

CULTURAL BENEFITS OF FORMER MILITARY BUILDINGS' REUSE: PUBLIC ROOM, SKOPJE, REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA¹

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Military Heritage

Adaptive Reuse

Smart City

Decision-making

ABSTRACT

The reuse of former military buildings is a relatively recent tendency in Skopje. As in different regions and countries around the world, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and start of the new political realities in Europe in the late 80s and the beginning of 90s, in the former socialist countries, such as Macedonia, military heritage has become a common part of the society and has been used for various cultural purposes. These former military facilities that have remained in a good physical condition and that have undergone contemporary reuse projects in Skopje have become a part of the new cultural networks and routes, and they have even promoted various values related to smart city concept. The conversion from the rigid and neglected military buildings which have been existing near the former Railway Station into new cultural hubs, centers for design and innovations are offering vast multi-layered benefits to the cultural mainstreams. This paper aims to interpret how the mentioned benefits are achieved through the applied adaptive reuse project and decision-making process within the context of "Public Room"; offering and promoting up-to-date multicultural activities and events to the locals and tourists, without any bias towards political, ethnical or religious orientation.

1. Introduction

Buildings have always been adjusted or modified to a certain extent. Although the adaptation of old buildings is not a new practice, their conversion into contemporary uses on a regular and larger scale has been a recent case. From the past, there was evidence of only occasional building conversions starting up from the Roman era up to the late Medieval period, whereas conversions implemented between the 16th and 19th centuries and other forms of adaptive reuse approaches became more common (Cunnington, 1988).

Nowadays, as a common problem in practice, besides many existing typologies including the industrial/military buildings that are potentially still in good physical/structural quality, unfortunately, they are being redundant or neglected due to various influential factors (Gregg and Crosbie, 2001). It would be a loss of valuable built assets to destroy such structures because demolition is a non-economic, wasteful, hazardous, polluting, disruptive and costly process (Douglas, 2006). Adaptive reuse of military buildings as part of the industrial building heritage in the cities received a lot of attention in the previous century, especially after II. World War and the changes in the political systems in Europe and worldwide. The redevelopments and reuse of

abandoned industrial sites and buildings, which are often located in the central sections of urban areas, have huge potential to improve the quality of life in different manners in the cities (Li, H & Lui, W, 2013).

The industrial heritage (warehouses, factories, gas-stations, mills, railway stations) is becoming more suitable to host various uses that are matching the contemporary way of living, such as art galleries, design & cultural centers, offices, theatres, etc. Moreover, their building characteristics and spatial volumes, the legislation and by-laws are allowing designers to have freedom in their conversion for different uses, concepts, and functions. Usually, conversions to other uses are more attractive than same-use conversions. The new use may involve minimal spatial, interior and functional requirements that do not differ much from the original. Usually, such building typology requires structural and interior modifications so to accommodate the changes easily (Douglas, 2006).

As the most recent tendencies in reuse strategies/approaches, the reuse or "retrofit" of different typologies of buildings, including the industrial heritage buildings, are covering a new and interesting aspect of the urban developments, especially in the domain of the mainstream culture today: the "creative cities" concept. As Harrison and

¹ This article is the peer-reviewed and revised form of the study entitled 'Cultural benefits of former military buildings reuse: Public Room, Skopje, North Macedonia' which is presented in the 20th National 4th International Tourism Congress, Eskişehir-Turkey (October 2019).

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Received 21.10.2019; Received in revised form 3.12.2019; Accepted 8.12.2019

e-ISSN: 2687 - 3737 / © 2019 Anadolu University. All rights reserved

Donnelly emphasize in their study about the theory of smart cities by analyzing recent developments and changes as:

"These challenges lead to experiments with new approaches to the planning, design, finance, construction, governance, and operation of urban infrastructure and services that Smart Cities are broadly called (Harrison & Donnelly, 2011)."

In that sense, reusing already existing structures in good condition is fitting the smart cities concept because it offers much more sustainable and economic solutions, less hazardous and wasteful approaches while adapting new functions to old buildings.

When it comes to the case study methodology of the Public Room facility in Skopje, this prism is becoming possible after starting with the steps for creating National Strategies on Creative Industries (Creative Industries Mapping in the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2016) that was initiated and performed basically by the Ministry of Culture. On one side, this explains the level of institutionalized influence in the process but on the other side it is not limiting the creative potential that influences the recent culture and art production, but instead of promoting art and culture as basic hubs for collecting creative potential that participates in the concept of the city creativity, cultural networks development, and cultural routes definition. In this context, the same point of "smart cities" appears to influence tourism, cultural tourism, adaptive reuse approaches and many other forms of creative existence on the urban scale.

Many other examples and platforms confirm the tendency of recognition of the cultural, thus promotional and touristic potential of these building typologies as well as bringing the life back into the forgotten corners of the cities, similarly to the case study of "Public Room". As stressed in detail in the PSFK platform – (The Future of cities, 2013), they even elaborate recent trends, which are responsible for the sustainable growth and effective management of the smart cities as they respond to the exceptional challenges by the rapid urbanization. These trends are mostly;

"aided by connected technologies, social platforms, and flexible design thinking, cities at the forefront of these progressive solutions are creating a compelling blueprint for ensuring that their citizens, businesses and public institutions thrive" (PSFK- The Future of cities, 2013).

² *Pop-up culture:* Architects and planners are experimenting with temporary venues designed to be quickly deployed and assembled to host temporary events like performances and films. These flash experiences connect with an ever-changing audience, while highlighting locally sourced content and bringing cultural enrichment into people's lives.

³ *Creative clusters:* As a way to breathe life back into forgotten corners of a city, there has been a renewed push to develop an artistic and cultural

Some of the emphasized values and topics coming from the above-mentioned report coincide again with the main topic of this research and presentation of the case study of "Public Room", such as pop-up culture², creative clusters³, urban canvas⁴, artistic endeavors (PSFK- The Future of cities, 2013).

With such approaches mentioned above, it is possible to reach the point to ask questions such as: Where are the forgotten corners and facilities in the cities that need contemporary, emerging and creative places? How do future creative scenarios seduce policymakers, decision-makers, planners, and designers? How are the complex decision-making processes and reuse projects provided in practice (Tsakarestou, 2013)?

Possible answers and solutions are again leading to the traces back to creativeness, adaptive reuse, smart cities, urban patterns and cultural routes, tourism developments, reviving forgotten facilities such as the study of "Public Room" in Skopje.

2. Research Process

The main objective of this paper is to examine how the benefits are achieved through the new contemporary reuse approach implemented on a former military building facility, namely "Public Room". Moreover, this research aims to examine and present how the complex process of decision-making in adaptive reuse strategies influences and improves the facility not just in micro (unit) level as well as urban level. Proper selection of the concept and the program for the former military facility are also crucially important because, in future stages, the reused facility should reflect creative and up-to-date values which will bring about benefits for the city.

The methodology used in this paper will be qualitative and initially provided through the setting of a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework includes the literature review related to adaptive reuse decision-making processes and context analysis of the former military heritage in Skopje, particularly introducing the context as a case study. The purposefully selected case study methodology for the "Public Room" is implemented in two phases. In the first phase, as mentioned before, is about the context analysis (presenting the nearest surrounding of the building, decision-makers, and policies of the stakeholders). In the second phase is about the descriptive analysis of the building and collected data (presenting the previous condition of the building, earlier conceptual stages

infrastructure like galleries, studios and workshops within transitional neighborhoods. By highlighting educational programming and creative self-expression, these grassroots efforts seek to build a strong anchor for the surrounding community that is attractive to both residents and visitors. As these areas establish themselves as destinations, they open the door for further social and business ventures, adding to the collective benefit of a place.

⁴ *Urban canvas:* Artistic endeavors and considered redevelopments that make the city landscape feel more vibrant and alluring, while engaging citizens around shared experiences and conversations.

of the adaptive reuse approach together with the new condition of the building; executive stages in the project and decision-making processes).

Furthermore, the data collection was done on the site of the case study through personal analysis, participation in the reuse project, observations, photo documentation of both previous and recent condition, and archive research for the technical documents of the reuse project, meetings, and interviews with experts and stakeholders.

The data collection was evaluated, analyzed and categorized through a comparative table which is presented in the result part as achieved in multi-layered benefits from the adaptive reuse project. Thus, recent tendencies regarding the "Smart city" concept and platforms that have already been presented in the introduction part are directly correlated with the case study as another aspect in the result part.

As a limitation of this paper, the focus is only on the decision-making process of the case of Public Room (Center for Design and Innovation) and the achieved benefits and the focus is not on any other industrial or military facilities in the nearby context or the urban cultural network in that part of the city.

3. Decision-making Process in Adaptive Reuse Approach

Particularly in the adaptive reuse approach and development and decision-making process, many professionals from both the public and private sectors are required to ensure that all of the necessary elements are coordinated and the tasks are completed. Because of their specific roles, expertise, and backgrounds, the stakeholders naturally approach the adaptive reuse process differently, with different ideas, strategies, and methods than the experts (Bond, 2011). Adaptive reuse process of industrial/military building typologies reflects with complexity, creativity, design thinking, co-creative, and collaborative planning which include involvement of various factors, strategies, and approaches such as (Bond, 2011):

- stakeholders (building owners, authorities, planners, institutions, companies, communities, etc.);
- strategies (intervention, insertion, and installation);
- approaches (contextual, contrast, free design, within, over, around and alongside building);
- feasibility studies, regulation, and legislation (degrees of protection);
- involvement of local communities (local needs, opinions);
- identification (location, building, materials, sense of place, values, etc.);
- definition of actors (experts, building owners, organizations, stakeholders);
- the decision of the conservation actors (working team);

- analysis of the existing fabric;
- definition of adaptive reuse potentials (concepts, typology, methods);
- definition of financial changes (funds, donations);
- final decisions (executive stages);
- a management plan for future use and maintenance of the building (international or local organizations, owners, etc.).

Furthermore, by applying these important steps of adaptive reuse decision-making process, the final result and the new uses, functions for existing industrial / military structures could be advantageous from many aspects such as: its function, users, the building itself (aesthetics, maintenance and protection) and on urban level as well (Mine, 2013). The most common benefits that could eventually come from the properly applied adaptive reuse strategies and decision-making process can be categorized as cultural, social, economic, environmental, technologic, functional, and aesthetic benefits common for both communities and the city (Johnson, 1996).

3.1. Former Military Heritage in Skopje

After the fall of Yugoslavia in 1991, in R. N. Macedonia as a former socialist country had many military and industrial facilities that were built in the first half of the 20th century and remained in the good physical condition and that were located in many cities across the country. Skopje, the capital city and a crossroad of many communications in the Balkan Peninsula, is a major political, economic, educational and cultural center. In Skopje, in the central district of the city there are many former military facilities (most of them were used for military needs as armor storages, warehouses, stables and some of them as facilities that are part of the Old Railway station) that remained abandoned and completely neglected besides their spacious capacities, unique characteristics and valuable locations.

Particularly, near the Old Railway station (built in 1938 by Velimir Gavrilovik, Serbian architect and existing before the devastating Earthquake in 1963) that had an enormous importance for the economic and industrial development for the country and the capital city, many warehouses and storage facilities were built between 1919-1938 and stayed in solid structural condition (The Old Railway Station, n.d. see Fig. 1). The reason why the structural qualities and capacities of these facilities are not easily prone to premature physical obsolescence could be answered as that it is because of the durability of the construction made for the industrial and military purposes (Multimedia Centre "Mala Stanica" - National Gallery of Macedonia, n.d.).

Some of the buildings were used for the purposes of the Ministry of Defense, yet some of them were completely demolished and some remained locked, empty and neglected. In the recent decade, these

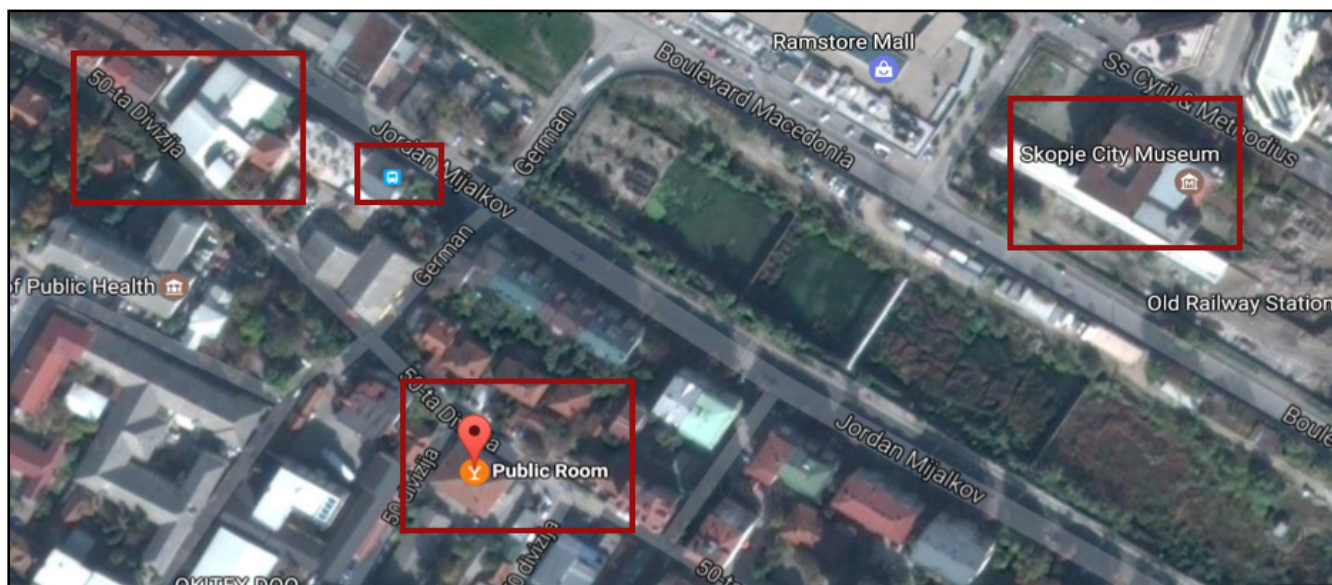


Figure 1. A map presenting the location of "Public Room" facility, the Old Railway station (today functioning as Skopje City Museum), "Mala Stanica" a former military warehouse (today functioning as Multimedia and Cultural Center) and "Station 26" (today functioning as Lounge Bar, located above of "Public Room") (Source: Google map, 2019).

buildings became attractive figures for experts to open discussions and debates (since they were not actively and sufficiently used) about their possible future reuse and creation of new cultural routes, connecting the old and new parts of the city so as to contribute to the cultural and urban life of Skopje.

One of the military warehouses located on left side of the building Public Room (See Fig.1) is one of the initial reuse projects that were applied to such buildings and it is successfully functioning as part of the National Gallery Network of Macedonia, as "Multimedia and Cultural Center, Mala Stanica" or literally translated as Small Station. Moreover, "Station 26" is another recent reuse project that is transformed from the former railway facility into a contemporary Lounge Bar.

4. Earlier Condition

The former military building so-called "Vardar" (today's Public Room) is located nearby the Former Railway Station (today's Skopje City Museum) and

was initially constructed in 1921 and functioned as a military stable during the period between the two World Wars. Later on, according to the needs of the military, it was used as warehouse storage together with an administrative part on the ground floor. The structural system is made from reinforced concrete (columns and beams) and remained in good structural condition (Josole Engineering, 2015). The building has a total capacity of 1440 square meters and has a ground floor, a first floor, and an attic. Moreover, in recent years the facility owned by Ministry of Defense, unfortunately remained in derelict condition (interior-floor, walls, stairs and exterior façade – not renewed and full of graffiti, openings, chimneys, roof, details and ornamentation, accessibility) and is used only for minor administrative purposes only in the ground floor (See Figure 2-3).

The pitched wooden roof structure stayed in critical condition as well; wooden beams (roof construction) are slightly damaged and needs to be replaced/strengthened. The roof construction was



Figure 2. Previous condition of the building (exterior) a



Figure 3. Previous condition of the building (exterior) b

to be replaced to be able to hold heavier weights in the future such as solar panels so as to ensure the energy efficiency of the building. Another problem with the attic is that the existing roof structure is not providing any natural ventilation/light. For that purpose, restructuring and consolidation of the roof had to be considered.

4.1. Public Room Organization

Public Room is an active non-governmental organization and non-profit civil and urban society organization in R. N. Macedonia and across Balkan region. The activities and the program they are providing to the community are to empower the non-profit sector from the region, influencing the national cultural policies and intensifying the cooperation in the field of culture, arts, design, and architecture in relation to the business sector. Public Room exists as a non-profit organization from 2007 while producing the most tangible results from 2008 in the focus sector – Design (URL 1).

From that year till present, the organization is hosting and organizing the most important cultural events such as “Skopje Design Week” in the historical building – “Kurshumli Han” in the Old Town of Skopje (See Figure 4-5). Moreover, this organization has held various international exchanges and presentations, production workshops, training, and management courses in the field of design.

4.2. Requirements and program

As popular NGO and non-profit organization in Skopje, in 2014 Public Room required new space / building (with previously estimated location and spatial characteristics) that will respond to the needs for creating a new Center for Design and Innovation and organizing Skopje Design Week in a new facility that will actively contribute to the community with its urban and cultural profile as well.

The program of the new Center for Design and Innovation has consisted of lobby and reception desk, restaurant (bistro) and bar, kitchen and storages, prototyping room with separate entrance

for supplying and delivering goods with truck (wood department, metal department, upholstery department, modeling department and storage, separated but still to be visible for visitors from the restaurant and bar area). Moreover, it also consisted of toilet units, multifunctional spaces to host various types of events such as seminars, workshops, presentations, screenings, debates, exhibitions, public and private events; concept store + shopping room, private room with small bar and kitchenette, open room, administrative zone with advertisement agencies, working stations, design studios etc. (Velinovski, 2014). These requirements are given to the stakeholders and expert team (architects, engineers) as well as a conceptual design program to be able to fit the existing military heritage building to convert into a new center in Skopje for Design and Innovation. Furthermore, in the next chapter, the decision-making process of conversion and adaptation of the building will be explained.

4.3. Decision-making process (conceptual and executive stages)

The building “Vardar” located on the “50th Division” street is governed by the Ministry of Defense (previously used as storage and administration for military purposes, but not sufficiently used and neglected). Due to the lack of use and poor conditions of the building, after major analysis of the space and estimation from authorities, stakeholders and experts (evaluation of the existing physical condition, documentation, measuring and drawing, preparation of a conceptual project), the Public Room organization found the building suitable to host the appropriate program.

The conceptual project of the facility was presented by Public Room organization to the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Culture. The project showed the design program and possibilities and benefits from reuse of the facility for the cultural events of the city. According to the national strategies of the Ministry of Culture for promoting the awareness in the design sector in Macedonia and the region,



Figure 4. Public Room Organizing Skopje Design Week a



Figure 5. Public Room Organizing Skopje Design Week b

the Ministry of Defense, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Government of Macedonia, approved its reuse and it transferred the ownership of the facility to the Public Room organization for purpose of cultural activities and maintenance for the period of 20 years (Vecer, 2015). The support of the Ministry of Culture will allow future development of the creative industries together with the business sector of the country.

When it comes to the legislation and regulations in the further design process, there is no strict protection for the building and it is not categorized as an important industrial heritage of the city. In collaboration with experts and authorities, it was decided that the facility should preserve the original tissue with possible minor additions such as shading elements and the entrance, changes of the openings and color of the façade.

After finalizing the decision process of the conceptual project, the implementation of the projects was planned at two stages. The first phase was about providing: structural reinforcement on the roof and repair work on façade, openings (new), additions (shading elements, entrance definition - stairs), painting, floor replacement, stairs (interior-exterior) changes in the inner division, lightning, HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), electricity. Due to the lack of finances, the second phase was executed later to include structural reinforcement and replacement on the roof and roof floor, in order for the attic space to be used for advertisement agencies, working stations, design studios and administrative purposes of the facility. In the second stage the interior design of the conceptual store, the prototyping room, and the meeting rooms were executed as well.

After a long and complex decision-making process of negotiations and approvals with authorities, stakeholders and experts (interior designers, architects, engineers), conceptual and executive phases of the project were finalized. After the period of one year, the adaptive reuse project was completed on 28 October 2015.

The significant opening of the new Center for Design and Innovation – Public Room, marked a new beginning of the urban and cultural activities that will be supported by the regional Balkan Design Network and European Union. In the next chapter, a new condition of the facility, what it offers to the citizens and designers and its benefits will be presented.

5. New Condition of the Public Room

After the long and complex decision-making process, today the new center for design and innovation is offering various urban events happenings in the cultural and design domain such as: free co-working spaces for freelancers, concept store, prototyping room, library, commercial bazaars, fine arts and photo exhibitions, seminars, workshops and creative courses for children and

adults, business meetings, presentations and celebrations.

Public Room is a pure hybrid and multifunctional place that offers realization of ideas, open and friendly access to the public, local and international companies, organizations or individuals. Moreover, the new condition of the building is promoting leisure activities like local and international cuisine, mezze bar, live music and DJ performances (New Center for Design and Innovation - Public Room, Skopje, 2015).

The improved new condition of the building is visible both in the exterior and interior. In the exterior, it is possible to witness some parts on the façade of the previous condition and function by the emphasized structural system with grey color and the details with the hooks (that served for caring the heavy objects). The contrasting contemporary touches on the façade are the wide openings on the ground floor as well as the shading element and stairs for the definition of the main entrance (see Figure 6). The interior design reflects with the same characteristics: the structural elements (columns and beams) from the previous condition are visible and clear. The new additions, furniture, and fixture reflect the contemporary and urban life of the 21st century. Furthermore, the interior design enables group/team or individual works with regards to space.

The constant and active use of the facility (interior and exterior) by locals and foreign visitors is a proof that the new form of the converted facility and the offered program/management are successful in many aspects (see Figure 7). In other words, Public Room completely encourages pop-up culture (hosting temporary performances and bringing cultural enrichment into people's lives), cultural cluster (breaths life back into forgotten corner of the city) or urban canvas (engaging citizens through shared experiences, platforms, gastronomic events, co-creative spaces and conversations) in the city. In the next chapter, the results and the achieved benefits of the reuse project will be examined.

6. Results and Benefits

As a result, the achieved benefits from the reuse project are evaluated on a micro (unit) and macro (urban) scale (See Table 1). The benefits are categorized as: cultural (unit scale: gastronomic events, hosting design week and various exhibitions, promoting local and international events in the cultural domain; urban scale: pop-up culture, cultural cluster, urban canvas, cultural route, cultural tourism) social (unit scale: offering various events for the citizens and visitors (all ages), co-working spaces, raising community awareness, organizing Skopje Design Week; urban scale: attracting local and foreign visitors, presenting the urban culture of the city and the region, preserving the collective memory), economical (unit scale: renting the spaces, buying designer products from concept store, bar and restaurant; urban scale: reduced costs for materials



Figure 6. The new condition of the military building after the reuse project and seating area in the courtyard a



Figure 7. The new condition of the military building after the reuse project and seating area in the courtyard b

and transportation, no rent to pay to the authorities), environmental (unit scale: saving energy from new systems applied; urban scale: no demolition, reduced pollution), functional (unit scale: multifunctional spaces with sub-functions; urban scale: connected into a cultural route with surrounding facilities in the cultural domain), technological (unit scale: new innovations and designs, new systems implemented;

urban scale: improving the context by presenting new technologies in the field of design), aesthetical (unit scale: new façade that still reflects the previous condition, contemporary and urban interior design; urban scale: enriching the context visually and aesthetically).

It can be also summarized that as the most recent reuse project, the Public Room facility was influenced

Figure 6. Achieved benefits on micro and macro scale

Benefits of re-use project (Public Room)	Micro (unit) scale	Macro (urban) scale
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gastronomic events design week exhibitions promoting local and international events in the cultural domain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pop-up culture cultural cluster urban canvas cultural route cultural tourism
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> offering various events for the citizens and visitors (all ages) design week co-working raising community awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attracts local and foreign visitors, presenting the urban culture of the city and the region, preserving the collective memory
Economical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> possibilities for renting the new spaces for private occasions, organizations, and companies, designer products, concept store, bar and restaurant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduced costs from the reuse project – materials and transportation, no rent for the period of 20 years
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> saving energies through sustainable façade, new systems (HVAC, solar panels) new roof garden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduced pollution and CO2 emission, transportation, no demolition
Functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multifunctional hybrid spaces, sub-functions such as concept store, prototyping room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> connected in a cultural route together with other cultural facilities nearby (Mala Stanica, Skopje City Museum, Station 26)
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> innovations and new designs (SDW), sustainability-new systems implemented in the facility, roof improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving the context, presenting new technologies in the field of design
Aesthetical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new façade with preserved envelope, interior design, colors, furniture and fixture, urban style, garden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving visually the context and the neighborhood

by the previous series of the reuse projects of the industrial and former military facilities in the central district of Skopje, such as:

1. the reuse project for the Old Railway Station (previously functioning as the main Railway Station in the City, today functioning as the Skopje City Museum);
2. the reuse project of the Mala Stanica (previously used as armor warehouse, today functioning as National Gallery and Multimedia Centre);
3. the reuse project of the Station 26 (previously used as part of the Old Railway Station facilities, today functioning as a lounge bar).

In that sense, the civic function of Public Room today is reflected as part of the Smart City concepts and part of the Cultural Route of the city co-existing and co-creating together with other reused facilities nearby which contribute, on daily basis, to enriching the cultural life of the city through active engagement of the citizens.

7. Conclusion

As a summary, it is possible to conclude that the adaptive reuse of industrial/military building heritage, no matter where their location is, can bring back life in forgotten corners of the city and be invaluable and beneficial for the structure itself and many other aspects. Even though the reuse strategies/projects depend on the complex, long-term decision-making process by involving various influential factors (locals needs, expert's opinions, administrative and authorities' approvals, stakeholders, managers), it does not allow premature redundancy or obsolescence of the existing heritage structures. Instead, they extend their life and continue to contribute to the communities, preserving the collective memory and showing the need for a smart update that can easily accommodate the rapid changes in urban developments.

Moreover, properly applied adaptive reuse projects will result in multi-layered benefits (cultural, social, economic, environmental, technological, functional and aesthetical) on the unit scale and urban scale as well. The case of Public Room in Skopje is a successful example of a former military building typology that was converted into a new Center for Design and Innovation bringing about all cultural benefits, pop-up culture, urban, smart and contemporary content to the city of Skopje offering to the citizens and visitors many new events in the field of design and cultural enrichment.

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