Creative ideation and adaptive reuse: a solution to sustainable urban heritage conservation

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Abstract. The rapid phenomenon of urbanization in the last century has resulted in abandonment of historic urban centers and still today attracting people to suburbs and newly developed districts. This urban expansion poses a serious threat to historic properties when people opt to move away leaving behind their heritage. The adaptive reuse of heritage is considered to be a dominant strategy for handling this issue bypassing demolition of heritage properties. However, the adaptive reuse cannot only consider the preservation of the heritage as the structural retrofit or functional revitalization but rather it needs to enunciate the image and the creative ideation that reflect upon the future of heritage. Consequently, this paper aims to examine the role of branding as an innovative source of ideation in the implication of adaptive reuse on heritage. In this regards, the case study of Zalando outlet store in Berlin is selected, which is an old building situated in the commercial district of the city in a wide range of styles and heritage buildings from the middle ages. This research uses semi-structured interviews to examine the significance of Brand making in a successful adaptive reuse process. The findings indicate that the importance of the outlet building lies not only in its physical fabric or commercial aspects, but the spirit of the place that lies in the magical essence of big labels as emblems. This underlying essence of place stimulated the adaptation of building in a way that it surpasses the physical and functional aspect of a building and makes it merge in new times and new sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Urbanization is a growing concern for the protection of heritage properties. Increasing urbanization is putting a strain on sustaining significant heritage properties [1]. To access modern amenities, people prefer to make a shift from heritage assets to newly developed urban areas. If people do not espouse the heritage appropriately, it would be forgotten forever. Therefore, lack of proper consideration into the issue of increasing urban development may pose a threat to the survival of heritage properties.

The adaptive reuse of heritage assets is becoming an increasingly recognized process to safeguard the abandoned historical buildings in rapid urban development milieu. Where the original function of the building can no longer be adequate to protect the neglected heritage, a new use through adaptation can serve to rejuvenate the heritage asset. Adaptive reuse is a better sustainable alternative to demolition or reconstruction of buildings [2]. It does not only contribute to maintain the physical fabric of the heritage property but can also serve to rejuvenate its built environment. Therefore, the appreciation of heritage buildings that are successfully reused is inevitable.
Adaptive reuse is a process of discovering the potential of a new function to revitalize disused heritage buildings [2]. This method involves the refurbishment of those old monuments which do not serve the contemporary interests of life and consequently, they are no more desired [3]. Therefore, the new designated function has to integrate a layer of modern demands of facilities to convert an old space into an acknowledged useable place. It would serve not only to reinstate its cultural significance but would also contribute to competing with the challenges put forward by growing phenomenon of urbanization.

The existing approaches towards adaptive reuse have been dealing with reusing places without theoretical considerations [4, 5]. There is a limited comprehension of the ‘meaning’ of host building and implication of new function in the process of adaptation [6]. The decision of adaptation does not entail profound analysis [7]. Therefore, the current challenges of adaptation demand integration of a creative approach and need more innovative concepts based on the theoretical reflections. It also requires better understanding and creativity to comprehend the interplay of new function and old buildings [8]. In this way, the heritage buildings would not only open to contemporary usage but also to contribute to changing perceptions and meaning of place. It is because the heritage also has the potential to shape and endorse distinct image of a building [9]. This fact, however, leads to the question of how can adaptive reuse strategy contribute in making heritage property more appealing as a place to live in as compared to new buildings? How can it inspire people to the extent that they develop a sense of pride in their heritage? The perspective through which one approaches the adaptive reuse process, provides answers to these questions. These perspectives further govern the physical, functional, social and economic benefits through heritage adaptation. Therefore, the existing strategies to perceive adaptability process require a creative process of evolving new ideas or concepts; also known as creative ideation. An ingenious and efficient adaptive reuse without compromising heritage value demands significant emphasis over critical analysis of prevailing research [8]. The aim of this paper is to present a comprehensive review of the existing approaches in adaptive reuse and set forth innovation in them through the process of creative ideation.

In the field of heritage conservation and architecture, there are three major conventional strategies of adaptive reuse which primarily become a determining factor for the process building adaptation into its new use. These include typological, technical and strategic approaches [6]. However, this paper also examines a comparatively emerging category in pertinent literature also known as ‘creative reuse’.

Several authors have discussed adaptation as predominantly a typological matter. This approach tends to emphasize over the building typology of the host building and considers it as a protagonist for adaptation. The author Sherban Cantacuzino primarily discusses it in his book ‘New uses for buildings.’ He has majorly identified various typologies and discussed the implications of specific new functions for each of them. He asserts that the type of host property is a major factor before transformation [10]. Therefore, the typology must be the key emphasis of adaptation and the original character must be secured as much as possible. The new uses must justify or complement the original function. He also emphasized over a comprehensive understanding of new usages for the old buildings. The author has discussed a variety of examples from all over the world to elaborate the role of typology in deciding the reuse of a particular building. However, the implications contemporary demand on new functions have not been an evident scope of work. The author James Douglas reinforces a similar typological approach. He also discusses a number of possible new uses for the old buildings [11].

Another approach towards adaptation is a technical approach which accentuates technical aspect of the host heritage property. It focuses over the thorough understanding of technical challenges to adapted buildings. James Douglas has identified technical objectives behind building adaptation. Various technical aspects including insulation, thermal efficiency, fire resistance and structural stability play a vital role to make a building sustainable [6]. Buildings with poor comfort level and energy efficiency have more tendency for adaptation. It also supports to improve structural durability and thermal performance of the disused buildings. He further explains the methods for refurbishment,
alteration or transformation of abandoned buildings. Rehabilitation requires technical standards including fire safety, handicap accessibility, mechanical and electrical demands to correct the condition of building [12]. David Highfield in his book “Rehabilitation and reuse of old buildings” affirms adaptation as a technical matter which is led by economic motives. The majority of rehabilitation schemes are carried for economic reasons and are a mode of financial savings for developers instead of demolition or new construction [13]. The potential monetary advantages dictate the decisions regarding refurbishment or reuse of an existing building. Therefore, the adaptation process has to address the key issues of fire resistance, internal surfaces up gradation, thermal and acoustics performance, moisture dampness, and facade retention. Kenneth Powell also interprets the adaptation in a similar context. He asserts that the old buildings are being recast for various uses as it is more economical and less complicated process. Therefore, functional or financial factor serves as a major reason behind a conversion process [6]. The economic benefits lead to the transformation of old buildings.

Brooker and Stone in their book ‘Re-readings’ advocate the strategic approach. Interior architecture and the design principles of remodeling existing buildings. They proposed three modes of alteration which include intervention, insertion, and installation. The three notions of remodeling and transformation are indeed pragmatic and widely accepted in practice. The process of conversion initiates by reading the place, and this further accelerates the generation of new ideas for alteration [14]. Intervention sews together the old with a new function. Insertion incorporates new features to the old building while installation uses vigorous measures to upgrade the host space. However, the selection of each of these strategy demands a holistic investigation to read the host building. A mere superimposition of new function over the old building results in the lack of spirit of a place. A more comprehensive approach, known as creative reuse approach advocates it and further discusses how to read existing architectural features, interpret them and conceive peculiarities originating from the new function.

The author Derek Latham, who is well recognized for his work in the reuse of historic properties highlights creative reuse approach towards building adaptation. In his book ‘Creative reuse of buildings,’ he discusses the viability of creative reuse. He asserts that creative reuse of redundant assets does not only successfully combine the old and new function but it is a more robust way to accentuate the character of a place. It is the lack of imagination towards adaptation approach that suppresses the process of stitching the historic buildings with new moods of time. He states that “The real limitations are not archaeological, aesthetic, economic or functional, but psychological: the limits created by preconceptions, and by the lack of imagination. Once the will is there, the skill and ingenuity will follow” [8].

The creative reuse approach does not disregard other approaches towards adaptation but rather rationalize them to create synergy between them [8]. The process needs to initiate a plan of action which would incorporate technical aspects concerning people that use them. The decision whether to preserve, restore or repair and their methodology is adopted after investigating the existing situation of the building and creatively analyzing the design philosophy for it. It is a holistic approach that encompasses aesthetic appeal, functional considerations, economic value and psychological needs of the people and society. It requires novelty of mind which can generate ideas that can convert limitations into advantages [8]. Thus, it results in constructing a distinct design language that allows a similar interpretation of historic property by the people that use them. The compatibility of a new function with the old building can be evaluated by its potential to have minimum interference in existing fabric [15]. Thus, the technical viability alone cannot provide a sustainable solution to changing parameters of time. Therefore, new usage should integrate modest changes to significant elements of heritage building and accommodate some new substantial associations and meanings in it. The substantial new meanings would cooperate to maintain an impression of historic interior and building’s spirit of place [11]. Such sort of adaptation would add to renewal of physical, psychological and economic advantages for a linked community [16]. The decision of technical services, interventions and sustainable solutions depend on a systematic approach and desired results from the
adapted building [17]. Hence, a successful innovative approach towards adaptive reuse depends primarily on its process of creative ideation. It depends on the unique ability to conceive, generate and manipulate useful and innovative ideas [18]. These ideas serve as the underlying concept of the adaptation project and provide a unique solution to the challenges faced by heritage buildings. Therefore, the necessity of sustainable adaptability encourages novel ideas and ingenious techniques [19]. A successful adaptive reuse project undertakes comprehensive research prior to its commencement [20]. The adaptation process needs to be rationalized by creative reuse approach to develop a synergy through innovative design philosophy with an analysis of existing urban challenges to heritage properties. Consequently, this study aims to examine the role of “Brands” as a creative ideation strategy in the adaptive reuse process. By investigating a successful adaptive reuse project of Zalando shop in Berlin, the concepts of “Brand” and “Outlet” were triggered. To what extent and under which circumstances are the brands influential in a creative adaptive reuse, are the questions to be acknowledged by results.

2. Methods
The case study is a Zalando Shop which is in the eastern part of the Berlin, Germany. What makes it remarkable, according to the current landlord, is the old construction of the building which is about 100 years old. The building was originally a fabric factory which was hit by an economic decline during the 1950s and eventually ended up in the firm to shut down. The building was afterward occupied by a wide range of small retail stores and workshops including publishing company, some of which even survived till 2007. However, the land had lost its economic value so far, that the rent for each quarter meter was about one euro in average.

In 2008, the building went on a major renovation project, and several retail companies including Zalando Company leased it in 2012. Needless to say that the corporation undertook a minor renovation and interior design itself. Nowadays, Zalando store, in particular, attracts daily a significant number of customers, demonstrating a successful adaptive reuse project which was able to bring back life and identity to a distressed urban block. Nevertheless, it is a perception that the adaptive reuse project connects to the subject of creativity by emphasizing on Brands as an influential magnet for people and a dominant economic engine.

3. Results
To prove the hypothesis, thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with the customers on the weekend. The aim was to encompass as much various target groups as possible. The questions were both closed and open, estimating different contributing factors attracting people to the place. 60% of interviewees were women while more than half of the customers were between 20 and 29. Regarding the fact that 70% of respondents were below 30, a common viewpoint is that the outlet mainly attracts the youth. Additionally, to extract the influential factors which are attracting people to the store, an open question was designed and the answers were coded. The outcome shows 10 factors which play an integral role in the success of the adaptive reuse. These include variety of Brands, price factor, variety of items, the concept of Outlet, the Zalando shop itself, the structure and arrangement of the store, the quality and specialty of products, curiosity, the short distance to the house and the age of the building. The importance rate of each factor illustrates a surprising result. About 45% mentioned price as the most contributing factor along with 18 and 8 percent claimed for a variety of products and Brands respectively. Age of the building or distance were the least important factors with only 2% as shown in figure 1.
At the next stage, the participants were asked to express their perspectives about the other estimated factors such as Brand, the products, the decoration of the store and the age of the building through closed questions. Interestingly, 50% of people were not conscious about brands in general. However, Zalando still acts as a source of attraction to them as shown in figure 2. For 74%, the age of the building was not an influential factor for shopping, rather 20% preferred an old building for shopping. Interestingly, 69% of interviewees reacted to the interior decoration of the store by words “Simple” and “OK” and even 9% didn’t find it pleasing at all. It is even more interesting to note that despite the age and simplicity of store, it still serves as one of significant and striking stores to visit.
To evaluate customers’ preferences of buildings’ experience while shopping, a question regarding buying big brands at low price from an old building or having them at high price from a new building is significant. About 87% of people found labels in an old building with low prices more appealing as compared to have them at an elevated price from a new shop as shown in figure 3. It is evident here that people would not prefer building age if the stores provide a better opportunity for shopping. Thus, historic buildings can still have the potential to compete with new buildings if they meet the demands of people more efficiently.

![Circle diagram showing customer preferences.]

Figure 3. Customers’ Preferences for building typology.

The last closed question makes the results more concrete. The customers expressed their views about the question whether they would prefer the Zalando outlet over the other retail shops in the same building or not. It is interesting to know that 67% didn’t even know that there are other stores in the same building and their only purpose of visiting the building was Zalando. Interestingly, the rest of the population claimed to prefer Zalando over other retail. Suffice to say that, as a result of a qualitative comprehension of the interviewer, many traveled from far distances and even other cities near to Berlin, just to visit Zalando. A common viewpoint is that such a huge rush for an outlet declares a creative solution which can be a role model for other adaptive reuse projects.

4. Discussion
According to the early outcome of the study, besides two major contributing factors which include the variety of products and Brands, it is also the low price of the high-end products which makes people enthusiastic for shopping here. More precise investigation through closed questions clarified that neither decoration nor the age of the building is important for customers.

Investigating the initial results, it may seem that Brands are not a major contributing factor in shopping and consequently, making an adaptive reuse project successful. Nevertheless, this may not be the whole answer. Perhaps the Brand cannot individually be a powerful engine of a progressive urban renovation, but rather if they gather under the outlet umbrella as an innovative way of adaptive reuse. As Brands are the symbol of ideation and place-making, the Outlet can benefit the both, the sense of place and the added value called a financial advantage. In other words, companies such as Zalando truly earn and deserve the expression “high brands at low prices.”
Based on initial results, it seems that people are extremely attracted to Zalando outlet, because of price for most. But is it only the price which brings this huge mass to an old building? If it were a correct statement, a regular unknown cheap shop would do the same work, whereas it doesn’t. The strategy of outlets, however, is to offer lower prices for big brands. The sense of financial advantage is the main force which tempts people to rush for discounted luxurious brands. One cannot also deny that this strategy also increases the number of customers by covering various brands instead of one and it can satisfy a wider range of taste. The fact that Zalando is preferred over other single brand stores in the same building also proves this assumption.

Understanding the significant thirst for buying “high brands with low prices” sets the stage for new creative strategies in the regeneration and adaptive reuse. The key is not only “Brands,” but “Outlets with Brands.” Consequently, Outlets can be remarkable pilot projects in both adaptive reuse of the old building and urban regeneration of historic districts. As the starting project, it covers all renovation, ideation and financial advantage aspects of a successful adaptive reuse project and in comparison to other land uses, it can bring back more people and money to the distressed old spaces in shorter time.

5. Conclusion
This study suggests to include Outlets of Brands in the early phases of development projects and adaptive reuse in particular so as to regenerate life, activity and the sense of place in old structures. Reusing industrial heritage for outlet purposes can contribute in the process of re-imaging of heritage properties and meeting the challenges of urbanization. Therefore, the viability of adaptive reuse depends on the process of creative ideation. There is a need to identify the high-potential ability of a new use for renewal of an old heritage building which is capable of strengthening and signifyng the abandoned heritage. The amalgamation of the exceptional creative function and the potential of existing heritage building would serve as a new spirit of the place. This distinguished practice which is a result of creative reuse approach towards adaptive reuse would provide a substantial opportunity for attaining more livable place to use.

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