

Protection and Utilization Paths of Historic Architectural Heritage Under the Background of Urban Renewal

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Abstract

Urban renewal has brought significant changes to the spatial structure, functional organization, and social environment of cities. In this process, historic architectural heritage is not only a physical record of urban development but also an important carrier of collective memory, cultural identity, and local characteristics. Traditional conservation approaches that mainly focus on static preservation are increasingly unable to respond to the practical demands of contemporary urban development. The protection of historic buildings needs to achieve a balance between maintaining historical values and meeting modern functional requirements. This paper discusses the relationship between urban renewal and historic architectural heritage conservation, analyzes the major problems existing in current protection and utilization practices, and explores possible paths from the perspectives of heritage value recognition, adaptive reuse, digital technology application, and multi-subject participation. The study argues that historic architectural heritage should not be regarded as isolated historical objects, but as active components of urban systems. Through appropriate renewal, functional transformation, and cultural interpretation, historic buildings can continue to contribute to contemporary urban life while preserving their historical significance.

Keywords: urban renewal, historic architectural heritage, conservation, adaptive reuse, cultural value, sustainable utilization

1. Introduction

Cities are constantly changing through economic development, population movement, technological progress, and spatial restructuring. Urban renewal has become an important approach for improving urban quality and optimizing existing built environments. However, the process of renewal also creates challenges for historic architectural heritage. Many historic buildings are located in areas with

high development potential, where conflicts may occur between preservation requirements and demands for improved functions, increased land efficiency, and modern living conditions. If renewal focuses only on physical transformation and economic benefits, historic buildings may gradually lose their cultural characteristics and connection with urban memory.

Historic architectural heritage contains multiple values, including historical, cultural,

architectural, social, and spatial values. Unlike newly constructed buildings, historic buildings reflect the development process of cities and preserve information about past lifestyles, construction techniques, and social changes. They provide important evidence for understanding urban history and maintaining local identity. Previous research has indicated that architectural heritage conservation has gradually shifted from simple protection of individual buildings toward broader approaches involving sustainable development, adaptive reuse, and cultural landscape conservation (Xiang, 2020). This transformation suggests that heritage conservation is no longer limited to preventing physical deterioration but also involves exploring how historic buildings can continue to participate in contemporary urban life.

In the context of urban renewal, the relationship between protection and utilization has become a central issue. Traditional conservation approaches often emphasize maintaining original appearances and minimizing intervention. Although this principle is essential for preserving historical authenticity, it cannot fully address contemporary requirements related to building functions, public accessibility, and environmental improvement. The concept of authenticity remains an important foundation in architectural heritage conservation, but its application should consider local cultural conditions and the specific characteristics of different heritage sites rather than simply applying external standards (Zhang & Yang, 2021). Therefore, historic architectural heritage protection requires a balance between historical continuity and necessary transformation.

Existing studies have examined architectural heritage conservation from different perspectives. Research on traditional villages has emphasized that architectural heritage is closely connected with local cultural identity and community development, suggesting that protection should integrate historical preservation with regional development needs (Yao & Zhao, 2026). Studies on adaptive reuse have further demonstrated that reasonable functional transformation can provide new vitality for historic buildings while maintaining their essential values (Yu, 2026). Meanwhile, the development of digital technologies has created new possibilities for heritage documentation, conservation management, and public

communication, enabling historic buildings to be interpreted and protected through more diverse approaches (Zhang, 2026; Liao et al., 2026).

However, several problems remain in current urban renewal practices. Some historic buildings lack systematic value recognition before intervention, resulting in inappropriate renovation strategies. Some projects focus excessively on external appearance while neglecting spatial characteristics, material features, and cultural meanings. In addition, insufficient financial support, limited professional resources, and weak public participation may influence the long-term sustainability of heritage conservation. These issues indicate that historic architectural heritage protection requires approaches that connect architectural conservation with urban development rather than treating heritage buildings as isolated objects.

Based on this background, this paper discusses the relationship between urban renewal and historic architectural heritage conservation, analyzes major challenges in current protection and utilization practices, and explores possible development paths. The purpose is to examine how historic buildings can maintain their historical values while becoming active elements within contemporary urban environments.

2. The Value and Challenges of Historic Architectural Heritage in Urban Renewal

2.1 Cultural Memory and Historical Continuity of Architectural Heritage

Historic architectural heritage is an important material representation of urban memory. Buildings not only provide physical spaces for human activities but also record social relationships, cultural traditions, and technological characteristics from different historical periods. Through architectural forms, construction materials, spatial layouts, and decorative elements, historic buildings preserve information that cannot be fully replaced by modern constructions.

The value of architectural heritage is not determined only by its age or visual appearance. A building becomes heritage because it carries specific historical meanings and cultural connections. Traditional residential buildings, industrial structures, public facilities, and religious buildings all represent different aspects of social development. Their values are reflected not only in architectural style but also in the

relationship between buildings and the communities that use them.

Research on traditional architectural heritage has shown that buildings in historical villages serve as important carriers of regional culture and collective memory. Their protection should include both physical preservation and the continuation of traditional knowledge, construction techniques, and local lifestyles (Yao & Zhao, 2026). This perspective suggests that heritage conservation should move beyond protecting individual structures and pay more attention to the broader cultural environment.

In urban renewal, historic buildings can provide cities with a sense of continuity. Rapid urban transformation often changes original spatial relationships and community environments. Historic buildings can serve as important anchors that connect different historical periods and maintain the uniqueness of urban spaces. They allow residents and visitors to understand the development process of cities and strengthen cultural recognition.

However, the value of historic architectural heritage is sometimes underestimated during renewal processes. Since historic buildings may not immediately generate economic benefits, they are occasionally regarded as barriers to urban development. Such an understanding separates heritage protection from urban growth and ignores the long-term cultural and social value created by historical continuity. A more comprehensive perspective should recognize historic buildings as valuable urban resources rather than outdated spatial remains.

2.2 New Requirements for Heritage Protection in Urban Renewal

Urban renewal has changed the context in which historic buildings are protected. Traditional conservation mainly focused on maintaining existing structures and preventing physical damage. Although this approach remains important, contemporary urban development requires heritage protection to respond to new demands, including functional improvement, environmental adaptation, and public use.

The increasing emphasis on sustainable urban development requires historic buildings to participate in contemporary urban systems. Protection should consider not only individual buildings but also their relationship with surrounding communities, public spaces, and urban functions. Historical districts, for example,

are not static museums but dynamic urban environments where preservation and daily activities need to coexist (Lin & Ruan, 2006).

The concept of adaptive reuse provides an important direction for integrating historic buildings into modern cities. Through appropriate functional transformation, historic buildings can continue to serve social needs while maintaining their historical characteristics. Adaptive reuse does not mean replacing original values with new functions. Instead, it requires identifying which elements must be preserved and which aspects can be adjusted according to contemporary needs (Yu, 2026).

For example, former industrial buildings can be transformed into cultural spaces, public facilities, or creative industry areas. Such approaches allow abandoned buildings to regain vitality and reduce unnecessary demolition. Research on industrial architectural heritage has demonstrated that protective reuse can contribute to both heritage conservation and urban transformation when appropriate strategies are adopted (Wang & Jiang, 2006).

2.3 The Necessity of Balancing Protection and Utilization

The relationship between protection and utilization has always been a fundamental issue in architectural heritage conservation. Complete preservation without appropriate use may lead to insufficient maintenance and social disconnection, while excessive commercial development may damage historical characteristics. Therefore, the goal of heritage conservation should not be choosing between preservation and development, but finding suitable ways to integrate both.

The idea of living heritage emphasizes that historic buildings should remain connected with contemporary society. Buildings are not merely objects for observation but also spaces where people live, work, communicate, and create cultural activities. Modern heritage conservation should consider human needs while respecting historical values (Jin, 2026).

A balanced approach requires clear recognition of different heritage values before intervention. Some elements, such as structural systems, traditional materials, and significant spatial patterns, may require strict protection. Other elements, such as service facilities or interior functions, may allow moderate adjustment. Through careful evaluation, renewal can achieve

both conservation and functional improvement.

At the same time, utilization should not be limited to tourism development. Although cultural tourism is a common method for activating heritage buildings, excessive commercialization may weaken local identity. More diverse uses, including community services, cultural education, public activities, and creative industries, can help historic buildings become integrated parts of contemporary urban life.

3. Current Problems in the Protection and Utilization of Historic Architectural Heritage

3.1 Conflict between Preservation Requirements and Urban Development Needs

Urban renewal aims to improve the quality of existing urban spaces, enhance public services, and optimize land use efficiency. However, historic architectural heritage often exists in areas with high development intensity, which creates conflicts between conservation requirements and urban development goals. In many cases, historic buildings are located in central urban areas where land resources are limited and functional demands are constantly increasing. How to maintain historical values while meeting contemporary urban needs has become a major challenge.

The conflict does not mean that heritage protection and urban renewal are naturally opposed. The problem often lies in the lack of appropriate coordination mechanisms. When urban renewal mainly focuses on economic benefits, historic buildings may face demolition, excessive reconstruction, or inappropriate functional transformation. Such practices may preserve only the external appearance of buildings while damaging their spatial characteristics and historical meanings. Research on twentieth-century architectural heritage has pointed out that historic buildings should not be treated as obstacles in urban development but should be understood as important components of urban cultural continuity. Protection should move from simple preservation toward active inheritance and reasonable utilization (Jin, 2026).

In some renewal projects, the value of historic buildings is evaluated mainly through short-term economic indicators, while cultural and social values receive insufficient attention. This narrow understanding may lead to decisions that prioritize immediate development benefits over long-term urban identity. Historic buildings

often contribute to cities by providing cultural recognition, place attachment, and historical interpretation, which cannot be measured only through direct economic returns.

Therefore, urban renewal requires a shift in thinking. Instead of replacing old buildings with new construction, renewal should explore how existing heritage resources can support contemporary urban functions. The key question is not whether historic buildings should be preserved or transformed, but how transformation can occur without weakening their essential values.

3.2 Insufficient Recognition and Evaluation of Heritage Values

Accurate recognition of heritage value is the foundation of effective conservation. However, in current practices, some historic buildings lack comprehensive evaluation before protection and renewal decisions are made. The value of a building is sometimes judged mainly according to its age, architectural appearance, or official protection status, while other dimensions such as social memory, technological significance, and community connection are overlooked.

Architectural heritage contains multiple layers of value. A building may have historical value because it reflects a specific period, architectural value because of its design and construction techniques, cultural value because of its connection with local traditions, and social value because of its role in community life. If only one dimension is considered, conservation strategies may become incomplete.

Studies on residential architectural heritage have emphasized that many ordinary buildings with relatively low protection levels also contain important regional and cultural information. These buildings may not have outstanding artistic features, but they reflect local lifestyles, construction traditions, and settlement patterns. Therefore, heritage evaluation should not focus only on representative monuments but also consider ordinary buildings that contribute to urban diversity (Tian, 2024).

The lack of systematic value recognition may result in two opposite problems. Some valuable buildings may not receive sufficient protection because their importance is underestimated. Meanwhile, some buildings may experience excessive restoration because their historical characteristics are interpreted too narrowly. Both situations can weaken the authenticity and

integrity of architectural heritage.

A more comprehensive evaluation approach should consider the relationship between buildings and their surrounding environments. Historic buildings do not exist independently; they are connected with streets, communities, landscapes, and social activities. Protecting the building itself while ignoring its spatial context may fail to preserve the complete historical meaning of the heritage environment.

3.3 Loss of Historical Characteristics during Functional Transformation

Functional transformation is an important way to activate historic buildings, but inappropriate transformation may damage heritage values. In urban renewal practices, some historic buildings are adapted for commercial, cultural, or tourism purposes. While such uses can provide financial support for conservation, excessive modification may cause the disappearance of original spatial features and cultural meanings.

Adaptive reuse requires a careful understanding of the relationship between existing structures and new functions. The goal is not to completely restore buildings to their original conditions or to redesign them according to modern standards, but to find compatible uses that allow historic buildings to continue their life cycle.

Research on historic building reuse has indicated that protection and utilization should be based on the characteristics of different heritage types. Different buildings require different intervention strategies. Industrial heritage, residential heritage, public buildings, and religious architecture each contain specific values and face different functional requirements (Chen, 2024). A unified transformation model cannot effectively respond to these differences.

In some cases, commercial development becomes the dominant purpose of reuse. Historic buildings may be converted into restaurants, shopping spaces, or tourism facilities with limited consideration of their original functions. Although such approaches may improve economic performance, they can also create problems such as excessive decoration, loss of spatial authenticity, and separation from local communities.

The transformation of historic buildings should therefore emphasize compatibility between old and new functions. New uses should respect existing architectural characteristics and avoid

major changes to valuable elements. At the same time, modern facilities such as safety systems, accessibility equipment, and environmental improvement technologies can be introduced when necessary, provided that they do not undermine the historical integrity of the building.

3.4 Limitations in Funding, Technology, and Social Participation

The protection of historic architectural heritage requires continuous investment in finance, technology, management, and human resources. However, many heritage protection projects face difficulties related to insufficient funding, limited professional teams, and weak coordination among different stakeholders.

Financial limitations are particularly significant for historic buildings that cannot generate immediate economic benefits. Regular maintenance, structural reinforcement, material repair, and environmental improvement all require long-term investment. Without stable financial support, some buildings may gradually deteriorate, increasing future conservation difficulties.

Professional technology is another important factor affecting heritage protection. Historic buildings often involve complex structures, traditional materials, and unique construction techniques. Modern intervention methods need to balance technical improvement with respect for historical characteristics. Recent research has shown that digital surveying technologies, including laser scanning and photogrammetry, can improve the accuracy of heritage documentation and provide technical support for restoration and management (George et al., 2026).

Digital technologies have also expanded the possibilities of heritage management and public communication.

Three-dimensional documentation, digital archives, and virtual exhibitions can help record heritage information and increase public understanding. However, technology should serve conservation goals rather than replace historical interpretation. The application of digital tools requires integration with architectural knowledge and conservation principles (Liao et al., 2026).

In addition, public participation remains an important but sometimes insufficient aspect of heritage conservation. Historic buildings are closely connected with local communities, and residents often possess valuable knowledge

about the history and daily use of these spaces. If conservation decisions are made only by government agencies or professional institutions, the relationship between heritage and everyday life may become weakened.

Therefore, sustainable heritage conservation requires cooperation among governments, professionals, communities, and other social groups. Different participants can contribute different resources and knowledge, creating a more comprehensive protection system.

4. Conceptual Transformation of Historic Architectural Heritage Conservation

4.1 From Static Preservation to Dynamic Conservation

The understanding of architectural heritage conservation has gradually shifted from static preservation toward dynamic conservation. Traditional approaches often considered historic buildings as fixed objects that should remain unchanged. Although this approach helped protect many valuable buildings, it sometimes separated heritage from contemporary society.

Dynamic conservation emphasizes that historic buildings should continue to exist within changing urban environments. Protection does not mean freezing buildings in a specific historical moment, but maintaining their essential values while allowing reasonable adaptation. This approach recognizes that buildings have always changed throughout history, and appropriate transformation can become part of their continued development.

The concept of living heritage reflects this transformation. Historic buildings maintain their significance not only because of their physical materials but also because they continue to serve social and cultural functions. A building that remains connected with community life is more likely to achieve long-term preservation.

Research on architectural heritage development has suggested that modern conservation should combine protection, renewal, and utilization rather than treating them as separate processes (Xiang, 2020). This means that conservation strategies should consider both historical continuity and future development possibilities.

4.2 Combining Authenticity Protection with Appropriate Renewal

Authenticity is one of the fundamental concepts in architectural heritage conservation. It emphasizes that heritage values should be

preserved through respect for original materials, construction techniques, spatial characteristics, and historical information. However, authenticity does not mean that historic buildings must remain completely unchanged. In the process of urban renewal, buildings inevitably face new functional requirements, environmental changes, and technological improvements. Therefore, authenticity should be understood as a principle for guiding transformation rather than a restriction that prevents any form of change.

The application of authenticity principles requires consideration of specific cultural and architectural contexts. Since different regions have different historical backgrounds, construction traditions, and social environments, the meaning of authenticity cannot be completely standardized. In some cases, maintaining original materials and structural systems is the primary goal, while in others, preserving spatial relationships, cultural meanings, or traditional construction knowledge may be more important. Zhang and Yang (2021) argued that the authenticity of architectural heritage should be understood through multiple dimensions, including material authenticity, technological authenticity, and the spirit of place.

Appropriate renewal based on authenticity principles can help historic buildings adapt to contemporary requirements. For example, improvements in fire protection, energy efficiency, accessibility, and infrastructure are often necessary for the continued use of historic buildings. These interventions should not be regarded as damage to heritage values when they are carefully designed and do not destroy significant historical features.

The relationship between conservation and renewal can also be understood as a process of dialogue between different historical periods. Historic buildings represent the past, while renewal introduces contemporary functions and technologies. The objective is not to eliminate differences between old and new but to create a harmonious relationship in which historical characteristics remain recognizable while modern needs are appropriately addressed.

Research on energy improvement in historic buildings has demonstrated that conservation and modernization can be coordinated through scientific assessment. Technologies related to environmental performance, material evaluation,

and risk control can improve building conditions while reducing negative impacts on heritage values (Dang, 2026). This indicates that technological improvement and heritage protection are not contradictory when intervention methods are carefully selected.

4.3 From Individual Building Protection to Integrated Urban Conservation

Historic architectural heritage should not be considered only as individual buildings. In many cases, the value of a historic building is closely related to surrounding streets, public spaces, landscapes, and communities. Protecting isolated buildings while ignoring their urban context may result in fragmented conservation and the loss of historical relationships. Integrated urban conservation emphasizes the connection between buildings and their environments. Historic districts, traditional neighborhoods, and cultural landscapes contain multiple layers of historical information. Their value comes not only from individual architectural elements but also from spatial patterns and social activities developed over time.

Historical districts provide important examples of integrated conservation. As dynamic urban heritage areas, they need to maintain both historical characteristics and daily urban functions. The protection of historical blocks should consider environmental improvement, community needs, and economic sustainability rather than simply preserving old buildings as exhibition objects (Lin & Ruan, 2006). This approach is particularly important in the context of urban renewal. Contemporary cities require improved transportation, public facilities, and living environments. If heritage conservation is separated from urban improvement, historic areas may become isolated spaces with declining vitality. Instead, renewal should integrate heritage protection into broader urban planning processes.

The protection of twentieth-century architectural heritage also demonstrates the importance of considering urban context. Many modern buildings may not have the same historical age as traditional monuments, but they represent important periods of social development and urban transformation. Their value lies in their relationship with collective memory and urban identity (Jin, 2026).

Therefore, urban renewal should adopt a broader perspective that recognizes historic buildings as

components of urban systems. Protection strategies should include not only building repair but also the improvement of surrounding spaces, transportation connections, public services, and community environments.

4.4 Strengthening Social and Cultural Value Expression

Architectural heritage conservation is not only a professional activity but also a process of cultural communication. Historic buildings can only achieve long-term protection when their values are understood and recognized by society. Therefore, improving public awareness and strengthening cultural interpretation are important parts of heritage conservation.

In the past, heritage protection often focused on professional management and technical restoration, while public participation was relatively limited. However, contemporary conservation increasingly emphasizes the relationship between heritage and society. Local residents, visitors, educational institutions, and community organizations can all participate in heritage interpretation and preservation.

Communication strategies can help transform historic buildings from passive objects of protection into active cultural resources. Through exhibitions, educational programs, digital platforms, and public activities, people can better understand the historical meanings of buildings. This process can strengthen social support for conservation. Research from the perspective of communication studies suggests that heritage protection requires effective interaction between heritage resources and audiences. Cultural communication can promote understanding between heritage sites and the public while supporting a balance between protection and reuse (Song, 2017).

Digital technologies have further expanded opportunities for heritage communication. Virtual exhibitions, digital archives, and interactive platforms allow historic buildings to reach wider audiences. Digital approaches can particularly support heritage sites that have limited physical accessibility, providing new ways to present historical information (Liao et al., 2026). However, cultural expression should avoid simplifying heritage into purely commercial symbols. Excessive entertainment-oriented presentation may weaken historical meanings. Effective interpretation should respect the complexity of heritage and help the public

understand the relationship between buildings, history, and social development.

5. Protection Paths of Historic Architectural Heritage under Urban Renewal

5.1 Establishing Value Assessment and Classification Protection Systems

Effective protection begins with accurate understanding of heritage values. Before renewal interventions are carried out, historic buildings should undergo systematic assessment to identify their historical significance, architectural characteristics, structural conditions, and social values. Without clear evaluation, conservation decisions may lack direction and result in inappropriate interventions. A classification-based protection system can improve the effectiveness of conservation. Different buildings have different values and conditions, so they should not be treated with identical protection methods. Buildings with high historical and artistic value may require strict preservation, while buildings with stronger functional adaptability may allow more flexible reuse. Research on residential architectural heritage has shown that value assessment should combine cultural significance with current conditions. Low-level protected buildings may also contain important regional characteristics and should receive appropriate attention rather than being ignored because of their formal protection status (Tian, 2024).

Value assessment should also include surrounding environments. The relationship between a building and its urban context often determines its historical meaning. A traditional building that loses its original neighborhood environment may experience a reduction in cultural value even if the physical structure remains. Therefore, assessment should move beyond evaluating buildings as isolated objects. A comprehensive system should consider architectural features, historical background, spatial relationships, community connections, and future utilization possibilities.

5.2 Improving Restoration Technologies and Management Methods

Restoration technology plays an important role in maintaining historic architectural heritage. Historic buildings often involve complex materials and traditional construction methods that require specialized approaches. Modern technologies can provide important support, but they should be applied based on conservation

principles. Traditional repair methods emphasize respect for original materials and construction logic. Modern technologies, including structural reinforcement, three-dimensional scanning, and digital documentation, can improve accuracy and efficiency. The key is to determine appropriate intervention levels according to the actual conditions of each building.

Digital surveying technologies have become increasingly important in heritage conservation. Techniques such as UAV photogrammetry, laser scanning, and mobile LiDAR can record detailed information about building forms, materials, and deterioration conditions. These technologies provide reliable data for restoration planning and long-term monitoring (George et al., 2026). At the same time, technology should not replace professional judgment. Digital data can support decision-making, but the interpretation of historical values still depends on architectural knowledge and conservation experience. A balance between technological assistance and cultural understanding is necessary. Management systems are equally important. Sustainable protection requires continuous monitoring, maintenance plans, and clear responsibilities among different institutions. One-time restoration projects cannot guarantee long-term preservation if daily management is insufficient.

5.3 Applying Digital Technologies to Heritage Conservation

The development of digital technologies has provided new possibilities for the documentation, management, and utilization of historic architectural heritage. Traditional conservation methods often rely on manual surveys, drawings, and written records. Although these methods remain valuable, they may face limitations when dealing with complex architectural forms, detailed decorative elements, and long-term monitoring requirements. Digital technologies can provide more accurate and comprehensive information support for heritage conservation.

Three-dimensional scanning, geographic information systems, building information modeling, unmanned aerial vehicles, and digital archives have gradually become important tools in architectural heritage protection. These technologies can record building dimensions, material conditions, structural characteristics, and environmental information, creating a more

complete database for conservation decisions. Research on heritage surveying techniques has shown that different digital methods have their own advantages in terms of accuracy, efficiency, and adaptability. The combination of multiple technologies can improve the quality of heritage documentation and provide technical support for restoration projects (George et al., 2026). Digital technologies also contribute to the preservation of heritage information. Historic buildings may experience gradual deterioration due to natural conditions, human activities, and functional changes. Digital records can preserve information about buildings before changes occur, providing references for future repair and management. This is particularly important for buildings with complex structures or fragile materials.

Beyond documentation, digital technologies can enhance public understanding of architectural heritage. Digital museums, virtual exhibitions, and online platforms allow heritage resources to reach broader audiences. For buildings with limited accessibility or fragile conditions, digital presentation provides an alternative way for people to understand their historical and cultural significance. Research on digital heritage protection has suggested that digital intelligence technologies can support classification preservation, public participation, and interactive interpretation of traditional architectural heritage (Liao et al., 2026). However, the application of digital technologies should avoid becoming a purely technical process. The purpose of digital conservation is not simply to collect large amounts of data, but to support better understanding and protection of heritage values. Excessive reliance on technology without consideration of historical context may result in accurate records but insufficient cultural interpretation. Therefore, digital methods should be integrated with architectural analysis, conservation principles, and social needs.

In future urban renewal practices, digital technologies can support the establishment of dynamic heritage management systems. Through continuous monitoring and information updating, conservation decisions can become more scientific and adaptive. This approach can help historic buildings remain connected with changing urban environments while reducing unnecessary intervention.

5.4 Promoting Adaptive Reuse of Historic Buildings

Adaptive reuse is an important strategy for achieving the sustainable development of historic architectural heritage. Many historic buildings face problems such as functional decline, insufficient maintenance, and reduced social connection because their original functions no longer meet contemporary needs. Simply preserving unused buildings may create difficulties in long-term management. Adaptive reuse provides a way to maintain heritage values while allowing buildings to participate in modern urban life.

The core of adaptive reuse is to introduce appropriate new functions while respecting the historical characteristics of buildings. Unlike ordinary renovation projects, heritage reuse should begin with an understanding of existing values and limitations. New functions should match the spatial characteristics, structural conditions, and cultural meanings of historic buildings. Different types of heritage buildings require different reuse strategies. Industrial buildings often have large spaces and unique structural systems, making them suitable for cultural centers, creative industries, and public facilities. Traditional residential buildings may be more suitable for community services, cultural exhibitions, or small-scale commercial activities. Public buildings with historical significance can be transformed into educational or cultural spaces while maintaining their symbolic meanings. Research on industrial architectural heritage has demonstrated that protective reuse can contribute to both heritage conservation and urban transformation. By integrating existing buildings into new economic and social systems, cities can reduce demolition pressure and preserve historical resources (Wang & Jiang, 2006). Similarly, studies on modern architectural heritage have emphasized that reasonable utilization can help historic buildings continue serving society while maintaining their cultural significance (Jin, 2026). However, adaptive reuse requires careful control. If new functions become dominant, historic buildings may gradually lose their original identity. For example, excessive commercial transformation may introduce large-scale alterations, inappropriate decoration, or changes in spatial organization. Therefore, reuse should follow the principle of minimum intervention and maintain a clear relationship between historical elements and new additions.

The success of adaptive reuse also depends on understanding local conditions. A suitable reuse

model should consider surrounding communities, urban functions, economic conditions, and cultural characteristics. A strategy that works for one heritage building may not be directly applied to another. Local adaptation is therefore essential for achieving sustainable conservation.

6. Strategies for Sustainable Utilization of Historic Architectural Heritage

6.1 Integrating Heritage Buildings into Urban Public Spaces

Historic architectural heritage should not exist as isolated cultural objects but should become active parts of urban public life. Urban renewal provides opportunities to reconnect historic buildings with surrounding spaces and improve their social functions. Through appropriate spatial integration, heritage buildings can contribute to urban vitality while maintaining historical characteristics. Public spaces around historic buildings often influence how people perceive and use heritage areas. Streets, squares, landscapes, and community spaces form an important environment for heritage interpretation. If surrounding spaces are poorly designed, even well-preserved buildings may lose their connection with urban life.

The protection of historical districts demonstrates the importance of spatial integration. Historical areas need to balance environmental improvement, community activities, and heritage preservation. The goal is not to create static cultural scenes but to maintain areas where residents can continue living and participating in daily activities (Lin & Ruan, 2006).

In practice, historic buildings can be integrated into urban public systems through cultural facilities, community services, educational spaces, and public activities. Such approaches allow heritage resources to provide broader social benefits. At the same time, public use can increase people's awareness of heritage values and encourage greater participation in conservation.

6.2 Combining Cultural Display with Community Functions

Cultural interpretation is an important aspect of heritage utilization, but heritage buildings should not only serve as exhibition spaces. Combining cultural display with community functions can help historic buildings maintain

continuous social relevance. Many historic buildings have developed close relationships with local communities over time. Residents often possess valuable knowledge about the history, use, and cultural meanings of these buildings. Involving communities in conservation and utilization processes can improve the connection between heritage protection and everyday life. Community-oriented reuse can include public reading spaces, cultural activity centers, educational facilities, and neighborhood services. These functions allow historic buildings to continue serving people rather than becoming purely symbolic spaces.

The participation of communities also contributes to the preservation of intangible heritage. Traditional construction knowledge, local stories, and cultural practices are often closely connected with physical buildings. Protecting only the material structure without considering associated knowledge may result in incomplete heritage conservation. Research on vernacular architecture has emphasized the importance of preserving traditional building skills and related cultural knowledge as part of architectural heritage protection (Curk et al., 2026). Therefore, sustainable utilization should combine physical conservation with cultural continuity. Historic buildings can become spaces where historical knowledge is transmitted and contemporary community life develops.

6.3 Exploring Appropriate Cultural Tourism Development

Cultural tourism is one of the common approaches for activating historic architectural heritage. When properly managed, tourism can provide financial resources for conservation and increase public recognition of heritage values. However, tourism development should be based on heritage protection rather than replacing conservation goals with commercial interests.

A reasonable tourism model should focus on cultural interpretation and experience rather than simple consumption. Visitors should be encouraged to understand the historical background, architectural characteristics, and social meanings of heritage buildings. This requires careful design of exhibitions, services, and cultural activities.

Studies on traditional architectural heritage have shown that tourism development and heritage protection can form a mutually supportive

relationship when appropriate mechanisms are established (Xie, 2020). Tourism can provide economic support, while well-preserved heritage resources can enhance the attractiveness of destinations. However, excessive tourism may create pressure on historic buildings. Large visitor numbers, commercial facilities, and inappropriate modifications may damage physical structures and change local community environments. Therefore, tourism development should consider carrying capacity, functional compatibility, and long-term conservation needs. The purpose of cultural tourism should be to strengthen the connection between people and heritage rather than simply generating economic benefits. Through balanced development, tourism can become one component of sustainable heritage utilization.

6.4 Building Multi-Stakeholder Participation Mechanisms

The protection and utilization of historic architectural heritage involve multiple dimensions, including architectural conservation, urban planning, cultural communication, economic development, and community management. Therefore, relying on a single institution or professional group is often insufficient to achieve long-term conservation goals. A sustainable heritage protection system requires cooperation among governments, professional organizations, communities, enterprises, and the public. Government departments play an important role in establishing protection frameworks, providing policy guidance, and coordinating different interests. Through regulations, planning systems, financial support, and supervision mechanisms, governments can create a stable environment for heritage conservation. Research on architectural heritage protection practices has shown that the establishment of legal systems and management institutions is an important foundation for improving conservation effectiveness (Zhang, 2024).

Professional institutions, including architects, planners, researchers, and conservation specialists, provide technical knowledge and evaluation support. Historic buildings often involve complex relationships between structure, materials, cultural meaning, and spatial environments. Professional participation can help ensure that renewal interventions follow appropriate conservation principles rather than being driven only by short-term objectives.

Communities are also important participants in heritage protection. Local residents are not only users of historic spaces but also holders of historical memories and cultural knowledge. Their participation can provide valuable information about buildings and improve the connection between conservation projects and daily life. In some traditional settlements, community involvement has become an important approach for maintaining both architectural heritage and local cultural continuity (Yao & Zhao, 2026). Enterprises and social organizations can contribute through financial investment, operational management, and cultural activities. However, participation from market actors should be guided by clear conservation principles. Economic development should support heritage protection rather than replace it. Commercial activities that ignore historical values may lead to excessive transformation and weaken the cultural significance of heritage buildings. A multi-stakeholder mechanism can also improve the sustainability of heritage utilization. Different participants have different resources and knowledge, and cooperation among them can create a more balanced system. Through shared decision-making and coordinated management, historic buildings can achieve better integration into contemporary urban development.

7. Conclusion

Historic architectural heritage represents not only physical structures from the past but also important carriers of urban memory, cultural identity, and social development. Under the background of urban renewal, the protection of historic buildings faces new challenges. The rapid transformation of urban spaces, increasing functional demands, and changing social conditions require heritage conservation to move beyond traditional approaches based only on static preservation.

The relationship between protection and utilization should not be understood as a contradiction. Appropriate utilization can provide new vitality for historic buildings, while effective protection can maintain their cultural significance. The key lies in finding a balance between preserving historical values and adapting to contemporary needs. Concepts such as authenticity protection, adaptive reuse, integrated urban conservation, and public participation provide important directions for achieving this balance.

In future urban renewal practices, historic architectural heritage should be regarded as an active component of urban systems rather than an isolated historical object. Value assessment should become the foundation of conservation decisions, while digital technologies and scientific restoration methods can provide technical support. At the same time, adaptive reuse should focus on compatibility between historical characteristics and new functions, avoiding excessive commercialization or inappropriate transformation.

The sustainable development of historic architectural heritage also depends on broader social participation. Governments, professionals, communities, enterprises, and the public should jointly participate in conservation processes. Through cooperation among different stakeholders, historic buildings can continue to preserve historical memory while contributing to contemporary urban life.

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