Formulating social indicators of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal: towards a research agenda

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Abstract

Urban renewal is often beset with social problems such as destruction of existing social networks, expulsion of vulnerable groups and adverse impacts on living environments. Numerous historic buildings are located in the old dilapidated areas undergoing large scale urban renewal. Although conservation of historic buildings is increasingly recognized to contribute to social well-being and sustainability in the urban city, the tension between heritage conservation and redevelopment is always a controversial issue. In this context, it urgently needs a robust evaluation framework for the impact of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal districts. This paper proposes a research to explore the possible social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal on the community life. With intensive literature review, a list of social impacts with the elaborated factors was identified. Case studies will be further undertaken to validate the list of social impacts. In addition, the corresponding indicators will be developed for the refined list of social impacts. The indicators will be formulated using a public participatory approach of the general public. The entire theoretical framework and the social indicators aim to assist the general public in assessing the social sustainability of the revitalization of historic buildings on the renewed districts. In particularly, it helps to evaluate the tangible and intangible, short-term and long-term, positive and negative impacts on the community.

Keywords: social indicators, revitalization, historic buildings, urban renewal, sustainability

Introduction

There is an ongoing debate on whether conservation and redevelopment can be complementary (Larkham, 1996, Delafons, 1997). It is increasingly recognised that the two can coexist and there is a great potential for conservation-led regeneration worldwide (Powell, 1992; Yeoh and Huang, 1996; English Heritage, 2005; Amit-Cohen, 2005). The mobilization of historical environments has become a staple element of post-industrial urban renewal strategies and generating business opportunities (Kearns and Philo, 1993, Swensen, 2012). Urban renewal can be seen as a strategy focusing on the physical improvement of the deteriorated and obsolete built environment. The historic building(s) is not only conserved for its associated historical value and architectural value, but also for its rich social values to the society as a whole. It has the potential to enhance the place-making character of urban area (Swensen, 2012). However, the social impacts on the community are often overlooked. Social issues include conflicts involving the cultural role of heritage and loss of social continuity and community neighborhood, property speculation, loss of sense of place, urban sprawl, gentrification and social exclusion (Pendlebury et al., 2004; Chan and Lee, 2008; UNESCO, 2004, 2005; UN-HABITAT, 2008, Yung and Chan, 2012a). In particular, exclusion of community participation also leads to a lot of social issues in heritage conservation (Yung and Chan, 2011).

As there is a growing tendency for giving a new use for the historic buildings, the uniqueness and local characteristics of each townscape which interact with the historic buildings have often been overlooked. Whether and how the new use of the historic building has been implemented and integrated with the renewed urban setting is a vital challenge (Swensen, 2012, Yung and Chan, 2012b). Urban setting characterized by continuous change (Jones, 2007) has even made the historic building

more difficult to integrate the surrounding context. As in many cities, conservation of single buildings rather than surrounding neighbourhood and district has often been taken place (Swensen, 2012). This further creates challenges to defining meanings for the historic buildings in an area undergoing a transformation. This in turn, usually leads to social issues.

Historic buildings are not only referred to those listed buildings or monuments of international or national significance, but also those containing the familiar and cherished local scene (Delafons 1997; Lamei 2005) in the local community. Inevitably, historic buildings situating in old urban areas are facing demolition threat, particularly in cities with immense redevelopment pressure. In Hong Kong, heritage conservation regime has not been in urban renewal agenda until recently, in particular, after the Star Ferry and Queens' Pier Conservation controversies. Some argue that urban renewal has been perceived as "just another developer" (Lam, 2009, Lai, 2010). As different from many other countries, urban renewal aims to revitalise a declining or depressed area or economy, a property-led redevelopment strategy has been adopted in vibrant neighbourhoods, full of local economic activities, social capital and unique culture and histories and at convenient locations (Ng, 2009). As such, historic buildings situated in the urban renewal districts are likely to be compromised for economic concern and profit making. The social value is often at best, not fully utilized, and at worst, sacrificed and even neglected. As a result, it creates many adverse social impacts to the local community.

Thus, this paper presents a list of critical factors to assess the social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal, using Hong Kong as a case study of dense urban city facing immense redevelopment pressure and favor in economic growth. The initial list of critical factors are concurrently identified through literature review. The list of critical factors is scrutinized from the controversial social issues of revitalizing historic buildings and the key roles and benefits it raise in urban renewal. Different critical factors would be relevant to projects with different characteristics, including the local community, scale of the historic building site, future use of the building, and (re)development in the local vicinity, etc. Therefore, the social impacts identified will form a generic theoretical framework, elaborated with the corresponding qualitative evaluation questions. The framework represents a template for evaluating a wider range of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal districts. The study will further verify and refine the list through in-depth interviews with a panel of experts. The framework developed will be further tested and analyzed in case studies which will be conducted. The final stage of the study includes developing corresponding social indicators adopting the participatory approach of the general public.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we provide an overview of the urban renewal regime and the evolving trend in recent years. We also provide a concise review of the social role of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal districts. Then, we next turn to provide the context for the revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal in Hong Kong. We then present the methodology and the initial list of social impacts of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal. Finally, we came to the initial results and the way forward for developing the robust theoretical framework and the corresponding indicators in assessing the social impacts of heritage conservation on urban renewal.

Urban renewal

Urban renewal is a process involving "physical change, or change in the intensity of use of land and buildings" resulting from the "economic and social forces" imposed on the urban areas (Couch, 1990). Healey et al. (1992, p.3) describe renewal in action as '[r]ebuilding the city, clearing away obsolete buildings and vacant sites, and producing new building forms and designs'. It is increasingly common in modern societies to improve urban quality of life (Goodman and Monti, 1999). Some stress that urban renewal involves the improvement of environmental quality, and resettlement of households (Planning and Lands Bureau, 2001). Priemus (2004) highlighted that urban renewal did not simply involve brick and mortar and it involves a process combining physical, social and economic considerations.

In cities worldwide, urban renewal has become increasingly important strategies in urban planning and development. In addition to demolition and reconstruction of decayed and obsolete buildings to create better living environment, urban renewal also emphasizes conservation and revitalization (Steel and Slayton, 1965). Revitalization is defined as "The process through which the mismatch between the services offered by the fabric of the historic quarters and the contemporary needs can be reconciled" (Tiesdell et al., 1996). Urban renewal which has disregarded the neighborhood, heritages and natural environment, ultimately will deteriorate the quality of life of the citizens (Lee, 2003). As such, a property-led redevelopment model which adopts the bulldozers approach has increasingly been replaced by the more sustainable, conservation-led redevelopment model in the last two decades (Feng and Wang, 2009; Pendlebury, 2002). It is evident that conservation-led redevelopment encourages private-sector investment and partnership (English Heritage, 2000, Yang and Chang, 2007). It is also increasingly recognized that conservation of historic buildings in urban renewal can embrace the social and cultural benefits (Chan and Lee, 2008).

The social benefits of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal

As stated in the 1987 Washington Charter, "[urban] conservation …should be an integral part of coherent policies of economic and social development and of urban and regional planning at every level" (ICOMOS, 1987, p. 1). Previous research suggests that revitalization of historic buildings can potentially provide the following social benefits.

Sense of place
It refers to a feeling of belonging and attachment, and importance that the visitors, residents and workers have on the place. It is stated that sense of place arises from a multi-dimensional experience including, views, sounds, scents, textures, tastes, movement, individual impression, etc. (White, 1999). Stubbs (2004) proposes sense of place as a social indicator of historic sustainability and construction of new place attachment. It is clearly recognised that people enjoy living in historic places because there is often greater community cohesion (English Heritage, 2005). On the other hand, the everyday experience of the people of the place may contain negative feelings of toleration or frustration (Lynch, 1972).

Collective memory
It is a feeling that is shared, passed on and also constructed by a group or modern

society related to an urban space (Boyer,1996). Heritage is used as a form of collective memory, a social construct shaped by the political, economic and social concerns of the present (Halbwachs, 1980). Collective memory relates to both the tangible physical evidence of the past (Barthel, 1996) and the intangible evidence /symbols for people to get in touch with the past including the character defining elements. In the context of urban renewal, it can relates to the everyday lives, communications and meanings attached to the district before the transformation (Assmann, 1995). Previous work also links collective memory with a deep bereavement when people saw or heard that heritage building was torn down (Fried, 1963).

Cultural identity
It can be defined as some common means/ ground of identifying with each other associated with the place in different time context. It helps the understanding of the individual as a coherent group of various characteristics including location, history, aesthetics, religious beliefs, etc. (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge, 2007; Guibernau, 1996)

Local characteristics and uniqueness
Cultural heritage has a role to play for developing the place-specific character of urban regions (Swensen, 2012). Conservation and revitalization of historic buildings should improve the physical condition of the environment while maintaining and enhancing local life and culture and the uniqueness of the place (Strange and Whitney, 2003). It is claimed that facilitating diversity in various human activities can boost the quality of environments and human life (Zukin, 1998). People's desire for diversity has been increasingly visible in the proliferation of lifestyles associated with identity building which enhances the streetscape and townscape of the city's urban fabric (Cullen, 1961).

Educating present and future generations
Historic buildings can educate present and future generations on the history of the people, the place and the events connected with the district (English Heritage, 1997; Atkins and IFA, 2004). It is also very important that appropriate interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment of the historic place (Australia ICOMOS, 1999).

City liveability
It refers to the extent to which that environment supports individual and collective needs (Stevens, 2009). It is the part that the physical environment plays in day-to-day life and its contribution to perceptions of satisfaction, safety, sense of place and community and community stability (Dempsey, 2008). It is also raised that whether social well-being and quality of life, has been enhanced by implementing polices that stress city livability in urban regeneration projects in the UK (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011).

Cultural diversity
It is recognized as "Common heritage of humanity" (UNESCO, 2001) and "equality and valuing different cultural experiences, whether they are due to ethnic identities, social or economic situations" (English Heritage, 2000, p.15). The historic environment contributes to quality of life and enriches people's understanding of the

diversity and changing nature of their community (English Heritage, 2005).

Community interaction and social cohesion
It is recognized that a heritage resource contributes to enhancing the contemporary social interaction in the community (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998). Research also states that social networks and interaction can enhance mutual understanding, trust, sharing and increase in social capital (Coleman, 1988, Putman, 1995). However, gentrification often occurred in urban regeneration process is increasingly threatening the social cohesion of the local community (UNESCO, 2004).

Illustrate the economic and scientific development took place in the district
Historic buildings can show evidence of economic, engineering, technological or scientific advances by which specific industries have contributed significantly to the development of the city.

Accessibility of use
Accessibility refers to how easily people can reach services and facilities at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001, p.1). Affordability in terms of ease of access and/or entry fees can be a prerequisite for equal access to historic sites, without encroaching on people's rights to use, visit and appreciate the place.

Social inclusion
Historic environment contributes to improving the physical environment which is one of the objectives of a social inclusion policy (DCMS, 2002). It can be achieved by broadening access and education, acknowledging cultural diversity and multiculturalism and developing partnerships and community involvement (Pendlebury et al., 2004).

Developing skills in heritage restoration and related activities
The revitalization of historic buildings can offer people the possibility of developing technical and/or social skills through work experience as volunteers or paid workers in heritage related activities (Atkins and IFA, 2004), such as the restoration of historic buildings and the provision of guided tours for visitors.

Public involvement opportunity
Active participation in the historic environment can positively affect the sense of belonging that can help people develop social networks with others, increase their pride in and understanding of the local area, identify their common interests, aspirations, goals and courses of action and improve their self-efficacy (Bramley and Power, 2009; Heritage Lottery Fund, 2009; Yung and Chan, 2011). In particular, the local population should be encouraged to take part in every phase of the revitalization process (ICOMOS, 1987).

Revitalization of historic buildings regarding social aspects in urban renewal in Hong Kong

The role of revitalizing historic buildings has been mainly rest upon the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) for the privately owned buildings, and the Development Bureau for the publicly owned buildings in the last two to three decades. In Hong

Kong, the main conservation strategy adopted in urban renewal district has been to bundle small scale individual historic buildings with large scale redevelopment. Although the idea of preserving local characteristics and social networks has been increasingly advocated in urban renewal regime (Development Bureau, 2011), many traditional trades and businesses had always been disappearing from the streetscape in the past history of Hong Kong. The commercial redevelopment which claims to subsidize the revitalization and reuse of the historic buildings has often destroyed the local characteristics of the district. Displacing the existing local inhabitants creates discontinuity of neighbourhood and the social network (Lai, 2010).

The Urban renewal authority (URA) was established in 2001 to assist the Hong Kong government in regenerating the decayed urban environment (Planning and Lands Bureau, 2001). URA is tasked to undertake "redevelopment" and "rehabilitation" as its core business under the "Four R's" Strategy, including Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, heritage pReservation and Revitalization (URA, 2011).

A major review of the Urban Renewal strategy in Hong Kong, has been carried out to resolve the growing problems associated with urban regeneration since 2008. The key reasons behind the review include the increasing demands from the public for retention of local characteristics and communities, particularly, the preservation of sites and structures of historical, cultural and/or architectural interest, and preserving the social networks of the local communities. The final Urban Renewal Strategy was finalised in 2011, initiates a social impact assessment for all the renewal projects, to assess a list of socio-demographics factors, local and cultural characteristics and social needs of the people affected by the proposed project. However, the impact of any preservation and revitalization of historic buildings has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

The URA has been undertaking 10 projects for the revitalization of historic buildings in the old districts, in which some are still in progress. The first completed heritage project was a Shop-house clusters, which has been criticized on its focus to achieve economic objectives and has overlooked social aspects. The Board of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) in 2008 decided to adopt a conservation-led redevelopment approach for the controversial case of the Wing Lee Street project instead of undertaking it as a redevelopment project with preservation elements. However, with no thorough considerations on the ways that conservation would affect people's way of life, the project has attracted a lots of criticisms.

Apart from the URA, the Commissioner for Heritage's Office (CHO) of the Development Bureau which was established in 2008, launched the Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme for the government owned historic buildings (Development Bureau, 2012). A total of fourteen historic buildings which are situated in the old urban districts have been announced since 2008. The social impact of the reusing the historic buildings on the community has yet to be examined.

After understanding of the background of the research context, it shows that there are only fragmented findings in the literature on the social impacts of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal. Many controversial issues still remain in the topic and there is not yet any comprehensive framework developed. Therefore, this study contributes to build the theoretical assessment framework.

Methodology

This study employed the qualitative research methodology to develop the robust theoretical framework for analyzing the social impacts of revitalizing of historic buildings in urban renewal.

The research study is based on three phases. First, data collection from literature, and with simultaneous analysis of the data by conceptualising and reducing data, elaborating categories (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In this first phase, it also employs in-depth interviews discussion with experts in the field; second, it uses case studies of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal in Hong Kong to further evaluate the applicability of the factor; and finally, corresponding indicators will be developed with the involvement of the general public.
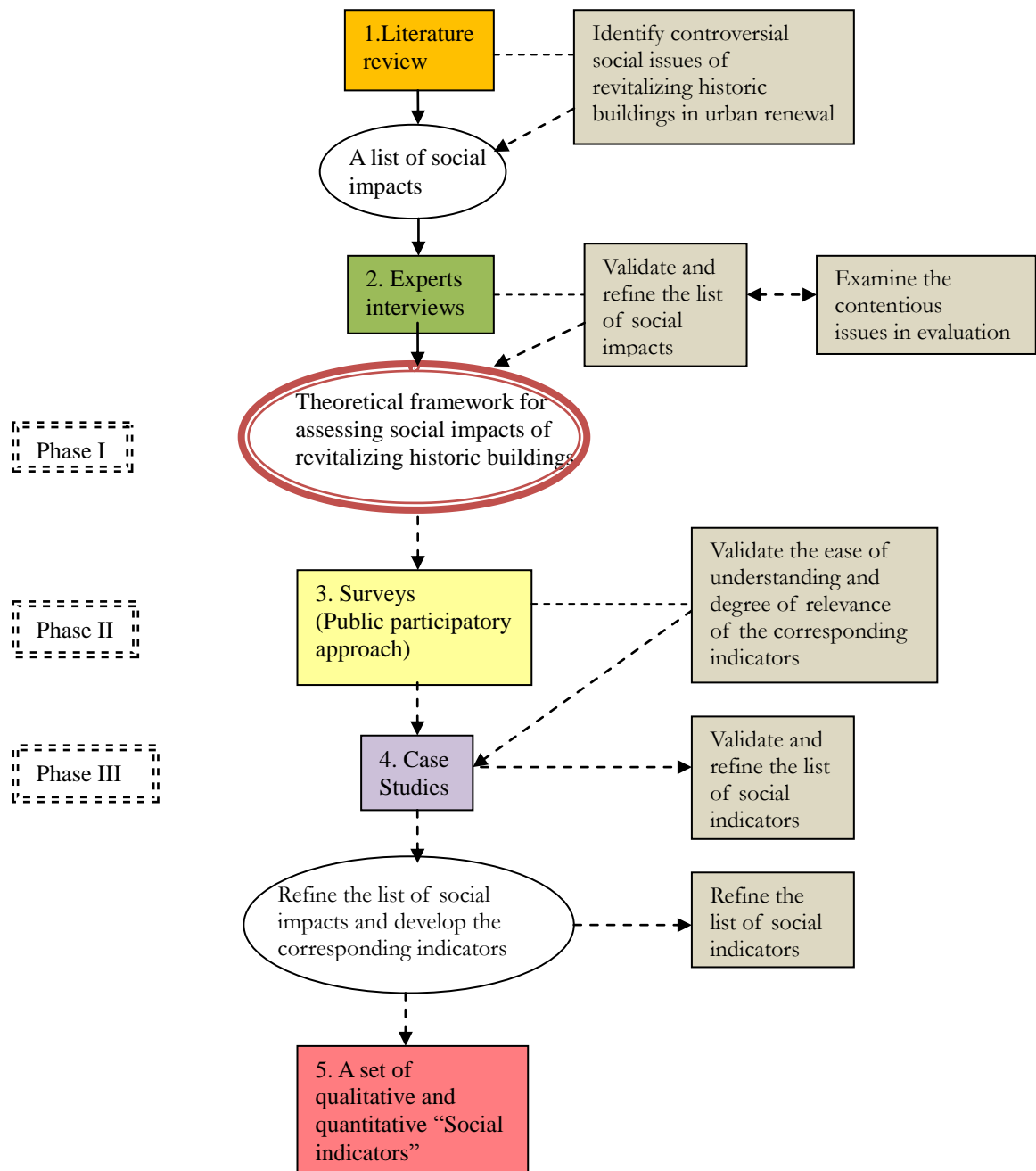

Figure 1. Research methodology adopting in this study

Literature review

This study began with an extensive review of books, professional journals, conference papers, government reports, local publications, newspapers, urban renewal authority's publications, internet resources, etc. to capture relevant background knowledge. The literature review helps to develop a framework for this study and prepare for the list of social impacts of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal.

In-depth Interviews with experts

A panel of experts was invited to participate in the process of developing a list of critical factors for evaluating the social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal districts. The experts chosen are professionals and academics who have at least fifteen years of working experience in the field of urban design, planning, architecture and heritage conservation in Hong Kong (table 1). During the in-depth interviews, they provided the list of preliminary critical factors developed by the research team and asked to evaluate the validity of each factor and the corresponding evaluation questions to the local context of Hong Kong.

Table 1 Profile of the expert's panel

Name	Field of expertise	Affiliation
Prof. A	Urban design and architecture	Professor, The University of YY, Hong Kong
Prof. B	Heritage Conservation	Professor, The University of YY, Hong Kong, TPB
Dr. C	History	Associate Professor, The University of ZZ, Hong Kong, AAB and TPB
Dr. D	Planning, urban renewal and social impact assessment	Research Institute on Sustainable development, The University of WW, Hong Kong,
Prof. L	Architecture, Urban Planning and urban renewal	The University of WW, Hong Kong, TPB
Mr. E	Heritage conservation	Member of Heritage and Conservation Committee of a Professional Institute, AAB, active critics and journalist
Mr. F	Town Planning and heritage conservation	Senior manager, Community development, Urban Renewal Authority
Mr. G	Social work	Senior manager, Community development, Urban Renewal Authority
Dr. H	Urban Design and urban renewal	Professor, The University of WW, Hong Kong,
Mr. J	Urban development	CEO of an NGO- Designing Hong Kong
Mr. K	Architecture and sociology	Architect of several revitalization of historic buildings in Hong Kong

Formulating social indicators

Based on the refined list of social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal districts, the research team will develop the corresponding qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess the performance of the revitalization of historic building project. Instead of validating these social indicators with experts, this research adopts a public participatory approach to formulate the social indicators. It is argued that the laymen should be the respondents who evaluate the social impacts of the project on their everyday lives. The Phase III of the research intends to ensure that the developed indicators and are commonly agreed and are easily understood by the general public.

Case Studies
Two cases of revitalization of historic buildings in urban renewal districts in Hong

Kong will be used to test the developed list of indicators. The case of Blue House Clusters (figure 1) and the Lui Seng Chun (Figure 2) located in Wanchai and Mongkok respectively are chosen and they are located in two areas with distinctive characteristics. The case studies aim to examine whether the social indicators for the conservation of built heritage in different urban renewal districts varies. If so, the generic framework for assessing the social impacts of the built heritage project will need to be refined for different urban renewal districts. It intends to investigate whether and how the local context, socio-demographics, the urban renewal approach and the existence of other built heritage in the district affect the list of social impacts on the community.

Figure 1. Blue House

Figure 2. Lui Seng Chun

Preliminary Results

Initially, a total of 16 social impacts shortlisted from the literature were scrutinized. For each social impact, elaborative statements are also provided for the better understanding of the impacts.

Table 2 presents the final list of social impacts factors after the experts' in-depth interview. The experts made critical comments on the validity of each of the factors and their elaborated statements proposed to be used for assessing the social impacts of the revitalization project in urban renewal during the in-depth interviews. The interviews took about one and a half to two hours. Some of the social aspects which are not agreed by more than 50 % of the experts were deleted.

It is proposed that this list of social impacts should form a generic template for future evaluation of revitalization projects and different list of social impacts would be applied to each specific project.

Table 2. Social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings in urban renewal

Social impacts	Sub-factors (Elaborated statements)
	The revitalization of historic buildings has the following impacts:
1. Sense of place	□ want to stay in the historic building(s)
	□ the historic building(s) is alive with people
	□ moving and or stationary activities is/are happening in the heritage building(s)
	□ the historic building(s) can be easily differentiate from other places in the district
	□ the historic building(s) provides a multi-dimensional experience to you (ie. views, sounds, scents, textures, tastes, movement, individual impression, etc.)

2. Collective Memory	□ provide tangible physical evidence of the past of the renewed district □ provide intangible evidence /symbols for people to get in touch with the past (e.g. the character defining elements). □ enhance everyday lives, communications and meanings attached to the district before the renewal □ provide the link between the present society and the people and historic event in the past □ a deep bereavement when you saw or heard that heritage building(s) was torn down
3. Cultural identity	□ provide a sense of pride □ convey an identity for yourself and/or a particular group of people □ help us to link to our roots and the past □ is/are an important symbol for the district □ provide meanings that are marked out by identity
4. Local characteristics and Uniqueness	□ become a landmark in the local district □ conserve unique traditional businesses and industries □ continue the social everyday lives of the people □ enhance diversity of streetscape – more variety of things to see and do □ enhance diversity of townscape – more variety of things to see and do
5. Educating the present and future generation	□ More programs/ workshops related to the historic building(s) (e.g. school activities / guided tours per month) compared to 5 years ago □ Illustrate the economic and scientific development took place in the district: - The heritage building(s) recalls history of traditional old trades and businesses in the local district. - The heritage building(s) reflects the economic and/or science, technological, and city planning development
6. Cultural diversity	□ retain and respect the variety of local traditional trades and business □ retain and respect people with different nationalities □ retain and respect different values, beliefs, traditions □ establish forums for dialogue between diversified cultures □ foster creativity in all its diversity
7. Community interaction and social cohesion	□ provide opportunities for meeting new friends □ provide opportunities for developing social bonding □ provide opportunities to take part in any heritage related community events □ enhance ease of maintaining close relationship with the old local neighbors □ enhance trust in other people □ enhance interdependency
8. Accessibility of use	□ public are allowed to visit the heritage building(s) □ provide affordable access to the heritage building(s) for the general public, if entry fees apply (including the disadvantaged groups) □ public transports are within a manageable walking distance from the site □ provide satisfactory disabled access for people with special needs
9. Social inclusion and gentrification	□ increase job opportunities related to heritage activities □ increase the property price and rent in the renewed district □ improve the neighbourhood
10. Developing skills in heritage restoration and related activities	□ more workers/ professionals know heritage conservation skill compare to 10 years ago □ more volunteers or paid works in heritage related activities for the local community (e.g. tour guides) and research compare to 10 years ago
11. Public involvement opportunity	**Public involvement activity/activities includes:** □ public consultation forums with government officials on the future use and operators of the historic building(s) □ participatory design workshops/ exhibitions during the design stage □ public involvement in decision makings related to the use of historic building(s)

	□ on going communication between the future building operator and the community
	□ Adopt partnership opportunities between the public and private sector
	Effectiveness of the public involvement activities:
	□ The public views obtained through different channels during the process of the conservation of heritage buildings are well addressed
	□ Different stakeholders are able to share the fruits of the conserved heritage site

Recommendations and future study

This study addresses the important role and social impacts of revitalizing historic buildings on the community in the context of urban renewal. Within urban renewal policy and practice, the application of the developed critical evaluation questions can be significant in measuring the social impacts of revitalization of historic buildings on urban renewal. This current paper presents the initial attempt of the whole study. It completed the phase I of the study which asked the experts to refine the list and identify the underlying issues in assessing social impacts. Phase II of the study requires further validation and refinement of the framework with case studies. Sample cases of revitalization of historic building projects in urban renewal districts will be selected for analysis. It needs to consider the time horizon and thereby incorporate a longitudinal, prospective design to reveal the long-term social impact and change over time. Interviews can be conducted for residents, business owners, and workers living in the urban renewed areas which contained revitalization of historic buildings. Possible mitigation measures should be provided to tackle the social impacts identified. Finally, a list of robust qualitative and quantitative social indicators will be developed with the participation of the general public.

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