RESEARCH ARTICLE

RSP Science Hub

International Research Journal on Advanced Science Hub
2582-4376
www.rspsciencehub.com
Vol. 07, Issue 10 October

Check for updates

http://dx.doi.org/10.47392/IRJASH.2025.098

Adaptive Reuse for Community Development

Aayush Chanana[1], Geeta Rani S[2], Mansi Pillai[3], Sunakshi Shokeen[4]

[1]UG Student, Interior and Architecture design, SOD, World University of Design, Sonepat, Haryana, India.

[2,3]PG Student, Interior and Retail design, SOD, World University of Design, Sonepat, Haryana, India.

[4]Assistant Professor, Interior and Architecture Design, SOD, WUD Sonepat, Haryana, India.

Email ID: *aayushchanana28@gmail.com[1], geetarani17527@gmail.com[2], mansipillai04@gmail.com[3], sunakshi.shokeen@wud.ac.in[4]*

Article history

Received: 29 August 2025
Accepted: 12 September 2025
Published:23 October 2025

Keywords:

Heritage, Reuse, Community, Sustainability, Identity

Abstract

Garli and Pragpur, a heritage village cluster in Himachal Pradesh, are known for their fading havelis, narrow lanes, and a distinctive blend of colonial, Sikh, and vernacular Himachali architecture. Once flourishing under the enterprise of the Sood community, these settlements today face neglect as many historic structures remain abandoned or underutilized, leading to a gradual erosion of cultural identity. This research explores adaptive reuse as a sustainable strategy to revitalize void heritage buildings for social welfare and community development. Through site observations, architectural documentation, and analysis of reuse approaches, the study examines how abandoned structures can be assigned new functions that respond to present societal needs. The findings reveal that heritage conservation must extend beyond physical restoration to address the social and functional dimensions of space. Buildings that lose their original utility risk falling into disrepair; however, adaptive reuse bridges the past and present by providing renewed purpose while respecting original character. The study concludes that integrating modern, community-oriented functions within heritage buildings can foster inclusive development, preserve cultural continuity, and revitalize neglected environments, positioning adaptive reuse as a key strategy for ensuring the sustainable survival of cultural assets and enhancing the quality of life for local communities.

1. Introduction

India is losing its architectural heritage, with many historic buildings, such as havelis, palaces, and temples, becoming abandoned and neglected [1]. This decline is fueled by rapid urbanization, economic shifts, and the high cost of maintenance, leading to the loss of both physical structures and cultural memory. The villages of Garli and Pragpur in Himachal Pradesh are a prime example of this issue. Once flourishing with unique architecture from the Sood community, these twin villages are now in decay due to economic migration [2]. Many historic havelis are abandoned and deteriorating, while poor tourism infrastructure and a lack of conservation efforts further threaten their unique

blend of colonial, Sikh, and local Himachali styles. To combat this trend, adaptive reuse offers a sustainable solution [3]. This approach transforms neglected heritage buildings by giving them a new, contemporary purpose while preserving their historical integrity. By doing so, it helps revitalize these structures, create new economic opportunities, and ensure the continuity of cultural heritage for future generations [4].

1.1. Aim

The central aim of this research is to investigate adaptive reuse as a sustainable strategy for revitalizing underutilized heritage buildings in different heritage contexts within India for social welfare and community development purposes while preserving their cultural and architectural integrity [5].

1.2. Objectives

- To comprehensively assess the current condition and adaptive reuse potential of underutilized heritage buildings in various heritage settings, documenting their architectural significance, structural integrity, and spatial characteristics [6].
- To examine the relationship between heritage conservation and community development needs, identifying opportunities where adaptive reuse can address contemporary social welfare requirements while maintaining cultural authenticity [7].
- To develop a framework of recommendations for implementing community-oriented adaptive reuse projects that can serve as a model for similar heritage sites throughout the country facing abandonment and cultural erosion [8].

1.3. Need of Study

Adaptive reuse is a crucial strategy for preserving abandoned heritage buildings, which are losing their purpose due to urbanization and changing lifestyles. This approach revitalizes these structures by giving them a new function, preventing cultural loss, and boosting the local economy [9]. Academically, this research explores how adaptive reuse connects heritage preservation, functional transformation, and community development. It provides a practical framework for repurposing buildings to meet modern needs without compromising their architectural or cultural value [10]. Professionally, the study advocates for integrating adaptive reuse into conservation policies. It encourages planners and policymakers to see it as a key tool for sustainable development. Socially, the research shows how adaptive reuse can benefit communities by reintegrating heritage assets into daily life, creating jobs, and ensuring cultural continuity. Ultimately, this study presents adaptive reuse as a catalyst for sustainable community development, not just a conservation method.

1.4. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the heritage villages in Himachal Pradesh, analyzing abandoned or underutilized buildings of architectural and cultural significance [11]. It involves architectural documentation, community consultation, and assessment of adaptive reuse potential for around 25 such structures. The scope spans the villages' evolution from their 16th-century origins to the present, with emphasis on the construction boom of 1820–1920, when the Sood merchant community shaped the architectural legacy that characterizes these settlements today. Refer Figures 1, 2 & 3.

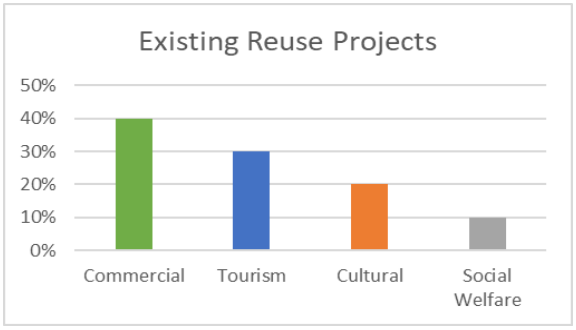

Figure 1 Existing Reuse Projects (source: Author and AI)

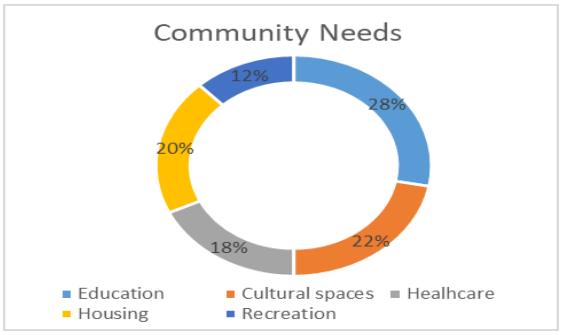

Figure 2 Community Needs (source: Author and AI)

The study faced certain limitations, including its focus being restricted to only two villages, which reduces the broader applicability of the findings [12]. Access to private heritage properties was limited, preventing a comprehensive evaluation of all relevant structures. Additionally, time constraints restricted the ability to assess long-term impacts, while limited

resources affected the scope and depth of technical evaluations of the buildings.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the socio-cultural and architectural dimensions of heritage conservation and adaptive reuse in Garli and Pragpur. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture community perceptions, cultural values, and lived experiences associated with abandoned heritage structures. Field-based observations were conducted to document the physical condition, spatial organization, and architectural character of buildings, with particular focus on deterioration patterns, usage trends, and potential for revitalization. To complement these observations, semi-structured interviews were carried out with residents, property owners, artisans, and shopkeepers, providing insights into the historical significance of the buildings, reasons for neglect, and perspectives on their reuse. The collected data was analyzed thematically across three dimensions: architectural significance, community perceptions, and opportunities for adaptive reuse aligned with local needs. This approach ensures a holistic, community-centered framework for proposing sustainable strategies for the revitalization of heritage structures in Garli and Pragpur.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

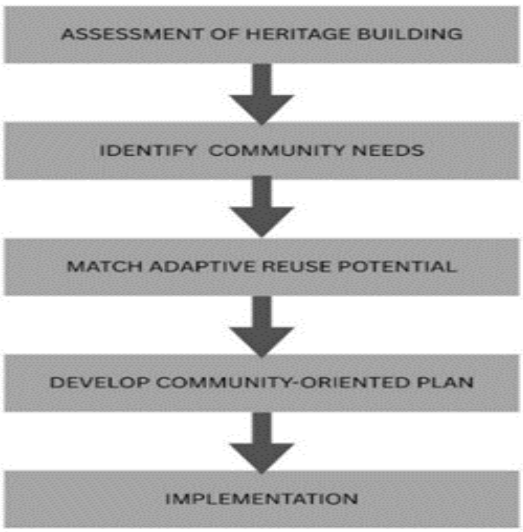

Figure 3 Framework for Community-Oriented Adaptive Reuse (source: Author)

Architectural voids—heritage buildings that remain unused, abandoned, or underutilized—present complex challenges across social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. Such structures often face physical decay due to insufficient maintenance, unclear ownership, and limited policy support, which undermines their potential as active community assets. Beyond deterioration, these voids disrupt the continuity of cultural practices and weaken the connection between built heritage and community life. Within this framework, adaptive reuse emerges as a strategic response, offering a means to reconcile preservation with functionality. By repurposing voids into productive, community-oriented spaces, adaptive reuse can restore the social, cultural, and economic roles of heritage architecture.

3. Literature Review

The concept of adaptive reuse has been widely examined as a sustainable strategy for extending the lifespan of heritage buildings while reducing resource consumption. Bullen and Love (2011) argue that adaptive reuse not only conserves cultural assets but also minimizes environmental costs associated with demolition and reconstruction. Similarly, Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) highlight its role in bridging historical continuity with contemporary functional needs, positioning reuse as both a cultural and ecological imperative.

However, scholars also identify significant limitations in prevailing reuse practices. Orbasli (2000) notes that adaptive reuse often gravitates toward tourism-oriented interventions, while Pendlebury (2013) cautions that such approaches primarily serve external markets, neglecting the everyday needs of local communities. This trend, while preserving physical structures, risks transforming heritage into privatized enclaves rather than community assets. In contrast, Yung and Chan (2011) emphasize that socially sustainable reuse requires reintegration of heritage spaces into daily community life, thereby maintaining their cultural and social functions. Bullen (2007) further stresses that without community-centered models, adaptive reuse fails to achieve long-term social value, as it overlooks identity, inclusivity, and public engagement

3.1. Case Studies

3.1.1. Primary Case Study – Site Visit, Photographs, Drawings, Interviews and Observations

Chateau Garli represents a quintessential example of successful haveli adaptive reuse as a private

property serving community development. Built in 1921 by Lala Mela Ram Sud, this 100-year-old heritage haveli was lovingly restored by his descendants, Yatish Sud and Amish Sud, starting in 2012. The restoration of Chateau Garli began with the conservation of its original architectural and decorative elements to safeguard the haveli's historic identity. Special care was taken to preserve Belgian chandeliers, carved wooden facades, stained glass windows, and traditional courtyards, ensuring that the cultural essence of the building remained intact. Once the heritage fabric was stabilized and conserved, extensive cleaning, scrubbing, and structural repairs were carried out to strengthen the building and restore its usability after decades of neglect. Following this, modern amenities such as plumbing, electricity, and air conditioning were introduced, carefully integrated so as not to compromise the architectural character of the haveli. The process concluded with adaptive reuse measures that harmonized the diverse Colonial, Portuguese, Mughal, Rajasthani, and Kangri stylistic influences, ultimately transforming the property into a heritage hotel that retains its authenticity while meeting contemporary needs (Refer Figures 4 to 7).

Figure 4 The Chateau Garli-luxurious heritage hotel; (source: Author)

Current Function and Community Impact

- The restored haveli now operates as a boutique luxury heritage hotel, offering:
- Accommodation facilities with modern amenities while maintaining historical authenticity
- Cultural experiences including heritage village tours, local cuisine, and traditional hospitality
- Employment opportunities for local communities in hospitality services
- Tourism promotion that benefits the broader village economy

3.1.2. Secondary Case Study – Existing Documented Examples, Published Sources

The Dr. Ramnath A. Podar Haveli Museum, located in Nawalgarh, Shekhawati (Rajasthan), is a notable example of adaptive reuse where a heritage haveli has been transformed into a museum and educational space. Built in 1902 by the Podar merchant family, the haveli is renowned for its intricate frescoes and Shekhawati-style architecture. Its transformation highlights how heritage structures can be repurposed to preserve culture while serving educational and community needs.

Figure 5 Dr. Ramnath A. Podar Haveli Museum front view; (source: Author)

Figure 6 Dr. Ramnath A. Podar Haveli Museum; (source: Author)

Restoration and Adaptive Reuse

- The haveli was restored by the Podar Education Group with a focus on heritage conservation and public engagement:
- Restoration of frescoes, murals, and architectural features to maintain cultural integrity.

- Conversion of interior spaces into museum galleries and learning zones.
- Introduction of modern display systems while retaining historical aesthetics.
- Exhibits showcasing Rajasthani culture, crafts, and traditions, enriching heritage education.

Community Impact

- The Podar Haveli Museum functions as a cultural and educational hub, fostering community development by:
- Providing heritage learning opportunities for students and visitors.
- Creating employment for local guides, artisans, and support staff.
- Promoting heritage tourism, thereby boosting the local economy.
- Preserving regional identity and strengthening cultural continuity.

Relevance to the Study

- This case demonstrates how adaptive reuse can merge heritage conservation with social development, serving both as a repository of culture and a community resource.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The study of Garli and Pragpur, supported by primary site visits and secondary case studies, produced several key findings:

- **Architectural Documentation**: Around 25 havelis and heritage structures were recorded, with varying levels of deterioration. Common issues included structural cracks, loss of wooden details, and abandonment due to migration.
- **Community Perceptions:** Interviews revealed a dual perspective. While older residents valued cultural continuity, younger generations often viewed havelis as financial burdens.
- **Adaptive Reuse Potential:** Buildings near central streets and tourist corridors were more feasible for commercial reuse (cafés, homestays, boutique hotels), while those deeper in villages held potential for community spaces (libraries, cultural centers, artisan workshops).
- **Case Study Insights:** Chateau Garli demonstrated successful private-led restoration, integrating heritage aesthetics with modern hospitality, creating jobs and boosting tourism.

Podar Haveli Museum highlighted the role of institutional initiatives in converting private heritage into public cultural assets, emphasizing education and community engagement.

5. Discussion

The results underline adaptive reuse as a viable strategy but reveal contrasting outcomes depending on implementation:

- **Tourism vs. Community Needs:** As Pendlebury (2013) warns, tourism-led reuse often prioritizes external visitors over locals. Chateau Garli reflects this risk, where community access remains limited despite economic benefits.
- **Cultural Continuity:** Yung & Chan (2011) emphasize socially sustainable reuse. Podar Haveli aligns with this by providing cultural learning and community involvement, ensuring heritage becomes part of daily life rather than a distant spectacle.
- **Architectural Authenticity:** Both case studies highlight the importance of conserving original materials and spatial patterns. Findings suggest that authenticity not only safeguards identity but also enhances tourism and community pride.
- **Innovative Insight:** Adaptive reuse in Garli–Pragpur can serve as a hybrid model — balancing hospitality-driven functions with community spaces. For example, allocating portions of restored havelis as public cultural zones could bridge private profit with collective benefit.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that adaptive reuse extends beyond physical restoration — it is a socio-cultural process that reconnects heritage with community life.

Key takeaways

- Adaptive reuse safeguards cultural identity while addressing contemporary needs.
- Both private and institutional models are effective but must avoid exclusivity.
- Hybrid reuse frameworks combining tourism, education, and community spaces can maximize social impact.

Implications for Architecture & Interior Design

- Designers must balance preservation of historical aesthetics with discreet integration of modern systems.

- Interior interventions should respect spatial hierarchies (courtyards, verandas) while reprogramming them for new uses.
- Sensitive reuse ensures that heritage buildings remain living entities rather than static relics.

Future Research

- Long-term impact studies on community development.
- Comparative analysis across more heritage villages in India.
- Exploration of policy tools and funding models to incentivize community-centered adaptive reuse.

Reference

[1]. Bullen, P. A. (2007). Adaptive reuse and sustainability of commercial buildings. Facilities, 25(1/2), 20–31

[2]. Bullen, P. A., & Love, P. E. D. (2011). Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings. Structural Survey, 29(5), 411–421.

[3]. Orbasli, A. (2000). Tourists in historic towns: Urban conservation and heritage management. London: E & FN Spon.

[4]. Pendlebury, J. (2013). Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage. International Journal of Heritage Studies, 19(7), 709–727.

[5]. Plevoets, B., & Van Cleempoel, K. (2019). Adaptive reuse of the built heritage: Concepts and cases of an emerging discipline. Routledge.

[6]. Yung, E. H. K., & Chan, E. H. W. (2011). Problem issues of public participation in built-heritage conservation: Two controversial cases in Hong Kong. Habitat International, 35(3), 457–466.

[7]. Tam, V. W. Y., & Hao, J. J. L. (2019). Adaptive reuse in sustainable development. International Journal of Construction Management, 19(6), 509-521. DOI:10.1080/15623599.2018.1459154.

[8]. Discusses economic, social, environmental factors of adaptive reuse, with a case in Toronto. Taylor & Francis Online

[9]. Abdulameer, Zahraa Adil & Abbas, Sana Satiʿ (2020). Adaptive reuse as an approach to sustainability. IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 881. Article 012010. IOPscience

[10]. Tao, Ruyu; Chen, Pinyu; Aoki, Nobuo (2025). Conceptual changes and controversies in rural historical building relocation in China under the heritage adaptive reuse discourse. Built Heritage, 9, Article 6. SpringerOpen

[11]. Yaelle Cudicio & Narcís Bassols i Gardella (2024). Adaptive Reuse as a Tool for Sustainable Urban Development: The Case Study of Singapore, Southeast Asia. Journal of Urban Culture Research, 29, 184-201. Thai Journal Online

[12]. Sheila Conejos, Esther H.K. Yung, & Edwin H.W. Chan (2014). Evaluation of urban sustainability and adaptive reuse of built heritage areas: a case study on conservation in Hong Kong's CBD. Journal of Design Research, 2014, 260-279. InderScience Online