

LEEUWARDEN DECLARATION

ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF THE BUILT HERITAGE: PRESERVING AND ENHANCING THE VALUES OF OUR BUILT HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Adopted on 23 November 2018 in Leeuwarden

Europe has a rich and multi-faceted built environment, incorporating strong spiritual, cultural, social and economic values. Due to evolutions in our economies and societies, many heritage sites, whether listed or not, are nowadays disused or have lost the functions for which they were originally built – notably industrial, religious, and military sites, but also more contemporary buildings from the second half of the twentieth century.

However, heritage buildings that have lost their original function still embody cultural, historic, spatial and economic values. *Adaptive re-use* offers itself as a strategy aimed at preserving those elements that contain these values, while at the same time adapting the place for new uses. New functions are thus brought together with heritage values in an active and meaningful dialogue.

Throughout the European Year of Cultural Heritage, within the framework of the initiative entitled *Heritage in Transition: Re-imagining industrial, religious and military spaces for the regeneration of urban and rural areas*, the benefits of adaptive re-use strategies, as well as good practices, challenges and barriers to their implementation, have been intensively discussed. The present Declaration aims to take stock of lessons learned over the Year and reflect on good practices supporting quality interventions.

THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF RE-USING OUR BUILT HERITAGE

Through smart renovation and transformation, heritage sites can find new, mixed or extended uses. As a result, their social, environmental and economic value is increased, while their cultural significance is enhanced.

- **Cultural aspects:** heritage sites are often spatial and social landmarks that characterise the landscape and confer a strong identity on the environment. They create a sense of place and are a major determinant of local and regional identity. By preserving our heritage, adaptive re-use can help to maintain and strengthen people's perceptions of their own traditions and history and provide perspectives for the future, while responding to the needs of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies.

- **Social aspects:** by re-opening closed or disused spaces to the public, the adaptive re-use of our built heritage can generate new social dynamics in their surrounding areas and thereby contribute to urban regeneration. These projects offer the opportunity to involve citizens in the shaping of their living environment, resulting in greater sense of place and democracy. In addition, re-used heritage can provide the basis for school and educational programmes. Adaptive re-use is therefore a key lever for more cohesive territories, both in urban and rural areas.

- **Environmental aspects:** the re-use of our heritage reduces the consumption of construction materials, saves embodied energy and limits urban sprawl. It often provides the opportunity to undertake a deep energy retrofit, resulting in better-performing, climate-proof, healthier buildings. Moreover, high quality projects, by their very nature, ensure a long-term usability, flexibility and adaptiveness to future needs. Adaptive re-use contributes, therefore, to the building of more resilient and sustainable cities and the application of circular economy principles in the built environment.

- **Economic aspects:** the re-use of our built heritage can contribute to increasing the attractiveness of areas. On the one hand, quality architecture is a major factor of place branding, generating jobs and growth, notably in the tourism sector. On the other hand, new functions generate new users and situate territories in new economic networks. Re-used heritage sites cease to be isolated places and can act as catalysts within a broader context.

FOR SMART AND QUALITY-BASED PROCESSES

Adaptive re-use projects bring about specific challenges throughout their life-cycle. Processes that favour and ensure flexibility, participatory approaches, innovation, quality-based procurement, multidisciplinary teams, financial viability and good story-telling can contribute to successful projects in the long term.

- **Flexibility with respect to regulatory framework and standards:** the upgrading of our built heritage to current standards in terms of accessibility, safety and energy efficiency raises numerous challenges. If applied in a strict manner, planning and building regulations may prevent creative solutions from emerging and undermine the quality of projects. Flexibility needs to be engrained in planning and local government bodies.

- **Participation of citizens:** which heritage sites should be preserved, demolished or re-used has to be discussed in a democratic and participative way. Consulting citizens is a good way of gaining support for financial investment and ensuring that a project will match the needs of the local population. Such debates boost social interaction and society's responsibility for local cultural heritage.

- **Temporary uses** of unoccupied spaces can be an excellent way of testing possible future uses, involving citizens and raising awareness of buildings' values. Additionally, temporary uses can contribute to maintaining the building in a good condition. Adaptive re-use interventions, especially if they are temporary, should be reversible, as far as possible, in order to make possible future re-uses or a return to the original condition of the building.

- **Active responsibility of the competent public authorities:** The process of continuous analysis, selection and legal protection of listed buildings requires active attention from the competent public authorities, so that ambitions for adaptive re-use can be tested against the requirements arising from the legally protected status of heritage and integrated in a responsible manner.

- **Quality-based procurement:** project selection procedures must be clearly focused on quality with the application of the most economically advantageous tender for awarding contracts. Architectural Design Contests are the best way of commissioning architectural services.

- **Multidisciplinary teams & collaborative approaches:** responsibility for re-imagining our built heritage is shared by many stakeholders. Multidisciplinary teams are needed, working in a collaborative manner from the very beginning of the project, in order to discuss technical, economical and legal possibilities and resolve possible contradictory interests.

- **Financial viability:** to enable a re-use in the long-term, it is crucial to ensure that the preservation of heritage values is compatible with the economic requirements of the project (renovation, exploitation and maintenance of the building).

- **Good story-telling,** using all opportunities offered by digital technologies, is key to conveying the history of the place and enhancing its heritage value.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The dialogue between past, present and future is an obvious characteristic of re-use projects. The architectural project makes things tangible and concrete and constitutes the right moment for bringing the various possibilities into debate.

- **A reflexive dialogue between past, present and future** should allow for mediation and striking a balance between heritage elements and new interventions that relate intelligently to future uses, through a sensible and meaningful weighing of interests.

- **Multi-scale and territorial approach:** heritage sites should be understood in their wider, surrounding context (district and city) in order to fully consider their integration into their urban environment and natural landscape, while responding to access and mobility challenges. By opening to the surrounding context, heritage sites can create new dynamics and thereby contribute to the regeneration of the urban fabric.

- **Case-by-case and knowledge-based approach:** various stakeholders bring multiple issues and possibilities to each project, so that standardised approaches and “one-size-fits-all” solutions are impossible. On the contrary, re-use projects require bespoke architectural solutions, based on a careful assessment of the specific nature of the existing building, using proper methodologies based on an holistic and integrated view of cultural heritage. An in-depth and thorough understanding of the building and its historic ‘place’ is a prerequisite to exploring possible changes within a given building and making proposals for new forms associated with it.

The adaptive re-use of our built heritage brings multiple benefits to individuals and society, for present and future generations. Yet, it can still be regarded as being an unviable option, while planning and building regulations may prevent the development of re-use projects. It is essential to sensitise all stakeholders – local and regional public authorities, the financial sector, owners and heritage professionals - to the benefits and challenges inherent to such projects, and to foster peer-learning across Europe, as many good practices and solutions already exist.

Adaptive re-use requires the adoption of a ‘living’ attitude vis-à-vis our built environment; an attitude that considers our built heritage as a man-made landscape that can be re-worked and re-modeled when necessary, starting out from the social, cultural, environmental and economic needs of our time. In so doing, our built heritage can be integrated in a meaningful and creative way into contemporary society and thereby be conserved in a sustainable way for future generations.

As recalled in the Davos Declaration, “*cultural heritage is a crucial component of high-quality Baukultur*”. The adaptive re-use of our built heritage presents itself as a necessary strategy to meet the challenges expressed in the Davos Declaration and achieve *high-quality Baukultur* in Europe, understood as “*a new, adaptive approach to shaping our built environment (...) that is rooted in culture, builds social cohesion, ensures environmental sustainability, and contributes to the health and well-being of all*”.

This Declaration is supported by:

