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Revitalization of The Ex-Bank UOB Building with an Adaptive Reuse Approach to Become a Center of Creative and Retail Activities in the Old Town Area

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ABSTRACT

Jakarta's Old Town area holds significant historical value as a colonial-era commercial center; however, many of its heritage buildings have been abandoned or have lost their original functions. This study aimed to examine strategies for revitalizing the former United Overseas Bank (UOB) building in Jakarta's Old Town through an adaptive reuse approach, transforming it into a center for creative and retail activities. The adaptive reuse of cultural heritage buildings presents challenges in balancing the preservation of historical significance with contemporary functional requirements and long-term sustainability. Employing a qualitative approach with an in-depth single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including conservation architects, area managers, and creative industry practitioners, supplemented by field observations and archival document analysis. Thematic analysis identified three principal themes: the integration of historic spatial elements with contemporary functional requirements, the development of retail spaces responsive to the architectural characteristics of heritage buildings, and the establishment of a creative ecosystem that encouraged public interaction. The findings suggested that adaptive reuse could extend beyond physical and functional transformation by contributing to the revitalization of an area's socioeconomic value while maintaining its historical and architectural integrity. The study provided practical insights for architects, conservation professionals, and policymakers in developing adaptive conservation design guidelines for historic urban areas. Further research was recommended to evaluate post-occupancy performance, long-term economic sustainability, and socioeconomic impacts on local communities.

INTRODUCTION

Within contemporary urban development and architectural conservation discourse, the preservation of cultural heritage buildings is increasingly understood not merely as an effort to maintain physical structures but as a dynamic strategy for sustainable urban development (Foster, 2020; Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022). Adaptive reuse, which involves repurposing existing buildings to accommodate contemporary socioeconomic needs while retaining their heritage significance, has become an important approach in various countries to prevent urban deterioration and extend the functional lifespan of historic architectural assets (Foster, 2020; Arfa, Zijlstra, et al., 2022; Vafaie et al., 2023). In Indonesia, these challenges are particularly evident in historic districts such as Jakarta's Old Town, where numerous colonial-era heritage buildings face physical deterioration, underutilization, and threats to their historical identity

amid rapid urban modernization (Saputra & Purwantiasning, 2020). The former United Overseas Bank (UOB) building, a historically significant structure with distinctive spatial characteristics in Jakarta's Old Town, exemplifies these challenges. Having previously accommodated financial activities, the building presents an opportunity for functional transformation to prevent prolonged underutilization and support ongoing government initiatives aimed at revitalizing historic urban areas (Sudiyono et al., 2024).

Existing conditions indicate a substantial gap between architectural conservation policies and the practical implementation of new functions within cultural heritage buildings (Artha & Purwantiasning, 2022; Pintossi et al., 2023). Preliminary field observations in Jakarta's Old Town suggest that some revitalization initiatives have emphasized commercial activities without adequately addressing heritage values, while others have prioritized physical authenticity to an extent that limits functional flexibility and public accessibility (Saputra & Purwantiasning, 2020). In the case of the former UOB building, its proposed transformation into a center for creative and retail activities involves not only architectural and technical considerations but also challenges related to developing an inclusive social and creative ecosystem. Preliminary interviews with local creative industry practitioners and area managers revealed concerns regarding the potential loss of the building's genius loci, or distinctive sense of place, and the possible marginalization of community activities if architectural interventions prioritize commercial profitability over cultural and social functions. Consequently, the proposed transformation requires comprehensive theoretical and practical consideration to ensure that architectural interventions reconcile the building's historical identity and collective memory with the functional requirements of contemporary public spaces (Ayudyawati & Handajani, 2022).

The significance of this research lies in its sociocultural and urban economic sustainability dimensions (Foster & Saleh, 2021a; Kaya et al., 2021). From a sociocultural perspective, heritage buildings such as the former UOB building embody historical values and collective spatial memories that contribute to urban identity. Transforming the building into a center for creative and retail activities could facilitate the development of an inclusive "third place," where educational, artistic, cultural, and creative economic activities encourage informal social interaction and community engagement (Devina et al., 2025; Fajarwati, 2023; Fajarwati & Aviandy, 2025). From an economic perspective, adaptive reuse has the potential to stimulate local investment, strengthen tourism appeal, and generate economic opportunities while minimizing unnecessary alterations to the historic urban fabric (Foster, 2020; Foster & Saleh, 2021b; Siregar & Susilo, 2026). Integrating creative spaces into heritage structures may also provide additional economic opportunities for local retailers and creative entrepreneurs while encouraging greater public engagement with cultural heritage assets that were previously inaccessible or underutilized (Rombe et al., 2023; Siregar & Susilo, 2026).

Although adaptive reuse has been examined in various Indonesian architectural and urban planning studies, a review of the existing literature reveals several areas requiring further investigation. Previous research has predominantly emphasized physical feasibility, technical restoration requirements, and broader economic implications of heritage revitalization (Artha & Purwantiasning, 2022; Saputra & Purwantiasning, 2020). However, qualitative investigations examining spatial negotiation, stakeholders' subjective experiences, and the integration of contemporary creative functions into historic architectural structures remain

relatively limited (Arfa, Lubelli, et al., 2022; Arfa et al., 2024; Ayudyawati & Handajani, 2022). In particular, the relationship between commercial retail activities and creative spaces within former colonial-era banking buildings warrants further examination to understand how these functions can coexist while maintaining architectural integrity and historical significance. Addressing this gap requires an approach that considers both the physical characteristics of heritage buildings and the experiences of stakeholders involved in their adaptive reuse.

Accordingly, this study aimed to critically examine adaptive reuse strategies and processes associated with the proposed transformation of the former UOB building into a center for creative and retail activities in Jakarta's Old Town. The investigation focused on how historic architectural elements could be adapted to accommodate contemporary functions, how interactions among stakeholders influenced spatial planning and functional allocation, and how creative industry practitioners and visitors perceived the proposed adaptive reuse approach. Theoretically, the study sought to contribute to the literature on adaptive conservation by incorporating qualitative perspectives on stakeholders' experiences and interpretations within the context of heritage revitalization in developing countries. Practically, the findings were expected to provide insights for architects, developers, heritage conservation professionals, and policymakers in formulating revitalization strategies that balance the preservation of cultural heritage values with the functional and economic sustainability of creative activities (Devina et al., 2025).

Based on the identified research problems, the study was guided by three principal research questions. First, how could adaptive reuse strategies and processes be applied to the former UOB building to transform its historical function into a center for creative and retail activities within Jakarta's Old Town? This question emphasized spatial planning, architectural interventions, and the balance between heritage conservation requirements and contemporary functional needs.

Second, how did key stakeholders, including conservation architects, area managers, and creative industry practitioners, interpret and negotiate the integration of historical values and the building's genius loci with contemporary creative economic functions? This question focused on stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and interactions in shaping the proposed transformation.

Third, what spatial and socioeconomic implications could arise from the adaptive reuse of the former UOB building for the long-term sustainability of Jakarta's Old Town? This question addressed potential changes in spatial utilization, the development of a sustainable creative ecosystem, community participation, and the implications of adaptive reuse for heritage conservation policies.

Consistent with these research questions, the study pursued three primary objectives. The first objective was to examine adaptive reuse strategies and processes for transforming the former UOB building into a center for creative and retail activities while maintaining compatibility with the architectural and historical characteristics of Jakarta's Old Town. The second objective was to explore how conservation architects, area managers, and creative industry practitioners interpreted and negotiated the relationship between preserving historical values, including the building's genius loci, and accommodating contemporary creative economic activities. The third objective was to identify the potential spatial and socioeconomic

implications of the proposed transformation for the sustainability of creative activities, heritage conservation, and the broader urban environment of Jakarta's Old Town.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a single-case study design (Moleong, 2021). The case study focused on the physical and functional transformation of the former United Overseas Bank (UOB) building in Jakarta's Old Town. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of adaptive reuse strategies, architectural design negotiations, and the integration of heritage values with contemporary creative and economic functions within the building's spatial and social context.

The research was conducted over eight months at the former UOB building in the Kota Tua Cultural Heritage Area, West Jakarta. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling to identify individuals directly involved in or knowledgeable about the revitalization project (Moleong, 2021). The informants included conservation architects and consultants, representatives of heritage management authorities, creative industry practitioners and retail tenants, and visitors or local community members. Nine informants participated in the study, and data collection was considered sufficient upon reaching thematic saturation (Miles et al., 2020).

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis (Moleong, 2021). Interviews explored participants' experiences, spatial perceptions, and perspectives on balancing heritage conservation with contemporary functional requirements. Nonparticipant observations focused on spatial utilization, visitor circulation, and interactions between users and architectural elements. Document analysis examined architectural drawings, historical records, conservation regulations issued by the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government, and photographic documentation of the building's transformation.

Data credibility and trustworthiness were strengthened through source and methodological triangulation (Miles et al., 2020; Moleong, 2021). Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different stakeholder groups, while methodological triangulation involved cross-checking interview findings against field observations and archival documents. Member checking was conducted with selected informants to verify the accuracy of interview interpretations. An audit trail was also maintained to document methodological decisions, analytical procedures, and coding processes, thereby enhancing transparency and confirmability (Miles et al., 2020).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis integrated with the interactive analytical model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Miles et al., 2020). The iterative analytical process involved data condensation, initial and categorical coding, thematic data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were systematically examined to identify recurring patterns, organize themes into thematic matrices, and interpret the architectural, spatial, and socioeconomic dimensions of adaptive reuse in the former UOB building (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Miles et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on field observations and physical documentation on the Ex-Bank UOB Building in the Jakarta Old City Area, this building has the characteristics of a typology of banking architecture from the early to mid-20th century which is very dominant. Visually and structurally, the building consists of three main floors with *a central void* with a glass roof, a banking *hall* area with monumental nuances, and a row of administrative office spaces and *vaults covered with* thick concrete in the semi-basement area.

Spatial Components	Existing Condition/Authentic Elements	Potential & Limitations of Conversion
Banking Hall (1st Floor)	High ceilings, monumental columns, authentic marble floors.	It has great potential for flagship retail functions and inclusive exhibition/creative activity areas.
Atrium / Central Void	Natural lighting from skylights, circular circulation.	Serves as a focal point and a third place for public interaction. Its rigid/closed
Vault	Thick iron-clad concrete walls, authentic steel doors.	character offers unique potential for an exhibition gallery or thematic pop-up store.
Upper Floor / Mezzanine	Rigid office compartment division with massive partitions.	Requires demolition of non-structural partitions for open-plan creative studio.

Figure 1. Existing Spatial Conditions and Adaptive Reuse Potential of the Ex-Bank UOB Building.

Field studies through semistructured interviews identified three main groups of actors that play a key role in the adaptive conversion of this building, namely:

1. **Regulatory & Conservatory Authority:** Focuses on compliance with the Cultural Heritage Law and the preservation of façad and key structural elements so as not to undergo irreversible changes (Artha & Purwantiasning, 2022).
2. **Architect & Developer Team:** Acting as a technical mediator that transforms the rigid physical space of a bank into a hybrid public space that is flexible and commercially valuable (Ayudyawati & Handajani, 2022).
3. Creative Industry Players & Local Communities: Act as *end-users* who need affordable, accessible, and creative rental space (Devina et al., 2025).

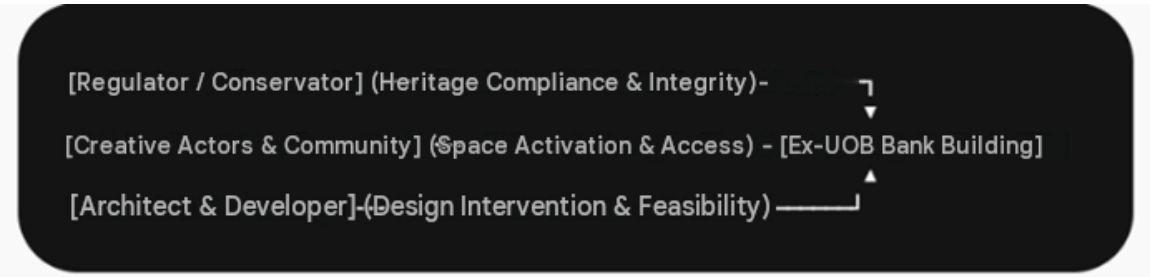


Figure 2. Stakeholder Roles and Interactions in the Adaptive Reuse of the Ex-Bank UOB Building.

The results of the empirical mapping at the site reveal three fundamental problems faced in adapting the Ex-Bank UOB Building:

- **Introverted and Formal Spatial Nature:** The initial typology of bank buildings was designed for high-level security (massive and closed composition). This is inversely proportional to the needs of creative and *retail* centers that demand visual accessibility and open circulation (*extrovert*) for pedestrians in the Old Town Area.
- **Utility & Mechanical-Electrical (MEP) Degradation:** Existing electrical, lighting, and artificial ventilation systems are obsolete and do not meet thermal comfort standards for the function of gathering large masses.

The Dilemma of Physical Intervention vs. Authenticity: There is a need for the addition of modern supporting facilities (such as escalators/elevators, disabled toilets, and fire protection systems) that risk damaging authentic ornaments or walls if not designed with *a reversible intervention metho* (an intervention that can be removed again without damaging the original structure).

The thematic analysis process of in-depth interview data, passive participatory observation, and archival documents resulted in three main themes that explain how *the adaptive reuse strategy* was applied to the Ex-Bank UOB Building in the Jakarta Old Town Area.

Spatial Negotiation: Transition from Formal-Exclusive Typology to Inclusive Public Space

The Ex-Bank UOB building typhologically has the character of colonial banking architecture that is closed, rigid, and full of private-public boundaries. The *adaptive reuse* strategy applied does not carry out massive structural demolition, but uses *spatial insertion* and *re-articulation* methods. The *banking hall* area on the main floor, which used to function as a banking transaction area with a massive *teller* desk , is now transformed into *a flagship retail area* and an open exhibition space.

Field observations showed that transparent physical barriers based on glass and light steel were used to divide the *retail zone* without covering the monumental columns and authentic ceiling ornaments. One of the architects of the conservation team (Informant 1) revealed:

"Our biggest challenge was to break the 'spooky' and rigid feel of the old bank without losing its historical dignity. We didn't touch the original structural walls or marble. We designed intervention elements such as retail corridors and flexible stages that were reversible—meaning that if one day they were removed, the building would return to its original shape without blemish."

Activation of Loci Genius through the Formation of a Hybrid Creative Ecosystem

The findings of the study revealed that the conversion of the building's function does not stop at changing the architectural visual aspect, but focuses on the formation of a social-creative ecosystem. The integration between *local retail*, art studios, and communal areas in the central atrium (*central void*) succeeded in reviving the "soul of the place" (*genius loci*) which had been dimmed due to functional vacuum (*underutilization*).

The vault*/safe deposit box* is covered with thick concrete and authentic steel doors are adapted into *thematic popup stores* and experimental art galleries. The character of the isolated treasure room provides a unique narrative aesthetic value for visitors. A local creative industry player (Informant 4) said:

"Exhibiting or trading in a former bank deposit room provides a different experience. The historical value of this building is no longer a dead display, but a 'background' that enhances

the aesthetic value of our local brand. Visitors don't just come to shop, but to enjoy the historical atmosphere."

Synergy and Dynamics Between Stakeholders

The transformation of the Ex-Bank UOB Building involved complex interactions between three stakeholder groups: conservators/governments, developers/architects, and the creative community. The results of the interviews indicated that the success of the adaptation was determined by regulatory flexibility and mutual agreement on the limits of intervention. The following table summarizes the thematic patterns that emerged from the qualitative data analysis:

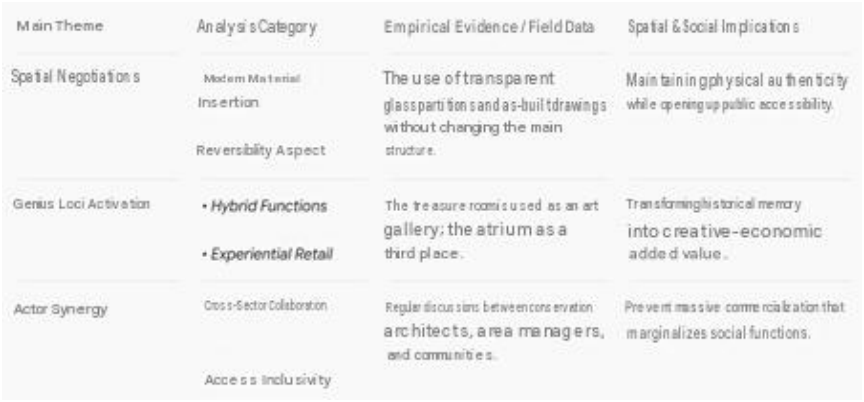


Figure 3. Thematic Analysis of Adaptive Reuse Strategies and Their Implications for Heritage Conservation.

The results of this study confirm that the *adaptive reuse* strategy in the Ex-Bank UOB Building has succeeded in transforming passive cultural heritage buildings into adaptive and inclusive public spaces. Theoretically, the findings on the use *of reversible interventions* and modern material insertion reinforce the views of Saputra & Purwantiasning (2020) and Ayudyawati & Handajani (2022), who stated that the preservation of architectural heritage in dense urban areas does not have to be destructive or otherwise too rigid (function freezing). Limiting physical interventions that focus on non-structural elements has been proven to be able to maintain the historical integrity of buildings while accommodating the dynamics of *contemporary retail* functions.

Furthermore, the use of atriums and treasure rooms as *third places* provides new empirical evidence of the importance of socio-economic attachment in conservation projects. While previous studies such as **Foster (2020)** have emphasized the sustainability of *adaptive reuse* from the perspective of environmental management and macroeconomics, the findings of this study offer a qualitative-phenomenological perspective: the sustainability of *heritage buildings* is strongly influenced by **spatial experience (*experiential value*)** and the availability of space for local communities. Hybrid (creative-retail) structuring has been proven to be able to prevent the pitfalls of superficial commercialization that often uproot cultural heritage buildings from their social roots.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

- **Theoretical Implications:** This study enriches the *adaptive reuse* discourse in developing countries by showing that *the genius of loci* is not static, but can be reformulated through the re-articulation of spatial functions that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of the younger generation.
- **Practical Implications:** The results of this study provide concrete references for architects, developers, and the Cultural Office in formulating *design guidelines* for the adaptation of cultural heritage buildings to colonial banking or office typologies in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the adaptive reuse strategy applied to the former United Overseas Bank (UOB) building in Jakarta's Old Town successfully transformed the formal, enclosed spatial configuration of a colonial-era banking building into an inclusive and adaptable center for creative and retail activities. This transformation was achieved through spatial insertion strategies and reversible architectural interventions that accommodated contemporary functions while preserving the building's primary structural elements, historical significance, and architectural integrity. The adaptive reuse of distinctive architectural spaces, including the former banking hall, central atrium, and bank vault, as multifunctional social gathering spaces and experiential retail environments contributed to reinforcing the building's genius loci, or distinctive sense of place, while revitalizing public engagement with the historic urban environment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the conduct of the research, preparation, or publication of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the preparation of this article. The first author, Sutan Wijaya , was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and manuscript preparation. The other authors contributed to the review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the preparation of this article.

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