

# The Story of Adaptive Reuse in Jakarta's Old Building Under the 'Instagrammable' Era

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## ABSTRACT

Cities are manifestations that record every development and change in society that occurred very rapidly. Even though it keeps changing time by time, it often leaves a corner or area that still kept memories from the past. Sometimes the preservation of old buildings faces several issues that turn them into empty buildings in the middle of the cityscape due to the maintenance cost. Lately, these buildings are seen as potential spaces by the investors to be utilized. This remodeling process is commonly known as adaptive reuse: to revive old buildings by alternating space programs and display features to be a bit different from the original or the previous one. The investors restore the buildings' form and give new features adapted from today's city lifestyle. This process also allows the designers or the owners to curate several new visual looks or styles to the buildings inspired by social media, especially Instagram. Therefore, these buildings would become the new spot in the cities because of their instagrammable looks, a term that represents an attractive or photogenic scene to being posted on Instagram. This paper aims to highlight the adaptive reuse practice in Jakarta and determine how visual trends that bloomed on social media influence investors while redesigning old buildings into restaurants or café. Through the observation method, it can be inferred that the current practices of adaptive reuse in Jakarta are done under the spirit of preservation and driven by economic motives. The owners would remodel their building assets into new looks to invite more crowds, which could earn as much money as possible; one of the approaches is making instagrammable spots.

**Keywords:** *Social media, M Bloc space, Placemaking, Adaptive reuse, Industrial heritage.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An old historic building in the middle of the metropolis city is like a two-edged sword. Although storing memories and nostalgia from a certain period, old buildings often become abandoned structures in the neighborhood and decrease the city's visual. Hence, some treatments are needed to be done to solve it. According to the scopes of works, there are four levels of procedures or approaches that can be done for old or historic buildings [1]. Those are:

1. preservation: the way to maintains the building in the found condition, whether ruinous or not. The ruined state would be preserved to understanding the historical context of the building;

2. restoration: the process of returning the condition into its original state, and this often involves using materials and techniques of the initial period as though it has just been constructed.

3. renovation: the process of renewing and updating a building but not substantially changed.

4. remodeling: the process of alternating the purpose of an existing building. It is also called in other terms, e.g., recycling and conversion [2], retrofitting, rehabilitation, refurbishment [3] or adaptive reuse—a term used widely, especially in the USA.

Remodeling or adaptive reuse is the process of wholeheartedly altering a building into a new item that can be used for a different purpose, but still considering the heritage significance value of buildings [1,4,5]. It is reactivating the old buildings, either unused or abandoned, the new cycle within the terminology of sustainability, both construction, economic value, and environmental aspects [2,6]. These obsolete buildings would be saved from demolition and utilized for new uses [7,8]. This process is consisting of many ways, such as finding alternative forms, functions, circulation, programs, or merely a cosmetic change of an original building that already exists.

Brooker and Stone analogize adaptive reuse as the rereading process: rereading buildings to look for other possibilities, e.g., function, purpose, forms, yet still maintaining their historical values [9]. The rereading method refers to Rodolfo Machado's opinion [10], who used the term palimpsest to explain the overwriting process story while reusing a building. According to Machado, remodeling is a process of balancing between the past the future. The past would provide the 'marked' canvas, and the building itself would be remodeled, reused, rethought, and inspires the subsequent design through remodeling or adaptive reuse process. By considering the existing conditions, the designers could decide which part of the building should be maintained, transformed, even refused [1].

Adaptive reuse is one of the design approaches that blooms within the last decade [5,9]. It provides more economic value in saving the cost, energy, and resources rather than build a new building by demolishing the old [1,2,11]. Adaptive reuse could also earn another economic value for the owner of buildings by fulfilling the demand or serving the market needs and optimizing building assets' commercial performance. The decision-making process of adaptive reuse was fundamentally driven by a "desire for short-term profits [5], influenced by three components:

1. Capital investments. The building needs to possess commercial performance to provide premium prices and rents determined by its finishing, esthetic appearance, operational costs, and employee productivity.
2. Asset condition. Not every building can qualify for being remodeled for an economic profit. The building condition and its opportunity should be considered before deciding the project.
3. Regulation. Government and other agencies in the city usually regulate the old and heritage building through law and articles. This situation could be a barrier or trigger for the owner and designers to innovate within the buildings.

Adaptive reuse could be an approach for the owners, designers, or architects to deal with old buildings that need to be redefined. Yau Ch'ng referred to John Warren et al. to emphasize that adaptive reuse was instead a design method of reusing buildings from the past for new use by taking portions of the existing building with historical characters, rather than a particular effort to replicate and renovate old buildings [12]. Plevoets & Cleempoel [13] explain that adaptive reuse strategy shows a high complexity of practice. It can be separated into a specific field that involves architecture, interior design, planning, engineering, and conservation. The practice of reusing building itself is not a new thing. It has been going on for a long time, even since time immemorial, and human reusing their caves [13,14].

Thus, it is suggested that the owner and designers should do some feasibility studies and considering the location, function or use, operational and commercial performance before practicing adaptive so that the owner could maximize the profit from their built assets [3,15,16]. The most successful adaptive reuse projects the best respect and retain the building's heritage significance and add the new layer that provides value for the future. By the in-depth design process, the project would provide some benefits in four aspects, including environmental, social, economic, and promoting innovation for architects and designers [4].

### ***1.1 The aspects of adaptive reuse***

The adaptive reuse process involves a dialogue of the old and new features: harmony vs. contrast, traditional vs. sophisticated, et cetera. The most important thing from the adaptive reuse project treatment is the old and new relationship that requires knowledge of buildings, utilities, code requirements, and financial implications [1,2] In their book, Brooker & Stone [1] introduced a method for understanding the old building that would guide the designers while doing an adaptive reuse project—and also could be a tool for evaluating and reinterpret the projects that have been revitalized. It consists of three aspects: Analysis, Strategy, and Tactics.

Analysis is an initial process of adaptive reuse to understand the building's original conditions. The analysis itself divided into four aspects, there are (i) form and structure, to explain how the building stands up, the order and proportions, et cetera; (ii) historical and functional, to tell the past stories of the building chronologically; (iii) context and environment, to analyze the relation of building and its surrounding; and (iv) proposed function, a new program or scheme that would be implemented there.

After analyzing the building's based form, the next aspect that must be passed is Strategy, an approach that has been chosen for the project based on the analysis result. Brooke & Stone [1] dissect the adaptive reuse strategy into three different categories based on the degree of action taken:

1. Intervention is a process of modification that makes the new and old elements intertwined and merged into one. The main character of intervention is the permanent treatment, so the elements that have been interrupted by the architect cannot be returned. If we take out the new features from the building, it could be damaging the existing or the original one.
2. The nature of the insertion strategy is attaching an element to the building. In contrast to intervention, the elements installed on this strategy are more impermanent and could be disassembled anytime. The insertion has another characteristic: the module or components to be

attached have a precise dimension and perfectly fit the building's specific part.

3. Installation. Compared to the other two categories, installation is the addition of the least permanent or temporary elements. The installation strategy also usually not specific to the size and position where the object will be attached, such as an art installation exhibition that can be easily removed and dismantled without physically injuring the original building.

The adaptive reuse process' latest aspect is Tactics, how to materialize the chosen strategy. There are six different categories of tactics introduced by the writers: (i) planes, including space and barrier arrangements; (ii) object, any elements that are placed in the space; (iii) light, both natural and artificial; (iv) surface, the experience of materiality; (v) movement, human circulation in the space; and (vi) opening, explaining the physical and visual relationship or connection between the place and things. Hence, we could summarise the Brooke & Stone's adaptive reuse method, as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1** The aspects of the adaptive reuse. Source: [1]

1. Analysis	2. Strategy	3. Tactics
- Form and structure	- Intervention	- Planes
- Historical and functional	- Insertion	- Object
- Context and environment	- Installation	- Light
- Proposed function		- Surface
		- Movement
		- Opening

**1.2 Adaptive reuse practice in terms of investments and 'instagrammable' trends**

To fulfill the economic goals, the owners (and the designers) have to meet the pupils' needs when redesigning their built assets through the adaptive reuse method. The proposed program or functions have to be suitable for the social context, especially citizens who lived in a city with high mobility and connected digitally—and the best ways to see trends in society is through social media platforms.

Social media is a modern-day phenomenon that has transformed individuals' interaction throughout the world and becomes a daily practice in some user's lives [17]. Through social media, an individual could share ideas, activities, also preferences to their mutual even to the

stranger on the internet. One of the most popular social media platforms is Instagram, a photo and video-sharing social networking service that focuses on capturing and sharing visuals, pictures, and short videos.

Have been launched in 2010, Instagram reached more than one billion global users as of April 2020 [18]. The countries with the most Instagram user come from the United States (120 million), India (88 million), Brazil (82 million), and Indonesia (62 million). Those statistics show the significant number of the platform's users and indicate that the social media platform impacts many aspects of human life and how to communicate. The users would run as the society of the spectacle: they communicate by share their best photos with exciting captions to earn likes and comments on their profiles or to see and to be seen [19,20]. Later, Instagram is turning becomes a part of the lifestyle of current society.

Instagram phenomena are more than personal representation, but image reinvention of self, using "filters" tools by which a personal image is modified and manipulated in such a way that it reveals different and augmented perceptions on one's identity. Not only self, but the practice of Instagram image-making also resulted in the city being imagined differently by different participants and, in the end, produce an augmented image of places. No novel representations may be produced, but rather existing images of visuals choreographed according to Instagram's conditions as medium and characters as expected – branding [21].

The indication that proves Instagram's popularity in society is the born of the term instagrammable. According to Oxford's Lexico, instagrammable is an adjective that visually appeals suitably for being photographed for posting on the social media application Instagram [22]. Moreover, other online dictionaries also suggest the other meaning of instagrammable, e.g., made to be photographed and posted on social media, photogenic, visually attractive or interesting [23], and worthy of being posted on Instagram [24]. This term refers to the excellent quality of photos and editing, including the objects, lightings, poses, and places' backgrounds.

Directly, the term of instagrammable itself also interfering with the built environments. Through the article on Archdaily—the most well-known architecture sites Valé Architects suggests that some design features might be inherently more instagrammable than others [25]. Those are (1) views of natural elements or surroundings, (2) signage and lights, (3) pools, and (4) wall or floor paint murals. A reciprocal process from the internet users who published it on Instagram would shape the visual perception and make a visual preference or trends in society. This instagrammable experience would play a huge role in marketing and business because it will determine place preferences to visit, stay, buy, or rent in the modern age [26].

Building alteration or adaptive reuse is the mediation between preservation or demolition [27]. The practice of adaptive reuse could be an investment to provide premium prices and rent of buildings. Through a good finishing and aesthetic appearance (or instagrammable looks), the owner focuses on emerging the old building's function and sustainability and increasing its commercial value, which is suited to the urban society's lifestyle. Therefore, being instagrammable means a condition where a place or subject could also recreate its personality and spatial representations without violating its essential personal value and objectiveness. Furthermore, the creative nature of humans makes self-reinventing a common tradition.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study involves a qualitative analysis using field observation based on Brooker & Stone's adaptive reuse [1]. The observation took place in the "M BLOC Space," one of the new public places in South Jakarta that applying the adaptive reuse method. Secondary sources, e.g., news, articles, designers' video interviews, also were collected as the background of the project and the basis of analysis. It would also be analyzed how far the adaptive reuse process could accommodate economic motives through the visual strategy and fulfill the needs of Instagram contents for the visitor. To enrich the analysis, the author also comparing other adaptive reuse cases in other places in Indonesia.

## 3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

At the end of September 2019, a new creative space was opened in South Jakarta called M BLOC Space. This place occupied a 6,500 square-meter plot of land hosted Peruri's banknote printing building and 1950's-look employee housing that was already vacant for several years. Through Brooker & Stone's method [1], this paper would explain the adaptive reuse that has been done in M BLOC Space.

### 3.1 Aspect of analysis

In collaboration with PT Ruang Riang Millennial and the Arkadia Architects Bureau, Peruri transformed its

property assets into a creative hub. It provides programs suitable for urban youth lifestyle, e.g., discussing and spending time with relatives by enjoying coffee, culinary, and musical accompaniment.

Initially, the area itself was the official residence of Peruri. It was redesigned into coffee shops, restaurants, 17 tenants of small and medium enterprises, and an open amphitheater for discussion or music performance. The tenants who are permitted to do business there have been curated strictly by the management, fitting with the concept of M BLOC Space, which wants to bring back the old-fashioned looks of the Kebayoran Baru—a district in which M BLOC Space is located.

Kebayoran Baru district is one of Jakarta 1950's suburban which famous for the Jengki style—a post-war modernist architecture style of Indonesia's houses with a titled eccentric façade. This place is located right next to the Blok M Jakarta Central Terminal and passed by the MRT line. With easy access to public transportation, M BLOC Space becomes a hangout for youth every night. Moreover, this creative space could be visited by up to 1,000 to 1,500 people on weekends.

### 3.2 Aspect of strategy

Besides altered the function, these former official residences were also changed in the façade. They demolished the fences and some walls and merged the house's garages into the luminous main entrance. They turn the backyards into a performance stage and permanent amphitheater, also add old-fashioned signage and modify the columns to emphasize the Jengki style's characteristics.

Based on the treatments, the M BLOC Space method is the intervention strategy, an adaptive reuse strategy that cannot be returned to the initial conditions. Although significant changes in appearance and function, we still recognize its original design through the shape of gable roofs, stone walls, and crossed window trellis that bring back the memory of the building and district. Simultaneously, they were also using installation strategy in the front area (contemporary sculpture) and light bulb installation in the backyards (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 The strategy of M BLOC' adaptive reuse (Brown: Intervention, Green: Installation).



Figure 2 Six points of tactics of M BLOC' adaptive reuse.

### 3.3 Aspects of tactics and Instagrammable spots

Brooker and Stone [1] suggest that six points of tactics can be made in adaptive reuse projects, and M BLOC Space meets all of these aspects. The designers destroyed the garage into the main entrance so that the visitors could move to the backyard freely. The ex-garages were designed as a lobby with a praying room or musala. They were using raw hollow bricks to distinguish from the origins, and the wall washed the partition with the lighting systems to make it the focal point.

They also split the houses into several lots to be rent, and the tenants were given the freedom to design their interior space but the storefront. All tenants must preserve the glass windows; then, they can only paint the doors with colorful looks and decorate their store with any furniture, signages, and vegetation. Moreover, the management also highlighted every single area with the luminous lights, e.g., in the veranda, backyards, also the main signage inspired by the fonts of the billboard of Broadway, NY. The summary of tactics could be seen in Figure 2.

The adaptive reuse process that was carried out in M BLOC Space might become a kind of cataloging style that consists of some vintage-looks combined, following the place's design scheme. Despite having a similar type and size, each tenant who rents in M BLOC Space has a

different way to manage their own space. With the transparent glass on the front side, store themes' uniqueness could turn into an exciting sight if viewed from the outside. Hence, all of the store design would be inviting for the visitors. However, the vintage look that appears in this place is not all authentic from the architectural features of original buildings, e.g., signage and skewed columns in M BLOC Space's main entrance.

The designers (and the owner) producing the tactics made some of the spots become visual trademarks for the M BLOC Space. According to the observation, there are six spots of M BLOC Space that have been photogenic areas. There are (i) pedestrian zone in front of the stores, (ii) wandelgang or backyards, (iii) mural zones, (iv) Oeang Restaurant, (v) amphitheater, and (vi) entrance lobby—where the brick partition placed. Spot mapping could be seen in Figure 3.

These visual displays come are not without reason. As a creative space, investors or owners process the spaces as hangout places and photogenic backdrops for visitors. Play of colors, signage, murals, sparkling lights, and tropical plants makes M BLOC Space an instagrammable place, as stated by Valé Architects [25]. It is confirmed by the large number of visitors who take pictures and carry professional cameras. It is a reciprocal process: the investors use social media for benchmark in visual cataloging, people flocking in those spots, then visitors

will upload their photos to social media. Later, it will spread visual trends and will manifest in a term called *instagrammable*: objects or pictures that look photogenic and can bring many impressions (in the form of the like button) if uploaded to Instagram. The more photogenic the place is provided, the more crowded the visitors and their money.

From the M BLOC Space, we could learn that there is a shifting of value in the practice of conserving an old building. The conservation in the present time is also pushed by economic aspects or for seeking profit. To attract people to visit their place, the asset owners have taken various efforts such as providing space influenced by urban pop culture and adjusting the design with the lifestyles of youth who like to find a comfortable and

artistic place for socializing. Therefore, the idle built assets are reused as the public place to gain money without eliminating its originality. We also found the same phenomenon in such big colonial cities in Indonesia, both in Jakarta and other cities such as Bandung and Semarang. Old buildings used as office space before are now transformed into cafes, coffee shops, or restaurants—of course, with *instagrammable* looks, through adaptive reuse: intervention, installation, insertion (Figure 4). Hence, the investors could take advantage of money-making by "selling" the atmosphere of vintage or ambiance, which increase the price of their products.



**Figure 3** Six photogenic spots in M BLOC Space, according to the field survey and the tagged posts of @mblocspace on Instagram.



**Figure 4** Adaptive reuse practice in big colonial cities in Indonesia: (left: Historia Food & Bar Jakarta, center: Didago Café Bandung, and Spiegel Bar & Bistro Semarang).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Adaptive reuse is a creative approach to conserving the old buildings, which revives the place's soul. The prevention is not invoking the past -on the contrary – trying to design new objects but using architectural elements of the past. It offers the designers an opportunity to explore the new function, ambiance, and materiality of the buildings—by concerning the context. The architectural design of adaptive reuse would be contributing to the creative culture of the city. Through the ideological tool named social media, the people would appreciate the new ambiance in the old buildings

by uploading *instagrammable* scenes and spread them to their profile. Thus, it would make a reciprocal process for the creative culture of society.

The story of adaptive reuse in M BLOC Space told us about the past ambiance, carried out through the design and felt by contemporary society and became part of the present times. We would see that M BLOC Space's case would represent a case where nonetheless, it revokes nostalgic feeling it is never the same old buildings. In our view, historicism and historical characters are here posited not as the goal of designs in the contemporary context, and a design is not a copy of the former one. Instead, it is an inspiration for generating new

architecture on the site. The motif is somewhat representational and spatial than preservations. Some elements of designs are even paradoxical and alien to the authentic one. Therefore as a design method, the architect holds the authority to a certain limit of freedom to juxtapose past designs to present ones to create attractive, functional spaces.

There are no exact prescriptions about how adaptive reuse is put into practice, except that the heritage essence is not disrupted. The concept of adaptive reuse and Instagram-ability contains a fundamental commonality in which both have pretensions to produce new images—which is not a copy but can revoke new ideas at their observer's viewpoint. They are not meant as memorabilia – about the past or old buildings or authentic self. They are meaningful because they are celebrated. Walter Benjamin's idea about "Aura" may help contextualize the old buildings' historical characters in contemporary architectural representations and reinvent themselves in an expected image.

However, we found that adaptive reuse practice is beyond an approach in conserving buildings. It is also a dialectical scenario that could connect the reuse and commercialization of unused space in this contemporary era. It conserves the historical aspects of building and compromising the economic motives behind that cannot be denied. Instagrammable aspects are at least the aspects that confirm its new state of the art. Finally, the building could refresh themselves to keep relevant to the current society that intensely depends on the digitalization lifestyle, mainly on social media platforms.

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