of unloading, queuing, and social interaction. In this way, the cooperative's presence extends beyond the interior of the hubs, momentarily reshaping neighbourhood rhythms.

Fruta Feia's temporal organisation is explicitly programmed. Deliveries from rural producers, volunteer shifts, and member participation follow predictable weekly schedules that generate shared expectations and collective routines. Yet this regularity does not produce a fixed spatial form. Instead, continuity is achieved through temporal coordination rather than permanent occupation, allowing the cooperative to operate across diverse urban contexts—from residential neighbourhoods such as Alvalade to more fragmented or transitional areas of the city. This capacity to circulate and return reflects a deliberate governance strategy. New hubs are opened only when local demand, logistical capacity, and community engagement align, while underperforming hubs may be closed, as occurred with a recent Fruta Feia hub in the city of Braga, in northern Portugal. Intermittence thus functions as a mode of organisational control that prioritises adaptability over expansion.

Viewed through the lens of intermittent urbanism, Fruta Feia demonstrates how programmed repetition can operate as a form of temporal infrastructure embedded in everyday urban life. By aligning ecological surplus with predictable civic rhythms, the cooperative produces continuity through return, shared labour, and mutual coordination rather than through permanent spatial presence. Within Lisbon's uneven urban fabric—marked by layered historical development and differentiated access to infrastructure—Fruta Feia exemplifies how cooperative practices can sustain urban continuity by mobilising time as a shared resource.

4.2. Renaturalizar Lisboa: Ecological Care (Structural–Cyclical Temporal Regime)

The practices of Renaturalizar Lisboa (Figure 2) emerge through gradual and cumulative acts of care that reshape urban space over time. As noted by its initiator, Nuno Prates, what began as a small, individual gesture expanded through collective engagement: "It started with one plant, then two...people began to bring plants, to water them, to talk to each other—the city changed rhythm here." This account highlights how incremental, participatory actions can generate new temporalities of use and interaction, grounded in ecological processes and social involvement rather than formal planning.



Figure 2. Renaturalizar Lisboa. Adopted flowerbeds in everyday use, Jardim das Plantas Doadas, Alvalade neighbourhood, Lisbon, October 2024.

Renaturalizar Lisboa is an informal civic movement dedicated to reclaiming small fragments of public space through planting, care, and long-term ecological stewardship. Initiated more than two decades ago, the movement unfolded across diverse areas of Lisbon, particularly in neighbourhoods such as Alvalade, Avenidas Novas, or Marvila, where post-war urban expansion, fragmented development, and contemporary redevelopment pressures have produced a mosaic of residual plots, roadside verges, and infrastructural leftovers.

Rather than operating through formally designed parks or continuous occupation, Renaturalizar Lisboa intervenes through a dispersed constellation of micro-sites: adopted flowerbeds, spaces around tree trunks, leftover plots along railway lines, and marginal green areas embedded within everyday urban environments. These sites are not accidental voids but the outcome of Lisbon's layered urban history, shaped by successive planning regimes, road infrastructure, and periodic redevelopment cycles. Gardening sessions are promoted informally, through WhatsApp communication, and occur intermittently—on weekends, seasonally, or in response to environmental needs—yet the accumulation of these actions produces a durable spatial presence grounded in ecological time.

The movement exemplifies a structural-cyclical temporal regime. Its rhythm follows the slow cycles of growth, decay, and regeneration, intersecting with the fluctuating availability of volunteers and the unpredictability of urban governance. Acts of care are repeatedly interrupted: Plants are removed during street maintenance, damaged by parked cars, or erased by construction works associated with Lisbon's

ongoing processes of street upgrading, densification, and green rebranding. These disruptions do not mark an endpoint but become incorporated into the temporal logic of the practice, requiring repair, renewal, and return.

Over time, this cyclical persistence has generated political visibility within Lisbon's urban governance. What began as discreet and sometimes contested actions gradually contributed to regulatory changes allowing residents to adopt and maintain public flowerbeds. More recently, the movement mobilised citywide networks in response to the cutting of jacaranda trees along Avenida da República, a central axis of Lisbon's 20th-century urban expansion, extending its action from neighbourhood-scale interventions to broader ecological advocacy.

Viewed through the lens of intermittent urbanism, Renaturalizar Lisboa demonstrates how continuity can be produced without permanence or constant presence. Stability emerges through repetition and care, aligning human attention with ecological rhythms and gradually reshaping public space as a shared ecological commons within Lisbon's uneven and historically stratified urban fabric.

4.3. Cinema no Estendal: Cultural Activation (Occasional–Temporary Temporal Regime)

As dusk falls over the Pátio da Moca washhouse, white sheets are stretched between two façades, shifting gently with the evening breeze. A faint mechanical hum from the projector cuts through the courtyard as residents begin to arrive, unfolding plastic chairs, leaning against walls, settling into an improvised arrangement of shared attention. In this suspended domestic landscape, someone remarks on the transformation of the space: "This place used to be silent," one woman says. "Now it's alive again."

Cinema no Estendal (Figure 3) is an itinerant short-film festival created in 2018 by the Portuguese collective Coletivo Pátio. The initiative activates overlooked micro-infrastructures across Lisbon—particularly in historic neighbourhoods such as Alfama, Arroios, Intendente, and Lumiar—through minimal, reversible cultural interventions. These sites, shaped by dense pre-modern morphology and long histories of everyday sociability, provide both material and symbolic conditions for episodic reactivation.

Before each screening, the collective undertakes situated fieldwork, including site visits, spatial observation, and informal conversations with residents. This preparatory process allows each intervention to respond to the specific histories, spatial constraints, and social dynamics of its location. Within Lisbon's historic neighbourhoods, where tourism-led redevelopment has intensified pressures on everyday uses of public space, these episodic activations momentarily reopen sites of collective presence without fixing them in permanent cultural programmes.

Public washhouses play a central role in the project. Once essential infrastructures of everyday labour and neighbourhood care, many have lost their original function and now occupy marginal positions within the contemporary city. Cinema no Estendal temporarily reactivates these spaces through deliberately light transformations: Clotheslines become projection screens, small sheds serve as projection booths, and portable equipment is assembled and dismantled within a few hours, leaving no material trace.



Figure 3. Cinema no Estendal. Temporary outdoor screening using domestic infrastructures, Pátio da Moca Washhouse, Arroios neighbourhood, Lisbon, June 2024.

Cinema no Estendal exemplifies an occasional–temporary temporal regime. Events do not follow a fixed calendar but recur through loosely seasonal and opportunity-based cycles shaped by volunteer availability, local consent, and spatial accessibility. Continuity is produced through recognisable returns and accumulated memory rather than through regular programming. In the context of Lisbon’s rapidly transforming historic neighbourhoods, the project demonstrates how episodic cultural practices can generate symbolic continuity and collective presence while resisting both spatial fixation and institutionalisation.

4.4. Gira: Platform Mobility (Contingent Temporal Regime)

On a weekday morning in Intendente, the Gira station stands half-occupied, with several empty docks and a single bicycle visibly out of place. A passer-by pauses, scanning the terminal, then mutters in frustration: “There are no bikes again.” Later that same day, at Cais do Sodré, another user steps off a ride and hesitates at the dock interface, visibly annoyed: “It froze—again.” The briefness of these exchanges is telling: moments of expectation interrupted by small, recurrent failures that have become part of the system’s everyday operation.

Gira (Figura 4) is Lisbon’s public bike-sharing system, launched in 2017 as part of the municipality’s strategy to promote sustainable mobility and reduce car dependency. Many of its docking stations are concentrated in central areas such as Baixa, Cais do Sodré, and Intendente, areas marked by intense tourism and

multimodal connectivity, while many peripheral neighbourhoods—shaped by mid-20th-century housing policies and post-revolutionary expansion—remain comparatively underserved. This uneven spatial distribution mirrors long-standing infrastructural asymmetries within Lisbon’s metropolitan development.



Figure 4. Gira. Public bike-sharing station in everyday operation, several places in Lisbon, September 2025.

Although publicly funded, Gira operates through a complex assemblage of physical infrastructure, digital platforms, and private management. Access to bicycles is mediated through mobile applications, user accounts, and real-time data, embedding everyday mobility within forms of digital governance. Stations anchor the system materially in the urban fabric, yet their effectiveness is conditioned by Lisbon’s topography, street morphology, and the competing demands placed on public space in central areas.

From the perspective of intermittent urbanism, Gira exemplifies a contingent temporal regime. While designed for continuous availability, access to bicycles is frequently interrupted. Malfunctioning docks, offline stations, or unavailable bikes reorganise daily routines, producing waiting times, detours, and exclusions. In central districts, users may adapt by walking to adjacent stations; in peripheral zones, where stations are fewer and distances greater, interruptions translate into more acute forms of temporal exclusion.

These contingencies expose the temporal fragility of “smart” urban infrastructures. Platform-mediated mobility redistributes not only access but also uncertainty, making time loss and unpredictability a routine part of urban movement. Alongside Gira, Lisbon hosts a range of cycling-focused civic initiatives—such as MUBi, Ciclofinas, and Lisbon Bicycle Trains—that seek to counterbalance these fragilities through collective learning and advocacy, highlighting how mobility in Lisbon is negotiated through both technological systems and situated social practices.

Across the four case studies, intermittence emerges as a differentiated yet coherent mode through which urban continuity is produced without reliance on permanent spatial form. Fruta Feia, Renaturalizar Lisboa, Cinema no Estendal, and Gira each articulate a distinct temporal regime—programmed–intermittent, structural–cyclical, occasional–temporary, and contingent—through which rhythms of repetition, care, encounter, and access organise everyday urban life. While these regimes operate in different domains—food redistribution, ecological stewardship, cultural production, and mobility—they share a common logic: Stability is generated through return, coordination, and adaptation rather than through continuous occupation or fixed infrastructures. Read comparatively, the cases show how temporal regimes shape not only spatial anchoring but also modes of governance and lived experience, from cooperative self-organisation and informal care to platform-mediated access and episodic publics. Together, they demonstrate that intermittence is neither accidental nor marginal but a structuring condition of contemporary urban practices, producing both possibilities for collective continuity and differentiated exposures to disruption, delay, and exclusion.

Table 1 synthesises the four case studies by mapping their respective temporal regimes, spatial anchoring, and forms of lived experience.

Table 1. Rhythmic regimes and case studies.

Case Study	Temporal Regime	Spatial Anchoring	Lived Experience
Fruta Feia	Programmed–intermittent	Rotating hubs activating underused civic spaces	Shared logistics; ecological and social synchronisation
Renaturalizar Lisboa	Structural–cyclical	Micro-sites maintained through long-term stewardship	Slow attachment; cumulative ecological care
Cinema no Estendal	Occasional–temporary	Reactivation of disused washhouses through reversible setups	Temporary publics; convivial gatherings; revaluation of overlooked spaces
Gira	Contingent	Docking network mediated by digital platform; uneven coverage	Expanded spatial reach of cycling infrastructure alongside unpredictable access, waiting, and temporal inequality in mobility

5. Discussion

The empirical cases analysed in this article operationalise the conceptual framework introduced in Section 2, in which time is understood not as a neutral background condition but as a constitutive medium shaping social coordination, institutional arrangements, and everyday urban experience. Examining four empirically grounded practices in Lisbon demonstrates how differentiated temporal regimes organise urban life across distinct domains—food redistribution, ecological care, cultural production, and mobility—while remaining embedded in ordinary practices and situated contexts.

Rather than suggesting that urban life is primarily organised through temporary or informal arrangements, the findings show that continuity is produced through rhythms of repetition, return, and maintenance that coexist with, and at times operate independently from, stable institutional frameworks. In this sense, intermittence does not appear as an exception to urban order, but as one of its organising principles, enabling practices to endure and adapt under conditions of spatial instability and temporal uncertainty.

Across the cases, repetition functions as a form of temporal infrastructure. In *Fruta Feia*, weekly cycles of cooperative redistribution generate predictability, trust, and coordination without reliance on permanent spatial occupation. In *Renaturalizar Lisboa*, cyclical ecological temporalities introduce slow rhythms of care that accumulate over time, producing durable spatial effects through seasonal recurrence and long-term attentiveness rather than through formal programming. *Cinema no Estendal* illustrates a different configuration, in which continuity emerges from occasional and low-frequency cultural activation, sustained through recognisable returns and accumulated memory despite the absence of fixed schedules. *Gira*, by contrast, exposes a contingent regime in which fluctuating rhythms of availability, malfunction, and repair shape platform-mediated access to shared mobility.

Read comparatively, these cases show that temporal regimes shape not only everyday routines but also forms of governance and inequality. The capacity to rely on repetition, anticipate return, or absorb disruption is unevenly distributed across practices and urban contexts (Cerrada Morato et al., 2025). Programmed and structural–cyclical regimes tend to foster stability through collective coordination and care, while contingent regimes redistribute uncertainty, producing waiting times, interruptions, and exclusions that disproportionately affect peripheral areas and users with lower temporal or digital resilience. Occasional regimes occupy an intermediate position, demonstrating how episodic practices can generate cumulative social and symbolic value even when they do not guarantee sustained access or institutional support.

Approaching time as a distributive medium brings the chronopolitical dimension of urban life into sharper focus. Temporal regimes regulate access to food systems, ecological commons, cultural participation, and mobility infrastructures, shaping who can remain, who must continually adapt, and who becomes temporally precarious within the city. Chronopolitics, in this sense, is produced not only through formal planning instruments or regulatory frameworks, but through everyday alignments—and misalignments—between urban inhabitants and the rhythms that organise services, infrastructures, and opportunities.

These findings underscore the relevance of a time-aware urbanism that complements spatial and regulatory approaches with explicit attention to rhythms, cycles, and temporal inequalities. Recognising that urban continuity is often sustained through temporal coordination rather than permanent form has direct implications for planning, policy design, and urban governance. By foregrounding intermittence as both an analytical and operational lens, this article contributes to debates on urban justice and sustainability, arguing that attention to temporal regimes is essential for understanding how cities endure, adapt, and negotiate the politics of staying over time. In this sense, the analysis aligns with rhythmanalysis in treating the city as a composition of overlapping, embodied, and uneven rhythms, through which access, stability, and exclusion are continually produced in everyday urban life.

6. Conclusion

This article argued that contemporary urban life is sustained not exclusively through fixed arrangements and permanent infrastructures, but through a multiplicity of rhythms by which practices appear, withdraw, and return. While stable institutions, regulatory frameworks, and built form continue to play a central role in urban organisation, the Lisbon-based cases examined here show that intermittent practices are fundamental to the production of everyday continuity, access, and collective life. These practices operate within and in relation to fixed structures rather than outside them, unfolding across multiple temporal layers in which structural, programmed, episodic, and contingent rhythms intersect—sometimes reinforcing one another, sometimes clashing—across uneven urban space.

By analytically distinguishing between temporality, temporariness, and intermittence, and by examining how these modes of time operate across four empirically grounded cases, the article positions intermittence as a meaningful form of urban organisation that complements, rather than replaces, permanence. Across domains as diverse as food redistribution, ecological stewardship, cultural production, and mobility, continuity emerges through patterned cycles of repetition, care, encounter, and access. These cycles often operate alongside—and at times compensate for—the limits of fixed spatial and institutional arrangements, mobilising rhythm and return as forms of temporal infrastructure.

At the same time, it is essential to recognise that fixed arrangements remain fundamental to the organisation of most urban lives. Planning regulations, infrastructures, housing systems, labour schedules, and welfare institutions continue to structure daily routines, life chances, and long-term trajectories. The contribution of this article is therefore not to displace the importance of permanence, but to address a persistent imbalance in urban research, in which fixed arrangements tend to overshadow the role of intermittent practices. When non-permanent activity is framed solely as temporariness, the structured repetition, coordination, and affective attachment that characterise intermittent regimes risk being overlooked. The empirical analysis suggests that such practices—while embedded within stable frameworks—are often more consequential for everyday continuity, access, and participation than is commonly acknowledged, particularly in urban contexts marked by redevelopment pressure, infrastructural unevenness, and socio-spatial instability.

The four cases analysed—Fruta Feia, Renaturalizar Lisboa, Cinema no Estendal, and Gira—demonstrate how intermittent practices sustain social, ecological, cultural, and infrastructural functions without relying on permanent occupation or continuous presence. They show how repetition, return, and temporal coordination enable practices to endure while remaining adaptable, and how different temporal regimes distribute stability and uncertainty unevenly, shaping differentiated capacities to stay, return, and participate in urban life.

Taken together, the findings foreground temporality as a socially produced and unevenly distributed dimension of urban experience. The typology of temporal regimes—structural-cyclical, programmed-intermittent, occasional-temporary, and contingent—offers a comparative lens through which urban continuity can be understood as rhythmically composed rather than spatially fixed. In this sense, the article aligns with insights from rhythmanalysis, treating the city as a constellation of overlapping and embodied rhythms through which access, coordination, and exclusion are continuously negotiated.

From a planning and governance perspective, these insights point to the relevance of a time-aware urbanism that complements spatial and regulatory approaches with explicit attention to rhythms, cycles, and temporal inequalities. Recognising that urban continuity is often sustained through temporal coordination rather than permanent form has implications for how urban policies address care, access, and sustainability. Rather than privileging permanence or novelty alone, this perspective understands the city as a temporal commons, in which fixed arrangements and intermittent rhythms interact to shape the politics of staying under conditions of ongoing urban change.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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