

## ADAPTIVE REUSE FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORIC CENTRES (some thoughts and considerations)

One of the most effective ways of practicing policies and programs for sustainable conservation of Historic Cities/Centres is to relate restoration, renovation and rehabilitation projects of the urban fabric to **Adaptive Reuse** of old buildings which constitute as monuments and as an urban ensemble the urban heritage.

**Adaptive Reuse** is not exclusively for Historic buildings per se. All sorts of buildings within the Historic City or in the vicinity can be converted to present needs and future opportunities.

Historic Cities may well wish to consider feasible and pragmatic projects leading toward the **Adaptive Reuse** and conversion of its ancient buildings along the stock of the Urban Heritage.

For the sake of clarity, it would be propitious to elaborate on this pragmatic notion, namely **Adaptive Reuse**, conversion.

1. **Adaptive Reuse** is a process by which older and/or historic buildings are developed for their cultural value while receiving economically, socially, culturally viable new uses of a sustainable nature. This sensible and creative reuse of buildings is an activity advocated by “progressive preservationists” and particularly professionals in the urban development field, as well as at times developers as such **and** Municipal/Local Authorities. While in the last fifty years or so most developing countries have applied this principle primarily for cultural purposes, it is now becoming evident and clear that within a market economy cultural/urban heritage could be considered as a financial asset. We therefore find ourselves with new solutions of reuse to both building functions and operations, alongside economic gains with the private sector or joint ventures and a good number of benefits for the public sector, particularly local governments, and the improvement of municipal services, to the benefit of the inhabitants.
2. Investment in historic areas is now closely related to the **new uses** to be given to a series of buildings with a view to get economic gains and at the same time protect and preserve and sustainably conserve not only the individual buildings, but in most cases, the urban fabric as a whole.
3. Buildings greatly contribute **to the significance, the identity and the physical condition of a given urban area.**

It is therefore normal and opportune to retain the historic building stock and the urban fabric in order to find and enhance values related to history, continuity, familiarity and identity, and above all, Sustainable Human Development, all elements which need to be omnipresent in historic areas.

We can assert that the initiation of **Adaptive Reuse** projects can be an extra stimulus for economic revitalization, not only for the centre in question, but

also **to the region and to the city as such.**

Dynamic relationship within cities can be promoted through conversion of old buildings and of course with the insertion of new architecture in old settings.

4. In this context, it is evident that one has to think in terms of a variety of purposes for **Adaptive Reuse**, ranging from habitat/housing for citizens of all walks of life, to culturally and economically viable activities, which, by giving a new function of the building and/or the fabric, creates conditions of revitalization of the economic base alongside **a socially well-balanced welfare and human development program.**

It is interesting to note that mixed uses are in place and so are exclusively social reuses, such as educational institutions, health centers, etc. etc. (See point 10).

Examples of **Adaptive Reuse** in some of the former countries of the Soviet bloc show that there have been trends to initiate these without sustained policy projects of adaptation. They were terminating in haste, at times exclusively for short-term gains of particular groups, without necessarily taking into account neither the principles of conservation nor the sustainability of the buildings and/or the urban fabric, let alone the social and human aspects of rehabilitation with a long-term perspective in mind.

At times, what has been done to preserve and sustain the urban heritage fabric has well become destructive and unsustainable.

It would be interesting to discuss this matter, in places such as Warsaw, Sofia, Prague, among others as we approach 2010.

5. Clear **guidelines** would have to be drawn up in sites which underwent 'economies of transition', now in full swing with the liberal market. Clear-cut long term projects would have to be envisaged. This is fundamental. We may well be destroying Heritage and not upgrading it.
6. Let us briefly look at some of the common reasons born in mind in the initiation of products of Adaptive Reuse. These are some of the reasons. They are so especially in free market economy-driven areas.
  - **Obsolescence of single-purpose structures or those which no longer are serving in economically viable function.**
  - **Changes in demand for building stock based on social and economic shifts.**
  - **The character and the density of settlements requiring increased performance from existing buildings in desirable locations. Adequate zonification.**

- **Landmark and historic ordinances as requirements for retention and not demolition.**
  - **Enhancing and shifting market interest in buildings which have a connotation of heritage, directly or indirectly. Listed as monuments or not.**
  - **Economic incentives which may be put in place for rehabilitation through tax exemption credits or grant programs, or the upgrading of basic infrastructure.**
7. While we are relating urban heritage to investment and to reuse, we should be cautious in not creating an **exclusive real-estate market** for urban/heritage fabric and/or buildings. There is an element of economic gains along social responses but Investment and **Adaptive Reuse** should in no way be looked upon as **an exclusively business operation in real estate**.
8. It is evident that we would have to make **studies in advance** on existing conditions, for reasons inherent to a complex set of conditions on land **ownership, land use and re-use**.

Municipal services are undergoing gradual change in context of urban management, and a progressive decentralization going along with the creation of a strong base at the local level. Is that so in developing countries? Are local governments well governed, well-equipped? What is the state of 'Governance'? Are there local government policies which can be called sustainable?

It would be necessary to establish **some basic criteria and specific guidelines** for the reuse of historic buildings and the urban ensemble.

9. As indicated above, **economic viability and economic return are definitely factors for serious consideration**.

**They cannot, and should not, supersede social needs. They should go hand in hand.**

A **combination** of Adaptive Reuse, e.g. for office buildings, apartments for various income groups shopping centres, shops, tourism-related industries like hotels, restaurants, public offices, etc., would have to be geared **simultaneously** to social needs. This would be ideal.

10. Here are some examples of **social uses**:
- **Health centres;**
  - **Educational and recreative institutions;**

- Day care centres;
  - Premises for third-age groups;
  - Vocational training and other employment generating institutions;
  - Production and marketing centres for home industries, handicrafts;
  - Social housing.
11. With a variety of legal, financial, technical issues identified in the initiation and gradual process of **Adaptive Reuse** projects, we can assert that no knowledge or the lack of it, on **proper restoration and renovation techniques, and adequate architectural interventions, including the use of adequate materials** can be counter productive. What is the role of an **architect, urban planner**, and urban **anthropologist** – legislator.
12. It has been noted over the years that in some historic urban areas developers have been ignoring the views of experienced **progressive** conservationists (and I do not mean **conservative** conservationists!) as to what has to be preserved and how.

What is the role of developers? What is development for them? **It seems that the UNESCO and Vienna Memorandum language is for developers.** What is the relationship between developers and other actors in Adaptive Reuse and conversion of Heritage and non-heritage buildings in historic settings and the general urban fabric, and the **urban landscape** (as seen the Vienna Developers Memorandum of UNESCO/WHC of 2005).

13. If at all, **Adaptive Reuse** is to be considered as a means of historic city rehabilitation of sustainable order as enunciated above. There must be a jointly approved policy and agenda between the public and private sector, and the appropriate public authorities.
14. The following are given as **indicative considerations** to be taken into account while studying the adaptability of the existing buildings to proposed new functions. These are a priori prerequisites to the whole design process. Let us enumerate some of the considerations in the selection of sites for **Adaptive Reuse**.
- **Cultural significance of the building or groups of buildings;**
  - **Legal protection instruments and implications;**
  - **(Legislation and instruments of application may have to undergo changes to reconcile realistically reuse with traditional old fashioned legislations);**

- Views on buildings in question by local community and Government agencies;
  - Survey;
  - Structural and architectural qualities corresponding to the proposed use(s);
  - Location and accessibility;
  - Opportunities for financial support in planning/construction stages;
  - Availability and procedures for purchase, leasing, permissions, zonification, 'schema directeur';
  - Compatibility with building layout with proposed use;
  - Acquisition and allied costs, particularly true when ownership is complex - private, public, municipal, religious organizations, state, mixed, etc. etc. - including payments and compensations for relocations of residents;
  - Physical condition, including founding and structural condition; size, expansion possibilities, vertical, horizontal;
  - Availability of utilities;
  - Impact of surrounding building;
  - Potential marketability of the new structure (both in free market economies and state-public economies).
15. It is also necessary to establish **guidelines as to the nature of intervention**, may it be in reuse, **conversion**, or may it be in **new architecture**, to meet the standards of historic value and adapt those in response to the economic and social realities in/for which the building is to be used. In this context, in addition to taking into account technical aspects of structures, resistance of materials, it may be opportune to look into the system of combination of 'old' and 'new' (**Orsay**) **within the** same building, **or in the urban fabric concerned**.

Special attention will have to be given to the adequate use of **open spaces**, especially public parks, etc., and the combination of modern **architectural** settings in old environments **and legislations** thereof modified and/or adapted if necessary.