

# The Regeneration of the Historic Area of Song Wat through the Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Buildings and the Sense of Place<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This independent study explores the multifaceted process of urban regeneration through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings in the historic area of Song Wat. The research methodology encompasses a comprehensive examination of the historical evolution of Song Wat Road, detailed surveys to assess the cultural significance of heritage buildings, and in-depth interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents, property owners, and local authorities. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study aims to unravel the complex interplay between historical preservation, community engagement, and sustainable development in the context of urban regeneration.

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Through a meticulous analysis of the physical and value aspects of heritage buildings, the study seeks to uncover the intrinsic connections between architectural heritage, cultural memory, and the evolving identity of Song Wat. By exploring the intangible heritage embedded in the community and the memories of its residents, the research sheds light on how different groups perceive and interact with the built environment, thereby shaping their sense of place and belonging. The study also delves into the historical narrative of Song Wat, tracing its transformation from a bustling commercial district to a neglected area characterised by old warehouses and abandoned structures.

The objectives of the study are multifaceted, aiming to regenerate Song Wat through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, raise awareness among locals about the importance of preserving cultural heritage, find a delicate balance between traditional ways of life and contemporary development, and document the chronological development of the area. By examining the physical, geographical, and socio-cultural dimensions of Song Wat, the study provides a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in regenerating a historic neighbourhood while fostering community resilience and sustainable urban growth.

Through a meticulous analysis of past cases, interviews with residents, and exploration of place identity, the study aims to elucidate the intricate dynamics of urban regeneration and heritage-led development in Song Wat. By studying the master plan for the conservation and development of Krung Rattanakosin alongside the regeneration of Song Wat, the research seeks to establish synergies between heritage preservation, economic revitalization, and community empowerment. The study expects to provide significant insights into Song Wat's potential transformation into a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich community that respects its history and embraces a sustainable future.

### **Keywords**

Regeneration, Adaptive reuse, Sense of Place, Song Wat, Heritage, Community, Urban landscape

## 1. Introduction

Urban regeneration is crucial for modern urban planning, aiming to regenerate areas to enhance their economic, social, and cultural value. Heritage-led regeneration, which conserves and adaptively reuses historic sites, is particularly important as it fosters cultural tourism, community engagement, and sustainable development. This journal explores the regeneration of Song Wat, a historic area in Bangkok, through the adaptive reuse of its heritage buildings, with a focus on enhancing the sense of place and community identity.

Song Wat, located along the Chao Phraya River, was once a bustling commercial hub with distinctive shophouses and warehouses. Over time, economic changes led to the decline of traditional businesses, leaving many buildings underutilized. Recent urban regeneration efforts have begun to transform Song Wat, converting old shophouses into vibrant spaces such as restaurants and cafés, attracting both tourists and locals.

The adaptive reuse of heritage buildings is a complex process requiring careful consideration of economic viability, cultural significance, and community needs. This study addresses the following research questions: How can the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings regenerate the community? How can a sense of place contribute to the conservation and development of heritage buildings? How does adaptive reuse sustain the relationship between heritage buildings and the local way of life? What will Song Wat's future look like?

This journal employs a mixed-methods approach, combining theoretical frameworks, historical analysis, and fieldwork, including interviews with local residents and stakeholders. By examining the impacts of adaptive reuse on Song Wat, the research provides insights into the broader implications of heritage-led regeneration in urban settings. Findings show economic revitalization, increased tourism, and preservation of cultural identity, though challenges like gentrification remain.

## 2. Research Questions

2.1 How can the community 'regenerate' through the use of adaptive reuse of the heritage buildings?

2.2 How can the 'sense of place' benefit the conservation and development of the heritage building as well as creating the identity of the locals?

2.3 How does adaptive reuse help to sustain the relationship between the heritage buildings and the local's way of life?

2.4 What will the future Song Wat look like? How do the residents perceive themselves and their relationship with the heritage building in the near future?

### 3. Objectives

3.1 To regenerate the Song Wat area and analyze its future through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings.

3.2 To raise awareness among locals about the importance of heritage buildings in the community, their relationship with these buildings, and the role they can play in conserving them.

3.3 To find a balance between the locals' way of life and their living heritage.

3.4 To document the history and evolution of Song Wat from the past to the present, along with future predictions.

### 4. Scope and Method of Study



*Figure 1: Map of Song Wat*

*Source: Author, 2023*

#### **4.1 Geographical area**

The area under consideration is bordered by buildings along Song Wat Road to the north, focusing specifically on those adjacent to the road. To the south, it extends to the Chao Phraya River, while the eastern boundary reaches the Sawasdee Pier. The western limit of the area is defined by Ratchawong Road. The buildings highlighted in green are those where I conducted interviews, while the ones in orange indicate religious sites.

#### **4.2 Scope of Study Content**

The study content will consist of the History of Song Wat and its development as well as any future development done by the residents in the area. This also includes the study of the economic and touristic trend of the Samphanthawong district along with the on-site data collecting, interviewing with the locals to find the 'sense of place'.

### **5. Theoretical Framework**

**5.1 Regeneration of Place through Heritage Buildings:** The first concept is the regeneration of spaces through heritage buildings. This concept elaborates on different types of regeneration, including urban regeneration (Tallon, 2010; Roberts, 2008), heritage-led regeneration (Jones & Evans, 2008; UNESCO Handbook for New Life in Historic Cities, 2013), and event-led regeneration (Smith, 2012). It highlights the economic benefits of regeneration.

**5.2 History of Architectural Heritage Conservation Charters and Their Adaptation in Thailand:** This section discusses the regulations of the Thai Department of Fine Arts on heritage conservation (1985), adapted from the Thai Act of Ancient Monuments (1961). It also covers Thai beliefs reflected in conservation regulations, the shift from material-based to value-based approaches, the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 2013), and the Washington Charter (1987) guidelines for historic urban landscapes.

**5.3 Guidelines on Planning the Historic Urban Landscape:** This section refers to "New Life for Historic Cities: The Historic Urban Landscape" (2013).

**5.4 Defining and Understanding the Concept of 'Place':** This section defines 'place' and its significance in urban regeneration. Freestone, Liu (2016), and Yi-Fu Tuan (2018)

explain the concepts of place, non-place, placelessness, sense of place, and approaches to understanding them. It emphasizes the interaction between humans and their built environment, reflecting values, meanings, and ideologies through places.

**5.5 Physical Concerns for Heritage Buildings:** This section addresses the physical deterioration of heritage buildings in urban areas and old towns, particularly in Northern Charoen Krung, which face similar issues to those in Song Wat. Contributing factors include the buildings' age, lack of maintenance due to their absence from official heritage lists, and inadequate conservation guidelines and practices. Specific issues are dilapidation, signage, building modification, and authenticity (Pimonsathean, 2009).

**5.6 SWOT Analysis:** This section assesses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the regeneration of heritage buildings in Song Wat.

These themes offer a thorough understanding of how to use heritage buildings to regenerate urban areas while preserving their cultural and historical significance.

## **6. Methodology**

It outlines the research methodologies used to examine the transformations in the Song Wat community over the past decade. The study comprehensively covers demographic changes, economic progress, social shifts, and cultural developments. The methodology chapter provides a detailed description of the study's design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and rationale for these choices, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the results.

### **6.1 Reviewing History and Evolution**

- a. Gather secondary sources like books, reports, maps, and previous studies on the Samphanthawong area and Bangkok.
- b. Focus on the historical and physical characteristics of Song Wat Road, including maps of heritage buildings and warehouses.

### **6.2 Survey and Assessment of Cultural Values**

Evaluate the cultural significance of heritage buildings in Song Wat.

### 6.3 In-depth Interviews with Stakeholders

Conduct face-to-face interviews using a snowball sampling approach.

### 6.4 Interview three types of stakeholders:

- Long-term residents or owners of heritage buildings (5 people)
- New residents and owners of heritage buildings (5 people)
- Explore their perspectives on Song Wat, their experiences of change, and their visions for the community's future.
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## 7. Results

### 7.1 How can the community 'regenerate' through the use of adaptive reuse of the heritage buildings?

Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings can be a catalyst for community regeneration, offering a multifaceted approach to revitalization. This approach preserves historical structures, maintains a connection to cultural identity, and fosters community pride. Repurposing these buildings into shops, restaurants, or cultural venues preserves their architectural significance and stimulates economic activity. This not only attracts tourists but also creates job opportunities, supports local businesses, and contributes to overall economic revitalization.

Moreover, adaptive reuse involves community engagement, encouraging residents to shape their neighbourhood's future. Involving the community in decision-making strengthens social bonds and promotes a sense of ownership. The sustainable nature of adaptive reuse aligns with modern environmental conservation principles, reducing waste and conserving resources by repurposing existing structures rather than demolishing and rebuilding.

Regenerating underutilised spaces enhances the aesthetic appeal of urban areas, attracting residents, businesses, and visitors. Through adaptive reuse, communities can achieve cultural preservation, economic revitalization, community engagement, sustainable development, and urban revitalization, contributing to a holistic approach to community regeneration.

## **7.2 How can the 'sense of place' benefit the conservation and development of the heritage building as well as creating the identity of the locals?**

The "sense of place" is critical in conserving heritage buildings and shaping local identities. It fosters a deep emotional connection to heritage buildings, emphasising their cultural significance and historical importance. This attachment drives conservation efforts, mobilising local communities to participate in preserving and restoring heritage buildings.

A strong sense of place can attract tourists, contributing to local economies through heritage tourism. Preserving heritage buildings maintains a connection to the past, reflecting the community's history, traditions, and values. This instills pride among locals, strengthens community cohesion, and fosters a shared identity.

Temporary adaptations, such as shop workers from neighbouring countries gathering to play sepak takraw, demonstrate how individuals create a 'sense of place' in their environment. These modifications reflect personal comfort and adaptability, contributing to the area's evolving identity. However, a business-focused approach may lead to gentrification, raising concerns about the future of Song Wat and its older generation. Evaluating current changes, including new shops and restaurants, highlights the need to balance heritage preservation with modern development.

## **7.3 How does adaptive reuse help to sustain the relationship between the heritage buildings and the local's way of life?**

Adaptive reuse sustains the relationship between heritage buildings and the local way of life. By repurposing structures for contemporary use, such as converting factories into cultural centres or mansions into boutique hotels, heritage buildings retain their cultural significance within the community. Community engagement in adaptive reuse projects fosters ownership and pride among residents. It creates opportunities for local businesses, strengthening the community. Events like "Made in Song Wat" highlight community-driven regeneration, promoting Song Wat as a cultural and hipster destination.

It also helps promote sustainable development by conserving existing structures and minimising environmental impact. It generates economic benefits, attracting visitors and businesses to the heritage buildings that have been adapted to the new functions. This continuity



bridges the past with the present, allowing residents to connect with their heritage while adapting to contemporary needs.

#### **7.4 What will the future Song Wat look like? How do the residents perceive themselves and their relationship with the heritage building in the near future?**

Marketing and event-based regeneration, rooted in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, drive Song Wat's future. Events utilise Song Wat's identity to attract lifestyle and cultural tourists, promoting it as a vibrant neighbourhood. During Bangkok Design Week, events like "Blending the Smell of Song Wat" emphasize the sensory experience of the area's hidden history.

The event mentioned uses Song Wat's distinctive smell of Chinese herbs that reflects its history as a trading area for agricultural goods as the main concept. This aroma triggers memories of the place as a marketplace for Chinese products. Cafes and restaurants along the road draw inspiration from these goods, offering menus that highlight the area's agricultural richness. By nurturing a sense of place, communities can preserve heritage buildings, foster local identity, and create a vibrant future for Song Wat.

In conclusion, nurturing a sense of place in relation to heritage buildings not only contributes to their conservation and development but also plays a vital role in shaping the identity of local communities. By recognising and celebrating the unique characteristics and history of these buildings, communities can create a strong sense of place that enriches their cultural heritage and fosters a sense of pride and belonging among residents. Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings not only preserves architectural heritage but also sustains the relationship between these structures and the local community's way of life by fostering cultural identity, community engagement, sustainability, economic vitality, and cultural continuity.

#### **7.5 Recommendations and Future Development Plan Suggestion**

Based on the findings and insights gathered from the study on urban regeneration through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings in Song Wat, the following recommendations and future development plans are proposed to guide the sustainable growth and revitalization of the community:

### **7.5.1 Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

- Establish a community-led steering committee comprising residents, property owners, local authorities, and urban planners to oversee the regeneration process.
- Organise regular community meetings, workshops, and cultural events to foster a sense of belonging, ownership, and pride among locals.
- Encourage the active participation of residents in decision-making processes related to the preservation, adaptive reuse, and development of heritage buildings.

### **7.5.2 Heritage Preservation and Adaptive Reuse:**

- Develop a heritage conservation plan that identifies key heritage buildings, their historical significance, and potential adaptive reuse opportunities.
- Provide incentives and support for property owners to undertake adaptive reuse projects that respect the architectural integrity and cultural heritage of the buildings.
- Promote the creation of mixed-use spaces, such as cultural centres, artisan workshops, and community hubs, within heritage buildings to enhance their economic viability and cultural relevance.

### **7.5.3 Sustainable Urban Development:**

- Integrate sustainable design principles, green infrastructure, and energy-efficient technologies into the regeneration projects to enhance environmental sustainability.
- Implement pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, cycling lanes, and public spaces to promote active mobility and enhance the quality of life for residents.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms, public-private partnerships, and community-driven initiatives to fund and support sustainable urban development projects.

#### **7.5.4 Economic Revitalization and Cultural Tourism:**

- Support local businesses, artisans, and entrepreneurs through capacity-building programmes, marketing initiatives, and access to markets.
- Develop cultural tourism initiatives, heritage trails, and storytelling tours to showcase the unique history, architecture, and cultural heritage of Song Wat.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, creative industries, and cultural organisations to promote arts, crafts, and cultural heritage as drivers of economic growth and community development.

#### **7.5.5 Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress, impact, and outcomes of the regeneration projects over time.
- Conduct regular assessments of community well-being, economic indicators, heritage conservation efforts, and stakeholder engagement to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the development plan.
- Solicit feedback from residents, businesses, and visitors to continuously improve and adapt the development plan to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of the community.

By implementing these recommendations and a future development plan, Song Wat can emerge as a model for sustainable urban regeneration, heritage preservation, and community empowerment, creating a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich neighbourhood that celebrates its past while embracing a sustainable future.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has delved into the intricate process of urban regeneration through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings in the historic area of Song Wat, with a particular focus on the role of locals in shaping the future of their community. Through a comprehensive analysis of the history, cultural significance, and community dynamics of Song Wat, several key findings and implications have emerged, highlighting the importance of community engagement and empowerment in the urban regeneration process.

One of the central themes that emerged from this study is the vital role of locals in preserving the cultural heritage and historical identity of Song Wat. Urban planners and policymakers can ensure the revitalization of the neighbourhood, rooted in the community's needs and aspirations, by actively involving residents in regeneration efforts. Empowering locals to participate in decision-making processes and encouraging their active involvement in shaping Song Wat's future fosters a sense of ownership and pride, resulting in more sustainable and inclusive development outcomes, as demonstrated by the study.

Furthermore, the research has underscored the significance of understanding the perspectives and experiences of local residents in the regeneration process. By conducting in-depth interviews with both old and new residents, the study has provided valuable insights into how different groups perceive and interact with the built environment, shaping their sense of place and belonging. The diverse narratives and memories shared by residents have enriched our understanding of the cultural significance of heritage buildings and the evolving identity of Song Wat.

Moreover, the study has highlighted the importance of raising awareness among locals about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the role they can play in conserving the historical fabric of their community. By documenting the timeline and development of Song Wat from the past to the present, the research has emphasised the need to involve residents in the preservation and promotion of their heritage, ensuring that future generations can continue to benefit from the rich cultural legacy of the area.

Finally, the regeneration of Song Wat through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings presents a unique opportunity to create a vibrant, sustainable, and culturally rich community that honours its past while embracing the future. By recognising the invaluable contributions of locals in shaping the identity and future of Song Wat, stakeholders can work collaboratively to ensure that urban regeneration efforts are inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs of the community. It is essential that policymakers, urban planners, and community leaders continue to engage with and empower locals in their efforts to revitalise Song Wat, fostering a sense of community pride, resilience, and sustainability for generations to come.

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