

ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING “BANK OF ABYSSINIA” (THE FIRST ETHIOPIAN BANK), PIAZZA, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract. Adaptive Re-Use is a process of re-purposing old historic buildings that have outlived their original purpose or functions while retaining historic features. It is also a way to save neglected buildings that might otherwise be demolished. Adaptive re-use for historic buildings meets a specific need, retain historical value, architectural significance, economical value, and cultural value. Bank of Abyssinia is one of the historic buildings in Ethiopia and is found in Addis Ababa, Arada Sub City, Piazza, Ethiopia. Piazza is one of the places many historical buildings and monuments were found and also the center of Addis Ababa City. The general objective of the study is to re-purposing old historical buildings through adaptive re-use. The study identified how to breathe new life into old historic buildings in order to conserve resources and historic value. The study employs case studies, interviews, photographs, and personal observation. In doing so, the study took one case area which is the Bank of Abyssinia. The case gathered for the study was analyzed qualitatively. The analysis and findings clearly indicate that Adaptive re-use of Bank of Abyssinia to the extent of bringing adopted new sustainable technology.

Keywords: Adaptive reuse, creative reuse, neglected buildings, historic buildings, design, embodied energy.

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1. Introduction & History

While “adaptive reuse” is considered a legitimate historic preservation activity by many historic preservationists, it has not always been a strategy that preservationists, planners, or developers have used as one of the tools in their typical toolboxes. Before adaptive reuse became a preservation-related strategy in the mid-1960s, the main approach to historic preservation was “curatorial”. This was preservation in the strict sense of the word, usually consisting of preserved house museums and villages for patriotic, educational, and cultural reasons (Historic Preservation, 2021). Started as a grassroots movement, historic preservation, now represents the cutting edge in a cultural revolution focused on “green” architecture and sustainability (Tyler *et al.*, 2018). Dealing with historic buildings brings new ideas on design as well as problem-solving technologies (Bock & Hewitt, 2011).

Following the destructive urban renewal practices of the mid- 20th century, preservation became an antidote to the loss of historic infrastructure and community. “The beginnings of adaptive reuse included projects like San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square in 1964 and Boston’s Faneuil Hall in 1976, representing some of the first examples of profit- oriented developments done in conjunction with a desire to retain historic structures. By this point, historic preservation had broadened its horizons to

valuing the ordinary along with the exceptional, while acknowledging the value in a city’s and building’s evolution, rather than just arresting it in time. ‘Adaptive reuse’, therefore, became the response to a building’s loss of utility, trying to blend the mission purposes of historic preservation with the real estate aspects of development. It is important to understand, though, that most of the adaptive reuse activities were (and still are) carried out by developers, *not* by historic preservationists, thus planting the seeds for the conflict to come” (Keifer, 2011).

The more completely historically intact a building remains, the less likely one is to be allowed to make changes and adaptations. Ironically, depending on the building type and the intended use, more historically-intact buildings are frequently those which require more adaptation to allow for functional and financial viability. (Grimmer *et al.*, 2011).

Few people seem willing to defend the general quality of buildings today, compared against the best of our heritage (Mehaffy & Salingaros, 2020). Therefore, when we come to our homeland (Ethiopia), which is among one of the countries that have a great wealth of heritages like historic buildings, monuments, churches, traditional house, landscape and so on, especially our capital Addis Ababa had many historic buildings and monuments (Phillips-Garretson, 1974).

This study employs the case study method, interview, photographs, and personal observation. The case study methods were compared with other forms of research: experimental, survey, archival, analytic, and historical in this study (Yin, 2009). As per the study, these buildings, however, have not been properly preserved. This is because they do not receive adequate attention from local authorities and society, consequently, they lack proper maintenance and attractiveness (Zewdu, 2018). For instance, when we see the case of the old building of the First Bank of Ethiopia which was called Bank of Abyssinia — located in Addis Ababa, Arada Sub City, Piazza — currently it doesn’t perform any functions and has even been closed for a long time. So, it is deserving of special attention through conservation while retaining its historic features through adaptive re-use.

2. Objectives

a) General objective

The general objective of the study is to re-purposing old historic buildings for different uses in order to conserve them through retaining economical, architectural, historic, and cultural values for the benefit of the society and the city.

b) The specific objectives of this study are:

- To retain the characteristics and historic values of the original building.
- To identify the reasons for adaptive re-use for the buildings.
- To show how to use adaptive re-use for the buildings.
- To point out the suitable preservation and preventive maintenance method for the old buildings.

In this way, we intended to show the unique benefits of old historic buildings, leveraging the past to enable a more creative future —rather than neglecting and demolishing them.

3. Current Conditions & Discussions

a) Major findings

One of the major problems encountered in this research was the general fact that all historical documents in Ethiopia focus mainly on the socio-cultural, religious, and political issues while little or nothing is said about the architectural and engineering aspect of building heritages. As I have seen, the old Bank of Abyssinia, from the beginning until the present day, is located at the bottom of a gentle slope. On the front side of the bank is General Wingate Street, which runs between Mahatma Gandhi Street on the north and General Wingate Street on the west. Furthermore, at the back is another old historic building currently used as an office. The original dressed stone masonry wall is still used but some maintenance was made in a damaged part of the building.

The masonry fence extends around four sides of the building with gated openings on the north and the south sides. On the north is a pair of wide, double metal gates, while on the south is another gate inside of the compound at the back of the main building which is used to allow access to another building. At the front, there is a small space to admit vehicles in front of the bank's north entrance. On the north, the gate that served as the original main entrance to the bank runs General Wingate Street.

Inside the compound, there are no plants or trees, as the landscape is not well-treated. Furthermore, there is poor-quality pavement inside the compound. Perhaps worst of all, two existing buildings were demolished inside the compound each of which shared the same age as the old Bank of Abyssinia. They were supporting offices for the bank, and consequently, the whole compound has lost its identity (Fig 3).

The structural walls are built of stone masonry. The exposed masonry wall is well dressed. The central hall, which is about 12 meters high, is made of stone. This central hall has a floor area of 98 square meters. There is a large imposing stairway on the right side of the building which is used as access between the ground basement levels. The entrance of the main gate of the building is unique from the other door which is a double door. All the other smaller rooms are accessed from the central hall (Fig 4). Because of its age, deterioration and cracks are observed in some parts of the internal and external surfaces of the building and the need for conservation is clear (Fig 1).

Economic Value: The site is located in a high land-value area of the Addis Ababa master plan. Though currently, the house is not income-generating to the Kebele Admiration, it is within a very high potential area.

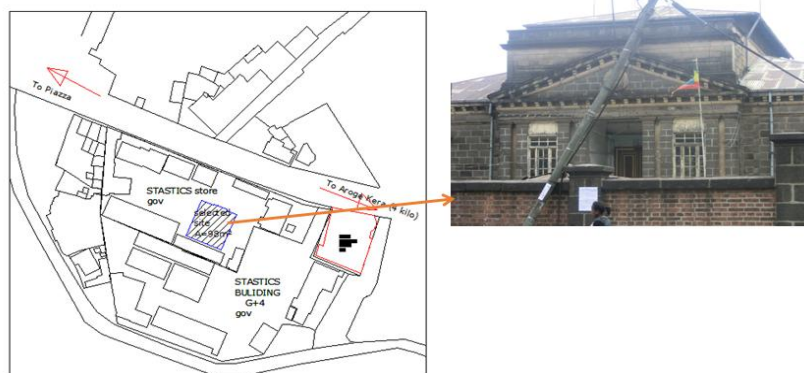


Fig 1. Location map of old Bank of Abyssinia, (source: Author)

Cultural value: The house was used as the first European style bank. Much Ethiopian nobility were serviced there. So, it has great cultural significance.

Identity Value: The rectangular form, the CIS roof, and the masonry wall with traditional mud mortar joints all have a strong Ethiopian Identity. But the interior characterizes a modern European setting. Therefore, the building is unique in combining two extreme cultures in one setting.

Authenticity: The rectangular extensions with a courtyard in the middle have been added to the original rectangular form with a rectangular veranda. The front part of the house still maintains its original form and interior appearance, and with some conservation and repair, it can regain its original significance.

Opportunities: The bank’s location is extremely strategic(Fig 1). Located on a number 1 value land, the property is capable of generating income for the owner, Kebele (Local Authority), and can be reused as a museum and research center. Today’s international heritage organizations promote the preservation and conservation of old historic buildings; we can easily get funding for adaptive reuse.

b) Adaptive re-use and maintenance

(Semmes, 2009) New buildings and additions to old buildings should be harmonious with their neighbors.

Every building requires maintenance, especially buildings whose materials are sensitive to rain, sun, wind, and also the resistance of materials reduced a consequence of weathering and deterioration of chemical reactions. When minor cracks, broken glass (Fig 2), and wear are not regularly maintained, major damage will easily occur and so to alleviate these problems it is important to adhere to the adaptive re-use of old buildings. In addition, when these buildings are neglected or kept closed like the Bank of Abyssinia, they face the same problem. If maintenance, repairs, or adaptive re-use are not carried out properly, we are exceedingly likely to lose all the building characteristics and values.



Fig 2. Some damaged parts of old Bank of Abyssinia (source: Author)



Fig 3. The site of demolished building,
(source: 2017 Author)

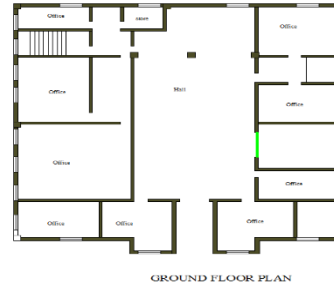


Fig 4. As built ground floor of the bank
(source: Author)

c) Lack of Awareness within a community

The desire to use and maintain a building over time is diminished if people find it ugly and unworthy of maintenance (Mehaffy & Salingaros, 2019). It is of crucial importance that every stakeholder and community is aware of the process to preserve and maintain old buildings. When we all work together, communicating effectively and constructively, we have an opportunity to maintain the pricelessness of these old buildings.

This attractive place is the first Bank in Ethiopia. The establishment of this bank in that period shows the beginning of modernization and the use of modern architectural styles in Ethiopia. It is a basis for today's bank development through adaptive human design, space usage, and functional arrangement, etc. To establish the neurological connections for adaptive human design, hand drawing is necessary (Salingaros, 2020). History is not a line but a fugue, with revivals and recreations and novelties all mixed up together (Mehaffy & Salingaros, 2020). The old Bank of Abyssinia will serve as a reference and documentation center to scholars and other researchers attempting to discover the history of finance in this nation. The building is 110 years old and currently does not give any function; adaptive re-use is the best conservation method for such a building.

3. Recommendation & Conclusion

Adaptive reuse is a truly exciting and dynamic development process, with the ability to creatively meet many important historical, cultural, economic, and environmental goals.

Sustainable urban design can be viewed as the wholeness-extending processes (Jiang, 2019). The case of building gathered for the study was analyzed qualitatively. The analysis and findings clearly indicate that adaptive re-use of Bank of Abyssinia to the extent of bringing new wholeness, adaptive and sustainable design, and technology.

The design method has to match human intuition; otherwise, it becomes a tool for generating monsters (Salingaros, 2019).

Since the primary value of the historic buildings is large of a social and historical contribution, the research result showed that the RCCH and Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau and the sub-cities, higher institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations must develop awareness programs for the community and stakeholders. This research also indicates that the concept of adaptive reuse has significant support as a positive strategy to make the built environment more sustainable. Adaptive reuse enhances the longer-term usefulness of a building and is,

therefore, a more sustainable option than demolition and rebuilding. The positive benefits for adaptive reuse identified during the research also support the tests of sustainability, and include:

- Social Values and Community Expectations;
- Environmental Sustainability;
- Economic Viability.

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