
Research Paper

Recycling industrial heritage: promoting local diversity and cohesion in globalising cities

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Abstract

The shift towards knowledge economy accompanied with the flow of people, capital and goods has manifold effects on urban development. On the one hand, cities are becoming more alike: in chasing for profit, global capitalism imposes spatial patterns that lack distinctiveness. On the other hand, network society makes people living in a global village, thus bringing multiculturalism to the fore. Consequently, continuous change and replacement of urban layers lead to the loss of readability, local diversity, and, finally, identity of a place.

To tackle the issue of preserving local identity in a globalising world, we place an emphasis on industrial heritage and the effect of its recycling on a local urban area. As industrial areas keep memory and deep-seated associations for local residents and communities, they play an important role in defining the identity of both the place and its inhabitants. To recycle industrial heritage means to alter obsolete industrial area using its available, useable material, thus making the site suitable for the new function. Recycling differs from both preservation – that persists in maintaining status quo, and the total demolition of an area in order to build it from scratch. Recycling of an industrial site with historic value, thus, make an important contribution to regeneration of urban areas and has a range of social benefits: recycled districts reinforce local cultures, instil a greater sense of pride and confidence among its inhabitants, and retain cohesion in globalising cities. Finally, recycled industrial areas usually become the hubs of creative industry, thus fostering the local economy based on knowledge in contrast to pure tourist areas as manifestations of global consumption.

Keywords

Urban recycling, industrial heritage, diversity, identity, culture.

1. Introduction

Architectural recycling and the broader concept of urban regeneration have usually been linked with sustainable development through its environmental component. However, the relationship between the urban regeneration and social sustainability remains underdeveloped, theoretical and oversimplified when compared to the progress of the environmental movement. If cities are to succeed as engines of economic growth, a balance must be achieved between promoting economic competitiveness, social cohesion and tackling environmental issues (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011).

Socially sustainable development can be defined as “development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of cultural and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population” (Polese and Stren, 2000:15-16). Through their chronological analysis of social sustainability themes, Colantonio and Dixon (2011: 18) came to conclusion that “traditional themes, such as equity, poverty reduction and livelihood, are increasingly been complemented or replaced by more intangible and less measurable concepts such as identity, sense of place and the benefits of ‘social networks’”. The authors underline that “social sustainability blends traditional social policy areas and principles such as equity and health, with issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and more recently, with the notions of happiness, well-being and quality of life (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011:18).

In the past decade we have witnessed a growing number of projects and research focusing on the positive effects of the architectural recycling on the environment, such as: exploitation of the existing urban infrastructure with no need for new site development; lesser generation of residues in relation to a totally new construction; saving new materials from being used, and cutting the associated environmental impacts of producing and transporting those materials. However, there is a range of positive social effects as well, including the reduction of local social problems and increased engagement and participation of residents, improved image of the local community and the reduction of crime and illegal activities (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011:20).

Colantonio and Dixon (2011) outlined 10 social sustainability dimensions and policy areas in which urban regeneration projects in general can generate potential outputs and outcomes as follows: demographic change (ageing, migration and mobility); education and skills; employment; health and safety; housing and environmental health; identity, sense of place and culture; participation, empowerment and access; social capital; social mixing and cohesion; and, well-being, happiness and quality of life. The authors are highlighting these areas as critical for the social sustainability of local communities and neighbourhoods.

This research focuses on the social component of the sustainable development and the role of the recycling of the industrial heritage in promoting cohesion and local diversity. Therefore, in the following subchapters, the concepts of architectural recycling and industrial heritage will be analysed, while placing a special focus on the social benefits of recycling industrial heritage.

2. Architectural recycling: a preservation through change

The Oxford Dictionary defines recycling as using again. However, while reuse means using again in the same way, recycling implies the element of change, i.e. starting a different cycle. Through the process of recycling, materials are changed into new products. According to Douglas (2006), recycling refers to transforming or re-utilizing a redundant or underused building or its materials for more modern purposes. Viganò (2012) points out that recycling is not just reusing, and highlights that, if we follow the analogy with the organic world, recycling puts forward a new life cycle. Furthermore, Ricci (2012) argues that recycling means creating new values and new meanings and points out that unlike conservation,

which embalms the image of architectural or urban space, when recycling is carried out the change itself is the value. Thus, the fundamental difference between recycling and many related terms is the notion of shift of the original function or purpose. Therefore, in this research the term recycling refers to the process of intervening with the existing industrial building, on different scale, and with different intensity, with the aim of making the building suitable for the new function.

Given that only a small percentage of the total building stock is made up of new works, this inevitably means that existing buildings play a key role in reaching the sustainable agendas. A number of authors (Kincaid, 2002; De Garrido, 2012; Kubba, 2012 and Szokolay, 2004) point out that through repurposing of what already exist, substantial environmental, economic and social benefits can be achieved. Through this process the embodied energy of building materials is saved, the environmental impact associated with excavation, production and transportation of the new materials avoided and the embodied memory of the communities preserved.

Architectural recycling refers to the process of altering the existing building, by using all of its available, useable material, in order to make it suitable for the new function. It is important to mention that unlike other terms which relate to intervention on the existing building, recycling implies the notion of change. Through such a process original building is altered, in order to make the accommodation of new function possible, while using as much of the original buildings' material as possible. This process increases the working service life of existing buildings, and so the rentability of the resources already applied (Cepinha, Ferrão and Santos, 2007). Through this process, extraction, processing and transport of the new material is diminished and the need for new development reduced, which has direct social, economic and environmental advantages. Recycling is also seen as a process which can mediate between the radical stasis, reflected in the rigid rules of preservation, and the radical change which new construction implies.

The practice of recycling is the practice of transformation, i.e. recycling demands change – the right amount of change. Through this transformation a new, viable use is affiliated to the disused building. Thus, recycling cannot be compared to preservation, which persists in maintaining status quo, nor to total replacement of a given building. Through this process a balance is searched for between the radical stasis and radical change.

Architectural recycling helps communities, governments and developers reduce environmental, social and economic costs of continued urban development and expansion. Gosling et al. (2013) highlight the benefits of recycling which include positive contribution to the socio-economic agenda driven by heritage and community interests, extending the economic viability of buildings and reducing maintenance costs. In the following subchapter the concept of industrial heritage will be analysed focusing on social benefits achieved through its recycling.

3. Recycling industrial heritage

The growing realisation of the importance of the industrial architecture consequently lead to the emergence of the 'industrial heritage' concept and to the interest in its preservation. Industrial heritage implies not only the "tangible heritage associated with industrial technology and processes, engineering, architecture and town-planning", it also includes

“many intangible dimensions embodied in the skills, memories and social life of workers and their communities” (ICOMOS, XVII Assemblée Générale, 2011: 1).

Loures and Burley (2012: 226) explain that even though industrial heritage was given a ‘formal’ document regarding its protection in the Nizhny Tagil Charter in 2003, followed by the Monterrey Charter, “some of the principles enounced in several other international charters and conferences, supported by the Council of Europe (COE), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) included somehow the protection of industrial buildings and landscapes”.

Industrial buildings and sites are important milestones in the history of humanity. Nevell (2017:6) highlights that today’s industrial heritage sites are the embodiment of the development marking the shift “from rural agrarian society to an urban manufacturing society [which] changes (...) the way people live and work around the globe”. The profound effects of the industrial development on the landscape, economy and society can serve as an instrument for “improving social inclusion, for nurturing historic roots and achieving sustainability through regeneration” (Oglethorpe, 2017:3).

Industrial heritage holds indisputable value through its ability to create a sense of place and identity for communities. According to Landry (2013), the development of many existing communities is based around its industrial past which acts as a source of memory and a place of anchorage for many communities, demonstrating its intrinsic cultural and social value. The author highlights that historic buildings exude memory and foster stability in a rapidly changing society.

According to Preite (2013), rehabilitation of the industrial heritage has played a fundamental role in the creation of a new urban landscape. Restored industrial building and industrial areas that have been transformed can develop an enormous cachet, as many examples like warehouses converted to flats in London’s docklands and in Liverpool’s Albert Dock have shown (Binney et al., 1990). According to Stratton (2000: 127), industrial and science museums, located in run-down industrial and dockside areas, “have evolved to be at the forefront of innovative interpretation and, in some cases, to act as agents of inner-city regeneration”. Reutilization of industrial buildings secures long-term opportunities that connect directly to the development and redevelopment of the cities which are at the centre of our economic life (Kincaid, 2002).

Buildings in industrial areas act as incubators for small businesses especially in growing sectors of the economy (House of Commons ODPM, 2004). Regenerated industrial heritage sites offer a deviation from a traditional corporate aesthetic that is desired by creative start-ups. In their report, “New ideas need old buildings”, the Heritage Lottery Fund (2013) highlights a strong correlation between industrial heritage and creative start-up industries. The report shows that, in the historic places, there is a greater propensity for businesses to be working in the most highly productive parts of the economy – professional services and the creative and cultural sector. It also shows how independent retail and leisure businesses seek to cluster in historic areas of towns and cities – adding to the distinctive sense of place which is key to success in attracting successful businesses. The research shows that historic buildings have a greater concentration of businesses linked to the creative and knowledge economy. It also shows that historic buildings are far more likely to be occupied by the types

of independent non-branded business that give places a sense of distinctiveness, authenticity and diversity.

Cossons (2013: 13) underlines that “across much of Europe, industrial heritage now takes its place as an acknowledged and valued part of the wider historic landscape, in many cases enjoying legislative protection and enthusiastic public support”. According to the same source, industrial heritage is being seen today as a symbol of national identity. Recycling industrial heritage helps preserving the character of the community and provides people with a sense of belonging. This process acts as a catalyst of the urban transformation and renewal through its ability to promote cultural distinctiveness and preserve the character and embodied memory of our communities.

3.1. Recycling industrial heritage: a social perspective

Architectural heritage plays a crucial role in supporting cultural continuity, and promoting distinctiveness and identity of neighbourhoods and towns. In a joint report with the British Property Federation (BPF) and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Historic England highlighted the significance of the heritage assets in the formation of a communal identity through their ability to create a sense of place and destination (Historic England, 2017). The Civic Trust points out that there is a great positive contribution which improving the historic fabric of areas plays in restoring local confidence as well (House of Commons ODPM, 2004).

Explaining the social benefits of heritage, Graham and Howard (2008) refer to David Lowenthal’s four traits of the past: *antiquity* – conveys the respect and status of antecedence, and underpins the idea of continuity and its essentially modernist ethos of progressive, evolutionary social development; *connection between the present and the past* – represents an unbroken trajectory, established by certain artefacts in emblematic landscapes created by societies; *a sense of termination* – reminds us that what happened in the past has ended; *sequence* – allows us to locate our lives in linear narratives that connect past, present and future. These traits provide familiarity and guidance, enrichment and escape, and “a point of validation or legitimation for the present in which actions and policies are justified by continuing references to representations and narratives of the past that are, at least in part, encapsulated through manifestations of tangible and intangible heritage” (Graham and Howard, 2008: 6).

Historic buildings lend character to an area and have deep-seated associations for local residents and communities (House of Commons ODPM, 2004). Esther H.K et al. (2012) stresses the role of the historic buildings in representing the memory of the society and retaining the attractiveness of the streetscapes, adding character and providing status and image to the neighbourhoods. According to Godwin (2011), local distinctiveness and character is what makes places special and, by association, their people too.

The Parliamentary Select Committee on The Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration (2004) states that the historic environment has an important part to play in regeneration schemes, helping to create vibrant interesting areas, boosting local economies and restoring local confidence. The Committee underlines that historic buildings provide a foundation for the regeneration of many of our towns and cities and that through the regeneration of these buildings a sense of community can be reinforced, an important contribution to the local economy made. The Committee also states that reuse of buildings, which have historic value, can make an important contribution to the regeneration of the urban areas and

underline that reuse of historic buildings have several benefits: Act as a catalyst to the regeneration of a neighbourhood or district; Boos the local economy and create jobs; Reinforce local cultures, instil a greater sense of pride and confidence in a neighbourhood, and; Achieve better use of natural resources.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation outlines that “historic buildings have been a positive catalyst in achieving structural economic change, attracting higher value investment and jobs, and providing the context for creative, high quality contemporary design in new development” (House of Commons ODPM, 2004: 6). The historic environment plays an important role in creating jobs, attracting tourists, and supporting small businesses.

4. Concluding remarks

Industrial heritage plays an important role in defining the identity of both the place and its inhabitants. Industrial complexes are recognized as the local landmarks and symbols of the cities’ vibrant life. The emergence of the ‘industrial heritage’ concept demonstrates the growing awareness on the importance of the industrial architecture. Industrial heritage is not just about industrial buildings, it is the deep societal history of industrial communities today. Through reactivation and repurposing of industrial buildings cities have transformed and regenerated entire districts. These buildings have become symbols and impetus for urban, economic, social, and environmental change.

Industrial buildings were also responsible for the creation of new and impressive urban identity and they determined the character of neighbourhoods and towns. Simply by the virtue of their size, but also due to their active role in the shaping of communities these buildings are considered valuable and important local landmarks. They have deep-seated associations for the local residents, and they give character and distinctiveness to a neighbourhood. Precisely because of the part industrial buildings played in the shaping the Modern World, i.e. profound changes induced by the industrial revolution, and their social importance as collectors of the embodied memory of our communities, these buildings have an important role in the urban regeneration of towns and cities. Through the recycling - ‘preservation through change’, of industrial buildings, a sense of community can be reinforced and the important contribution to the local economy can be made.

Industrial heritage is of manifold significance in terms of our cultural identity, social practices, and contemporary industry. Given that image and branding are crucial for the social regeneration of city areas, recycling of industrial heritage sites offers a unique opportunity to add value to a local community. The recycling of these buildings acts as a catalyst for the improvement and regeneration of districts and wider urban area as well. In this way new jobs are created, local economy is boosted, local cultures reinforced and better use of natural resources is achieved. Furthermore, recycling industrial heritage can be used as a form of unique branding that could inspire a sense of local pride through the creation of cultural and heritage symbols which can act as centres of community life.

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