Contextualising Practice 3: Critical Analysis - Design (1G6Z9943_2324_9F)

Factors affecting the prevalence of adaptive reuse in different contexts:

a cross-cultural examination of the history, attitudes, and government frameworks that affect the practice of adaptive reuse in Kuwait and Manchester

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PREFACE

In Kuwait, a country with sweltering heat and a lack of public urban space, life is restricted to the interior of a building, and there is a distinct apathy towards the buildings that are occupied. I couldn't understand why we had to drive everywhere, why familiar places kept disappearing and a lack of something that felt like it belonged to me, and I belonged to it. This persistent confusion and nagging feeling of loss that has led me to studying design in a new country. and being here fully cemented the answers I was looking for to dormant questions I have had about the environment in which I lived and new questions about where I am currently living and the striking contrast between the two in terms of approaches to buildings and what buildings can be.

Almost ten years have passed since Bayt Lothan last stood. A white building, a storey high, made of packed sand and clay, maybe stone or concrete, it is not there for anyone to check. A former king dwelt in its humble courtyard and rooms, though the time of his occupation is long gone. Sand has been swept away and huge monoliths emerged from the ground and dwarfed the structure. Its concurrent peers torn down one by one to make way for the grand plans of modernist schools of practice, a city of cars and highways, a modern metropolis which emerges from the rubble of a cluster of coastal fishing villages which sits at the northern crest of the Arabian gulf.
Tables stacked with soaps, jewellery, and artwork are some of the things I can recall passing by on bazaar and market days, where local artists and craftspeople would gather in the courtyard. I recall a sea of iridescent furniture, the radiant mother of pearl against dark wood.

When we put the pieces back together, we can see a community that thrived within the walls, went from being the home of one to the home of many, an archive, a place to gather, learn and remember. All that is left are a scarce few website links and articles about the once grand building and the community that thrived within it.

Figure 1

Figure 2

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this essay is to illustrate an in-depth view of adaptive reuse, a key concept that underpins interior design, and the ways in which its practice or lack thereof manifests in two different various global contexts. Through close readings of buildings, both standing and non-existent, and examinations of local attitudes and histories, their impacts on a building's life and usage can be laid out. In The ideas and attitudes of a culture are clearly reflected in their buildings , even more so in their treatment and modifications of the structure (Stone, 2020) a much more globalised world, it is important for interior designers to invest in their understandings of local contexts with great sensitivity and allow their findings to guide their work. Most of an interior designer's work will take place in existing buildings. Adaptive reuse can play an important role in addressing the issue of the ongoing climate crisis, with how extremely energy intensive and extractive process of creating a new building is, many architects and designers are turning towards this practice in order to ensure sustainability goals are met. This essay consists of three chapters, two of which covers a locale and its built history, one that will cover case studies from both locales, a discussion and a conclusion.

1.2 Understanding Adaptive reuse

Adaptive reuse is an emerging practice, one that comes with and shares many definitions that cross over the borders and parameters of multiple disciplines such as architecture, interior design, and history. The simplest definition of adaptive reuse is the change of function of a building that has outlasted its original use. Often found in tandem with the term adaptive reuse are words such as preservation, conversion, remodel and retrofit which all share the same spirit but ultimately represent different levels of design intervention in an existing structure.

As noted by Stone (2020) and Wong (2017), adaptive reuse is a new name for a practice that has existed for as long as built structure has existed. In 1975, Sherban Cantacuzino wrote of how buildings often outlive their original functions, and people adapting them to new uses and in 1976 Rodolfo Macado wrote of old buildings as palimpsest. It was previously a practice often undertaken pragmatically with little concern for preservation, and it was undertaken as it was the most economical choice (Van Cleempoel & Plevoets, 2019) and it still is to this day. The contemporary practice of adaptive reuse is led with ideas of preservation, climate consciousness and design theory, as evidenced by the plethora of literature focusing specifically on this topic over the past two decades.

With the global climate crisis becoming more dire due to over a century of burning fossil fuels, unsustainable resource usage and consumption and production patterns, the latest IPCC report states a global warming of 1.1°C above the average temperatures pre-industrialization have been reached(UNITED NATIONS). This has already had profound impacts on the climate globally , with a sharp increase in extreme weather events such as flooding, droughts and storms. In order to not surpass the 1.5°C threshold, which is when the effects of climate change will become more difficult to reverse, carbon dioxide emissions will have to be reduced dramatically across all sectors of human activity (cH. Lee and J. Romero, 2023) include the construction of architecture and interior design. The conversations on the energy exhaustive practices of construction and demolition have shifted towards the minimisation of both new construction and demolition altogether and aiming to adaptively reuse and reinforce all existing building stock. In the Architectural Review's 'DEMOLITION' issue which was published in July 2023, it was highlighted that carbon emissions for buildings need to be reduced by 99% in the next 25 years to 10 kilograms of CO_2 per square metre of floor area, which is 400 kilograms less than what the most sustainable buildings that currently exist have achieved (Giddings, J., 2023). Hence adaptive reuse has become a key strategy and solution to offset the astronomical carbon emissions that often come with the outputs of the professions of architecture and interior design.

2.KUWAIT

2.1 The Emergence of Kuwait

Kuwait is a small Arabian Gulf state that rose to prominence in an extremely short span of time. The country a few centuries ago was a cluster of fishing villages, which then turned into a port that traded goods such as pearls, services like shipbuilding and welcomed ships from Zanzibar to India. The discovery of oil in the 1940s, however, radically altered the trajectory of Kuwait and saw the rapid assembly of a metropolitan state built en-masse (Shiber, 1964). This influx of wealth brought in an ambitious government that sought to improve living standards and build a city that was worthy of a country that was now thrust onto the world stage. However, this period of planning and building has brought with it an array of new attitudes and consequences that still impact the fields of interior design and architecture today.

2.2 Architecture of the Past and the Present

Kuwaiti architecture can be categorised into two categories: the Old Kuwaiti vernacular that emerged from the limitations of the materials found and the harsh climate and New Modernist movement carried out by architects brought in from all over the world, the latter of which dominates the built matter of the State (Fabbri, Saragoça and Camacho, 2016), which is why most literature on the architecture in Kuwait covers this period and style of building. A key figure from this period was Saba George Shiber, a Palestinian -American Architect who was invited by the Kuwaiti government in 1960 to oversee the new buildup of the new Kuwaiti masterplan, part of which was already built. Shiber was a witness of the rapid transformations of the urban fabric from the 50s to the 60s. Shiber's 1964 monograph, 'The Kuwait Urbanisation' compared the building grains of Old and New Kuwait. A remarkable feature was that none of the old town was preserved, as modernist planning principles called for a clean slate, a 'tabula rasa' for the new city to be built upon. This clean sweep of demolition was carried out under the supervision of three foreign architects, one of whom - the planner Charles Antony Minoprio - said about the old town wall:

Figure 3

> "you can't drive limousines through a gateway made for carts and goats. So we had to dismiss the idea and regard the wall as demolished"

(Camacho, Saragoça and Fabbri, 2018). The methods and strategies put into use this period of building and planning are ultimately what lead to the lack of adaptive reuse in contemporary architecture practices in Kuwait.

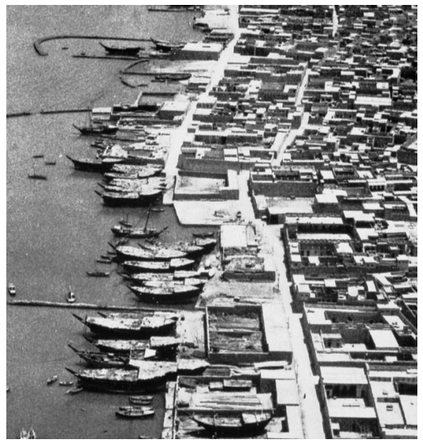

Figure 4. Old grain

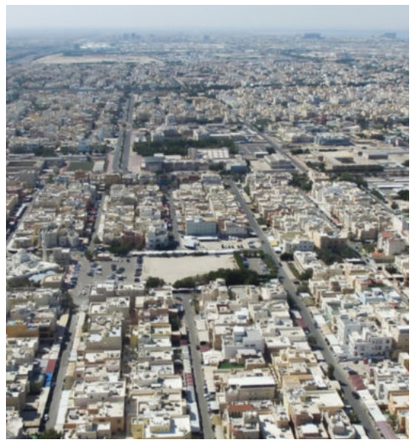

Figure 5. New grain

Although 'The Kuwait Urbanisation' was written 60 years ago, the problems analysed and highlighted then are problems still plaguing Kuwait today, as highlighted in publications on Modernist Heritage in Kuwait that have emerged in the past ten years and thus is still a valuable resource in the analysis of the built environment of Kuwait.

The government needed to build an entire new town and infrastructure in a location where there was already a dense settlement, the first step was land acquisition through a program. Incentives were created to help ease people out of their old homes, the government paid people for their land, offered a home and plot of land in the newly designed and built suburbs along with a mortgage that comes with no interest (Al-Ragam, 2012). While this was enough for many to leave, the government wanted a complete demolishment of the old town, and began to heavily disseminate an idea of the pre-oil Kuwait as one of suffering and abject poverty where the old homes were 'dirty', and a new attitude emerged, one which rejected all that was associated with the period including its architecture (Al-Nakib, 2016). The Kuwaiti government pushed a narrative on the vernacular building of Kuwait and cast connotations of poverty and dirtiness with those houses, severing a connection to and decontextualising the Kuwaiti from their environment. According to While and Short (2010),' the protection or promotion of 'heritage' involves the selection and (re)interpretation of certain aspects of the past to serve interests in the present'. The interests of the government in that period was to create a clean slate to be built upon, in order to build a modern metropolis to project a new image of Kuwait to the world. This method of disseminating a narrative to change the attitude of the public made it difficult to preserve buildings, as the narrative began to emerge from all types of people from citizens to politicians to architects in charge of the very urban scape of Kuwait (Camacho, Fabbri, & Saragoça, 2016).Estrangement from the vernacular (Al-Ragam, 2012) and from the city (Shiber, 1964) led to an apathetic people with little regard for the reuse let alone the preservation of a building. The decontextualisation of the Kuwaiti vernacular and sudden removal of the familiar has manufactured the consent of the citizens for the wholesale demolishment of the old town, leaving few viable buildings to be adapted and reused.

Most of the Government's building budgets was spent on acquiring the land from construction; therefore, construction went to cheapest construction firms (Al-Nakib, 2016) leading to low quality buildings with short lifespans, the maintenance of which largely out-priced the original construction and design costs, making demolition the most desirable choice at the end of its life.

Further detachment to buildings from their users came in the following years, though this time it was unintentional. From the 1950s to the 1960s, many foreign architecture firms were brought in as experts by the government. With the buildup being of a new country, there was very little information on building styles and requirements. Many buildings were created that did not serve people's needs and social lives, as the architects who were designing were unaware of culture, routines, and lives of the people they were designing for and did not fit the context of Kuwait(Camacho, Saragoça and Fabbri, 2018). This 'discontinuity' in the built environment brings about an apathy toward it (Albloushi, 2018). An example of this is the Kuwait National Museum. Designed by a staunch follower of Corbusier's school of modernism (Norman, 2014), many of the choices made were poorly received. Museums are a tangible, physical manifestation of a country's heritage, and yet the exterior makes no reference to what it is supposed to display inside in either its form or materiality. The exhibits focus mostly on Kuwait in antiquity, which conjures strong associations with rammed earth and coral, and yet the building is mostly steel and grey stone. There are no shops or restaurants, therefore no place for visitors to stop or linger(Norman, 2014). The museum also does not fit its context, it is situated in the midst of the few pre-oil structures that remain in Kuwait, such as Sadu house or Bader House, which are small one to two storey buildings.

Figure 6

Figure 7

According to While and Short (2010), 'the protection or promotion of 'heritage' involves the selection and (re)interpretation of certain aspects of the past to serve interests in the presen t'. The Kuwaiti government pushed a narrative on the vernacular building of Kuwait and cast connotations of poverty and dirtiness with those houses, severing a connection to and decontextualising the population from their environment. Estrangement from the vernacular (Al-Ragam, 2012), and estrangement from the city (Shiber, 1964) leads to an apathetic people with little regard for the reuse let alone the preservation of a building.

The initial rejection of the past has set a precedent of new is always better, and the complete demolition of and apathy towards the old town has paved the way for disregard towards the modernist heritage of Kuwait, which is the only tangible architectural heritage that has remained outside a handful of buildings that have managed to avoid destruction. The modernist buildings which are now falling into decay like the vernacular architecture they replaced are the ideal grounds for adaptive reuse in Kuwait (Fabbri, Saragoça and Camacho, 2016). While a country can't become a museum to dilapidated buildings that don't serve their users, but following a precedent of disregard has failed Kuwait, a fact that has not – in the words of Cantacuzino (1975) – 'enabled generation after generation to derive a sense of continuity and stability from their physical surroundings'. The prospect of wealth from the discovery of oil may have caused the past government to take haphazard decisions which led to alienation and severance of a population from a heritage which once bound them to the land'.

2.3 Sustainability in Kuwait

Kuwait has signed The UN'S Paris agreement in 2016, one of the key aims of which is to limit global warming to below 1.5°C. Since 2016, the CO2 emissions have gone up +0.06% and show an upward trend (Ritchie, H., Roser, M., and Rosado, P.,2020). Al- Raggam (2012) says: In 2010, the volume of construction waste in Kuwait was estimated at 4.1 million tons at a rate of 11,000 tons per day. There continues to be reckless demolition without any regard for preservation of tangible architectural heritage or carbon emissions.

2.4 Legal Frameworks

Another glaring reason for the lack of adaptive reuse in the region is the lack of an organised legal framework in which the practice could sit. The existing guidance regarding preservation in the country 'is still in its infancy compared to other urban environments' (Albloushi, 2018). In 1960, the Law of Antiquities was introduced and remained largely unchanged and not used in the realm of building preservation until the 1990s, when the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) established an architectural division along with the Kuwait Heritage Building Registry (KHBR). While a grading system exists, it relies to a high degree on the judgements of individual assessors, rendering it inconsistent (Albloushi, 2018). Issues begin to arise when one tries to seek out information on these buildings. According to Albloushi, 137 buildings are on the KHBR register, while the NCCAL claims to be the custodian of 103 buildings on their website with no further information or even mention of the register. Of the 400,000 buildings that are recorded in Kuwait (Central Administration of Statistics, 2015), only 137 are registered as buildings of interest, then only approximately 0.03% of all the structures in Kuwait are protected in some way from demolition. This lack of documentation and consistency makes it easy for many buildings to fall under the radar, and become mismanaged or unmaintained, leading to their decay and eventual destruction, as was the case with many modernist and vernacular Kuwaiti buildings in the past.

3.MANCHESTER

3.1 The Emergence of Manchester

Manchester is a major city located in the northwest of England with a history that dates back to the Roman colonization of Britain. Known now for its many cultural exports in the world of music and football, the familiar red brick Manchester sprung up in the 18th and 19th centuries as it became the industrial heart of England through its textile manufacture(Parkinson-Bailey, 2002). The industry was immensely lucrative and it drew in many people, both industrialists and labourers, and thus led to the buildup of Manchester in the form of warehouses, factories, mills and housing in the Edwardian and Victorian periods (Parkinson-Bailey, 2002). The buildings of the previously mentioned periods still make up a significant portion of the built matter of Manchester even though the city has deindustrialised, but they continue to survive due to a thriving and encouraged practice of adaptive reuse in the city.

3.2 Manchester and Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse has been ever present in the urban fabric of the city. As described by Haslam in 'Manchester, England: Pop Cult City,' Manchester has always at its core been a palimpsest. Initial cases of reuse date back to five hundred years ago when planners and builders recycled the stones of the Roman settlements that still stood in the area and used them in new projects such as building churches and bridges. Continuity is ever present in Manchester and in Catacuzino's words allows 'generation after generation to derive a sense of continuity and stability from their physical surroundings'. Adaptive reuse emerged as a practice as it was often the most pragmatic and economic choice (Stone, 2020).Ideas of conservation in England go back to the 19th century, with pioneers of the movement such as William Morris and John Ruskin (Soane, 2002) whose disseminated works were influential then and still widely read today.

In the 80s, there was an estimated twenty million square feet in unused floorspace in these abandoned industrial buildings (Haslam,). The structures of these buildings were robust, open in design and had many windows, making them ideal to be built into. Economically, for a city that was in a recession in the 1970s, it made sense to keep using the existing structures rather than to demolish everything and begin again, tying back to the original reason of for the practice of adaptive reuse coming from a place of pragmatism (Van Cleempoel & Plevoets, 2019).

3.3 Legal Frameworks, Public and Private Sector Involvement

Supporting the extensive practice of adaptive reuse in Manchester in a thorough legal framework that is underpinned by public bodies such as Historic England and the Manchester City Council. Since the 1990s and the 2000s the local government has strategically marketed and created a manicured image of Manchester as a 'vibrant post-industrial service centre'(While & Short, 2010) with a robust regional policy of using the abandoned mills and factories that stand in prime locations within the city.

There is a thriving ecosystem in Manchester of both public and private sector contributions to the delivery of adaptive reuse projects in the city (Oevermann & Jones, 2022). Heritage industry of Manchester. According a 2020 report published by Historic England on the heritage sector in England, It was estimated in 2019, England's heritage sector contributed £14.7 billion to UK GDP (CEBR, 2020).

Central Manchester Development Corporation (CMDC) was a public body with the aims of effectively reusing and attracting people back to disused environments(MENGÜŞOĞLU and BOYACIOĞLU, 2013) was established in 1988 and was active until 1996 but helped set the precedent of reuse in Manchester. Due to their successful reuse projects, 'every artifact of the city's previous industry has [become] a valuable asset'(MENGÜŞOĞLU and BOYACIOĞLU, 2013). Another major player in the Manchester reuse projects of the 1990s, Urban splash is a private firm specialising in housing development, commercial development such as offices, and they are especially noted for their work in the regeneration of disused spaces. They have been active in Manchester for thirty years at the time of writing. They rely on place making narratives extensively, picking and choosing the most attractive facets of the past to reinterpret to serve their interests(While and Short, 2010), which is to preserve the urban fabric of Manchester while also addressing the need for housing. Stone (2020) highlights the usage of narrative to commodify heritage and make a place more attractive to live in, for example when real estate companies carefully choose to omit any language which may conjure imagery of the horrific working conditions that was often pervasive in the mills and factories that are now being marketed as 'luxury conversions', supporting the idea of a growing commodification of the past which can tamper with the authenticity of a culture and sever a people's true connection to heritage (MENGÜŞOĞLU and BOYACIOĞLU, 2013).

4.CASE STUDIES

4.1 Sadu House, Kuwait

Sadu House is a cultural institution in Kuwait concerned with the safeguarding and preservation of the endangered Bedouin craft of weaving. Originally built in 1936 as the home of a merchant, it was the first building in Kuwait that made use of cement and concrete. The NCCAL bought the house some time in the 1950s in order to preserve it as the family presiding in it at the time decided to move into a more modern house (National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, n.d.), aligning with the modernization and suburbanisation period of Kuwait (Al-Nakib, 2016). In the 1970s, the Sadu Society (formed in the 50s) adopted it as a place for meeting and dispersing knowledge of the craft. The typical organization of a Kuwaiti home of that period consisted of a centralized courtyard where the entrance opened into, and all the rooms that were on the perimeter opened into the courtyard. Sadu house had four courtyards for: the diwaniya (men's), the hareem (women's), the main entrance and a small kitchen courtyard. Courtyards are where socialisation, meals and the daily chores of the household would take place.

The society succeeded in the adaptive reuse of the building without needing to make many structural changes in the building's transition of private residence to a public facing institute. In the present day, the men's court is being used as the office quarters of the employees and volunteers within the House. The women's court is where events and workshops are held, and from there, you can enter rooms 19 through to 24, which are enfiladed and contain an exhibition of the history of Sadu Weaving. The main entrance houses a café(room 2) and a gift shop(room 4), along with a café seating area. The society organised many activities and modes of engagement that could take place within the house that served their interests of promoting the history and learning of Sadu while also preserving an important and tangible architectural monument. It is more successful than the neighboring Kuwait National Museum as it combats didactic museumification by being a place people can interact, socialize and learn in a myriad of ways, which suits the locals preferred methods of engagement with a space (Norman, 2014). The building and the organization that preside within present a rare case of adaptive reuse within Kuwait, and can provide a template moving forward for other organisations and individuals.

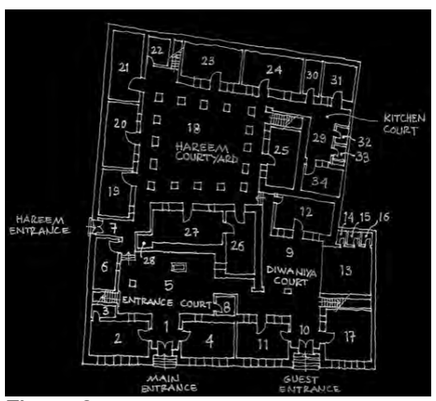

Figure 8


Figure 9

4.2. Merchant's Warehouse, Castlefield, Manchester

Manchester is a city with ancient roots, with some tracing back to the Roman period of settlement within Britain. All of Manchester's layers and major historical events from the early village remains of 2000 years ago to the whirlwind industrialisation of the Victorian period can be seen within the small circumference of the Castlefield area(Parkinson-Bailey, 2002). What is notable about this area is that in the 1970s it was an industrial ruin, and prior to the 1990s no people had lived in the area, yet it is now a highly desirable area to live in, its canals and old warehouses creating an image of the ideal touristic European city (While and Short, 2010), due to the combined efforts of the government and local businessmen such as Jim Ramsbottom, who has been acknowledged for his great financial contributions towards the revitalization of the Castlefield area(Manchester City Council. and Royal Institute of British Architects., 2004).

One of the most notable conversions is the Merchant's warehouse, which is the oldest standing warehouse in Manchester. Previously used to store and load the materials and goods that were transported in and out of Manchester (Historic England), it has become a mixed use area with both residential and commercial spaces in the same building. The robust frame of the existing building with its many windows and open circulation suits its current occupations as a building where people either spend a lot of time, as tenants or as workers. It is an extremely successful case of adaptive reuse as it helped draw in more people increasing the city centre population, a major goal of the Manchester City Council in the 80s and 90s, and it helped set a precedent for what was to occur in many abandoned and disused buildings that were ever present throughout the city centre.

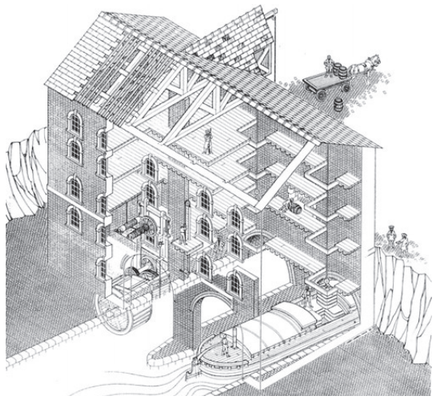

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

5.DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1 Discussion

For this study, Kuwait and Manchester were chosen for their relative similarity in multiple areas, such as historical contexts and size of landcover while also having interesting differences in approach to building use and conservation . According to the OECD, only 0.22% of the total land cover was built on in Kuwait in 2014, making the urban areas of Kuwait, which are comparable to the Greater Manchester areas.

Manchester and Kuwait are both areas built rapidly on economic booms, the former due to cotton trade and manufacture over 150 years ago(Parkinson-Bailey, 2002) and the latter the discovery of oil in the 1940s (Al-Nakib, 2016). Both locales used similar techniques to achieve opposing ends. Through narrative making about heritage and places, local government. Both Kuwait and Manchester were facing the same issue, the issue of negative associations with buildings, with constant calls for demolitions as soon as buildings fell into disrepair, like the mills of Manchester and the modernist buildings of Kuwait. However, they diverged in the 1990s with the way adaptive reuse was approached. Manchester invested greatly in marketing and creating a new image of the city to attract people back into the city centre(While and Short, 2010) (MENGÜŞOĞLU and BOYACIOĞLU, 2013), while Kuwait strongly marketed suburban life and modernist buildings as the future to its people, at the cost of losing the entirety of the urban fabric that made up pre-oil Kuwait (Al-Nakib, 2016). Kuwait used place making narratives, such as the ones of poverty and struggle, in a manner of impeding on the conservation and reuse of buildings while the Manchester City Council used place narratives to promote its image as an ideal European city(While and Short, 2010).

A limitation of the research is the lack of access to resources about Buildings in Kuwait online, as most of the research sits physically in archives or libraries in Kuwait, and a lack of research specifically on the topic of adaptive reuse in relation to Kuwait.

Manchester's success in adaptive reuse is leading to studies in trying to understand how to replicate the revival of post industrial cities around the world such as those carried out by Mengüşoğlu and Boyacioğlu in their 2013 study looking at how Manchester's methods of revival could be brought over to Turkey, and Oevermann's and Jones' study looking at the conservation and adaptive reuse practices of Mancunian mills and the mills of the Rhine region in Germany.
Similar to those studies, this writing aimed to compare and contrast approaches to adaptive reuse in a place with a lack of the practice to a place with an urban fabric that is defined by that practice, to understand how Kuwait could potentially move towards better building and management practices.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, a diverse range of factors can have an impact on the practice of adaptive reuse in different contexts. Some of the key factors are government intervention and policy which can shape local attitudes, sustainability practices as well as the state of the economy. In understanding local contexts and attitudes as designers, better projections of what obstacles might be faced in an adaptive reuse project and a better understanding of how to maneuver through those issues in a way that will prevent the loss of architectural heritage while also ensuring a connection between users and site with an increased sensitivity to the issues of unsustainability of new build and demolitions.

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