Chapter 3

The Role and Function of Historic Buildings in Cultural Quarters

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3.1 Introduction

Historic buildings such as old warehouses or shops often play an important part in making a Cultural Quarter come alive and give a sense of the place’s past. Consequently, the past, as symbolised by these buildings and environments, should always be seen as a vital cultural asset when establishing a Cultural Quarter. History epitomised in the built environment is often the most visible and concrete aspect of a place’s uniqueness.

Without this visual experience of the past, an important part of the “culture” of a place is lost. This is why the built heritage of any Quarter has to be developed sensitively. There are however a number of issues we have to address in order to successfully adapt these historic environments for creative uses:

- Why are historic buildings appreciated today?
- How are the most important characteristics of the built environment identified?
- How can redundant industrial buildings be adapted and re-used for the purposes of creative industries without destroying a sense of the past?
- How are complete environments (and not just individual buildings) recreated that can convey a historic sense of place?

These issues all connect with the re-use and rehabilitation of redundant urban environments as opposed to the restoration of unique individual architecture. In urban environment adaptive re-use, the possibilities of making insertions and changing both the exteriors and interiors are much greater than restoration projects, in which the purpose is to restore the building to an earlier state. Consequently, creative industries are much more likely to be located to recently deindustrialised areas than a block of seventeenth-century buildings in the centre of a town. Such buildings are most likely already to be attractive and as a result occupied with rental levels being much higher than small creative businesses are willing to pay. Another type of facility increasingly available for redevelopment throughout Europe today are military bases, of which many have important historic buildings, and monuments which are of increasing interest to cultural organisations and creative businesses.

An example of this is the re-use of one wing of a deserted fort (built in 1816–1830) in the former industrial centre of Daugavpils, Latvia. Following a private donation by Rothko’s
family, the beautiful classicist wing known as the Arsenal is destined to become a gallery displaying the works of abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko, born in Daugavpils in 1903. There is an annual culture festival held inside the Arsenal to commemorate the heritage of Rothko and his art. Today the fortress is mostly abandoned, partly used as social housing for the poor in a city mostly populated by ethnic Russian and suffering from mass unemployment following the closing of many mills.

3.2 The Re-appraisal of Historic Environments

There is evidence to suggest that many people working within creative industries are concerned about their working environment and seem to like working in historic environments: exposed brick walls, high ceilings, and tall iron frame windows have all become the everyday attributes of many businesses that wish to be associated with arts, creativity, and culture (Zukin 1995). One reason for this appreciation is that the city built heritage has undergone a major re-appraisal in the Western world in the last three decades. So today it is more difficult not to appreciate historic buildings, whereas 30 or 40 years ago almost all office workers seem to have preferred working in highly modern, newly constructed buildings. In 1960s Sweden, the thought of refurbishing a previously industrial building to provide new offices was peripheral and unpopular. There were, however, a handful of professionals working with adaptive re-use for cultural or creative functions before the mid 1970s (Legnér 2009a).

Things were however changing and American architectural historian Barbaralee Diamonstein (1978, p. 15) commented on the growing movement of historic preservation:

*More and more, people seem to prefer what the past has to offer in the way of handicrafts, custom design of hardware and moldings, attention to details (newness still prevails, though, when it comes to choosing appliances).*
There are important reasons why this re-appraisal has occurred. One is that deindustrialisation, i.e. the decline of the manufacturing industry and the decrease of the labour force used for manufacturing, today has progressed much farther and faster than expected in European countries in particular. Not that industrialisation has left the world, but is migrating from the European Union and the United States where manufacturing jobs are increasingly seen as dull, dirty and low paid. Manufacturing jobs, then, are moving to other parts of the world which makes it possible to begin seeing the "industrial epoch" as an historic age, rather than an age we are currently living in (Storm 2008). There are simply no more large brick buildings with tall windows and chimneys being built. Another, and perhaps more obvious reason, is that deindustrialisation leaves an abundance of abandoned built environments often in key city locations, consequently raising the question of what should be done with them. Should they be demolished and replaced with new developments such as shopping centres or housing estates? Is there any value in or motivation to preserve the best elements of the industrial past and generate re-use as a contribution to new economic development?

These questions are, of course, rhetorical but they need to be asked in order to understand why we are re-using some built environments which are not architecturally unique whereas many other areas are razed and constructed anew. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates the number of existing brownfield sites (old industrial sites) to be about 450,000, and increasing (EPA 2009). Needless to say there is a growing demand from national governments to regenerate these vacant areas not least to replace lost businesses and jobs. A third reason is concerned with the growth of the environmental movement and the resulting "greening" policies. Energy and physical resources can be saved by re-using buildings instead of demolishing and constructing new ones. Re-use is much more energy efficient than any other type of intervention in the built environment, and conserving the built environment is therefore an important contribution to sustainable development (Rodwell 2007).

Finally, the benefits of re-using historic structures in urban space are summed up in a clear way by Worthing and Bond (2008, pp. 49–52):

- There are significant benefits to the wellbeing of individuals as well as groups;
- There are educational benefits: we can understand aspects of past societies better;
- Existing buildings should be re-used for environmental and financial reasons;
- Historic environments contribute to a sense of place through their character and visual aesthetics;
- Historic areas attract tourist revenue and make significant contributions to local and regional economies.

In other words, there are significant benefits from social, environmental, as well as economic perspectives in re-using older built structures.
3.3 Identification and Rehabilitation

The most important aspect of rehabilitation is the functional continuity of a building (Stratton 1997). A voluminous power plant, for example, could easily be re-used for a gallery such as Tate Modern in London or for other large gatherings such as concerts or theatre, whereas re-using it as an office might be less appropriate because of the cost of converting the large open spaces compared with a new construction already designed for such a purpose. In Swedish Västerås which used to be the centre of the manufacturer ASEA (today called ABB), there are plans to re-use a huge 1940s power plant both as an exhibition centre of Swedish industrial heritage (Stähl 1999) as well as an indoor water adventure centre.

Furthermore, an old foundry which was used to forge steel goods can easily be rehabilitated into metal artisans’ studios. This was the case with the John Gutierrez studio in Baltimore, Maryland (United States). Gutierrez also re-used objects found in the nearby vacant buildings – such as cog-wheels and other metal scraps – to decorate the site (Legner 2007).

Other spacious industrial buildings have been used as rock climbing gyms or cinemas. Another example of matching large industrial spaces with relevant function includes parts
Could Paninhus I I, a deserted power plant in Västerås, be re-used for indoor water adventures demanding high ceilings and large spaces? Photograph: M. Lehnér.
of a former copper mill in Västerås, the building Culturen, re-opened in 2000 for teaching, displaying, and experiencing arts such as theatre, film, radio broadcasting, dance, music, workshops, and painting.

Before planning the re-use of a building it is important to identify what are its most striking and interesting features. If these features are ignored, much of the building's integrity will be lost, and also its attractiveness to potential investors. What are the distinctive features and spaces that characterise these historic buildings? All features and spaces do not carry equal weight in determining the character of a historic property. The more important a feature or space is to the historic character of a property, the less it can be changed resulting in less flexibility in re-use. In addition there are "periods of significance", implying that there is a defined historic period in which the building was given its most valuable features. The US authority National Park Services (NPS) has developed a policy solely concerned with historic rehabilitation (and not restoration) of buildings:

"... features and spaces that have been so substantially changed outside the period of significance or are so severely deteriorated as no longer to convey historic character can be more readily altered than those aspects of a property that retain a high degree of integrity."

(NPS 2009a)

In short, this generally means that if a building has been modified considerably after it was first built, it becomes easier to modify the building once again. Much of the historic authenticity has already been lost and cannot be recovered.

Regarding the interiors, the NPS identifies primary and secondary spaces (NPS 2009b). Primary spaces are the most important ones to preserve. Primary spaces are those that are essential in conveying the historic and architectural character of a building. They are often entrance halls, corridors, and other public or in other ways representative areas. Secondary spaces are ones that have not been as critical to the function of the building. As a consequence, significant parts of the interior may be altered without damaging the integrity of the interior.

Windows and doors are often deemed the most striking exterior features of a building, since they are highly visible. Changing the appearance of the windows, for example by removing old frames or by using other materials, can decrease the integrity of the building considerably. A developer who recently wished to rehabilitate an early nineteenth-century workshop at Clipper Mill, Baltimore, had to find a workshop that was able to re-produce similar steel window frames which needed to be replaced since the building had been severely damaged by fire. The building was to be used for living quarters and creative industries. The developer wished to place balconies on the front facade, but this was denied by the NPS since it would have diminished the features of the building. Putting balconies on the exterior of an industrial building is a clear breach of respect for the structure's historic use. In the end, the developer was allowed to put a few balconies on
Window frames at Clipper Mill replaced with similar ones manufactured solely for this purpose.
Photograph: M. Legnér.
The former communist headquarters and later orphanage in Disna, Belarus, now destined to be re-used as a cultural centre. Photograph: M. Legnér.

the back of the building by re-using steel girders from the old building (Legnér 2007). In Providence, Rhode Island (United States) the same developer also re-used the interiors of old brick buildings when setting up combined living spaces and studios for artists. Art displaying the historic uses of the buildings was set up in public areas, as well as pictures displaying the rehabilitation work in progress.

Doors and windows also prove to be the most striking and valuable features of a deserted brick building in the small town of Disna in northern Belarus. The Town Council wished to re-use this building, one of few surviving both world wars (Disna was occupied by German forces in both wars) and the following Stalinist vandalism of the 1950s, in order to begin developing cultural tourism attractions in the town. The building in mind was first built to provide the local financial centre. After the revolution it became the communist party headquarters, and on the dissolution of the Soviet Union an orphanage for fifteen years. Contemporary knowledge and skills about the re-use and rehabilitation of historic buildings is largely lacking in Belarus today as it is in many countries emerging from the soviet era. This has encouraged partnerships enabling historic building re-use expertise to be made available. In the case of the Disna project in Belarus the town cooperated with Swedish authorities funded through SIDA (Swedish Development Agency). As a result the building will become a combined Town Council and cultural centre; out of
which as confidence grows further new attractions will emerge in this beautifully situated area in the junction of the Dvina and Disna rivers (Legnér 2009c).

In the creative industries re-use of the old tobacco plant in Durham, North Carolina (United States), which is today renowned for its medical University rather than the tobacco industry, the developer used the heritage of different brands, such as Lucky Strike, to connect with the industrial past of the site. A tall water tower with the brand name on the side was kept as a “beam” or “icon” pointing out the place to everyone in the vicinity. The area was rebuilt as a park housing small biotech industry and software programming businesses (Legnér 2009a).

Similar principles of rehabilitation are practised in other countries, even if they are far from always articulated in policies as clear as that of the NPS.

In Norrköping, which used to be the industrial centre of Sweden, many industrial brick buildings from the beginning of the twentieth century are now re-used by creative industries, retaining their key external characteristics but having been completely changed on the inside, a historic shell with a contemporary interior. Currently, a former water power plant is being rehabilitated to be used as a multimedia centre with a dome theatre, located next to the University main building (Legnér 2009b). Another water power plant has been re-used as a science park housing small knowledge business, but
without compromising the striking external building features, among them a glass wall facing the river. In some buildings, such as Strykbrädan (Ironing Board), wooden floors and beams and steel columns have been left in place.

The most high-profile re-use in the so-called Industrial Landscape of central Norrköping was the turning of a large paper mill building from the 1920s into a symphony and event hall. Thanks to a joint venture between the five largest developers in town, most of the building – located along the riverside – could be preserved, making the necessary alterations highly visible, thereby not confusing their appearance with the original features (Legnér 2008).

Finally, it is difficult to provide universal recommendations on how to successfully re-use a building; each case brings together a unique combination of elements. Both historic and future functions of a building need to be considered in order to safeguard the continuity in the use of a building and in particular to avoid destroying the "sense of place" referred to above. Alternatively, some buildings have been extensively modified losing their historical significance or have been vacant for such a long time that they may more easily be re-used for entirely new purposes.

3.4 Creating Environments

A key factor when rehabilitating complete collections of buildings is time. It is difficult to create sustainable and attractive environments if the redevelopment has short timelines. Often when this is the case, government incentives are involved with substantial investments made in a short period of time. Norrköping's Cultural Quarter, the Industrial Landscape, has developed rather slowly over a period of more than 30 years, and is beginning to reach a mature phase. For many years developers have complained that regeneration is too slow and that the antiquarian officers of local and regional authorities have too much influence on redevelopment. However, they are beginning to realise that this slow-paced development has had its advantages. Slowing down redevelopment has meant more thought through and careful restoration and re-use of the building stock, and more public access to previously sealed off areas. Time has proven that this area is developing and surviving with a high degree of public engagement (such as intimate negotiations between property owners, developers, and the municipality), and independently of large government subsidies.

The urban landscape with its tall buildings and narrow streets and the integrity of the historic buildings has been preserved. This is as a consequence of investments made by the developers, legal protection of the area by county and national government antiquarians, the city's planning of public spaces and moving of public institutions such as offices and schools into the district. The Industrial Landscape has changed from having been a closed and prohibited to the public industrial site to becoming a public space with a range of cultural attractions – museums, exclusive shops, a gym, a symphony hall – and a University campus complete with a science park and technology hub, and soon to establish a multimedia centre of international ranking.
Part of the Industrial Landscape in Norrköping showing the old entrance to the area, now entrance to Museum of Work. Photograph: M. Legner.
Cultural Quarters

The public spaces are crucial to a Cultural Quarter since the concept is to mix functions based on "live, work, play" encouraging people to be present, stay, and move around in the Quarter. The area not only needs to be perceived as safe but also as aesthetically attractive. The design of plazas, streets, pavement, lighting, and signage becomes important. There also needs to be reason for activity after normal working hours. This seems to be a problem for many Cultural Quarters which focus on creative industries: streets appear more or less deserted after 6:00 pm. A place such as the Richmond Riverfront in Virginia (United States) is desolate most of the day and all night despite beautiful walkways and engaging public art relating to the history of the former confederate capital. The reason behind these empty streets is not the absence of residents, but because cultural amenities, offices, and commercial venues are completely missing. This is evidently the opposite problem for the Vienna MuseumsQuartier where activities are too much focused on museums, exhibits, and day time coffee shops to allow for night time activities.

In Tampere, Finland, the industrial district redeveloped for culture, entertainment, and creative businesses in the 1990s has addressed this problem by integrating workplaces with a night time economy involving cinemas, restaurants, and bars. It is clear that if there are no possibilities of social interaction in the Quarter, people will not go there (especially not at night) even if there are exquisite historic buildings and well-designed public spaces.