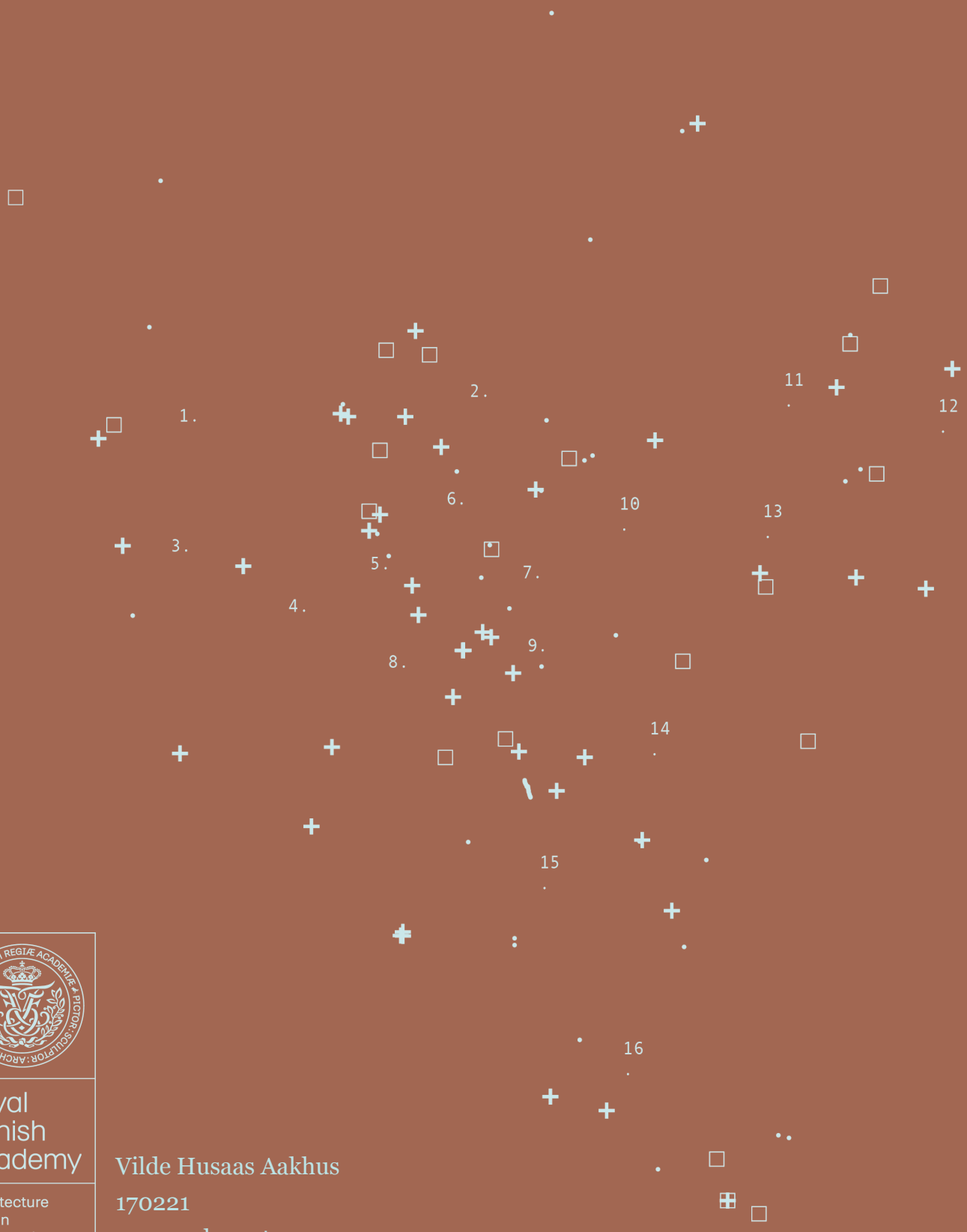
Building seeking programme!



Royal Danish Academy
Architecture Design Conservation

Vilde Husaas Aakhus
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Abstract

This research paper investigates what values are worth the most when Oslo Municipality is addressing their empty buildings and unused plots in their report on *Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality*, and how this value assessment might affect the recommendations that are given for the future of their vacant public buildings.

Through an analysis of the data that is presented in the report, this paper examines the findings with theories based on values of reusing existing building stock in urban contexts. The discussion revolves around how a beyond traditional heritage thinking can inform a new outlook on the vacant buildings, and how it can contribute as a catalyst for a more sustainable urban regeneration.

The paper concludes that as the municipality is practicing a traditional value assessment of built structures, which is causing a number of unused buildings being abandoned for periods of time. Furthermore, the paper finds that the buildings with no cultural historical heritage form typologies that appear to be more prone to being abandoned and becoming an economical liability. Finally, the paper suggests that in order to resurrect the vacant buildings, a strategy might possibly lay within an expansion of what is considered valuable heritage in buildings.

Content

Introduction

With cities growing as fast as ever, the globe is running out of vital resources such as, for example, sand due to cradle-to-grave nature of modern construction. At the same time, buildings are discarded after unprecedently short life spans.[1]

The consequence of discarding existing buildings, causes a number of built structures being abandoned and forgotten. Often, they are vacant for such a long period of time that the buildings decay into obsolescence and are left as holes in the urban fabric. The desertion of these buildings leads to a decline of the building structure in such degree that eventually, the land it is built upon is worth more than the structure itself. This raises concerns about how built structures are valued in the present day where our materials are limited and natural resources scarce.

In May 2023, Oslo Municipality published a report describing their vacant properties and buildings; *Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality*.[2] Data from this report unfolds the number of their empty buildings, which constitutes an amount of unused square meters. The report also questions whether the existing system for mapping the vacant buildings is sufficient for making use of them within a reasonable time.[3] This research paper seeks to investigate if some of these empty public buildings in Oslo might be perceived as disregarded resources in the urban development in Oslo. When it comes to unlocking the municipal reserves as catalysts in a sustainable urban development, how is the material legacy valued when the municipality is facing their empty buildings?

Research formulation

In this paper, I will research what values are worth the most when the municipality is addressing their empty buildings and unused plots. In relation to this, how this value assessment is practiced, and how to avoid the vacant public buildings being abandoned for long periods of time.

[1]
Quote from Chudoba et al., “Introduction”, in Built Environment and Architecture as a resource, ed. Chudoba et al., (Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research, 2020), 8

[2]
Department of Municipal Auditing in Oslo. Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality. Oslo: Department of Municipal Auditing, May 2023.

[3]
Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 9

Structure;
empirics, theory, and method

In my research paper, I primarily use one written source. It is a report from the Municipality of Oslo titled *Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality*,[4] published in May 2023. The report contains valid data in the form of descriptions of the empty buildings, along with an attached document that provides a general overview of all their vacant buildings.[5] It is comprehensive in its amount of data and has therefore constituted a sufficient data basis for this paper, since there is no other or similar updated data on the municipal´s empty buildings. As it is authored by the municipality itself, it is a credible source, but a biased report.

I apply a number of different approaches to the investigations in the paper regarding value assessment and historical heritage. To better understand how value assessment of buildings and urban areas are carried out today, I make use of the Norwegian method DIVE[6] in order to put the report´s methodology into perspective. The applied theories in this paper are utilized to open the analyses and discussion towards heritage thinking and values embedded in preservation of built structures. However, the theories do not address political frameworks, economical systems, or placemaking, which is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss. This paper primarily investigates the values of *tabula plena* in relation to retaining the empty public buildings, which I will return to in the next section.

I have worked with a mapping of the data that is presented in the report. Based on these results, I have analyzed the recurring patterns amongst the municipality’s recommendations for the empty buildings. Emerging of the results from my analysis, I discuss how these buildings are addressed and evaluated in the report. Finally, I review how the current method of practicing value assessment of built structures can be challenged with the aim of resurrecting a larger number of the empty public buildings than those presented in the report.

[4]
Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality

[5]
Vacant municipal buildings: status report 2023, in Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality

[6]
The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage. DIVE Guideline. Oslo: The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, 2018.

Background

Value assessment;
past, present, future

Alois Riegl discusses heritage value typologies in his book *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and its Development* from 1903, which is considered to be the first formulation of values-based preservation.[7] Following perspectives on the importance of keeping monuments alive, were stated in the Venice Charter, 1964: *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*.[8] Subsequently a few years after, the UNESCO World Heritage was established in 1972, with mission to protect natural and cultural legacy globally.[9] As both UNESCO and the Venice Charter arose from the concern over destroyed cities and demolished heritage, the need for preserving historical heritage was significant.

The succession of these established statements on values embedded in historical heritage of monuments has shaped the modern practices of value assessment of built structures. However, the present day´s relentless extraction of natural resources for new building materials and the current despair of the urgency of the climate crisis has given rise to a more contemporary approach to value assessment of existing buildings; *the embodied material legacy of built structures*. As the materials in most built structures possess great amounts of carbon and energy embodied resources, preservation of the material heritage should be seen as a catalyst for sustainable urban regeneration.[10]

"*Tabula plena* (…) connotes urban sites full of existing buildings from different time periods: a space where a density of previous markings remains."[11] Using the term *tabula plena* as a concept to value the existing conditions can be seen as a premise for contemporary urban development. This emphasizes the importance of seeing vacant buildings as places of interchange with co-adaptive capacities.[12]

[7]
Quote from Birgitte T. Eybye and Lars N. Bock, "The Past in the Future: Investigating Values of Circularity", in Built Environment and Architecture as a resource, ed. Minna Chudoba et al., (Nordic Academic Press of Architectural Research, 2020), 86.

[8]
The Venice Charter – 1964: International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/Venice_Charter_EN_2023.pdf)

[9]
"About UNESCO: The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention," Accessed October 11, 2023, https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/

[10]
Paraphrasing Hannah Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition: how heritage thinking can inform carbon reduction", (Journal of Architectural Conservation, 2021), 27:3, 178, DOI:10.1080/13556207.2021.1948239

[11]
Quote from Bryony Roberts, "Introduction", In Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation, ed. Bryony Roberts (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 11

[12]
Paraphrasing from Maria Luisa Palumbo, New Wombs – Electronic bodies and Architectural disorders, (Birkhaüser, 2000), 36

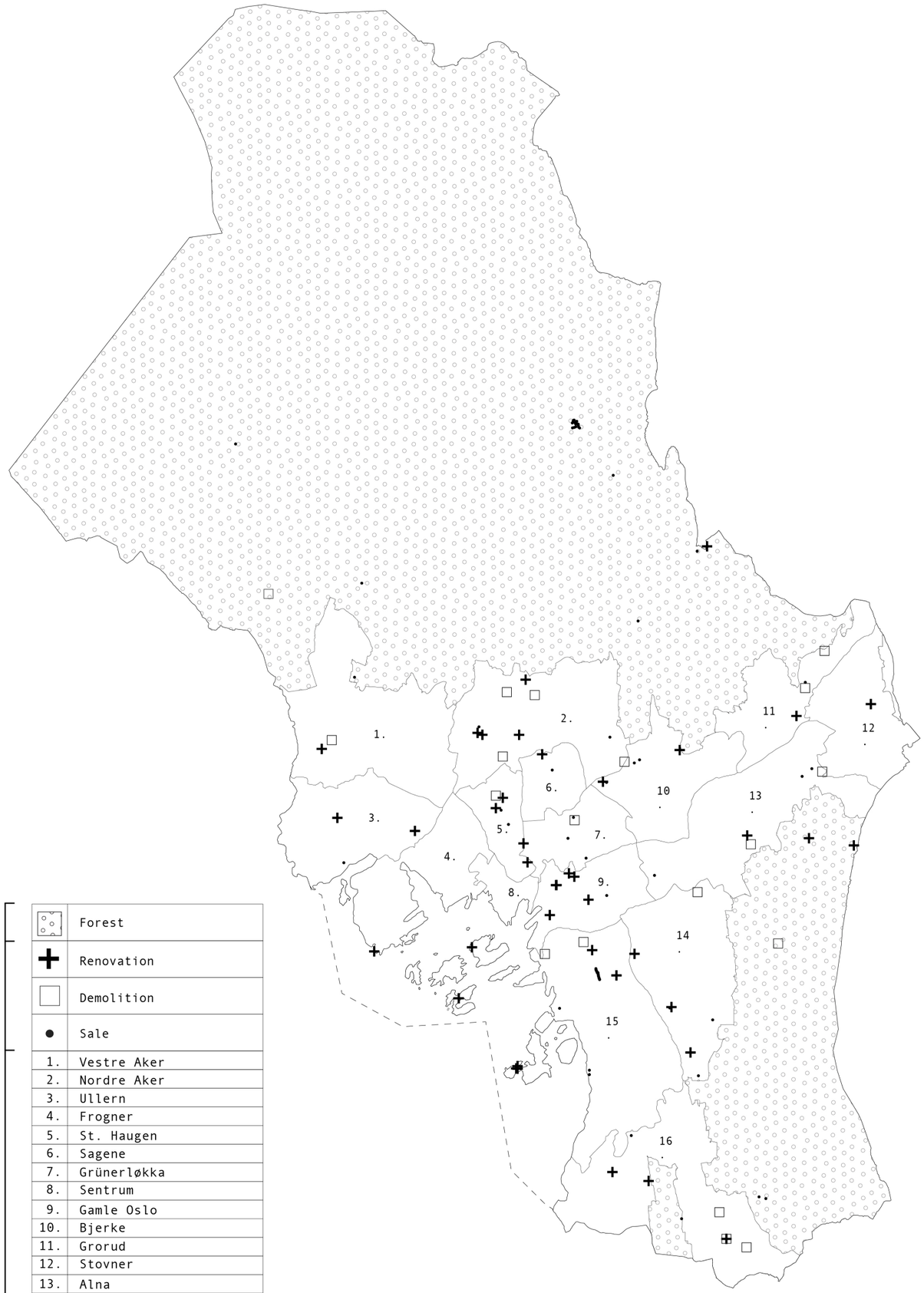
Analysis

Municipal vacancy

Numbers from the report Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo shows that the municipality owns 96 properties, with a total of 197 empty buildings that constitute a collection of 150.895 unused square meters. Over half of the empty buildings have been abandoned for over 5 years, and are characterized by having great need for renovation, some conservational values, and that they are considered to be demanding to renovate for reuse of the existing building mass. [13] One of my mappings of these properties and their locations shows that there is generally a wide spread of the empty buildings in the different districts of Oslo municipality, with more accumulation closer to the city center. (see figure 1)

A further analysis of the vacant buildings shows that the empty typologies is spanning in scale from small buildings, such as cabins or villas, to large scale structures, such as nursing homes or school facilities. These typologies make up a total of unused square meters where the figures clearly shows that Oslo Municipality possess a great number of unused spatial and material resources that are not taken care of. One might see these forgotten building structures as neglected resources.

[13]
Paraphrasing from Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 3. (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)



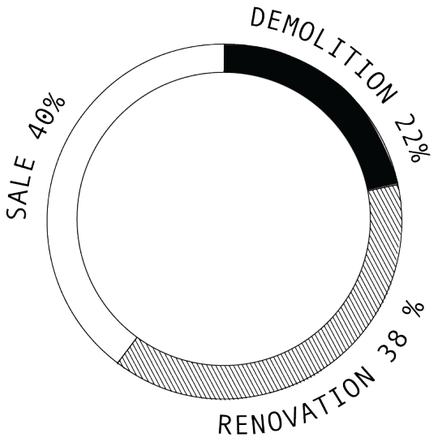
Recommendations

	Forest
+	Renovation
□	Demolition
●	Sale

Districts within Oslo Municipality

1.	Vestre Aker
2.	Nordre Aker
3.	Ullern
4.	Frogner
5.	St. Haugen
6.	Sagene
7.	Grünerløkka
8.	Sentrum
9.	Gamle Oslo
10.	Bjerke
11.	Grorud
12.	Stovner
13.	Alna
14.	Østensjø
15.	Nordstrand
16.	Søndre Nordstrand

[Figure 1]
Map over Oslo Municipality:
Locations of the empty buildings.

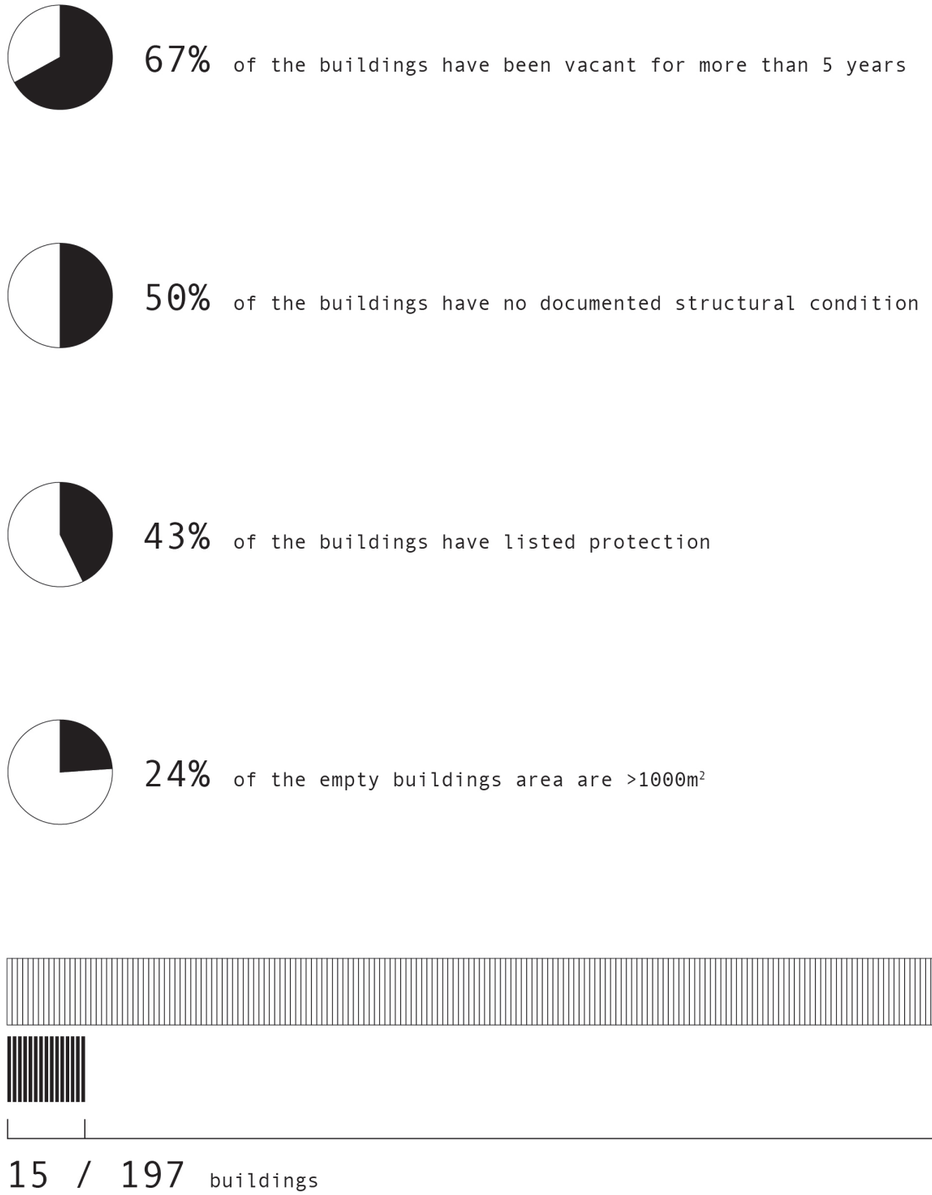


[Figure 2]
Division of the recommendations given by the municipality for the future of the empty buildings.

Methodical approach

The 96 unused properties of Oslo Municipality are administrated by three governmental property managers: Boligbygg, Eiendoms- og Byfornyelsesetaten and Oslobygg. As a part of the method for the report, 5 buildings from each of the property managers where chosen, which resulted in an in-depth study of 15 buildings. Even though these chosen buildings have been analyzed thoroughly, it can be considered problematic that the report presents a selection of 15 buildings that now act as representatives for the total 197 vacant buildings. This disregards the remaining 182 buildings and does not provide a complete picture of how the majority of vacant buildings are evaluated and valued.

The 15 buildings that were selected for further investigations, were also 15 buildings with strong cultural-historical heritage. This reveals that the municipality prioritizes the buildings with cultural historical values when conducting investigations in order to activate the empty buildings. Furthermore, this implies that there is a great number of abandoned buildings without any significant cultural historical value that has been somewhat overlooked in this report. Emerging of this wakes the question of how they have approached the remaining 197 empty buildings, and how they reached the recommendations that they propose for their future.



[Figure 3]
Characterizations among the empty public buildings. from my analysis of the presented report.

Assessing buildings

13 of the selected 15 buildings are listed for protection. The list is a national system for mapping buildings and urban areas with cultural historical heritage. The national method for analyzing and tracing significant cultural historical heritage is the DIVE-model which is developed by The National Directorate for Cultural Heritage. The model seeks to provide information about what is worthy of preserving, in order to help making decisions within urban development, urban transformation and/or developing an architectural policy. [14]

The model distinguishes cultural historical values and qualities from less important ones, and thereafter creates a predictable framework for protection and development of the cultural-historical resources in the analysis area.[15]

[Figure 6]

43% of the buildings are ensured preservation due to cultural historical heritage.

As 43% of the empty buildings entails historical heritage, this method therefore ensures preservation of almost half of the empty public buildings. Furthermore, the listed buildings are more likely to receive greater financial support for maintenance, and therefore an extended lifespan.[16] The retention of built heritage in urban development is valuable as it can contribute to site-specific adaptions along with providing a local character to a site while safeguarding immaterial values among the residents.[17]

As this model is the national method for assessing values in built structures, there is reason to question to what extent this model for valuation is sufficient when it comes to assessing the empty buildings in today's pressing climate crisis. This paper does not argue that cultural historical heritage is not important, but rather questions how the perception of values in heritage could be broadened to retain a greater number of the empty buildings than those presented in the report.

[14]
Paraphrasing from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, DIVE Guideline, 3. (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

[15]
Quote from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, "Cultural Historical Site Analysis", (Oslo: The Directorate of Cultural Heritage, 2018), 3. translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

[16]
Quote from Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 42.

[17]
Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 178.

In order to expand the perception of what buildings that are considered worthy of retention, one could e.g., look towards other approaches that address circular values within built structures. An example of this is the Norwegian innovation program FutureBuilt.[18] This nationally recognized initiative recognizes building projects with focus on circularity of material resources together with the energy and carbon impact of the building.[19]

Though the innovation program is not an official model for how to practice value assessment of built structures, it contributes to addressing and proposing methods for dealing with circularity in built projects to reach lower carbon footprint within the building sector.[20] Considering Oslo Municipality is one of FutureBuilt´s seven partners, one could assume that this focus on material reuse would influence the municipality´s recommendations when they address their own empty buildings.

[18]
"About FutureBuilt: FutureBuilt Quality Criteria", accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.futurebuilt.no/FutureBuilt-kvalitetskriterier

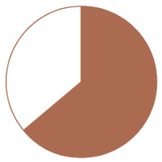
[19]
Paraphrasing Anne Sigrid Nordby et al., «FutureBuilt Circular – Criteria for circular buildings,", (Oslo: FutureBuilt, 2023), 3.

[20]
Paraphrasing Nordby et al., FutureBuilt Circular, 3. translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

Renovation

[Figure 8]

40% recommended for renovation.



[Figure 9]

64% of the buildings that are to be renovated, are either transformed or restored.

Of the municipal recommendations for how to deal with the empty buildings, there are more buildings that are recommended for renovation than demolition. Of the 197 buildings, almost 40% is suggested renovated. Findings from my analysis tells that there are two recurring tendencies in to how the different building typologies are planned renovated or transformed. Most of the educational amenities are recommended to be renovated in order to be implemented in the nearby school as an extension to the school facilities. While most of the housings and nursing homes are suggested transformed to housing for refugees. These are renovation acts that serves great societal value, especially since the number of refugees that Norway takes in yearly has increased drastically since 2020.[21]

64% of the buildings that are recommended for renovation have clear visions for what the renovation should entail. 44% is transformed, while 20% is restored to maintaining its original function. These numbers combined constitutes almost 1/3 of the total unused square meters that the municipality possess. The recommendation for renovation ensures that these structures are retained, reused, and saved from decay, and possibly demolition. In other words, these buildings are addressed in a way that safeguards the preservation of the material legacy within the built structures. However, the reports reasoning for renovating these structures appears vague or non-existing. This can be considered a lost chance to acknowledge the values of circularity and the environmental benefits of reusing built structures.

[21]
Number from Statistics Norway (SSB): “Highest number of refugees ever”, accessed September 24, 2023 https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/innvandrere/statistikk/innvandrere-etter-innvandringsgrunn/artikler/hoyeste-antall-flyktninger-noensinne

The full consciousness of uncertainty[22]

For the remaining 36% of the buildings recommended for renovation, it is still uncertain what the future renovation will entail when addressed in the report. It is also undecided when this renovation is to take place. This indecisiveness and absence of action causes buildings to remain vacant and continue to decay. The result of this lack of value assessment and use within a reasonable time, is causing a downward spiraling where the technical state of the building is worsened, and the economic expense for renovation is increased, - together leading way towards an operative void.

Though a renovation extends the lifespan of a building, it does not necessarily guarantee protection from demolition. A recent example of this is the demolition of the ETA-house in 2021, unluckily located in an area regulated to urban development in Oslo.[23] The building was demolished 10 years after a comprehensive renovation, and was also considered to being listed for protection due to history rooted in the Nordic wood industry from 1960´s.[24] In light of today´s reuse paradigm, an emerging wondering of this demolition is why the economical values in property is still so profitable that they compromise with the material values in built heritage.

[Figure 10]

36% of the buildings recommended for renovation still remain undecided

[22]
Quote from Paola Gregory, New Scapes – Territories of Complexity (Birkhaüser, 2003), 89.

[23]
Paraphrasing Mimmie Svensson, «Demolition values and waste», Arkitektur, October 4, 2023. (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

[24]
Svensson, “Demolition Values and Waste.”

[figure 11]

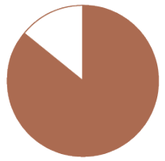
Hagegata 30, Tøyen, Oslo
Empty since: 2014
3480m²

Has since 2014 been recommended for renovation in order to be utilized as a pilot-project for the third housing sector in Oslo. However, due to its long abandonement, it has almost become a societal symbol of the time-consuming [illegible] of municipal [illegible] of empty buildings.

Demolition

[Figure 12]

20% recommended for demolition.



[Figure 13]

86% of the buildings recommended for demolition hold no listed protection.

(…) The focus on preserving the exceptional, and the lack of ideas for preserving the generic; the possibility of demolition as a necessary and opposite theory to preservation.[25]

The report recommends about 20% of the buildings should be demolished. This paper does not argue that all buildings should be kept as a principle, but rather questions what values that forms the base of the decisions that are made regarding the future of the buildings. Findings from my analysis of the empty buildings recommended for demolition shows that 86% of these buildings have no listed protection. Again, reflecting a traditional valuation system where cultural historical heritage is the key driver for selecting retention of specific vacant buildings and disregarding the "generic others". One might say that this prioritization of cultural historical values, represents a nostalgic surrender to the history as opposed to a proactive relationship with the past.[26]

Following, this contributes to a discussion of what is missing from the valuation assessment exercised by Oslo Municipality. Considering present days climate crisis, the built legacy could be seen as not only a part of cultural heritage, but also as a material inheritance of society.[27] Furthermore, the report lacks acknowledgement of the large amounts of carbon and energy are embodied in the building materials, which reminiscences part of the building until its destruction.[28] Hannah Baker documents in her research that embodied carbon is rarely influential in demolition decisions.[29] Confirming my findings in this analysis, Baker also points out in her research that where there are insufficient arguments based on heritage value, many buildings are therefore demolished and replaced rather than retained.[30] – Or sold, and then possibly demolished.

[25] Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, "Abstinence", In Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation, ed. Bryony Roberts (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 56

[26] Paraphrasing Laparelli, "Abstinence", 55.

[27] Paraphrasing Johannes Cramer, Stefan Breitling, Architecture in Existing Fabric: Planning, Designing, Building, (Germany: Birkhäuser, 2007), 20

[28] Paraphrasing Cramer, Breitling, Architecture in Existing Fabric, 24.

[29] Paraphrasing Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 188.

[30] Paraphrasing Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 176.

Sale

[Figure 15]

40% recommended for sale.

While almost 60% of the municipal´s empty buildings are recommended for either renovation or demolition, 40% still remains either undecided, or are listed for sale. This group contains the buildings where the municipality haven´t resolved the societal use of the vacant building. The reports reasoning for this uncertainty concerning the future of these empty buildings, is camouflaged as these structures being challenging to identify the municipal needs for. They are referred to as: *buildings without municipal use*.[31]

A recurring tendency among these buildings is that they have gone through several rounds of feasibility studies and technical investigations. In these periods, the building has been locked for investigations where the building often has fallen into despair in anticipation of a new project, which rarely has been materialized.[32] These time-consuming processes causes the buildings to decay and to be declared an economic liability, facilitating their sale and redevelopment.[33] Following, it is therefore interesting to question why the municipality owns these buildings for which they are unable to identify the municipal use.

[31] Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 18.

[32] Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 17.

[33] Paraphrasing Eduardo Rojas, “Governance”, In Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation, ed. Bryony Roberts (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 39 – 40.

Emerging of this raises the discussion of what are the main values for the municipality as a societal stakeholder, as they recommend sale for almost half of their unused buildings when addressing them. One might perceive this as a releasing of responsibility of their own vacant liabilities, which could be considered problematic, since this report here had the opportunity to set an example on how to approach utilization of the empty buildings in sustainable urban development. This might be perceived as somewhat contradictory, especially as the *Architectural Policy for Oslo*, also authored by the municipality itself, emphasizes the importance of reusing existing buildings by stating;

The architectural qualities of what has already been built must be preserved as climate resources and distinctive features.[34]

This makes one concern what the new future of the sold properties entails, as 70% of them hold buildings with no listed protection. Emerging of this, wakes the discussion of to what extent the traditional value assessment that favors cultural-historical heritage is beneficial for the municipality in order to practice their “climate-friendly” approach to city development with a mission of becoming a zero-emission city.[35]

[Figure 16]

70% of the properties that are recommended for sale hold buildings with no listed protection.

[34] Oslo Municipality, “Architectural Policy for Oslo: A sustainable city it is good to live in”, Oslo: Oslo City Counsil, 2018. 2. (translated from Norwegian by the author)

[35] Oslo Municipality, Architectural Policy for Oslo, 12.

Discussion

The challenges of traditional value assessment

”As a major developer, the public sector should be a champion of exploratory and progressive architectural solutions with a climate-friendly impact.”[36]

Within the analysis of how the municipality as a societal stakeholder and major developer faces their empty buildings is also a discussion whether the report acts on the environmental focus that they present in their *Architectural Policy for Oslo*. Recurring findings from my analysis of how the municipality address their vacant buildings reflects a traditional valuation system where values rooted in historical heritage is favored, and their embodied material legacy is not acknowledged.[37] As a result, it is important to open e.g., the discussion on how challenging the traditional perception of heritage can contribute to including the values of tabula plena in a sustainable urban regeneration in Oslo.

[36]
Quote from Oslo Municipality, Architectural Policy for Oslo, 13.

[37]
Paraphrasing Baker et al., “Retention not Demolition,” 178.

Obstructing urban resources

The DIVE-model is adapted to the challenges of our time, and to work with cultural heritage as a resource in cities and urban development processes.[38]

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the current method for assessing values within built structures in Norway is the DIVE-model. Since the method is described as being adapted to the challenges of our time, it is tempting to question what these challenges are, which are the most urgent ones, and how to approach heritage as an urban resource.

The authors of Retention not Demolition, states that "one of the most critical issues facing the world today is the anthropogenic global warming, resulting in international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."[39] As the building sector is responsible for 39% of the world´s co2 emissions, it seems urgent to implement urban strategies to prevent the climate crisis from worsening. (see figure 18) Reuse of the existing building stock could contribute as a mitigation measure by reducing the embodied impact of individual buildings.[40] In this sense, the need to re-activate the empty buildings seems to be a golden opportunity for this approach.

Within a further analysis of the buildings recommended for demolition, my findings found that a majority of these buildings have been vacant for more than six years, and that their structural condition makes reuse challenging. In this case, a renovation is likely to consume large quantities of resources and carbon emissions to a level where it is no longer environmentally beneficial.[41] However, if these buildings had been maintained as if they carried historical heritage, the current state of deterioration could have been avoided. As a result, one might say that the current valuation system acts as an obstacle to preserving a majority of the urban resources.

Because the DIVE-model presents itself as a policy for value assessment, it also acts as a barrier to demolition of buildings with values in historical heritage, in a way that does not yet exist for buildings with material value.[42] Emerging of this, one might say that this cultural lens has given rise to a phenomenon of urban residue; vacancy of buildings without values embedded in historical heritage.[43] One of the problems facing the regeneration of these remaining buildings is the lack of a valuation system that assesses built structures based on their material resources.

[38]
Quote from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, DIVE Guideline, 3 (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

[39]
Quote from Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 178.

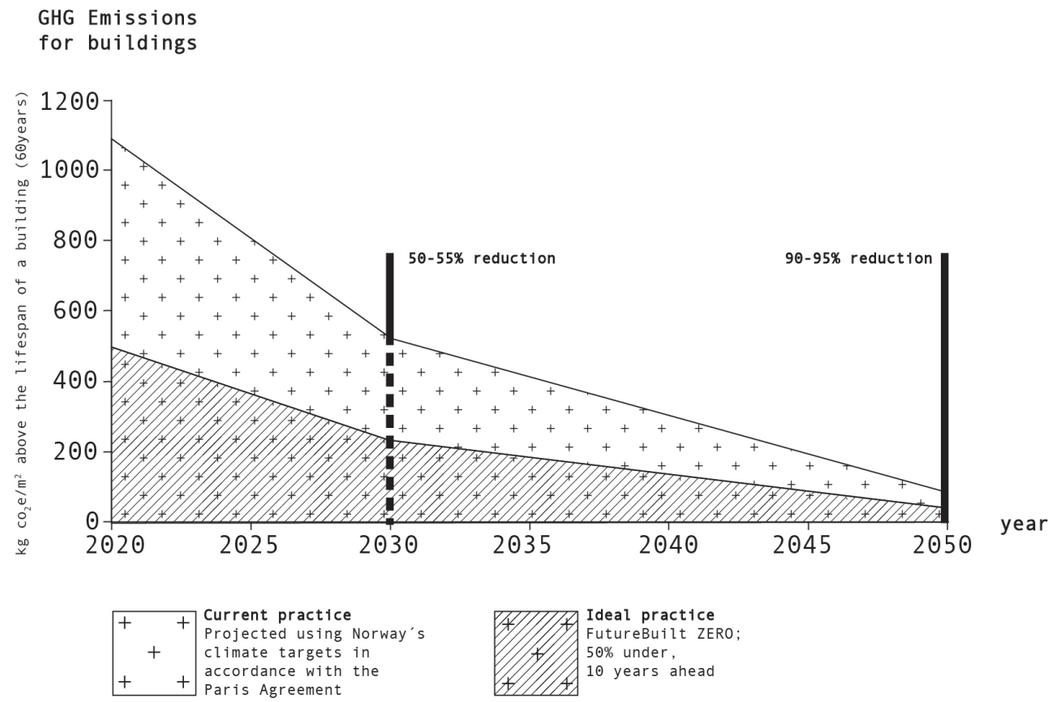
[40]
Paraphrasing Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 178.

[41]
Paraphrasing Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 178.

[42]
Paraphrasing Baker et al., "Retention not Demolition," 178.

[43]
Paraphrasing from Palumbo, New Wombs, 36.

[Figure 17]
FutureBuilt Zero



Monument culture

(…) Architectural conservation is a values-based activity, and it concentrates primarily on heritage buildings and their significance in the form of values and how to preserve them.[44]

In order to distinguish historical heritage, the DIVE-method questions what makes a building significant. It analyses if the building is rare due to its history, or if it has become rare as a result of random or planned selection by history.[45] Again, this raises the question of what type of heritage that is selected for preservation. This indicates that this model is influenced by a monument culture, in which the search for the ideal significant heritage is the primary driver.

Therefore, the narrow perception of what is considered as worthy of retention again appear as the main challenge when the municipality uses the traditional valuation system to decide what to keep and what to discard. As a result, a majority of the vacant buildings are disregarded due to a lack of "significant heritage".

In present day´s reuse paradigm, it is therefore important to broaden the perception of what is considered a heritage building, especially since built structures are carriers of a carbon- and energy embodied material legacy. Emerging from this, one might ask why there still hasn't been developed a valuation system that measures the extractive implications or embodied missions within built structures in order to assess what is worth preserving.

[44]
Quote from Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 84

[45]
Paraphrasing from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Value Assessment Guideline, 3 (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

Limited adaptability

The DIVE-model states that the mission to preserve buildings with historical heritage is with the intention of including them in the urban development. However, the model´s selective method can be considered as limiting in terms of the adaptive potential of the highlighted buildings

In chapter 4; *Activation*, the model presents a criteria list regarding the building´s cultural historical scope of action. It introduces terms such as "capacity to change" and "tolerate boundaries".[46] Furthermore, the method also specifies that the interference with the building cannot compromise with the distinct identity and characterization of the building.[47] Consequently, the reason to why this value assessment can be considered problematic in an urban scale, is because it highlights preservation of the buildings that are rather limited spaces for adaption and reuse of the built structure.

Emerging of this, it therefore appears even more important to challenge the perception of what buildings that is considered worthy of retention, as this could include a larger number of built structures more accessible for structural reuse and functional adaption. Here, their lack of values rooted in historical heritage would not be seen as a limitation, but instead as a spatial liberation.

[46]
Quote from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, DIVE Guideline, 36 (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

[47]
Quote from The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage, DIVE Guideline, 48 (translated from Norwegian by the author of this paper)

Beyond traditional heritage thinking

Perceptions and interpretations of heritage have changed overtime and are reflected in the development of heritage policy, which has served as a way of framing development activities.[48]

Bryony Roberts describes in the introduction to *Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation* that the perception of heritage has been adjusted throughout the history. He writes that from the 1931 Athens Charter to 1964 Venice Charter, to the 1972 UNESCO Operational Guidelines, that the understanding of heritage was expanded from single buildings to include urban sites and landscapes.[49] However, "their goal still remained to protect original conditions from change."[50]

The current urgency of the climate crisis demands a broader definition of heritage to also include the value of material heritage. The research paper *Retention not Demolition: how heritage thinking can inform carbon reduction*, found that "while heritage considerations often are the key driver for retaining buildings, environmental impacts, embodied energy in particular, were not."[51] Emerging of this, the focus on heritage values within preservation of built structures should not only be directed towards culture, but should also acknowledge the material itself.

[48]
Quote from Baker et al., Retention not Demolition, 177.

[49]
Paraphrasing Roberts, "Introduction," 13

[50]
Quote from Roberts, "Introduction," 13

[51]
Quote from Baker et al., Retention not Demolition, 177

Heritage as a resource

(…) Things or objects as valuable because they are socially useful and are important for the process of reproduction of society.[52]

Eybye and Bock defines in their paper "that in the conventional sense, a resource is the supply of something useful, and that it therefore represents a value which can be either material or immaterial."[53] Emerging of this, one could say that perceiving existing buildings as resources embodies great circular values that are important for the sustainable reproduction of society.

Rather than demolish and rebuild, adaptive reuse of buildings preserves the material heritage that already contains huge amounts of energy and carbon, while reducing the consumption of excavated and transported new building materials. By reusing existing buildings, it reduces the carbon emissions associated with construction, material consumption, and energy use, while reducing the strain on land resources.[54]

The authors of the research paper *Retention not Demolition* documented that the two benefits that is most commonly mentioned regarding reduced embodied energy and greenhouse gas emission, is the conservation of heritage and savings in material.[55] Following, it is important to emphasize that historical heritage does not have to be compromised with resource heritage. Rather, the two forms of heritage should be considered as two equal values, achieved through different approaches and serving the same mission:

To preserve built structures within urban development.

[52]
Quote from Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 87

[53]
Quote from Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 83

[54]
Baker et al., Retention not Demolition, 178

[55]
Paraphrase Baker et al., Retention not Demolition, 177

Rethinking the heritage buildings

Many heritage buildings exists today because they have been subject to alterations and transformations during their lifetime, and they are therefore examples of circularity.[56]

The historical culture of reuse has resulted in a broad knowledge of preservation activities, such as repair, addition, or reconstruction.[57] Given the consistent will of current policies to preserve heritage, it is therefore central to question what heritage is being inherited. By questioning the values that inform the current rationale for preserving built structures, one can begin to move beyond the traditional heritage thinking.

Eybye and Bock describes in their research paper *The past in the future: Investigating values of circularity that transformation*, modification, and reuse of buildings and building structures has been a part of urban cultures throughout the history.[58] Furthermore, that the transformation and reuse most likely occurred as the buildings represented material and economic resources.[59] However, the common modernist approach to the lifespan of buildings anticipated a throwaway culture that conflicts with the current need for sustainability.[60] A return to the historical culture of reuse, where material resources were valued, can inform contemporary practices of material assessment in buildings.

Due to the environmental benefits of reusing buildings, it is essential that heritage within buildings is also understood as the embodied carbon and energy heritage of the material resources in built structures. This could contribute to activate a broader specter of vacant buildings, while avoiding future vacancies. Consequently, this understanding of heritage gives rise to the contemporary heritage building that is valued for its material legacy.

[56]
Quote from Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 84

[57]
Roberts, "Introduction," 12

[58]
Paraphrasing Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 82

[59]
Paraphrasing Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 82

[60]
Paraphrasing Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 83

Liberated adaptability

Putting a beyond traditional heritage to use, exemplifies how an altered definition of heritage buildings could change the perception of buildings that previously were considered worthless. This thinking suggests that the material legacy of built structures is seen as a value that justifies the retention of existing buildings.

As already established in this paper, the current value assessment of buildings overlook a number of built structures because it operates as a cultural lens. Eybye and Bock points out that circularity of built structures comprises flexibility and adaptability of the spatial and structural properties of the building, which allows for the incorporation of new functions.[61] Therefore, the buildings that, according to the report, have no significant cultural value seem to appear as more accessible for adaptive reuse as they are not bound to conservation practices.

Currently, these buildings are referred to in the report as *buildings without identified municipal use*.[62] However, they are more likely to materialize as effective structures for implementing the concept of tabula plena. The abilities of these empty buildings to change and adapt could be seen as places of interchange with co-adaptive capacities.[63] Following, they can be understood as buildings with an identified reuse, constituting the contemporary heritage building that ensures preservation of urban resources.

[61]
Paraphrasing Eybye and Bock, "The Past in the Future", 99

[62]
Oslo Municipality, Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, 18

[63]
Paraphrasing from Palumbo, New Wombs, 36.

[Figure 19]

A contemporary heritage building

Odvar Solbergs vei 224
Grorud
1728m²

Example of an building without listed protection that currently is referred to as a building without municipal use, and is therefore recommended demolished.

Tabula plena; the values of urban preservation

(…) The clusters of problems in the built environment revolve around the question of how to reuse and alter the already there – the existing.[64]

In order to approach traditional heritage thinking as a resource for challenging the current conceptions of heritage values, it is central to ask why historical heritage represents such strong values associated with preservation. According to Alois Riegel, historical values represent something that once was can never be again, and that it therefore forms an irreplaceable link in the chain of development.[65] In other words, the historical heritage manifests as physical values where the existing represents a nostalgia of the past.[66]

Emerging from this, one could say that the existing built materials acts as material witnesses of the history, as they represent the past extraction of natural resources. Following, seeking the potential of reusing these disregarded resources, could contribute to a proactive relationship with history and establishing an agreement between the past, present, and future.[67] Furthermore, and more importantly, it could act as a sustainable investment in the future.

However, a central concern in present day is the production of abandoned spaces and spatial structures that have lost their usefulness due to changing urban patterns and economies, in which the fate of these material reservoirs appears as a societal issue.[68] Unfortunately, the present monument culture of preserving historical significance is reduced to a conservation of distinctive spaces, which appears to be deviating from the current need to reformulate the discipline of urban planning.[69] This raises the significance of seeing the contemporary heritage building as a sustainable catalyst in the urban development and regeneration.

Bryony Roberts states in the introduction of *Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation* that "the strategies for responding to tabula plena conditions are becoming increasingly urgent."[70] This paper suggests that accessing and activating the empty public buildings as urban resources, could be a recommended strategy for reacting to these conditions. Implementing the values of tabula plana in urban development resuscitates the historical culture of reuse where the material resources are considered valuable, and transformation and modification of existing buildings is common practice.

[64]
Quote from Thordis Arrhenius, "Nine Points Towards an Expanded Notion of Architectural Work", In Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation, ed. Bryony Roberts (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 193.

[65]
Paraphrasing Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development," In Gesammelte Ausfätze (Augsberg, Vienna: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, G.m.b.H., 1928), 70.

[66]
Paraphrase Laparelli, "Abstinence", 55.

[67]
Paraphrasing Erik Langdalen, "Utopia and Conservation", In Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation, ed. Bryony Roberts (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 139.

[68]
Paraphrasing Arrhenius, "Nine Points Towards an Expanded Notion of Architectural Work," 193.

[69]
Paraphrasing Langdalen, "Utopia and Conservation," p. 138

[70]
Quoting Roberts, "Introduction," 12

Conclusion

This research paper investigated what values that were worth the most when the municipality were addressing their empty buildings and unused plots in their report on Property Management of Empty Buildings in Oslo Municipality, and how this value assessment affected the recommendations that were given for their vacant buildings.

Findings from my analysis revealed that values in cultural historical heritage was worth the most when the municipality made its recommendations for the future of the vacant buildings. Most of the buildings without this heritage were defined as challenging to reuse and were therefore destined for demolition or sale. As a result, these buildings constitute a typology of built structures that appear more prone to being disregarded. Furthermore, when the municipality recommended renovation for reuse, the environmental benefits of reuse was not acknowledged. These findings imply that there is an urgent need to reformulate current urban development practices.

During my research for this paper, I found it surprising that there was a large amount of specific data available about these empty buildings, yet the motivation to actually activate these buildings seemed low. As this descriptive data appears as a strong tool to utilize the buildings, I see this as a lost opportunity for the municipality to exercise their sustainable focus within urban development.

In present days urgency of dealing with abandoned buildings before they decay into demolition, I find it central that the current valuation system is re-structured in its analytical perception of what is worthy of retention. As most built structures possess huge material values, the preservation of material heritage could be seen as a potential catalyst for a sustainable urban regeneration.

Following, I therefore believe that a first step towards including the premises of tabula plena in a sustainable urban regeneration, is to broaden the traditional understanding of what is considered as valuable heritage within built structures. I would argue that this expansion could encourage a long-awaited development of a method for practicing value assessment of buildings with base in its material legacy. Emerging from this, a beyond traditional heritage thinking could inform other outcomes in the future value assessment of empty public buildings in Oslo.

[71]
Quote from Langdalen, “Utopia and Conservation,” p. 138

Perspectivation

Societal mechanisms; building new, discarding old?

By contrast, the persistent process of renewal without regard for what exists is uneconomical, as it discards the potential of the already available resources.[72]

Based on my findings from the analysis done for this research paper, it appears that the Municipality of Oslo is still affected by the conventional modernist condition where tabula rasa is seen as a premise for urban development. Following, one might concern if this has consequently given rise to a limited perception of what is considered worthy for preservation.
– And if the value of reuse has been forgotten.

Further research on this topic could therefore be to investigate how much the municipality plans to develop new construction projects, compared to what resources that already exists. The findings could contribute to a discussion on the societal mechanisms and political discourse in Oslo and explore whether the existing structures are recognized as available urban resources.

[72]
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