

SOCIOCULTURAL IMPACTS OF IMMEDIACY-DRIVEN RENOVATION AND AN EXPERIENTIALLY GROUNDED RENOVATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE

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Architecture is never static; it can embody layered meanings and memory that evolve with time, context and users. As cities are growing and the buildable land is decreasing, architecture faces the challenge of intervening pre-existing buildings. A current trend in architectural renovation reflects an immediatism approach, where the emphasis is placed on the building as a product and its visual appealing and media-oriented design. While renovation has economic and environmental implications, this paper focuses on its sociocultural impacts, as it directly influences inhabitants' quality of life and their sense of belonging. The aim of this study is to determine how an Immediacy-Driven Renovation can generate negative social impacts, and how theoretical frameworks support an Experimentally Grounded Renovation as a meaningful alternative. Drawing on theories from authors like Rem Koolhaas, Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa and Floris Alkemade, this study analyzes the influence of renovation addressed from an experiential understanding of architecture. The result of the study is the development of a pedagogic and methodological tool for analyzing future renovation cases. The expected outcome are two tables: 'Immediate and Experiential Renovation Approaches' and 'Matrix of Renovation Throughout Project Phases', both summarize the factors that characterized each of the approaches, enabling the identification of the experiential and cultural impacts of renovation on society.

Keywords: Reconstruction consequences, Comparative evaluation, Methodological tool, Re-signification.

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The accelerating densification of cities and the decline of available buildable land contribute to the necessity of repurposing existing buildings. Conversely, “when some regions of the world are facing declining populations and vacant buildings” (Alkemade *et al.* 2020), there is an equally urgent need for renovation. As the need becomes increasingly evident, many architects are engaging with this field, approaching renovation either from an immediatist mindset focused on rapid economic returns and “fleeting images” (Saunders 2005), or through an approach that emphasizes the spatial experience and the sense of belonging of the users (Pallasmaa 2008). Grounded in a theoretical framework, this paper seeks to discern the consequences associated with Immediacy-Driven Renovation —such as rapid consumption, lack of identity, ephemeral trends and homogenous tectonic language— as well as alternative approaches, such as Experimentally Grounded Renovation, which encompass user participation and appropriation, recognition of contextual hidden values, resignification, and tectonics grounded by experience. As a

methodological tool, these parameters form the basis that provide an analytical framework to study cases of renewal and its project phases, with the aim of reveal possible impacts it the identity, cultural and tectonic dimensions.

Through a theoretical framework, four main factors, such as temporality, identity, edition and materiality, will be analyzed. These factors will then be synthetized in Table 1 to facilitate qualitative evaluations of renewal cases. Table 2 will extend these reflections across the different phases of an architectural renewal project.

2 CULTURE OF IMMEDIACY

The culture of immediacy promotes rapid consumption and short-term experiences even in the places we inhabit. We “need always to work faster, move faster, think faster and live faster. We mostly accept this ‘social acceleration’ and we mostly try to keep up with the pace of life.” (Hassan 2009). This speed is also influencing in how architecture is conceived and the purposes it is meant to serve. Many renovations follow an economy of speed logic, in which we become “caught up in a race against time. The speed-imperatives of efficiency and flexibility shape how we produce, consume and distribute commodities” (Hassan 2009), often leaving apart design practices that promote meaningful encounters with space.

Contrary to the ‘social acceleration’, Holl *et al.* (2006) argues that “all experience in architecture implies the acts of recollecting, remembering and comparing. An embodied memory has an essential role as the basis of remembering a space or a place.”. Furthermore, he states that “architectural experiences consist in approaching or confronting a building rather than just admiring the façade.”. From these two perspectives, this study encourages a reflective thinking about how architects are approaching renovation and if speed and economic gains take precedence over the experience of inhabiting a space.

3 FLEETING IMAGES VS. EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

A notable symptom of ‘social acceleration’ is the consumption of fleeting images. According to Pallasmaa (2008), architecture “has turned into instant persuasion within image products detached from existential depth and sincerity, instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience.”. Similarly, Saunders (2005), argues that “the new architecture may have its discontents, but this new architecture, this *architainment* of fleeting images and flashing screens, is out there, on offer in a NASDAQ of its own.”. In the same vein, Holl *et al.* (2006) observes that “architecture of our time is turning into the retinal art of the eye; instead of experiencing our being in the world, we behold it from outside as spectators of images projected on the surface of the retina.”. This raises the question of whether what we architects are offering meets the needs of society—an architecture that is responsible toward with environment, context and its inhabitants—or if instead we are “creating mere objects of visual seduction” (Pallasmaa 2008), and rapid consumption. Beyond this ‘visual seduction’, “architecture relates, mediates and projects meanings” (Pallasmaa 2008). Additionally, a “building is not an end to itself; it frames, articulates, restructures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits” (Holl *et al.* 2006). Thus, an experiential understanding of architecture evokes an appreciation of space, materiality, pace of time, rather than offering a glimpse of the surface of an object.

4 IMMEDIACY-DRIVEN RENOVATION

When approaching renovation, multiple layers of memory and meaning are inherently embedded within buildings. The manner in which architects address renovation determines whether the space

is re-signified and reprogrammed or whether it becomes a product of rapid consumption, standardized and ephemeral. The following section outlines some key factors that characterize an Immediacy-driven Renovation.

Rapid consumption: When buildings are meant to be spaces of rapid consumption—and therefore rapid reconstruction—multiple layers of memory and meaning may be ignored. The accelerated temporality of consumption and the absence of memory and identity fosters short-term experiences, ones lacking of emotional attachment to the site. Without an affective bond to the site, appropriation fades and collective memory vanished. Spaces may be perpetually renewed because, as Saunders (2005) observes, “we designers are not really producing what people need; we are producing what they want. Our economy is based on creating those wants.”. Such an approach reflects design strategies that intentionally evoke an architecture for fleeting encounters rather than one that fosters appropriation or reflection.

Lack of identity: Globalized and standardized architecture—generally driven by a rapid consumption—risks becoming generic or mere replicas of the aesthetics of other places. By replicating this aesthetics, a site loses its own character and expression, and therefore its identity—an identity that also depends on, and engages with, the users who will inhabit the space. As Saunders (2005) perceives, “mass culture has become a synonym for global culture, because the tidal wave of mass taste has already engulfed the farthest shores of a world woven by the warp and woof of the instantaneous net that blurs identity”. When renovation is driven by immediacy and generic aesthetics rather than by an effort to reveal the unseen values of an existing place, refurbishment ultimately turns into decoration—or into an architecture that “can be flamboyant yet unmemorable, like a screen saver; its refusal to freeze ensures instant amnesia” (Chung *et al.* 2001). In this way, it becomes a space that is easily forgotten, one that fails to promote appropriation and ultimately loses its identity.

Ephemeral trends and flux: Every renovation brings the opportunity to edit a space in order to re-signify it. However, when a space is conceived with a borrowed identity rather than one with its own character, it risk becoming part of an acquired culture or fleeting trend. This condition, according to Chung *et al.* (2001), produces an architecture that can even embody opposite conditions simultaneously: old and new, permanent and temporary, flourishing and at risk. It becomes an architecture without a plan—one that simply happens. Indeed, one in which the “successive transformations mock the word “plan”. The plan is a radar screen where individual pulses survive for unpredictable periods of time in a Bacchanalian free-for-all” (Chung *et al.* 2001). Immediacy-driven renovation depicts “the idea of how rebuilding on the spot has gained currency” (Chung *et al.* 2001), and how architecture “like a reptile, sheds skins, and is reborn every Monday morning” (Chung *et al.* 2001). The speed of renovation can be sometime so intense that, as Chung *et al.* (2001) notes, even users become witnesses and reluctant participants in the process—restoration no longer takes place in their absence.

Homogeneous tectonic language: Within a renovation shaped by immediacy, the temporality of materials is closely tied with trends, not with user’s experience anymore. In the same way, “the spread of superficial architectural imagery today lacks of tectonic logic and a sense of materiality and empathy” (Pallasmaa 2008). Even the pace of time is avoided, “materials of today present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying anything of their material essence or age” (Holl *et al.* 2006). According to Chung *et al.* (2001), materialization is becoming provisional and construction has become like tailoring, “detailing is now a transient coupling, waiting to be undone, unscrewed, a temporary embrace with a high probability of separation; no longer the orchestrated encounter of difference, but the abrupt end of a system”. Standardization is increasingly manifested in the tectonics of a building, as materials have become more modular, unitary and homogenized

rather than unique, irregular and singular. This homogenization in architecture may risk the identity, the imagination and the experience of a place.

5 EXPERIENTIALLY GROUNDED RENOVATION

Understanding architectural renovation involves more than material, economic or spatial factors; it also requires an experiential comprehension of space and the sense of belonging. While the previous section examined factors related to immediacy, the following section outlines the key elements that define an Experientially grounded Renovation, including user's appropriation, contextual hidden values and re-signification.

Participation / appropriation: Renovation brings the opportunity to edit a place and to tailor it to the changing needs of its users, while, as Alkemade *et al.* (2020) notes, writing a richer story by listening to the various voices involved in the design process. “When architects, together with users, develop the ability to see and use the same thing differently, they can find beauty and purpose in underutilized, ignored, and abandoned spaces. Redefining a building and redefining architecture itself, not from the outside in but from the inside out” (Alkemade *et al.* 2020). Approaching design from the inside out may foster the emergence of situations and narratives. “In shaping these narratives architecture can also be deployed as a language for giving users the space to achieve ownership of places. When these narratives are layered and different people feel represented in them, architecture can bring together people of various backgrounds” (Mackic 2018). In this way, architecture becomes an articulator of the wide-ranging needs and perspectives of its users.

Contextual hidden values: Contrary to seeking a standardized architecture, attending to the hidden values of an already existing place, can serve as the starting point of a renovation. As Alkemade *et al.* (2020) mention, “one can also eliminate in a much more subtle way by revealing unseen values, like lifting a rock to expose a hidden world.” In the same vein, Taillieu (2018) observes that “it is rather like revealing of what was already there, but was not seen before. Or as a conscious act to reunite what had been separated”. This approach is about discovering the characteristics that are unique and singular in the buildings, and, “instead of going against them or denying them, existing qualities should be engaged in a new setup as driving forces for the new project” (Alkemade *et al.* 2020). For that purpose, time and reflection are essential, as a standardized approach may blur those values and leave them unseen.

Resignification: Projecting buildings as the final product can result as a limited conception of a changing future, in which, “spaces remain in constant flux, while their uses are generally not specifically prescribed by the new occupants” (Boer 2018). Additionally, Alkemade *et al.* (2020) refers to an evolutionary process in which buildings outlive their designers and are constantly adapted, departing from the original design. Buildings are not static; they meant to be edited, reprogrammed, and repurposed in response to shifting needs over the time. Whiting this constant flux, renovation can either add value to the existing space, allowing its character to flourish—or deny pre-existing conditions and impose a borrowed identity.

Tectonics grounded in experience: Homogenization in the tectonics of architecture may limit the experience and may hide the history of a place. As Holl *et al.* (2006) observes, “natural materials express its age and history as well as the tale of its birth and human use.” He also states that “architectural experience is grounded in the tectonic language of building and the comprehensibility of the act of construction to the senses. We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence and the experiential world is organized and articulated around the center of the body”. Inhabiting a place involves a corporal experience where materials can awake memories and the sense of belonging. Embracing the singularities of materials is essential, as it encourages to use the senses and to form a bond with the space. “Deep shadows and

darkness are essential, because they dim the sharpness of vision and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy” (Holl *et al.* 2006).

6 RESULTS

Table 1 display the factors that characterized Immediacy-Driven Renovation and Experientially Grounded Renovation approaches according to a theoretical frame described in the text above. This table reveals contrasting positions within architectural practice, reflecting distinct ways in which architects, users, and constructors may find out the best alternatives to approach renovation according to the requirements of each project. As a pedagogical tool, this table can help students to analyze case studies, identify the sociocultural consequences of Immediacy-Driven Renovation, and critically reflect on inhabitants and their spatial experiences. Within public initiatives, it can be used to preserve built and intangible heritage, ensuring that reconstruction efforts align with cultural and contextual values. In private renovation processes, the table can guide users to be part of decisions related with personal experience, memory and sense of belonging.

Table 1. Immediate and experiential renovation approaches.

IMMEDIACY-DRIVEN RENOVATION		EXPERIENTIALLY-GROUNDED RENOVATION	
Rapid consumption	• Buildings as final products • Rapid reconstruction • Absence of memory and identity • Absence of emotional attachment to the site • Fleeting encounters architecture	temporality	Participation / appropriation • Buildings as layered narratives • Various voices involved in the process • Emergence of situations and narratives • Space to achieve ownership of places • Architecture as articulator of needs and users
Lack of identity	• Globalized and standardized architecture • Generic / aesthetics replicas • Lack of own character and expression • Refurbishment / decoration • Flamboyant yet unmemorable	identity	Contextual hidden values • Unseen values revealed • Reunite what had been separated • Unique and singular characteristics • Existing qualities as driving forces • Time for reflection
Ephemeral trends / flux	• Borrowed identity • Acquired culture or fleeting trends • Successive transformations • Rebuilding on the spot	edition	Resignification • Identity development • Reprogrammed to meet changing needs • Evolving through adaptive reuse • Add value to the existing space
Homogeneous tectonic language	• Materials closely tied to trends • Superficial architectural imagery • Materials with unyielding surfaces • Transient detailing • Modular, unitary, homogenized	materiality	Tectonics grounded in experience • Materials express its age and history • Memory and sense of belonging • Materials and corporal experience • Detailing as a complex system • Singular, irregular, unique

While Table 1 serves as an initial tool to identify the potential approach a renovation project may adopt, Table 2 expands the scope of analysis allowing a comparative evaluation throughout the different phases of the architectural renovation process. This table confronts an immediate and experiential approach during each phase of a project’s execution, allowing for the analysis of their potential impacts on both users and the space. Before starting a project, Table 2 can be used to evaluate the relevance of existing elements of a building, supporting informed decisions before moving into the design stage. During the design process, this table serves as a critical tool to evaluate if the strategies are responding to identified problematics, rather than personal preferences of the designer. In the construction stage, this table fosters users and designers to evaluate if construction systems are accurate to the project concept. The final outcome is a post-evaluation which can determine a long-term impact of the design and construction decisions, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. The results can define the parameters to perform future renovation interventions.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to create a methodological tool to prevent homogenization upon cities and the places we inhabit and rather promote a renovation that highlights the uniqueness and singularities

of places. Both tables intend to serve as a tool of empowerment and appropriation for users who are going through a renovation process. As they are the main protagonist that will experience and bond with the site, informed knowledge of the decisions made regarding the project must be agreed upon. The tables invite architects, engineers and students to establish critical thinking and ethical responsibility towards renovation by reflecting about the possible impact on the context, its identity, and memory. Ultimately, this study represents the first phase of an analysis of the impacts of Immediacy-Driven Renovation. While sociocultural aspects are defined and synthesized in this paper, economic and environmental implications will be addressed in a second phase. A third phase is subsequently proposed, focusing on the application of the tables in the analysis of case studies.

Table 2. Comparative matrix of renovation throughout project phases.

	DIAGNOSIS Detect prevailing logic		DESIGN Guide concept		CONSTRUCTION materials decision making		POST-EVALUATION Final outcome	
	Immediacy	Experiential	Immediacy	Experiential	Immediacy	Experiential	Immediacy (No)	Experiential (Yes)
temporality	Determine if the building was designed as a final product	Verify if the building shows signs of user appropriation	Promote design strategies to conceive ephemeral interventions	Design spaces open to evolution and appropriation	Employ materials with a short lifespan	Build with materials that last long time	Evaluate if the space provides increased flexibility and an invitation for new users Yes () No ()	
identity	Detect if the identity of the building is generic	Detect if the identity of the building is rooted in the context or users	Promote solutions rooted in fast trends or superficial refurbishment	Use design strategies that foster unique features: context, materials, symbolic character	Use of materials due to aesthetics reasons	Use of materials due to its cultural and symbolic meaning	Check if the space has been redefined and the identity has been reinforced Yes () No ()	
edition	Analyze if the building has undergone successive renovations	Analyze whether the building is in an evolutionary process	Apply strategies that promote rapid substitution	Implement re-signification, reuse and adaptation strategies	Adapt the building with decorative updates. Deny the pre-existing systems	Restore the building with construction systems that adapts to the existing	Asses if the renovation promotes the possibility of infusing a new register of meaning into the reassembly Yes () No ()	
materiality	Determine if the materials respond to trends or fleeting images	Trace materials and construction systems with heritage or memory value	Design the detailing as just execution	Consider the craft and detailing as part of the process	Implement generic or decorative solutions	Build with materials that foster senses and express time, use, and place	Evaluate if materials have enhance user's experience with the space Yes () No ()	
Objective: recognize and analyze the current state of the building and the logic that has guided past transformations.			Objective: raise awareness of how design is developed from conceptualization to detailing		Objective: determine if the materialization of an architecture is consistent with context, users and ultimately design intentions		Objective: evaluate the real impact of the renovation on the user experience, memory, identity, and sense of belonging.	

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