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Radical Heritage: The Introduction of Urban Fallows and the Value of Cyclical Rest

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Abstract

In the context of climate breakdown and socio-economic precarity, this article introduces the novel concept of urban fallows as fertile grounds for rethinking urban heritage through the dynamic interplay of space, value, agency, and time. Building on our previous summer school on "Staying with the Fallows" within rural commons, we extend its ecological and temporal insights to the urban realm, proposing a typological framework for reimagining the dynamic cultural and material worth of underused urban fabric. Rather than conceiving disused buildings or sites as vacant voids awaiting reintegration into cycles of capital accumulation, this article reframes them as latent commons, as spatial and cultural reservoirs imbued with social memory, ecological potential, and the capacity to host alternative, speculative urban futures. Drawing from place-based investigations of urban assets across scales, this article explores how practices beyond conventional use such as situated care, custodial stewardship, and collective reimagining can serve as relational modes of heritage production through which urban value, agency, and temporal rhythms are reconfigured beyond logics of permanence, productivity, and exchange. These practices challenge dominant value logics tied to property, permanence, extraction, and productivity, offering alternative temporalities grounded in rest, repair, and relational use. The article asks whether the often static, narrow notion of heritage can be expanded to generate new value from our existing resources. This article draws on data collected from the Radical Heritage summer school, a collaborative, research-driven initiative. By embedding fallow thinking into practice, this project seeks to activate new value channels and cultivate new spatial sensibilities oriented towards long-term care, time, and cultural revaluation in the urban environment.

Keywords

adaptive reuse; agency; circularity; commons; ecology; heritage; time; urban fallows; value

1. Introduction

Who decides what is worth preserving and who gets to define what counts as valuable? Heritage has long been governed by dominant narratives that privilege permanence, monumentality, and aesthetic distinction. These narratives converge within what Laurajane Smith terms the "authorised heritage discourse": a hegemonic framework that elevates material, monumental, and elite expressions of the past as the legitimate markers of cultural value (Smith, 2006). Emerging from Eurocentric traditions of knowledge, "authorised heritage discourse" constructs heritage as that which is "old, grand, monumental and aesthetically pleasing" (Smith, 2006, p. 11), thereby equating cultural value with permanence and monumentalising selective histories. Within this regime, decisions about what counts as heritage and who participates remain institutionally defined (Smith, 2006, p. 144). Operating within what Smith describes as broader "regimes of value," these discourses dictate what is conserved and who benefits, as well as who—and what—is systematically left out. In doing so, heritage is rendered static and monumental, detached from the everyday rhythms of use, decay, and renewal.

1.1. From Static to Dynamic Heritage

In contrast, recent scholarship has sought to move beyond this authorised discourse by conceptualising heritage as an active and relational process. Lowenthal (1985) describes heritage as a constructed and selective process that helps societies make sense of the present through reinterpretations of the past. Building on this relational understanding, Fouseki (2022) advances what she terms the heritage dynamism framework, which conceptualises heritage through the lens of complexity and systems thinking. At the core, this framework views heritage as a dynamic and complex socio-cultural practice whose emergence, transformation, and continuity depend on the interconnections among materials, values, skills, senses, time, place, and resources. "The underpinning premise of this approach," she writes, "is that heritage is a dynamic and complex socio-cultural practice" whose forms "emerge, shift, transform, disappear or revive" depending on how elements are "made, sustained, or dissolved" (Fouseki, 2022, p. 16).

Fouseki (2022) positions heritage as a systemic process of continual negotiation among interdependent elements and agents; as she writes, "the relationships between the elements are non-linear, with multiple causalities leading to unanticipated outputs. Events can be sudden, of short duration or long-term; in most cases they are unpredictable" (Fouseki, 2022, p. 18).

1.2. From Dynamic to Radical Heritage

Extending Fouseki's model, this article introduces the concept of *radical heritage* in an effort to move from observing this complexity to redistributing value, care, and agency across time, actors, and place. Where heritage dynamism captures systemic interdependence, radical heritage foregrounds fallow thinking: It seeks to re-value the overlooked, re-generate the disused, and re-distribute heritage resources beyond institutional hierarchies. It resists static preservation in favour of relational, adaptive, and situated practices of care that include the marginal, the ephemeral, and the non-human.

In this sense, radical heritage aligns with what David Harvey calls "small heritages"—ordinary, plural, and lived practices that sustain identity through everyday rituals, gestures, and memories (Harvey, 2001). These

practices often unfold in spaces deemed unworthy, unproductive, or invisible within the official city—what this article calls urban fallows. In an age marked by climate emergency, forced migration, and socio-economic precarity, the question is no longer merely what to preserve but whose futures are sustained through acts of care and regeneration.

1.3. From Radical Heritage to Fallow Thinking

This article builds off our previous summer school "Staying with the Fallows," which established the groundwork for the inclusion of fallow thinking as a necessary ontological and epistemological reorientation for the practice of architecture (from anthropocentric to eco-centric) and proposed the addition of a new stage to the RIBA Plan of Work, stage ∞, a cyclical stage in the design process where the earth is the underlying client, user, and site for every project.

Fallow is understood here as a condition of active rest, suggesting stillness and renewal can coexist through mindful engagement rather than absence, depletion, or withdrawal. In agrarian terms, fallow indicates a deliberate and temporary suspension of use to enable regeneration (most notably of soil), rather than abandonment. We retain this core meaning but extend it beyond cultivation to describe urban conditions in which space is held, paused, or loosened from intensive productivity such that ecological, material, social, and cultural processes can re-form. In this article, urban fallow does not have a single property status, but a relational condition of active rest produced by varying degrees of intention, governance, and more-than-human inclusion. This includes spaces that are deliberately held in reserve, spaces unintentionally left behind, and small urban interstices that nonetheless perform regenerative functions.

Crucially, we argue that the act of fallowing can be understood as a mode of care; an ethic of allowing time, repair, and non-human agency to operate rather than an absence of value or attention. Rest, then, is not a break from being-in-the-world or being void of value but a renewal of how one dwells within it (Heidegger, 1962). Lefebvre (2004) might describe this as the everyday rhythm of the body and city: moments of intense production followed by active reorientation; an opportunity to recalibrate one's relations as a process of attunement, to complete a full cycle (Figure 1). Fallowing, then, is the intentional act of allowing space to regenerate through re-earthed value in cyclical rest with care, attention, and time. This article therefore asks:

- What if the most fertile spaces in our cities are the ones left fallow?
- What if fallowing operates as a cyclical mode of valuation?
- What if heritage is not something to preserve, but something to practice together?

Building on these provocations, we reinterpret urban fallows as latent commons (Petrescu et al., 2020); spaces of civic potential, ecological regeneration, and social imagination. The article argues for a shift in how we perceive, value, and care for the built environment where a lack of visible activity conceals deep ecological, material and social processes. This reconceptualisation positions heritage as a living, collective practice that entangles material, ecological, and social systems in cycles of decay and renewal, revealing new modes of stewardship and responsibility toward our shared spaces and resources. This article extends the framework of fallow thinking toward a typology of urban fallows—defined by the interrelations of space, time, value, and agency.

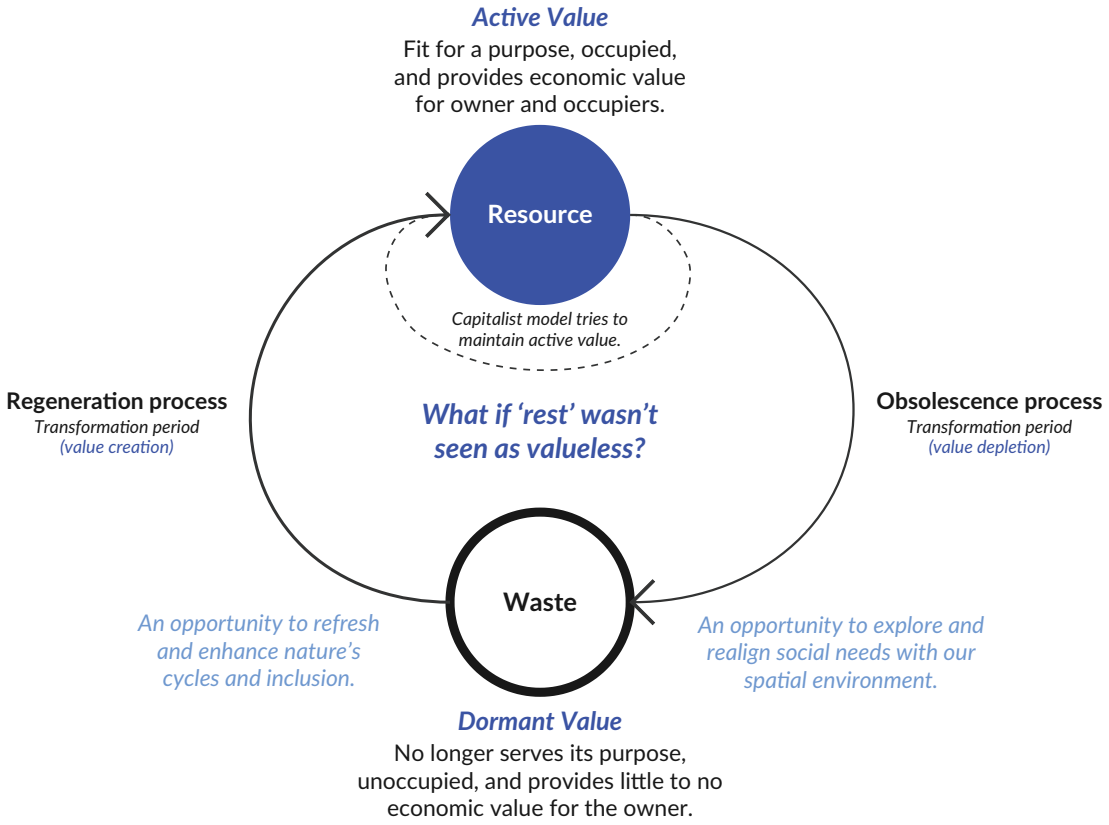

Figure 1. Disrupting value assumptions within the conventional resource (active) and waste (dormant) value cycle for spatial assets.

2. Towards an Urban Fallow Typology

2.1. Typology

Typology has a long history in architectural discourse conventionally serving as a method of classification or reasoning; a way of discerning the recurrent structures, spatial logics, and social meanings embedded within architectural built forms. Rossi (1982) defined typology as "a logical principle that is prior to form," positioning it as a bridge between architecture and history. Here, typology is both analytic and projective; it decodes the sedimented logics of buildings and provides a foundation for new building designs grounded in continuity (Caniggia & Maffei, 2001). However, such approaches have been criticised for excluding indeterminate and informal spaces (c.f. de Solà-Morales Rubió, 1995).

Modernism's attempts to stabilise typologies have since evolved towards more dynamic, context-based models. Allen (1999) reframes typology as a field of relations, suggesting a systems-based approach, in which architecture is infrastructural and operative rather than morphological. Similarly, Habraken's open building approach (Habraken, 1998) conceives buildings as stratified systems of use, control, and time, positioning typology as an open framework capable of accommodating social, economic, and ecological change. Brand (1994) further develops this approach through his concept of shearing layers, describing the built environment as an evolving assemblage. Typology here has shifted from a static taxonomy to a generative understanding of how architecture evolves and adapts in response to contextual conditions.

More recent critiques emphasise typology as relational; "spatial products" that are constructed through interdependent planetary conditions (c.f. Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Easterling, 2014). Others foreground participation, temporality, and user-responsiveness, emphasising indeterminacy as a productive condition (Petrescu et al., 2020; Till & Schneider, 2005). Our definition of a typology for urban fallows builds on this transition, extending typological thinking beyond the building and into the urban field of latency and potential, where the objects of study are not formal buildings but informal, temporal, and evolving spatial conditions. Here, typology is not a category of object, but a condition of becoming—a typological field defined by how space, time, value, and agency interact. It represents conceptual novelty, concerned not with stability but with transformability, not with form but relation, and not with authorship but stewardship. Table 1 outlines key conceptual differences between the traditional approach to typology and this expanded interpretation.

Table 1. Comparison of key aspects of traditional typology and urban fallows application.

Traditional Typology	Typology of Urban Fallows
Defines what a building is	Explores what a space could become
Concerned with form and permanence	Concerned with process and transformation
Rooted in formal classification	Rooted in relational mapping
Centres on architectural authorship	Centres on collective agency and care
Values historical continuity	Values ecological and civic regeneration

The fallow's indeterminacy allows plural forms of agency: informal reuse, ecological succession, community care, and more-than-human habitation. In line with Stavrides (2016), this expands typological reasoning toward a commons-oriented paradigm where types are understood as a spatial, collective, and generative condition; fields of shared practice rather than objects of ownership. This repositioning of typology aligns with our regenerative architectural thinking and our reconceptualisation of heritage as a living, collective practice. By tracing the interrelations of space, time, value, and agency, we operationalise typology at the intersection of ecological thinking and critical heritage studies to demonstrate how urban fallow is not outside the heritage discourse but constitutive of it—as a space of experimentation, collective imagination, and environmental care.

2.2. Defining the Space, Time, Value, and Agency

The typology of the urban fallow emerges through the interrelation of space, time, value, and agency—four dimensions that collectively articulate the latent potential of fallowness. The framework approaches these dimensions as mutually constitutive forces in continual exchange: The spatial openness or enclosure of a site influences its temporal rhythm; temporal duration reframes how value is assigned or withheld; and value, in turn, is mediated by forms of agency, human and more-than-human, that engage a site. It is within these shifting configurations that fallowness reveals itself not in absence, but as a generative condition of transformation, where social, ecological, and cultural processes intersect. Each of these four aspects is explored in the sections that follow, both as an analytical lens and as a means of reimagining how urban environments might be cared for, reactivated, and renewed.

2.2.1. Space & Time: Rhythms, Cycles, and Urban Fallow

Urban space, as Lefebvre (1991) argues, is socially produced and a continuously contested field. Its classification as resource or waste is neither natural nor stable; it is the outcome of dynamic socio-spatial processes, constantly rewritten through material, ecological, and cultural practices. As Degen (2018) observes, the process of urban transformation is a "fragile and dynamic process rather than a linear chronological continuum" (p. 16). Urban change unfolds through non-linear temporalities, oscillating between construction, decay, and renewal, rather than following a singular trajectory of progress. Within this flux, urban fallows act as active spatio-temporal agents of transformation.

Edensor (2005) and Gregson and Crang (2015) extend this understanding by describing urban change as lived through multiple and overlapping temporalities, in which what is perceived as resource or waste continually shifts in response to social, political, and ecological conditions. A space once valued for production may, through periods of disuse or suspension, become categorised as waste—only to be reactivated under new circumstances. This instability disturbs dominant narratives of progress and decay, revealing instead a cyclical urban metabolism in which material, meaning, and value are continually redistributed. Urban fallows occupy a critical role within this metabolism: They hold the capacity to transform, to be both surplus and potential, residue and reserve.

This condition aligns with Anderson's (2009) concept of dynamic simultaneity, where the urban is always in the process of becoming. Urban space is thus unfinished and processual, continually reshaped through emerging relations between humans, materials, and non-human entities. Within this frame, fallow spaces function as thresholds; temporarily open conditions that invite new spatial practices, ecological processes, and collective imaginaries to take hold. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis frames this spatio-temporal condition as one structured by rhythmic cycles. The urban fallow embodies these alternating rhythms; moments of pause that are still active, hosting ecological repair, material decomposition, and informal social practices. When urban space is approached through rhythm and simultaneity, the resource–waste binary gives way to a continuum of states, where sites shift between neglect and renewal, toxicity and fertility, dereliction and reuse, in response to intersecting temporal, social, and ecological rhythms.

Recognising this fluidity and relational condition reframes our perception of waste as a temporary phase rather than an end. It becomes an administrative fiction that can be countered through acts of revaluation—by making visible the material stocks, ecological functions, and affective ties that persist within apparently abandoned places (c.f. de Solà-Morales Rubió, 1995; Edensor, 2005). Through this lens, the urban fallow as space is latent potential, embodying active rest: a spatial condition where renewal, memory, and material agency coexist in cyclical, non-linear rhythms of urban becoming. Within the typology of urban fallows, space and time are therefore inseparable and mutually constitutive: Space refers to the physical and relational conditions shaping morphology and access, while time captures rhythms of use, suspension, stability, and change.

2.2.2. Value

The temporal rhythms of activity and pause in the urban fallow inevitably bring questions of value. Within capitalist urbanism, value is closely tied to productivity and exchange; land left idle is interpreted as a suspension of worth (Kim, 2016). Within such a framework, unproductive time and vacant land can be

casted as non-value—as interruptions in the circulation of capital. This narrow framing obscures the latent potential of fallow conditions. Cumbers (2019) describes waste as value in waiting, excluded from immediate circuits of capital yet tethered to future possibility.

The urban fallow occupies this same ambiguous terrain: excluded from formal economies yet charged with deferred potential. Andres and Zhang (2020) call for an alternative understanding of fallowing as a moment of transition, one that interrupts the ideology of perpetual building and unbuilding and opens space for reflection, repair, and ecological renewal. Value, in this sense, is no longer tied to acceleration but to regeneration—to the ethics of care and the capacity to sustain life across temporal scales.

This relational understanding of value resonates with heritage theory, where value is increasingly conceived not as inherent but as emergent. Harrison (2012) describes heritage as a dynamic ontology of relations between people, materials, and environments—fluid networks of attachment and meaning that evolve through acts of care, maintenance, and memory. Within this frame, non-value does not signal absence but potentiality: a phase in which social, ecological, and affective values are reconstituted through decay, renewal, and reassembly.

The typology of the urban fallow thus reframes value as plural and dynamic, beyond the economic commodification of the site to include social, cultural, and environmental worth, each operating across different temporal and spatial registers. Fallow becomes a site of redistribution, where disassembly, latency, and regeneration open possibilities for new forms of collective and ecological worth. It defines how the site is positioned within systems of exchange and care and how those valuations shift over time.

2.2.3. Agency

Agency within the urban fallow is distributed and relational, emerging through interactions among people, materials, institutions, and ecologies. Drawing on assemblage and actor-network theories, agency is understood as the capacity to affect and be affected rather than as command or control (DeLanda, 2006; Latour, 2007). The urban fallow embodies this distributed condition. It is not an inert residue awaiting human direction but an active assemblage, continually reorganising through natural succession, informal use, and material decay.

This expanded understanding of agency aligns with Latour's parliament of things (1996) and Haraway's sympoiesis (2016), both of which conceive politics and practice as shared acts of world-making, where humans and non-humans co-produce conditions of existence. Similarly, Albrecht's concept of sumbiocracy (2019) articulates an ethics of governance founded on mutual interdependence, an ecological democracy where every being holds a stake in the collective good. Within this framework, agency becomes a form of relational stewardship rather than ownership: a responsibility diffused across multiple actors who sustain, rather than exploit, the environments they inhabit. In contrast to agency theory, which assumes self-interest obligation as the basis of human behaviour, stewardship theory foregrounds intrinsic motivation, cooperation, and collective purpose (Davis et al., 1997; Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). As McCuddy and Pirie (2007) observe, the agent acts on behalf of shareholders, whereas the steward acts for stakeholders for the integrity and continuity of the system as a whole.

Applied to the urban fallow, stewardship reframes agency as an ethic of care. Diverse human and non-human agents become part of a wider ecology of action where agency is co-produced through maintenance, observation, and adaptive response. Within this stewardship framework, power, responsibility, and creativity are distributed across social, political, and ecological networks.

2.3. A Working Framework

The typology of urban fallows diagram (Figure 2) visualises how the interrelations of space and time generate distinct yet interconnected conditions of fallowness. The horizontal axis positions space along a continuum from enclosed to open, and the vertical axis positions time from ephemeral to enduring. This reveals the potential for four principal typological tendencies, with each quadrant capturing a characteristic configuration of value and agency. They are defined as a typology of relations and transitions, by a fluid negotiation between space (morphology and access), time (duration and rhythm), value (economic, social, or regenerative), and agency (who or what acts and cares).

Read relationally, the diagram demonstrates that fallows are not fixed categories but dynamic states of transition, capable of evolving across quadrants as social, environmental, and economic forces shift. Typology is reframed as a process-oriented tool for mapping latent urban spaces and their transformation

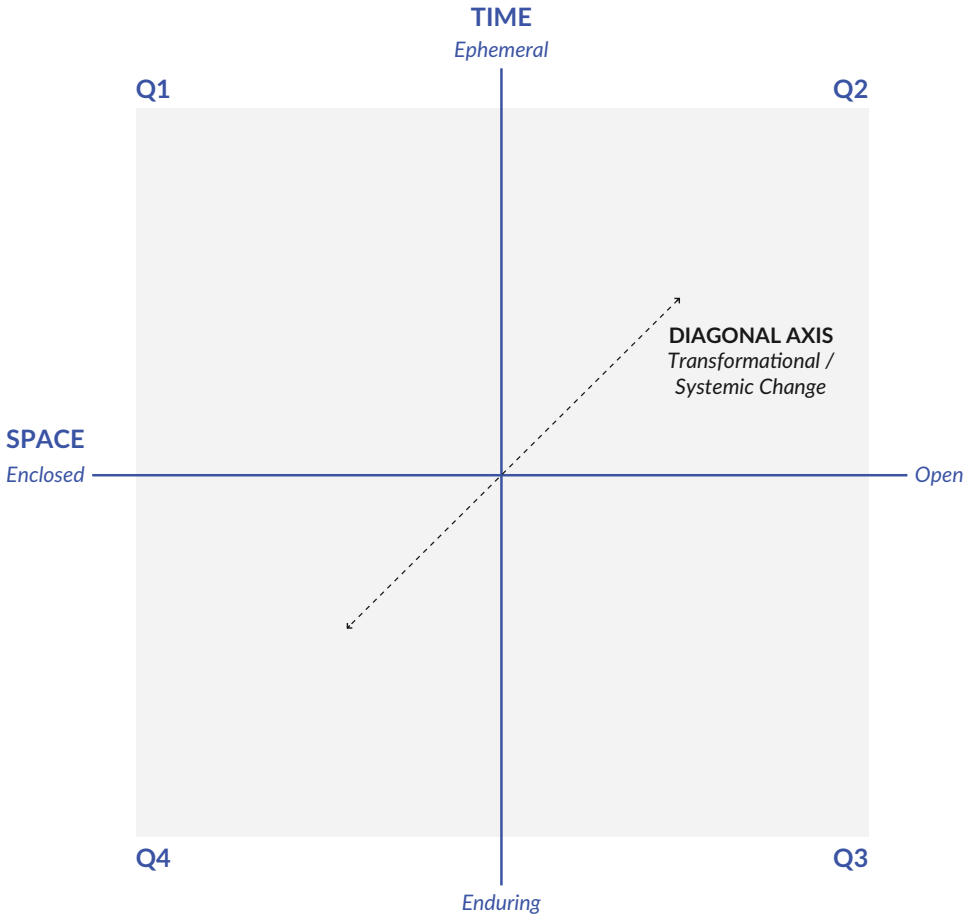

Figure 2. Relational framework mapping the interaction of space, time, value, and agency.

from neglect into sites of potential, care, and renewal. Urban fallows are seen as dynamic, adaptive fields of potential; laboratories for rethinking how cities rest, regenerate, and reimagine their futures.

3. Research Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative, constructivist approach grounded in the principles of circular, regenerative, and ecological urbanism. It recognises that urban systems are dynamic, relational, and co-constructed by diverse human and non-human actors. The study focused on understanding how meanings, values, and practices surrounding urban sustainability and heritage emerge, interact, and transform within specific contexts. Knowledge is therefore treated as situated and interpretive, shaped through reciprocal relationships between researcher and environment. The overall approach was exploratory and iterative, designed to move from breadth to depth.

The study used the format of an intense international research-focused summer school to gather spatial data from urban environments in five countries—Loughborough (UK), Recife (Brazil), Pune (India), Tokyo (Japan), and Belgrade (Serbia). The study drew on empirical observations from five urban contexts across three continents, developed through a collaborative research initiative involving local university partners in each location. These contexts span distinct governance, development pressures, and socio-environmental conditions, which provided a comparative ground for examining urban fallowness as a relational condition. Within each city, multiple fallow sites were identified and documented, resulting in a total dataset of 124 sites in Phase 1 and 56 sites in Phase 2.

The study was conducted in two phases. Researchers were collectively briefed in advance on the study's aims, methods, and tools, with piloted examples used to align practice and ensure consistency. The first, exploratory phase used desktop research, site observations, and local knowledge to conduct a rapid survey of fallow spaces. This "fast scan" documented a broad range of potential sites using a standardised Microsoft online form (Table 2, Phase 1) to help assure consistency and comparability with the data gathered. Sites were recorded in small groups to support consistency and reduce individual bias. Across the five contexts, 124 sites were logged, followed by cross-site discussions to clarify uncertainties and harmonise interpretation.

The second, sequential explanatory phase involved a smaller, more purposeful sample of 56 sites to enable deeper, context-rich analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Selection criteria included diversity of spaces, signs of interaction, ecological richness, and ownership. A second structured online form (Table 2, Phase 2) guided detailed data collection while maintaining consistency across locations. Throughout both phases, the approach remained reflexive and relational.

The analytical process followed a qualitative and interpretive framework, aligned with the redefinition of typology as an interplay of space, time, value, and agency. The data, organised within a structured database, were consolidated and cleaned to ensure consistency, depth, and theoretical alignment. This involved the removal of incomplete or duplicate entries, standardising of formats, and retaining all descriptive metadata to maintain traceability and compatibility.

The qualitative data underwent systematic coding using a combination of open and axial coding to ensure linguistic and conceptual consistency. Initially, the data were labelled according to emergent ideas and

Table 2. Entry fields for online data collection form.

Phase	Field	Prompt/Guiding Question
1	Entry ID	Unique label for each space based on country.
	Type of Space	Building, in-between or open space, infrastructure, etc.
	Location	Google Maps pin.
	Current Condition	Vacant, semi-active, maintained, overgrown, damaged, abandoned, etc.
	Signs of Interaction	Visible traces of human/non-human use.
	Quick Value Hint	Social, cultural, ecological, and economic value.
2	Entry ID	Unique label for each space based on country.
	Spatial Unit Name	Provide a short name/label.
	Scale/Extent	Approximate size and unit scale. Size: small, medium, large; Uni scale: building, block, neighbourhood.
	Material/Physical State	Materials & structures. How do they behave over time?
	History & Value States	What was this place before? How has it transformed? How has its value shifted?
	Political/Economic Context	Which wider forces shaped it?
	Accessibility/Governance	Access: open, closed, restricted; Status: legal or contested; Managed?
	Social/Cultural Value	Identity, shared memory, traditions, symbolic meanings. Who benefits? Who is excluded?
	Economic/Functional Value	Use, reuse, adaptability, informal economies, local jobs.
	Ecological Value	What current ecological services does the site support?
	Commons/Stewardship	Who maintains it (formal/informal, human/more-than-human)?
	Future Potential	What could this become? Consider community visions, design ideas, different forms of new value.

observations, then grouped into broader thematic categories reflecting the four analytical dimensions. This situated approach allowed for cross geo-contextual comparisons and the exploration of alignments and misalignments between value types. The relationships between the four attributes were mapped to reveal patterns in the data; this enabled "types" of fallows to emerge as clustered spatial examples plotted on the relational framework presented above.

3.1. Coding Procedure and Analytical Synthesis

Coding was grounded in direct, observable inputs, specifically: type of space, current condition, visible signs of interaction, and quick value hints. Each of these inputs was supported by predefined code families, rationales, and operational definitions, which guided consistent application across all locations.

Sites were coded according to their primary spatial unit using the Type of Space field based on observable physical and functional characteristics. Codes were grouped into four morphological families—defined,

layered, residual, and fragmented—reflecting spatial structure and origin. Defined forms referred to intact architectural units; layered forms captured overlapping infrastructures, ecologies, or uses; residual forms described interstitial spaces produced through planning or development; and fragmented forms referred to discontinuous or unbuilt ground conditions. These categories emerged inductively through aggregation rather than abstract formal judgement.

Temporal attributes were derived from the Current Condition field, capturing visible states of use, care, or neglect at the time of observation. Codes ranged from active and maintained to vacant, abandoned, damaged, or overgrown, with additional categories identifying transitional conditions such as temporary vacancy or renovation. Together, these codes were used to interpret temporal rhythms, distinguishing short-term pauses, managed dormancy, and longer-term ecological or institutional suspension.

Agency was operationalised through the Signs of Interaction field, recording visible traces of human, non-human, material, and institutional action; including graffiti or furniture traces, footpaths and wear patterns, vegetation colonisation, material decay, and signs of animal presence. Value was coded using the Quick Value Hint field, identifying social, cultural, economic, and ecological domains based on observable cues such as gathering, symbolic traces, market activity, or ecological services.

4. Data Analysis/Discussion

4.1. Four Attributes of Urban Fallows

4.1.1. Space

Space is the most materially expressive attribute of fallowness and offers spatial evidence into morphology, access and governance, surface character, and functional traces. Spatial morphology data showed that defined forms constitute 54.03% of observed sites, followed by residual (25%), layered (13.71%), and fragmented (7.26%) configurations (Figure 3). These distributions indicate that although a majority of fallows retain a coherent geometric or structural legibility, nearly one-third (32.97%) display residual or fragmented morphologies that destabilise formal boundaries and afford conditions for spatial adaptation and ecological emergence.

Observations such as “a clear rectilinear structure,” “leftover strips of land,” “patchwork surface conditions,” and “interior spaces made unusable” reveal how spatial coherence and fragmentation shape perception and activation; defined forms often signal containment and latent order, whereas fragmented ones often support ecological succession and informal reappropriation. This tendency is reinforced by surface character and material conditions, with notes such as “cracked asphalt” and “waterlogged depressions” evidencing how decay and uneven ground textures contribute to the performative potential of fallow spaces. The presence of ecological landscapes (8.06%), vacant plots (7.26%), and in-between spaces (12.9%) further demonstrates that spatial looseness and material deterioration act as generative affordances, producing ecologies of adaptation, permeability, and informal occupation that challenge conventional hierarchies of urban order.

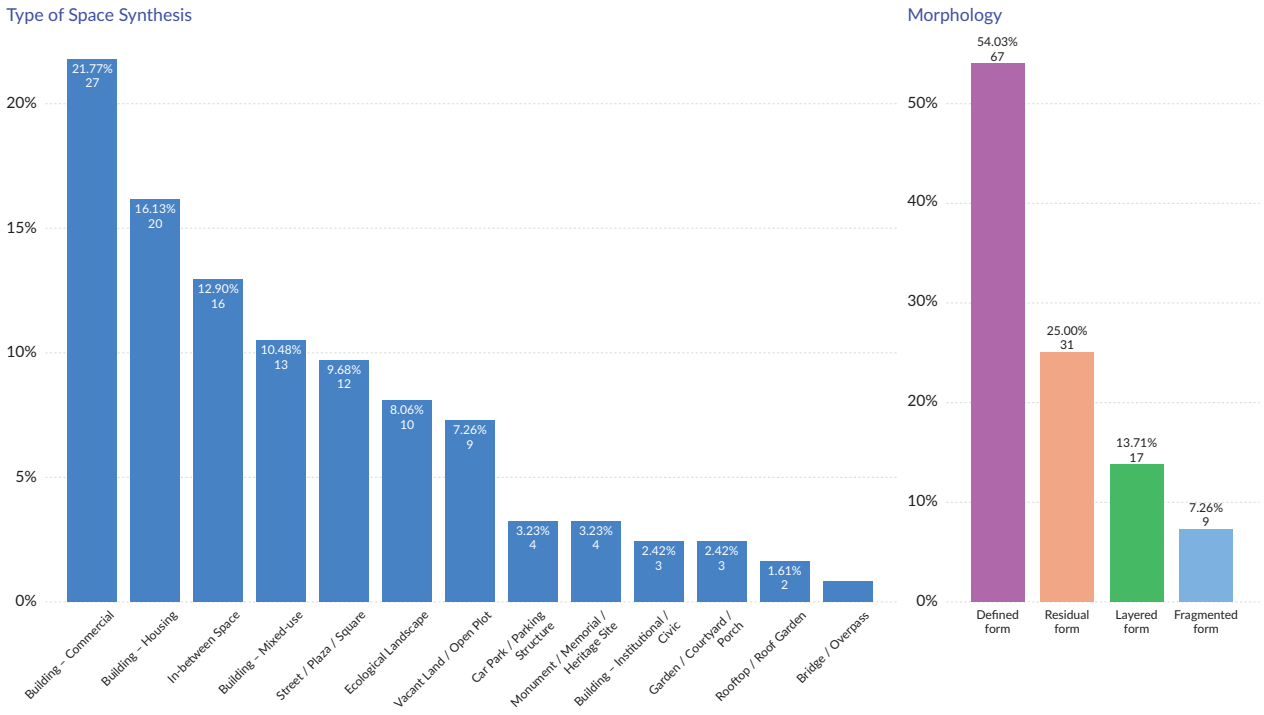

Figure 3. Space and morphology breakdown.

The Type of Space synthesis data reinforce this complexity. The largest share of fallows occurs within commercial (21.77%) and housing (16.13%) contexts, followed by in-between spaces (12.9%), mixed-use buildings (10.48%), and street or plaza conditions (9.68%). This distribution evidences that fallowness is embedded across active urban fabrics, occupying interstitial and transitional thresholds within everyday environments. The presence of ecological landscapes (8.06%) and vacant plots (7.26%) extends the spatial ecology of fallowness into more open, non-programmed terrains where material and ecological processes predominate.

Accessibility and Governance revealed codes such as fully accessible, partially accessible, closed/inaccessible, and ambiguous access, demonstrating that fallowness is profoundly shaped by permeability. Observations like "open access," "the pathways are accessible," "closed, most likely locked," and "status uncertain" highlight that spatial openness is both a physical and a social condition which can regulate behaviour through spatial cues rather than explicit rules. Functional and behavioural traces, such as recreational use, circulation, seclusion, and incidental use, demonstrate that fallows often host informal, low-intensity activities even when not formally programmed. Observations referencing "people cutting across the site," "sitting on makeshift benches," or "children using abandoned structures for play" show that space is performative by enabling contingent forms of use that fall outside conventional planning categories.

4.1.2. Time

Time distinguishes between temporal status, e.g., active, dormant, idle, suspended, awaiting development, and temporal rhythms, e.g., cyclical use, seasonal change, slow change, abrupt change. This dual structure captures fallowness as both a state and a process. Temporal status of the data shows how fallows oscillate between phases of activity, inactivity, and uncertain futures. For instance, "idle but maintained," "dormant

waiting for redevelopment," and "temporarily fenced during construction phase" differentiate between forms of inactivity that appear similar on the surface but are produced by different logics. These distinctions highlight the intentionality behind inactivity, e.g., dormancy (market-driven), managed (institutional), or emergent (ecological). This conceptual distinction becomes visible in the distribution of temporal categories. As shown in Figure 4, over one-third of sites (35.15%) were coded as vacant, representing spaces in extended inactivity yet held within frameworks of ownership or speculation. This category exemplifies institutional dormancy in which time is suspended by anticipation. Meanwhile, semi-active (14.06%) and maintained (12.5%) sites illustrate managed or curated fallowness, where intermittent or minimal care sustains the site in a ready state, delaying decline but postponing transformation.

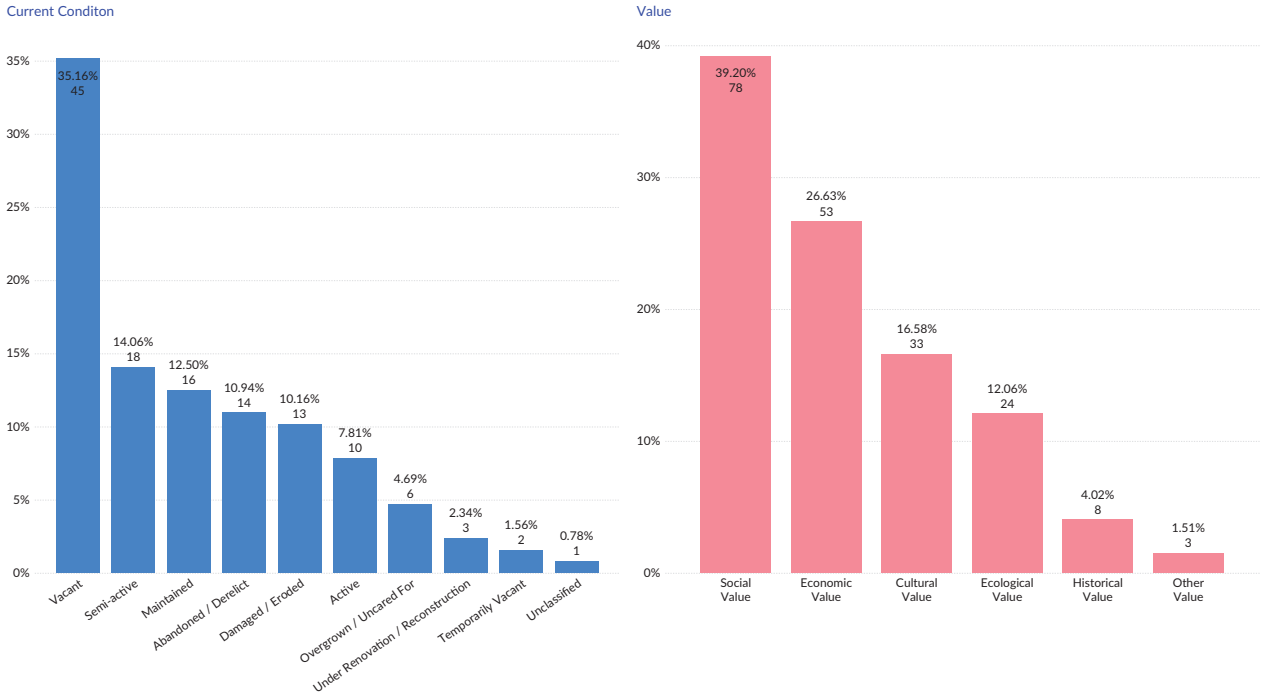

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of urban fallow conditions.

Temporal rhythms introduce a second layer of interpretation, referencing cyclical conditions as "seasonal flooding," "vegetation that returns each year," "weekend-only presence," and "daytime passage but nighttime emptiness," which show that fallows possess temporalities that oscillate across daily, seasonal, and multi-year scales. This is reflected in categories such as abandoned/derelict (10.94%) and damaged/eroded (10.16%), which reveal emergent temporalities where decay and ecological succession replace human oversight, bringing to the fore the agency of non-human processes.

At the lower end of the spectrum, categories such as under renovation/reconstruction (2.34%) and temporarily vacant (1.56%) indicate short-cycle transitions within the broader temporal ecology of the landscape—brief interruptions that punctuate longer rhythms of abandonment or redevelopment. These smaller yet significant states introduce the notion of temporal porosity, where sites move fluidly between use and suspension.

These rhythms determine whether fallows stabilise (institutional), transform (ecological), or fluctuate (civic). For example, cyclical human presence—coded as "sporadic use" or "periodic community activity"—signals a civic life even if the site is empty much of the time. Temporal ambiguity produced codes like "uncertain future"

and “indeterminate duration” that highlight temporal uncertainty; however, it reveals that the ambiguity is generative, creating opportunities for appropriation, ecological succession, or speculative delay.

4.1.3. Value

The value dimension opens up a multi-layered insight into how fallows are valued and devalued across economic, social, and ecological registers. Economic value appears primarily through codes such as land speculation, redevelopment potential, investment risk, and economic latency through supporting observations such as “held by developer awaiting approval” or “prime location” which demonstrate that economic value in fallows is often prospective rather than realised. As seen in Figure 4, economic value accounts for approximately 26.6% of all coded observations, emerging as a significant but not dominant register. This suggests that while speculative potential remains an important frame, fallows are not solely defined by their market logic.

By contrast, social value dominates the dataset (39.2%), reflecting the everyday engagement that residents and communities maintain with these spaces. Social value is captured in codes such as community utility, safety perceptions, informal use value, and public enjoyment, and is exemplified in observations such as “elderly residents use the bench here,” “a known shortcut for schoolchildren,” and “used as a social spill-out space”—showing that fallow space can serve vital social functions.

The chord diagram (Figure 5) further shows that social value most frequently overlaps with “vacant” (27.5%) or “semi-active” (17.5%) conditions, illustrating that social use thrives precisely where formal activity withdraws. This is bolstered through cultural and symbolic values like historic resonance, memory traces, identity anchors,

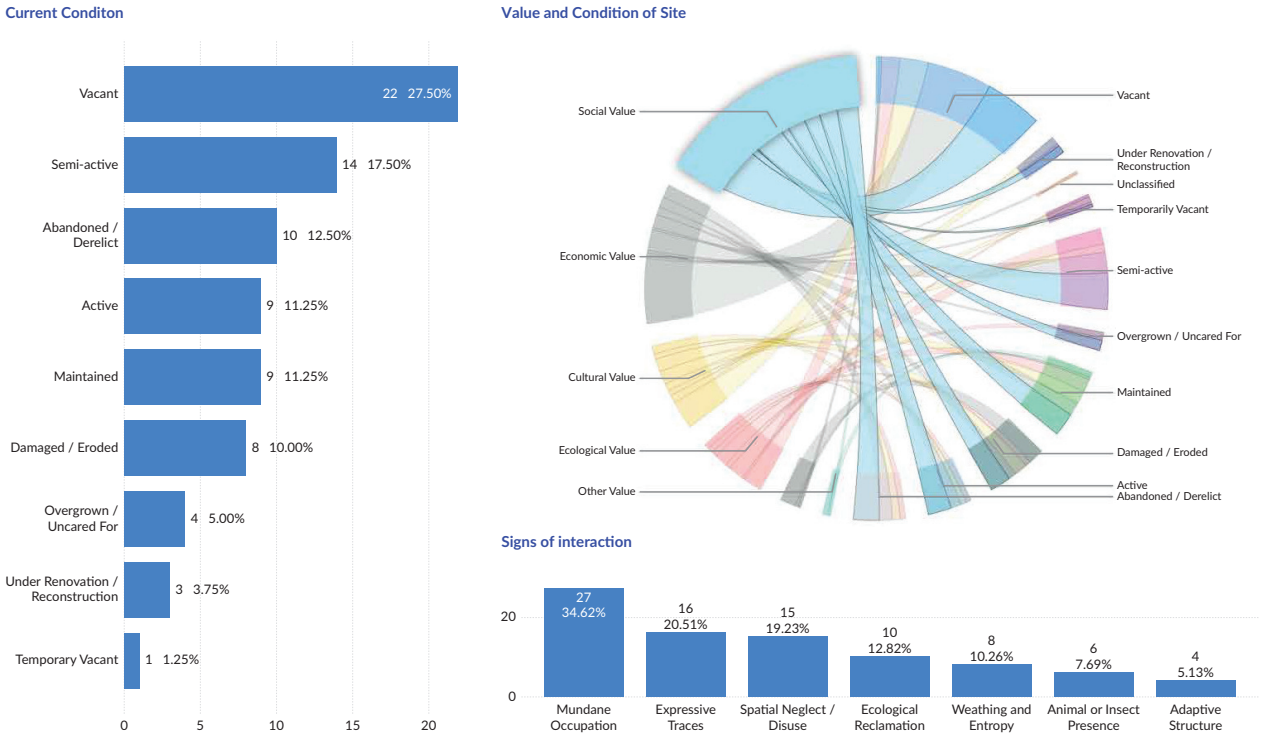

Figure 5. Relational diagram between social value, conditions, and use.

and symbolic neglect, illustrating how urban fallows function as repositories of memory and identity, opposed to simply spatial voids. These values were captured by, e.g., "once a factory" and "the old stadium wall still stands," positioning fallows as evolving cultural artefacts rather than failures of the urban system.

Ecological value is reflected in biodiversity pockets, ecological refuge, soil remediation, hydrological value, and spontaneous succession. Observations including "pollinator activity," "self-seeded trees," "wetland formation in depressions," and "proliferation of moss and lichen" show ecological value not as a by-product but as a central dimension of fallowness embedded within urban metabolisms.

4.1.4. Agency

Agency offers insight into modes of action, presence, and influence across human and non-human actors, revealing how fallow sites operate as layered assemblages of interaction. The urban fallow data show that human agency accounts for nearly half of all recorded instances (48.39%), predominantly expressed through mundane occupation (29.03%) and spatial neglect or disuse (25%). This category encompasses both intentional acts—such as murals, installations, and spatial modifications—and behavioural traces, including improvised paths, scattered litter, rearranged objects, and recurring patterns of movement or lingering. These categories show how urban fallows support informal occupation.

Non-human agency, representing 25% of the dataset, is most evident through ecological reclamation (16.94%) and animal or insect presence (8.06%), signalling that fallows operate as multispecies habitats shaped by autonomous ecological processes. Here, it is evidenced through vegetation expansion, animal foraging, pollinator presence, root displacement, and decomposition processes. The vegetation, animals, and microorganisms engage in forms of material labour that actively remake the site—cracking pavements through root expansion, softening hard surfaces through colonisation, and animating derelict structures with cycles of nesting, foraging, and decay which alter the morphology and function of fallows.

The material agency accounts for 8.87% of all recorded forms of agency, and it highlights processes of decay and transformation that shape fallow atmospheres (e.g., rusting metal, degrading concrete, pooling water, shifting soil). These processes are not passive; they direct subsequent ecological colonisation and influence perceptions of risk or possibility. In contrast, institutional agency appears through codes like custodial maintenance, surveillance, administrative delay, and regulatory intervention. The relative scarcity of adaptive structural interventions (3.23%) and the high proportion of no active engagement (25%) further underscore how institutional and environmental agencies act indirectly: through regulation, deferred maintenance, or climatic forces. Lastly, environmental agency is captured in wind exposure, flooding, heat accumulation, and shade patterns, expanding our understanding of fallows as climatic assemblages. These environmental forces shape use patterns, vegetation growth, and material decay.

4.2. Fallow Typologies

Typology here functions not as a taxonomy of forms but as a relational framework mapping how the four attributes dynamically interact to generate distinct conditions of urban fallowness. While each quadrant can be understood as a typological ecology (Figure 6), they are defined as a typology of relations and transitions, by a fluid negotiation between attributes. This section offers characterisations for each type.

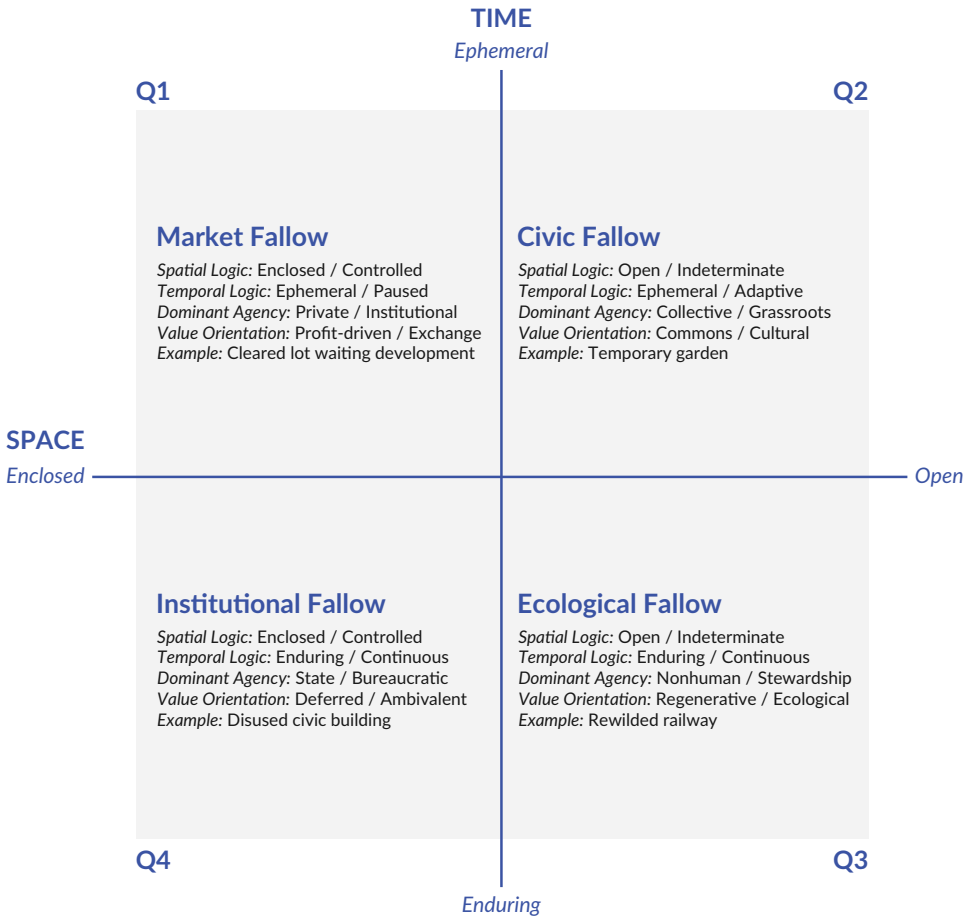

Figure 6. Fallow types outlined on the relational framework.

4.2.1. Market Fallows

Spaces that fall in quadrant one, labelled market fallow, are typically intentionally kept empty for economic or planning purposes. The data expose this latent condition where 46.3% of sites are classified as vacant and a further 14.8% as semi-active, indicating that more than half of the recorded sites remain in a controlled state of inactivity. The large share of vacant and semi-active sites signals an urban landscape of managed latency rather than abandonment. The high presence of maintained sites reinforces that these spaces are not left to decay but are strategically preserved in anticipation of market shifts (Figure 7). The fallow condition is an "engineered latency" serving market speculation rather than regeneration. Spatially, they are observed as enclosed, restricted, or controlled, with a defined and often maintained building.

The clearly visible restrictions assert ownership as a spatial claim and point towards a condition of curated inactivity, signalling the site is not abandoned but paused within an economic cycle. Temporal rhythm is dictated by planning requirements, market readiness, or investor expectation. Spaces here are rarely observed as "damaged," "overgrown," or "uncared for," as the fallow condition is stabilised through periodic maintenance. As such, value here is overwhelmingly dominated by projected economic value, suppressing broader social and ecological value, and thus, these fallows act as spaces of suspended potential, a controlled pause within the formal cycle of urban production.

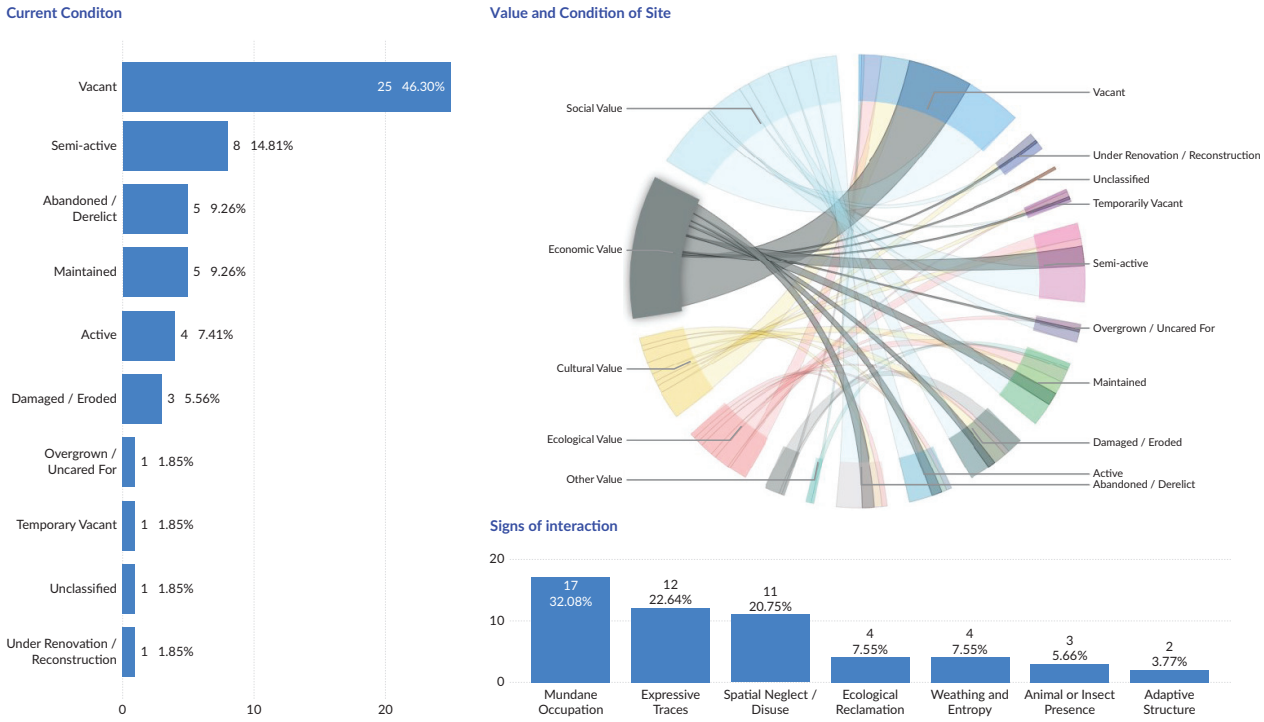

Figure 7. Fallows of engineered latency.

4.2.2. Civic Fallows

In contrast to market fallows, quadrant two, civic fallows, are marked by the convergence of spatial openness, temporary activation, emergent social value, and distributed agency. They are spaces where enclosure gives way to permeability and where ephemeral rhythms support forms of collective experimentation, informal care, and cultural activation. Unlike market fallows, where value is deferred, civic fallows generate value through use, even if that use is temporary or improvised. The data show that over 39.20% of the sites embodied some form of social value, often through short-term uses that transform emptiness into community infrastructure (festivals, gardens, markets, experimental architectures)—fallowness becomes a laboratory of civic imagination. This is supported by the distribution of conditions in these spaces, with three-quarters being vacant (27.5%), semi-active (17.5%), abandoned (12.5%), damaged (10%), and overgrown (5%), revealing that civic value frequently emerges in spaces not yet fully reactivated but open to use.

The spatial morphology is often soft or provisional, embracing light, non-permanent interventions that can be easily implemented and removed quickly, aligning with the transitional temporality and unfinishedness often embraced here. Access is a defining spatial characteristic signalling open, freely accessible conditions which invite participation and informal appropriation. Social value is often the dominant form of value shaped by social gatherings, artistic interventions, or cultural activities. These spaces are often the most expressive and participatory in terms of human agency and creativity, representing temporary urban commons. These fallows are not "paused," but provide productive intervals that are community-driven rather than market-timed. Regenerative value often co-exists through curated gardens, plants reclaiming edges, or spontaneous vegetation, all of which signal the active role of non-human agents in shaping these spaces.

4.2.3. Ecological Fallows

Quadrant three, ecological fallows, emerge when spatial openness intersects with long, unmanaged temporal durations, allowing natural processes, such as vegetation and wildlife, to gradually recolonise and take precedence over human intentions. The urban fallow data (Figure 8) show that "ecological landscape" appears as the single most dominant spatial type, representing 25.81% of all sites—surpassing all building-based categories combined. When paired with the 22.58% recorded as "vacant land/open plot," it becomes evident that over 48% of all identified spaces fall within conditions typically associated with ecological drift, non-intervention, and open-ended environmental processes.

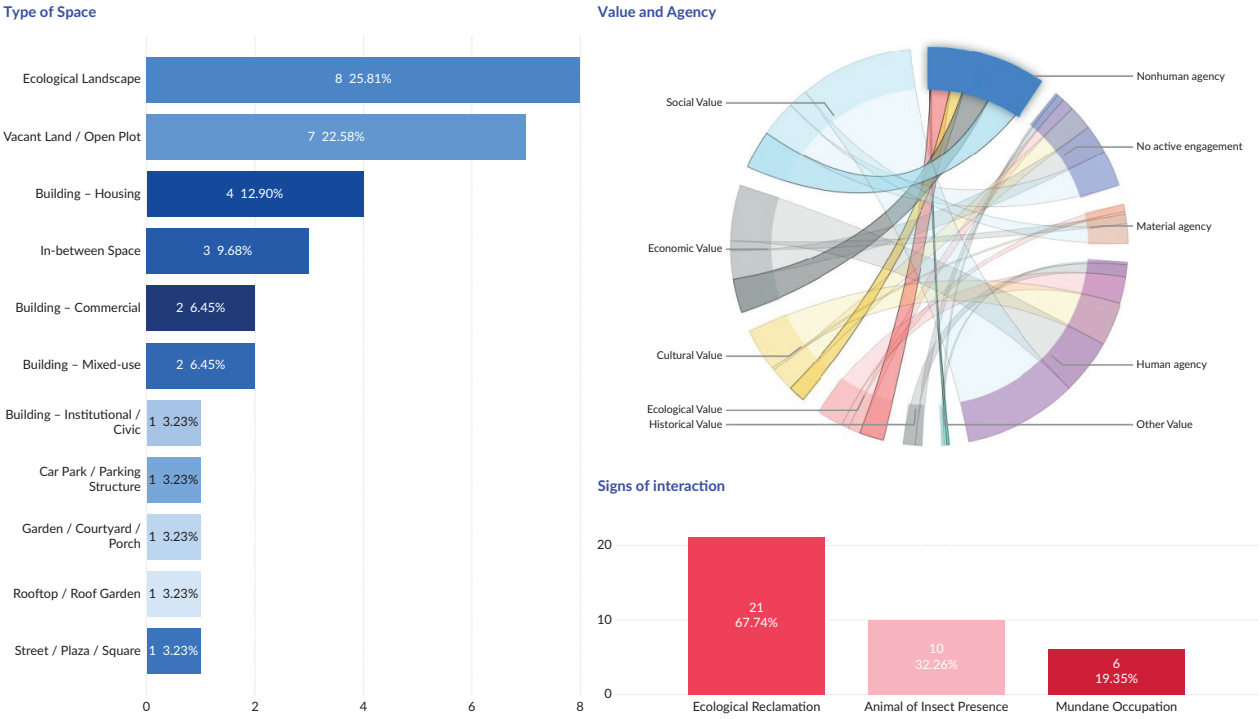

Figure 8. Non-human agency and its relations to value, signs of interaction, and type of space.

These sites exhibit characteristics of non-human succession, biodiverse habitats, material weathering, multispecies habitation, and regenerative value production, a pattern reinforced by the dataset in which ecological reclamation accounts for 67.74% of all observed interactions, demonstrating that non-human processes overwhelmingly drive the transformation of these spaces over time. They are fallows where human agency recedes or becomes peripheral, and where ecological rhythms (slow, cumulative, and cyclical) and environmental forces define the space's identity. Spatially, these fallows are often defined by their landscape-based conditions such as "open green space" or "overgrown terrain," further supported by the additional 22.58% classified as vacant land/open plot, which similarly exhibit loose boundaries and open, unprogrammed spatial configurations.

Access is often informal, unclear, and partially obstructed by non-human forces (e.g., uneven terrain, tall grass). Value is generated primarily through environmental performance such as cleansing soils, sequestering carbon, supporting pollinators, and regenerating degraded landscapes, rather than economic productivity. Thus, agency is predominantly more-than-human—plants, fungi, animals, soils, and weather are the primary

actors shaping the site's morphology through root expansion, foraging, nesting, erosion, waterlogging. This distributed agency disrupts traditional architectural assumptions about authorship, resonating with assemblage theory and concepts of sympoiesis, where regeneration arises from the entanglement of species and materials in the form of a restorative ecological latency.

4.2.4. Institutional Fallows

The last quadrant, institutional fallows, are defined by their long-term enclosure and minimal visible agency, producing sites that are stable but underused. These spaces are governed by bureaucratic or organisational structures, often maintained at a minimal level but lacking active occupation. Boundaries tend to be secured—fenced perimeters, locked access points—emphasising a maintained ownership and authority.

Across the dataset, institutional fallows most closely correspond to building types such as housing, commercial, and mixed-use structures, which collectively make up over 80% of observed sites. These may be redundant civil buildings or underused public estates whose conditions are often sustained, preventing decline and transformation, due to administrative delay and the bureaucratic inertia of heritage and planning regimes (e.g., awaiting funding cycle or administrative review). Value here is often ambivalent and layered. The site may hold conventional heritage or strategic value, but these forms of value are unrealised or underleveraged and differ depending on one's perspective (asset vs. liability). More-than-human traces appear but are often incidental rather than formative and are typically suppressed through mowing or clearing. The site is neither ecologically self-directed nor socially appropriated; its agentive force is primarily bureaucratic.

4.3. Transitions: Fluid Negotiations

As discussed, transitions across fallow types reveal that fallowness is dynamic, non-linear, and relational, with spatial, temporal, value-based, and agentive shifts producing movement between quadrants. This section characterises these movement types—horizontal, vertical, and diagonal.

Horizontal movements signal spatial transformations. Movement from enclosure to openness (left to right) marks the transition from controlled or fenced-off sites to porous, collectively shaped, or ecologically autonomous spaces, e.g., a derelict brownfield lot opens up to community gardening. Conversely, movement from right to left signals spatial containment or new enclosures, e.g., a park area fenced for redevelopment preparation. These are shifts in spatial agency, who can access, use, or influence the site (e.g., private property vs. commons)—often through shifts in governance and land use negotiation. Whereas, vertical movements signal changes in temporal rhythms from temporary pauses to sustained bureaucratic or ecological conditions. For example, shifting from evidence of cyclical or seasonal use (e.g., summer gatherings, weekend patterns) to consolidating into enduring, stabilised patterns of programmed space. Vertical shifts up are often abrupt interventions, e.g., an ecological fallow cleared for development; whereas shifts down tend to be gradual.

Diagonal transitions capture systemic shifts involving both spatial and temporal conditions. Moving from the top-left (market) to the bottom-right (ecological) suggests that a market fallow left long enough can allow ecological succession to overtake a controlled site. Whereas, moving from the bottom-left (institutional) to

the top-right (civic) suggests that institutional fallows can be reclaimed through civic or adaptive activation (e.g., policy reform or local activism opens restricted lands to participatory use). A shift from top-right (civic) to bottom-left (institutional) moves a site from an informal, temporary occupation or commons into official programmes or formalised leases. Lastly, moving from the bottom-right (ecological) to the top-left (market) offers the emergence of stewardship projects from rewilded sites, blending ecological care with community participation.

5. Conclusions

This article aimed to build upon the emerging notion of heritage as a dynamic and complex socio-cultural practice. We introduced the original concept of radical heritage through an exploration of urban spaces often deemed unworthy, unproductive, or invisible by applying our fallow lens and developing a typology framework for urban fallows. Here, urban fallows are defined as latent commons—spaces of civic potential, ecological regeneration, and social imagination. Urban fallows emerge through the interplay of four key attributes: space, time, value, and agency, providing an original contribution to debates on sustainability and heritage. The study moves beyond dominant taxonomic classifications and introduces a process-oriented, relational typology grounded in empirical observation.

Here, space is a negotiated field where power is exercised through material boundaries, resulting in distinct spatial morphologies and permeability. Openness invites civic use and ecological colonisation; whereas enclosure reinforces market or institutional control. Time is seen for its rhythmic complexity, beyond linear durations. The cyclical and multi-scalar rhythms revealed layers of temporal ambiguity and patterns—e.g., daily, seasonal, institutional, and ecological. Value is a multi-dimensional and contested construct, broadening and redistributing a fluid notion of value beyond monetary to co-exist, shift, and collide with social and ecological value. Fallows are multi-agent assemblages co-produced through multispecies entanglements, environmental forces, and organisational structures with no single actor determining outcomes. Human agency is both intentional and mundane; while non-human agency spans ecological and material forms.

Key to the narrative is the dynamic, shifting nature of fallows. The range of transitions demonstrate that fallows rarely remain as a single, consistent type; fallows are processual, constantly being reshaped by ecological rhythms, governance actions, human occupation, and material change. Fallows shift through changing boundaries, maturing ecologies, and institutional intervention. Additionally, fallows are latent commons often contested. This dual condition, generative yet contested, offers alternative urban futures rooted in ongoing processes of regeneration, appropriation, and multispecies cohabitation. Hence, urban fallows foreground what radical heritage seeks to do: unsettle inherited hierarchies of value and disrupt the assumption that heritage resides in stable objects, authorised narratives, or institutional control. Fallowing introduces heritage as an active practice of holding, pausing, and caring—one that allows meaning, memory, and ecological processes to emerge unevenly over time rather than be fixed in advance. In this sense, fallows sit within the heritage frameworks but actively rework them, opening the possibility for forms of heritage-making grounded in relational value, temporal openness, and shared urban responsibility.

The findings emerged from the particular structure and temporal intensity of the summer school, which shaped both their scope and resolution. The short, immersive format foregrounded close engagement while

limiting opportunities for durational observation, and differences in researchers' familiarity with qualitative and ethnographic readings of space inevitably influenced the depth of description, despite shared training and data harmonisation. Working across five international contexts enriched comparative insight but also introduced challenges of consistency across diverse geographical and socio-cultural conditions. Within this context, the resulting typology is empirically grounded yet remains provisional, with an attendant risk of overgeneralisation. While this study focused on characteristics transferable across contexts, future studies could examine geographic and cultural specificities to tease out more detailed recommendations. This includes governance and policy pathways that redefine how and who defines heritage and enable fallows to function as commons. Participatory mapping with residents and community groups could reveal lived experiences, memories, safety perceptions, and informal practices associated with fallows. Finally, a longitudinal and seasonal study of fallow dynamics would provide critical understanding of how the transformations unfold over time, in particular with regards to non-human actors.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to the nature of the research (participant-based discussions and workshops) but are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

LLMs Disclosure

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with language editing only, and all intellectual content, analysis, and conclusions are the authors' own.

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