Adaptive reuse

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Introduction

As someone that was born and raised in Glasgow I have always wondered why there was so many abandoned buildings in areas that I was told to be very sought after locations. When refurbishment or demolition started on the sites, it always seems to take a very long time to complete and in some cases it comes to a halt and no further work would be done for many years to come.

One such site that I remember quite vividly was the public toilets, situated at Anniesland cross. From the day that I moved to the area it was already closed and no longer in use. In recent years I have seen work being done and heard rumours of it being adapted into a bar, which to this day have not come to fruition.

My curiosity about the abandoned buildings only increased through the years and truly took form when I progressed into my university studies in interior design. Out of the many interiors that I designed, few of them were new developments. At the time I thought this was because new builds rarely required interior designers as the architect was the one that designed interior, in some cases, this statement was true. However as I entered my final year of study I discovered that many interior designers also work on new sites.

This led me to think “why do we work on so many projects that are refurbishments/adaptions?”, when I asked my lecturer at the time, their answer was that “there are more refurbishment projects compared to brand new projects” if this statement was true and interior designers are not going out of work, then why are there still so many abandoned buildings being left to rot and deteriorate?

I hope this project will provide me with the answers I have been looking for and a possible solution to the ever growing problem that is not limited to Glasgow alone.
The overall aim of this study is to identify distinct approaches to adaptive re-use and its effect on the local community. Through the different lenses and perspectives of the participants, I hope it could provide a deeper understanding as to why it is not always considered. The research hopefully will provide a series of insights that may inspire a solution geared towards the benefit of all parties including local authorities, community, and developers/companies.

Residents' views and opinions has been identified to be of great importance to this topic. Results of this investigation are intended to bring more clarity to the possibilities of adaptive re-use and inform the development of an approach where it would entice local communities and developers alike to consider the use of abandoned buildings.
Glasgow’s regeneration story & old buildings

At the end of 80s Glasgow entered a period of regeneration, which concentrated on two areas, the city centre and the Clyde side. The regeneration that was executed was far from the vision that Gordon Cullen (leading urbanist) had thought of at the time. He had hope to see the waterfront to become the central point of public gathering space, where people congregate and enjoy the facilities developed by the river. Instead a partial and segmented puzzle development is what today’s Clyde side redevelopment resembles.

There are three possible reasons as to why this has happened through her interviews with Glasgow City council.

1. The planners within Glasgow city council are unable to make “place making” a priority and cannot coordinate with developers
2. High development costs due to long term disuse and decay, along with brown fields in the area, which require decontamination before development has led to “A permanently empty public purse”.
3. Lastly the divided ownerships and power struggles has created a inconsistent state of renewal.

This can also be seen throughout the rest of Glasgow as the rest of the city undergoes redevelopment, it resembles a series of patchwork being done and abandoned buildings privately or publicly owned all being left to rot as there is a lack of investors and public funding.

Source - (Varna, 2014)
Types of adaptive reuse

Although there are many varieties of adaptive reuse that I have observed, there are three types that seem to be the most common throughout Glasgow, these are the following.

1. Façade – this usually involves one or two exterior faces preserved to give a historical look, while a new structure is built behind it. This type is usually adopted when most of the original building is severely damaged and the developers are required to or would like to preserve what is left of the original building.

2. Renovation – when a building’s exterior structure is still in a reasonably good shape, the interiors will get renovated to today’s building standards for the proposed use. This generally happens when a building is B or C listed.

3. Integration/extension – when a new adaptation requires extra space for the new use an extension is typically more common, however that all depends on the original size of the pre-existing building and the encompassing land available.

Insight

With many options available for adaptive reuse, I wouldn’t have thought that abandoned buildings is an ever increasing issue.
The case for adaptive reuse

As countries and cities develop through industrialisation, expansion and modernisation, there will come a time when there is no more land to develop and with our finite natural resources on the decline, it is imperative that we recognise the importance of adaptive reuse and acknowledge that adaption will be the new norm one day. Without a doubt there are many benefits and reasons for adaption which fall under different categories. However these can be broadly summarised into social, environmental and economic benefits.

Insight
Given the wide range of benefits, historical and sustainability value of reusing an old building, at first glance it would seem adaption is a no brainer.

Sources – (Clark 2008; Craven 2019; DEH 2004)
Factors that affect adaptive reuse

When a developer decides to develop a site that has a standing building, adaption of the building is usually considered but ultimately it comes down to 4 main factors.

**Condition of the building**

Depending on how deteriorated the building is different types of adaption would be considered. This factor could increase or decrease the overall cost depending on the level of deterioration.

**Historical value**

If the building is of great significance to the history of the location, the building would be a listed building.

**Listed status**

There are three categories at which buildings could be listed under A, B or C. A listed buildings will limit what can be changed internally or externally, B listed buildings will allow internal change, however external structure must be maintained. C listed buildings could be changed internally and externally as long as core features are retained.

**Cost**

Since the available budgets for development projects are limited, cost is a crucial factor when an old building is present as there can be hidden costs during development or high repair costs due to damage.

**Insight**

It would seem that there is more than meets the eye and the adaption of an old building requires more thought and the different factors that affects the project should be weighed against the case for adaptive reuse.

Sources – (Clark 2008; Craven 2019; G 2017)
Impact of adaptive reuse to the local community

Through adaptive reuse developers and architects alike have brought something positive to cities and local communities. The positive impacts of these buildings varies depending on new use of the site, although the developers vision is to enhance the local area, they do not always align with the local communities interests and may be poorly received or welcomed.

Sources – (De medici, De Toro and Nocca 2019; G 2017; Tu 2020)
Case study 1 (1051 GWR)

1051 GWR was designed by Sir John James Burnet, the site was initially used as a part of a railway station that ran between the west end and the north of Glasgow towards Maryhill. It was in use between 1897 and 1942 and was shut down as it was deemed too remote at the time.

It was later transformed into a restaurant, however a fire in 1995 reduced it interior to ash leaving the masonry shell behind.

1051 GWR is the most recent incarnation of the old railway station which brought life back to the area. Many locals feel the same and agree that the derelict building left behind by the railway company, has given the local residence a place to meet up, since there are not many catering facilities close by. They also feel that the design creates a sense of nostalgia reminding them that the building was once part of a railway station. When I asked them “if this building was to become something else what do you think would be better than its current use” many don’t think there could be a better use given its location and surroundings.

Insight

Considering that the building was burnt to a crisp the new owner or developer could have applied for it to be demolished even if it was listed. Could it be that there are other factors in which they would keep the building even at a considerable cost?

Source – interview with owner and local regulars
Case study 2 (Hillhead Bookclub)

Today’s Hillhead Bookclub was designed by architect Mr. George M Brand, it was originally called the Salon which was a purpose-built cinema, or in the early days an electric theatre. It would go on to be one of the longest-running cinemas, screening shows for a total of 79 years between 1913 and 1992. It suddenly closed one day as staff arrived and could not gain access to the building, as the doors were locked. This caused an outcry for it to reopen, which lead to great objections when an application was submitted for a change of use.

It took a total of 6 years before it got adapted into a restaurant and in 2001, it got renovated into today’s Hillhead Bookclub as a bar-restaurant and events venue. Given that it was only a few decades ago, some locals still miss the old cinema, however many have now welcomed this change and believe it is for the better.

Insight

Even if an establishment was once extremely successful, over time and a clever and correct choice of adaption, it shows the new will be welcomed with open arms and accepted as part of the new history.

Source – interview with long time regulars; www.scottishcinemas.org.uk: (Old Glasgow, 2013)
Stakeholder map

The stakeholder map shows internal parties that would be at the core of adaptive reuse and expanding out to potential users and external interested bodies. Since the targeted users are dependant on the adaption I have summarised that adaption is geared towards the local residents with a wider reach to tourist and possible new residents/office workers.
Online survey results

From the online survey I sent out, I have received the following answers and opinions from the 103 participants.

What percentage of old buildings do you think/feel gets adapted for a new use?

When I proceeded to ask “why do you feel that is the case?” most people said there are many abandoned buildings throughout the city even when development is happening all over.

Do you think the general public have an influence on what old buildings get adapted into?

When I asked “why did you select the answer above” most participants that selected no for their answer said “I have never been asked”. However the participants that selected yes mentions that they have received letters or information from developers.

Above are the answers I got when I asked the participants to rank each category in order of preference, if they had the choice to choose what an abandoned building becomes. At a quick glance it seems most categories are almost on par with each other, however this only shows an averaged outcome, on the next page I will explain the different rankings from each age group.

Source – online survey
As mentioned before the previous results was averaged out, however upon closer examination, it is clear that each age group has obvious preferences.

The results you see to the right are the percentages of each age group ranking each category in first place.

Age group : (18 – 24) & (25 – 34)
Both age groups have very similar interests with entertainment being ranked in first place by a majority. It is closely followed by retail and hospitality facilities.

Age group : (35 – 44) & (45 – 54)
In this higher age group we see a change of interests, although both are relatively similar, it would seem the interest in entertainment is on a downward trend. On the other hand housing and catering interests have boosted from the previous age groups.

Age groups : (55 – 64) & (65+)
Moving on the last set of age groups, there is a significant rise in the preference in community spaces and a slight rise on the retail. On the other hand interest in hospitality and housing has dropped ever so slightly.

Insight
After analysing the data it would seem that everyone from different age groups have different preferences on what they like most. It would be highly unlikely to adapt a building where it would please everyone. Although this might the case, going by the information on the previous graph, there are two categories that are ranked highest on average, those are housing and hospitality/catering. My dad has always said “everyone needs a roof over their head and everyone needs to eat” it would seem he was right all along.

Source – online survey
Interview with experts

Throughout this project I have had difficulty getting a reply from the experts who I had hoped to speak to. Luckily out of the many I reached out to, one responded back to me. Although their interview was conducted at a later stage in my project, their expertise and knowledge has helped me confirm some of my suspicions.

What I have learnt through this interview

❖ Adaptive reuse happens more often than what most people think and it is encouraged
❖ Money is typically the main barrier when it comes adaptive reuse
❖ Adaptive reuse might not be as lucrative is it first seems as there are hidden costs
❖ Not many communities bodies are actively seeking reuse of old buildings due to lack of knowledge, resource and grants
❖ Process for adaptive reuse is relatively complex and permission is not always granted
❖ Reuse sometimes is ignored

Source – Interview with assistant planner from Edinburgh city council
Developers journey

Shown below is a map which takes you through the steps a developer would go through and their thought process of adaptive reuse.

**Insight**

Through this map I can see that vast majority of the outcomes lead to adaption with a few exceptions where demolition could occur.

*Source – interview with assistant planner from Edinburgh city council*
Simplified Developers & community journey

Shown below is a map which compares the journey that the community body would go through for adaptive development.

Source – interview with assistant planner from Edinburgh city council
Overall insight & design concepts

Through my analysis of the information that I have gathered, it would seem that money is at the top of the list of reasons as to why buildings are left abandoned. Although there are some cases where developers and communities went ahead with projects regardless of financial cost, because of their intrinsic motivation. However, these cases are rare simply because of a lack of knowledge and low resident activity. Below are three potential concepts that could hopefully bring change to the current activity of adaptive reuse.

A tool kit could be created to help local communities or designers decide what derelict buildings could be transformed into.

Many people did not know that local community bodies could apply for the use of an empty building/spaces, through the council. So my second approach would be looking into how we can make this information more readily available to the general public.

My last approach would be looking at ways to raise awareness about the situation of the underused buildings. This process would hopefully reach people of all ages especially the younger generation in hopes it would bring change for the future.
Current information

What I found when I tried to look for information on grants and information on adaptive reuse.

❖ Search bar was totally useless (never showed me what I wanted to see)
❖ Too much information unrelated to what I was looking for
❖ Kept on redirecting to another part
❖ When I finally found something it directed me to Glasgow City councils home page

I also found a website that had information on abandoned buildings throughout Glasgow, however the page resembled a pile of word vomit and information overload, which was worse than the councils website

Insight

Current information available is a bit like looking for a needle in a haystack. Available websites are limited and not user friendly.

Old space new purpose (OSNP) website and app

My proposal to tackle the issue is a purpose built website and exploration app. The website will be simplistic and user friendly.

The website's purpose –

❖ Allow the user to easily see local abandoned buildings
❖ View information related to each building site
❖ Directing users to relative websites with more information
❖ Provide information on local community bodies

The exploration app

❖ Similar properties to website, however main function is encourage user to explore local area
❖ App could also increase a sense of community as people meet other residents in the area using the exploration app
Collaboration opportunities

The collaboration between the three parties (shown on the right) would create the best symbiotic relationship which can achieve the possibilities of raising awareness of the current issues with abandoned buildings, while providing a platform with easy to access information.

Stats about Pokemon Go

❖ Over 1 billion downloads worldwide
❖ Over 147 million users active at any time
❖ Users age and percentages: (13 – 17) 22%, (18 – 29) 46%, (30 – 50) 25%, (50+) 6%

With such a large pool of users worldwide and majority of them being in the younger age group, it is clear the advantages this collaboration could bring. Through their app that already displays information on landmarks (shown bottom right), additional locations can be added to show information and a link on the abandoned buildings.

How would each party help each other

❖ Pokemon Go could raise interest and awareness among their users which would lead them to find out more on OSNP. In addition statistics show that users under the age of 15 are accompanied by parents. Through the power of “word of mouth” this information could be passed on to other people who might not be using their app.

❖ OSNP easy to use platform could help the council increase the interest of developers and communities bodies in abandoned buildings. While users of OSNP could be professionals and probably not a fan of Pokemon Go, it could spark interest in the Pokemon Go app because of this collaboration.

❖ The council could provide up to date information on landmarks and empty buildings for both parties as they generally are the first to receive this information. From my experience and research Pokemon Go has had issues with keeping the information of landmarks up to date, they rely on their users to inform them, however this process is slow and information can be months if not years out of date.

Source – Business of Apps (2019); Statista (2016)
This is Jimmy, one day he stumbles upon an abandoned building and realises it has been like that for a long time. He has an idea for the site.

He decides to check the government's website to look for some information, however he was overwhelmed by information and got annoyed.

He then finds the OSNP website, which was easy to use.

The easy to use map shows that there are more abandoned buildings in his area.
With a click of a button he finds in depth information about each buildings that was clearly displayed. With such a good initial impressions he decided to download the app.

Once he found out the purpose of the app he decides to go on a journey round his neighbourhood to explore other buildings. Along his journey he meets other user and begins chatting about the app and the building he saw..
After some discussion they all had a similar idea, one of the users that has been using the app for a while tells them they can form or look for a community body to apply for the use of the empty building.

Through everyone's support and the wider communities activity, the local council has approved the use of the abandoned building. Through crowd funding and government grants, the building is now fully repaired and ready for community use.
Conclusion

In a world where cities and countries are constantly undergoing redevelopment, with the new constantly replacing the old. It may seem ambitious to change the mindsets our predecessors instilled in us through destruction and creation. However, I believe people are capable of change, with the correct guidance and knowledge, little by little we can bring forth change.

Due to little resistance and effort from residents, many buildings with great architectural features and historical value are being demolished. A droplet of water might not be of much significance but when a magnitude of them come together they become oceans and oceans create waves that change the land. The OSNP website and apps purpose is to connect people to create waves of change for future generations to come.
Bibliography


