

Definition

Adaptive reuse concerns the acquisition and rehabilitation of spaces for development into cultural venues, particularly those spaces that were not initially built for creative sector purposes (former industrial buildings, firehouses, schools, churches) or were built for a previous cultural use and re-purposed for a new one (former vaudeville houses, movie theaters).

Key components

- Adaptive reuse stories have a “love at first site” component, where the nature of the venue itself seemed to invite the possibility of conversion.
 - Many projects had a history of public use that the community wanted maintained in any proposed use
 - Other projects had “good bones,” with deteriorated but compelling design
- Successful projects show clear-lines leadership and decision-making, especially when multiple cultural partners are involved.
 - These are complex projects requiring strong leadership to succeed
 - Unequal partnerships without agreed-upon roles can cause resentment
- Access to public funding is critical, and is managed through partnerships with elected and appointed officials
- Successful projects work early and constantly to engage local stakeholders and control the dialogue around the benefits and challenges of the project
- Structured finance and construction management skills are very important...
 - for potential owners. It is practically a requirement.
 - and ideally extend to managing the bureaucracy of public partners

Key Learnings

- As form affects function, so do capital projects directly alter an organization’s mission.
- Developers of adaptive reuse projects must be open to change.
 - Complex projects may require rapid and significant changes in plans and partners.
 - Even the best planned projects may have unforeseen impacts, including altering the organization’s operational structure and mission.
- There is no substitute for local expertise in project development and management.
 - While national partners can be critical allies, ultimately decisions must be made within the local context and by on-the-ground leadership.

- The more visible the project, the greater the need for community engagement.
- Capital projects require a careful earned-revenue strategy and, many times, this includes cultivating relationships with cultural partners who do not have access to a space of their own.

Open Questions

- How do you select cultural partners who are reliable, flexible and community oriented?
- How can opportunities for adaptive reuse, which are rare, be identified and targeted early?
- How can space owners build effective financial partnerships with non-space owners?

Case Study Example

Harlem Stage converted a former landmarked municipal building into a 3,000 square foot flexible performance art space (The Gatehouse) hosting dance, theater, film and music. Initial planning for the project included a full day design charrette involving 100 representatives from the local community. Participants included local artists, nonprofits, schools, parent groups, elected leaders and the community board. A number of cultural programs, during and after the construction process, were specifically designed to engage the local community. The \$20 million project was supported through public funding and private contributions and managed by the NYC Department of Design and Construction. Harlem Stage commissions and hosts work from local artists and cultural organizations to international entities. They are currently examining earned revenue strategies to supplement existing grants and ticket sales.

Additional Examples and Reference Points

- **Caribbean Cultural Center**, New York City (<http://www.cccadi.org>): former firehouse
- **Chocolate Factory**, New York City (www.chocolatefactorytheater.org): former industrial space
- **Flux Factory**, New York City (<http://www.fluxfactory.org>): former industrial space
- **PS 109 (Artspace & El Barrio/Operation Fightback)**, New York City (<http://www.eastharlempreservation.org/docs>): former school
- **Art Works Downtown**, San Rafael, CA (<http://www.artworksdowntown.org>): former opera house
- **ARTS at Marks Garage**, Honolulu, HI (<http://www.artsatmarks.com>)
- **LA Commons**, Los Angeles (<http://www.lacommons.org>)