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The Users' Perceptions on Adaptive Reuse of Selected Heritage Shophouses in Jalan Tun H.S. Lee

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Abstract

Adaptive reuse is increasingly becoming a more common approach in order to preserve heritage buildings by discovering new purposes and used for the buildings. This research looks at the physical changes of the heritage shophouses after adaptive-reuse initiatives and the effects on society socially. The case study is shophouses at Jalan Tun H.S.Lee in Kuala Lumpur. The result from the questionnaire survey reflects the perception of the users on the impact of the adaptive reuse of shophouses in terms of the social value to the society. Nonetheless, adaptive reuse projects should involve more social engagements and a wider variety of building typologies.

Keywords: social impact, adaptive-reuse, quality of life

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1.0 Introduction

“Architecture’s response to unpredictable economic forces led to the vertical and horizontal mushrooming of new structures throughout our cities. Many historic buildings and districts have been destroyed through urbanization, and the situation is particularly urgent in developing countries, where the public all too often sees historic structures as reminders of backwardness that they would rather forget. Instead, people want Western-style buildings to symbolize progress” (Cynthia, 1996).

Looking back at urbanization issues in recent years, the topic of sustainable development in urban heritage has been rising in demand. With this, there arises the question of how to preserve the culture and identity of a city’s history while developing the country simultaneously. The term adaptive reuse was an encounter that has become an essential part of heritage conservation concerning the issue of urban development.

Adaptive reuse is a method of conservation that converts old buildings which have outdated services and technology into new facilities with new needs and functions due to development through introducing new concepts while at the same time retaining the original structure and fabric (Douglas, 2006). The reuse of heritage buildings enables the future generation to appreciate the identity of the building (Burke, 2007) as the heritage building represent unique architectural, aesthetic, political, and social features of a different time (Rashid, 2016).

In Malaysia, society generally does not place much care and focus on the conservation and preservation of heritage buildings, especially as the country is rapidly developing. The public awareness and consciousness of safeguarding and conserving the heritage are mainly founded on changes in the social and economic environment. The current intensified urban issues faced by the heritage cities in

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developing countries like Malaysia, as a consequence of rapid growth of population, tremendous changes in fiscal development, and urbanization, which lead to an unstable and ambiguous social and economic environment (Yang, Mohd Nazlee, & Syed Mortadza, 2018).

There are some bad examples of so-called 'adaptive reuse' that have caused negative impacts and therefore threaten the survival of heritage buildings. Inappropriate and misguided conservation efforts may unintentionally harm the authenticity of heritage building conservation. The capital city of Kuala Lumpur continues to develop urbanization, meanwhile allowing the heritage part of the city to fade and deteriorate slowly. Compared to other countries, and even Penang and Malacca, Kuala Lumpur city is still far left behind in integrating urban conservation with future city planning developments. Nonetheless, adaptive reuse should attain the positive outcomes of revitalization and regeneration of heritage buildings with social, physical, environmental, and economic significance.

This research starts with the questions on the physical changes of the heritage shophouses after adaptive reuse initiatives and how it affects society and evaluates users' perception of the impact of adaptive reuse schemes on society in terms of value. The scope of this research is narrowed down to specifically study the heritage shophouses which have been adaptively reused as cafes and hotels at Jalan Tun H.S. Lee in Kuala Lumpur City Centre. The case studies are the Light Capture Café, LOKL Café, Timothy Café, and Mingle Highstreet Hostel.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Adaptive Reuse

As adaptive reuse is progressively being accepted throughout the world as a concept (Bullen, 2007; Oppio & Bottero, 2017; Yung et al., 2014), a broader spectrum of ideas comes with the growing popularity regarding the practice and difficulty in establishing a shared and accepted vocabulary and definition. It is driven and challenged by economic, environmental, cultural, social, and political factors. Due to this extensive range, numerous terms are used interchangeably: conversion, renovation, adaptation, reworking, retrofitting, rehabilitation, historic preservation, or refurbishment (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2013). It is essential to define these different ways of conceptualizing adaptive reuse in literature to understand its social impacts and see how it may improve urban conservation and regeneration.

Society plays a significant part in whether a building is demolished or reused. In the 19th century, the reuse of heritage buildings became a common theme (Nichols, 2020). The public ownership of many older French buildings after the revolution led the architect Eugene Viollet-le-Duc to conduct numerous restoration efforts on these buildings to either preserve them or prepare them for their new use as cultural spaces or museums. This new direction for older buildings shifted from practical industrial use to a historical preservation-based approach, where more attention was given to heritage value.

In 1964, the Second Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings took place in Venice, which led to the adoption of The Venice Charter, an international charter on conservation that reviewed theory on the topic (Yazdani, 2019). The Charter introduced adaptive reuse as a practice to conserve buildings, with Article 5 stating: "The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose" (ICOMOS, 2006).

More writings on the subject began to emerge in the 1980s. According to Yung et al. (2014), "an evolving shift in heritage conservation has broadened the scope of built heritage from buildings of international and national identity to the everyday, familiar, and locally cherished buildings". Cantacuzino (1989) wrote about how the main driver for adaptive reuse had been the structural durability of older buildings. He believed that the adaptation and preservation of existing buildings in an urban setting led to an increased sense of identity for communities, stating that "because structure tends to outlive function, buildings throughout history have been adapted to all sorts of new uses.

Consequently, it is most probable that the restoration or adaptive reuse approach will preserve most buildings with outstanding heritage value. Besides that, environmental concerns also play a significant role. Although it seems natural that reusing old materials and embodied energy is environmentally beneficial, there are also some drawbacks of reusing old buildings, such as the difficulty in upgrading them to meet modern environmental performance standards.

2.2 Adaptive Reuse as a Conservation Strategy in Malaysia

As Malaysia is still a developing country, Kuala Lumpur is the central city in Malaysia that has gone through rapid growth. The city of Kuala Lumpur is a city with a rich heritage that has undergone numerous changes toward urbanization. "It is normally grown as a method to control existing buildings from destruction" (Cantell, 2005). This shows that adaptive reuse could be the most well-known heritage conservation and preservation technique. The alterations made are probably through the function itself, but specific changes can be made to the structure itself. In addition, the spaces, positions, and pathways can be constructed while the other sectors can be destroyed (Brooker & Stone, 2004). Practices and speculations of conservation are usually considered a vital plan in preserving historical culture. It is important to perceive preservation on a broader sigh, and the correlation across the continuation of architectural features of the facade is balanced between the old and the new (Idid, 2005). Historically, experimentation with an existing building can decrease the urban slump and the effect on the environment whilst preserving the retention of people (Zeren, 2015). Without this perception, many rejuvenation projects fail to include building conservation as an element in the plan. They have typically destroyed existing buildings and renewal with new builds.

Malaysia is going through the age of growth and development, which has resulted in the obsolescence of some buildings with rich historical value that are now gone for future generations. "If there is money to be made, heritage is often forgotten" Ar. Loh, Conservation Architect (Property.com, 2016). There are numerous adaptive reuse projects on heritage buildings throughout Malaysia, especially in Melaka, George Town, and Kuala Lumpur. However, many of these projects have neglected the requirements and guidelines that need to have complied which leads to unsatisfactory examples of adaptive reuse as they fail to consider protecting the authenticity of the heritage buildings.

There have been several cases of unsatisfactory adaptive reuse where heritage shophouses have been restored but turned out to look newer than surrounding buildings. For instance, the building's original roof was replaced by a corrugated roof, and the original façade was altered. Another case of bad adaptive reuse has happened in Penang, where The Rice Miller City Residence decided to convert their heritage building into 30 stories (91m), which overly surpasses the 18m height limit permissible in the guideline. Apart from that, there is the issue where there is an increase of abandoned and dilapidated heritage buildings, for example, the old heritage shophouses at Jalan Cheng Lock and the Junction of Jalan Tun H.S. Lee, Kuala Lumpur (Sadafamarchitect, 2014). From studies conducted by other researchers regarding conservation works, there were difficulties met by heritage building owners in Penang, revealing that the sources of the issue are the fear of high cost (35%) and restriction of legislation and guidelines (30%) (Moey Sui Min).

2.3 Social Significance of Adaptive Reuse

Said et al. (2013) indicate that the importance of knowing the heritage and its value in a social context is essential in every society. Awareness about the history and glory of the past can help in nation-building. A knowledgeable community is a community that understands the different aspects of the values of their heritage. In a seminal work by Jane Jacobs, she stated, 'Death and Life of Great American Cities, "cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them." (Jacobs, 1961). Older buildings improve the quality of life in cities, and adaptive reuse is preserving them. Nevertheless, the practice maintains the facilities and turns them into accessible and usable places. There are multiple associated social benefits from this, including:

- The creation of community resources from the unproductive property;
- The revitalization of neighborhoods;
- Reduction of land consumption and urban sprawl;
- Enhancement of aesthetic appeal of the built environment;
- Retaining streetscapes that maintain a sense of place
- Retaining visual amenities and cultural heritage

(Bullen & Love, 2011; Langston, 2008; Oppio & Bottero, 2017; Powe et al., 2016).

However, there can also be negative social impacts from adaptive reuse. Studies have connected it to gentrification (Winson-Geideman et al., 2007; Yung et al., 2014), which can destroy the neighborhood character that the practice is supposed to maintain. Despite their prominence, the social impacts of adaptive reuse have received less attention in recent times than environmental and economic concerns, potentially because they are difficult to measure (Aigwi et al., 2018; Mohamed et al., 2017). Bullen (2007) highlighted the key issues surrounding the practice of professionals from a sustainability industry group in Western Australia. Only 51% of respondents believed that social sustainability should be considered during the adaptive reuse decision process for whether a building is suitable for the practice, compared to 87% for environmental sustainability and 70% for economic sustainability.

Yung et al. (2014) stated that "very often, adaptive reuse emphasizes economic growth and pays less attention to social well-being. Nonetheless, it is often associated with heritage dissonance, commodification, gentrification, displacement, and social exclusion. It is essential to remember that "sustainability is more than just about physical resources. It is also about community and culture" (Stubbs, 2004). Given the practice's impacts on cities, it is vital to understand them more profoundly.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design

Observation and initial study were carried out at the four cafés to assess how the adaptive reuse design was carried out and its impact on society in terms of physical aesthetic value and socio-economic value. Besides that, a questionnaire survey was carried out to assess the social effects of adaptive reuse on the quality of life of the community.

The focus of this study refers to the understanding and awareness of the user on the value of heritage buildings and their perception of the adaptive reuse approach. The crucial data for the social conditions of adaptive reuse is sourced from a questionnaire survey with a total of 60 respondents from the public who have agreed to participate. The survey was done online through the usage of Google Form to ease accessibility for the respondents. The total number of respondents for the questionnaire survey is 60 people. The respondents stand from the public with a wide range of different backgrounds and fields. The selection of four case studies is due to the willingness of the owner to participate and to allow data collection carried out on their property.

The questionnaire survey was made up of close-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale and was divided into 6 parts to discuss the social impact of adaptive reuse from different perspectives: the public's understanding of adaptive reuse, the public's preferences, the public's satisfaction on the condition of adaptive reuse, the public's insight of the benefits of adaptive reuse, the public's perceptions towards existing adaptive reuse projects and the public's acceptance of the concept of adaptive reuse. To achieve the objective for this sub-topic, this method may support a more holistic approach by looking at the sub-topic from various perspectives.

4.0 Findings And Analysis

4.1 The Adaptive Reuse Approach

An assessment of the social impact of the adaptive reuse approach carried out in the four cafés looks at how the changes of use have benefited the quality of life of the users. From the observation and visual assessment carried out, it can be concluded that the adaptive reuse of the cafés was considered the green approach to the new design. All four case studies use energy-saving lighting with different types of artificial lighting. Overall, LOKL Café and Kleptokrat Café have the most sufficient levels of daylight for the occupants because of the open courtyard design. Timothy Café lacks sufficient daylight for occupants because it is more enclosed from being located next to a middle lane and therefore the lack of openings for sunlight to come in. Meanwhile, the Light Capture Café has the advantage of wide and tall windows that capture maximum natural daylighting into the café (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The interior of Light Capture Café with tall windows that provide natural lighting and retain its original fire-licked brickwall as the representation of the past.

Source: Sim, 2020

Besides that, all cafés recycled the materials that have been used before the adaptive reuse projects occurred. For Light Capture, they maintained the fire-licked brick walls and left the facade as it was before it was abandoned after a fire. While Timothy Café and Kleptokrat Café maintained the shophouses' old brick walls and old tiles to keep the history of the buildings. In regards to fire protection, LOKL Café has the most fire fighting technology while Light Capture Café, Timothy Café, and Kleptokrat are only equipped with fire extinguishers. In regards to the security system, all four buildings have installed a closed-circuit television system (CCTV) inside the buildings. Meanwhile, as for the alarm system, only Light Capture Café and LOKL Café implemented alarm systems in the buildings.

4.2 The User's perception of the Adaptive Reuse

From the table (Table 1), most of the respondents are not familiar with the adaptive reuse approach, whereas 22 respondents (37%) have no idea that the building was adapted to other usages. Thirty-three percent (33%) were not satisfied with the current condition of the building. Despite that sixty seven percent (67%) feels that the adaptive reuse approach can lead to sustainability of the building, fifty-eight percent are satisfied with the improvement of the ambience and sixty-five percent of the respondents feels that the adaptive reuse has a positive impact on the society and community while improving the value of the building.

Table 1: User's perception and preferences of the adaptive reuse scheme

Respondent's preference	Very unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Neutral	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory
Familiarity with adaptive reuse approach	9	13	16	12	10
Concept of adaptive reuse for sustainability of the building	1	0	5	14	40
Condition of the adapted building	4	16	25	12	3
Improvement of the ambience	1	3	21	25	10
Improvement on the value of the building	1	0	5	17	37
Positive Impact to society and community	1	0	2	18	39
Preservation of heritage values and identity of Kuala Lumpur	1	0	4	12	40

The top priorities on the perception and preference on the adaptive reuse by the respondents (Fig. 2) show that most of the respondents are very satisfied with the decision for adaptive reuse of the shophouses and agree that the scheme provides a positive impact on society and part of the preservation of heritage values and identities of Kuala Lumpur.

Furthermore, forty-four (44) respondents believe that further improvements could be made to the adaptive reuse projects in Kuala Lumpur after looking at pictures of the selected case studies, despite the positive view of the adaptive reuse projects. Additionally, 23.3% of the respondents seem to agree with this while the remaining 3.3% remain neutral. From this, it can be concluded that while these adaptive reuse projects provide a positive view and impact on society, there is still room for further improvements that can be made to the adaptive reuse projects in Kuala Lumpur city.

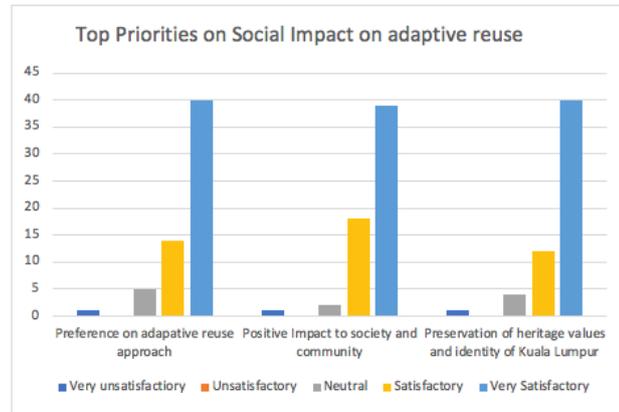


Figure 2: Respondents priorities on the impact of the scheme to the society

Decision on adaptive reuse to Jalan Tun H.S Lee should consider the types of adaptation of the building. Although the conversion of the buildings is pleasing to the eyes, similar types of business activities introduced within the same area could lead to the degradation of economic activities. From the survey, ninety-seven percent of respondents decided on the adaptive reuse approach if they are the owner of shophouses while 3% decided to retain the use of the original building. The result echoed the findings from the authors' previous research on the adjacent Petaling Street which concludes that the approach to adaptive reuse has suited their modern lifestyle and increased the quality of life of the people. Nonetheless, Petaling Street needs more regeneration initiatives for many more shophouses to be repaired and sustained. The result from the interview with the authorities indicates only small groups that have the ambition to retain the old building (Said et al, 2021).

5.0 Conclusion and recommendation

The overall result shows a positive review of the public's perception of adaptive reuse, and in general, the social impact of adaptive reuse is gradually improved correspondingly. Whilst the designer and owner of the buildings put forward the importance of retaining the heritage building significance value, the users are exposed to the adaptive reuse concept as a way forward for many heritage cities' regeneration. The adapted buildings were often taken into consideration the need of the society and tried to increase the social value of the community. In this study, all cafés have become socially significant buildings to the community with their attractive design. This shows that adaptive reuse positively impacts society in terms of providing opportunities for cultural activities within the community. However, adaptive reuse projects should involve more social engagements and also extend their coverage to a wider variety of building typologies, rather than just transforming old heritage shophouses into cafes. To achieve a greater social impact, adaptive reuse requires efforts from all parties including the architects, local authorities, private stakeholders, and the public.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The study explores approaches to adaptation of usage of heritage buildings in Kuala Lumpur and relevant to SDG11 Sustainable Cities Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

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