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CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO PROPERTY REUSE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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Abstract. This systematic literature review examines the challenges and barriers to property reuse for social housing development, a strategy increasingly recognized for its potential to address housing shortages while promoting sustainable urban development. The study synthesizes findings from a comprehensive analysis of peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and grey literature, identifying key obstacles across technical, economic, regulatory, social, and environmental domains. Our review reveals that while property reuse offers significant opportunities for creating affordable and sustainable housing solutions, it is hindered by complex interplays of structural limitations, financial constraints, regulatory hurdles, community resistance, and environmental concerns. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of barriers to adaptive reuse in the context of social housing, emphasizing the need for integrated approaches to overcome these challenges. This review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a holistic understanding of the obstacles faced in property reuse projects for social housing and by identifying gaps in current research. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy reforms, innovative financing models, and community engagement strategies to facilitate successful property reuse initiatives. These insights are valuable for policymakers, urban planners, and housing developers seeking to implement effective property reuse strategies for social housing development.

Keywords*: property reuse, social housing, adaptive reuse, urban regeneration, affordable housing, sustainable development, housing policy, community resistance, building renovation, urban planning.*

INTRODUCTION

The global challenge of providing adequate and affordable housing, particularly in urban areas, has led to increased interest in innovative solutions that can address housing shortages while promoting sustainable urban development. One such approach that has gained significant attention is the reuse of existing properties for social housing. This strategy not only offers the potential to create much-needed affordable housing units but also aligns with broader goals of urban regeneration, heritage preservation, and environmental sustainability (Bullen & Love, 2010; Mangialardo & Micelli, 2020).

Property reuse for social housing involves the adaptation of existing buildings, often those that are vacant, underutilized, or in a state of disrepair, into residential units that can serve low-income or vulnerable populations. This approach presents numerous advantages, including the reduction of urban sprawl, the revitalization of neighbourhoods, and the conservation of embodied energy in existing structures (Langston et al., 2008). Furthermore, in the context of ageing populations in many developed countries, the adaptive reuse of properties offers opportunities to create age-friendly housing solutions that can support older adults in maintaining independence and quality of life (WHO, 2020).

However, despite its potential benefits, the process of repurposing properties for social housing is fraught with challenges and barriers that can impede implementation and success. These obstacles span a wide range of domains, including technical feasibility, economic viability, regulatory compliance, social acceptance, and environmental considerations (Garcia & Kwon, 2021). The complexity and interrelated nature of these challenges necessitate a comprehensive understanding to develop effective strategies for overcoming them.

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to provide a thorough examination of the challenges and barriers to property reuse for social housing development (Sanchaniya & Geipele, 2023). By synthesizing findings from a diverse range of sources, including academic literature, policy documents, and case studies, this review aims to offer a holistic perspective on the obstacles faced in adaptive reuse projects for social housing. The insights gained from this analysis are critical for informing policy decisions, guiding practitioners, and identifying areas for future research.

This review is particularly timely given the increasing pressure on housing systems worldwide, exacerbated by factors such as urbanization, demographic shifts, and economic inequalities. As cities and governments seek sustainable solutions to housing crises, understanding the barriers to property reuse can help in developing more effective and targeted interventions. Moreover, in the context of global efforts towards sustainable development and climate change mitigation, the adaptive reuse of buildings represents a significant opportunity to reduce the environmental impact of the built environment (European Commission, 2022).

The structure of this review begins with an outline of the methodology employed, followed by a detailed examination of the challenges and barriers identified in the literature. These are categorized into technical challenges, economic barriers, regulatory and legal obstacles, social and cultural challenges, environmental considerations, and organizational and governance issues. The review then explores strategies that have been proposed or implemented to overcome these barriers, identifying best practices and innovative approaches. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of gaps in current research and suggestions for future research directions, aiming to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this critical area of urban development and social housing policy.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology to comprehensively examine the challenges and barriers to property reuse for social housing. The systematic approach ensures a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible process for identifying, selecting, and critically appraising relevant research (Moher et al., 2015). We followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to structure our review process and reporting (Page et al., 2021).

Our search strategy encompassed multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, to capture a wide range of peer-reviewed articles. We also included grey literature sources such as government reports, policy documents, and conference proceedings to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. The search terms used were combinations and variations of keywords, including "property reuse," "adaptive reuse," "social housing," "affordable housing," "challenges," "barriers," and "obstacles." The initial search was conducted for literature published between 2000 and 2024 to focus on contemporary issues while also capturing the evolution of challenges over time. Inclusion criteria were: (1) focus on property reuse or adaptive reuse; (2) relevance to social or affordable housing; (3) discussion of challenges, barriers, or obstacles; and (4) publication in English. We excluded studies that did not specifically address property reuse for housing purposes or those that only tangentially mentioned challenges without substantial discussion.

The screening process involved two stages: a review of titles and abstracts and a full-text review of potentially eligible studies. Two researchers independently conducted the screening to minimize bias, with discrepancies resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. Data extraction was performed using a standardized form to collect information on study characteristics, types of challenges identified, contextual factors, and proposed solutions. The quality of included studies was assessed using appropriate tools such as the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for empirical studies and a modified version of the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Text and Opinion Papers for conceptual and policy papers. The extracted data were synthesized using a thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns across the literature. This systematic process enabled a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges in property reuse for social housing development.

2. RESULTS

The systematic review of the literature reveals a complex landscape of challenges and barriers that impede the successful implementation of property reuse for social housing development. These obstacles can be categorized into several key themes: technical challenges, economic barriers, regulatory and legal hurdles, social and cultural issues, environmental considerations, and organizational and governance problems. Each of these categories presents unique difficulties that must be addressed to facilitate effective property reuse strategies.

2.1. Technical Challenges

The adaptation of existing buildings for social housing purposes often encounters significant technical obstacles. One primary issue is the structural integrity of older buildings, which may require extensive renovations to meet modern safety standards and housing needs. As noted by Hanafi et al. (2018), many existing structures, particularly those from earlier eras, were not designed with the flexibility to accommodate modern living requirements or the specific needs of vulnerable populations such as the elderly or disabled.

Accessibility is a crucial concern, especially when considering age-friendly housing solutions. Van Hoof et al. (2021) highlight that retrofitting buildings to include features such as elevators, ramps, and wider doorways can be technically challenging and costly. This is particularly evident in heritage buildings, where structural modifications must balance preservation requirements with accessibility needs.

Another technical challenge lies in upgrading building systems to meet current energy efficiency standards. The European Commission (2022) emphasizes the importance of improving energy performance in existing buildings as part of broader sustainability goals. However, integrating modern HVAC systems, improving insulation, and incorporating renewable energy technologies in older structures can be complex and may require innovative engineering solutions. Figure 2.1 illustrates (WHO, 2007) eight domains in which cities encounter challenges and in which actions are needed.

Fig. 2.1. WHO model of age-friendly cities in 2007 (World Health Organization, 2007).

2.2. Economic Barriers

Financial constraints represent a significant obstacle to property reuse for social housing. The high costs associated with purchasing, renovating, and maintaining older properties can make such projects economically unfeasible without substantial subsidies or innovative financing models. Brown et al. (2006) note that the initial capital investment required for adaptive reuse projects often exceeds that of new construction, particularly when dealing with buildings that have fallen into disrepair.

Moreover, the unpredictability of renovation costs poses a significant risk to developers and investors. Hidden structural issues, the presence of hazardous materials such as asbestos, and unforeseen complications during the renovation process can lead to budget overruns, deterring potential investors from engaging in property reuse projects (Bullen & Love, 2010).

The long-term economic viability of social housing projects also presents challenges. Maintaining affordable rent levels while covering operational costs and necessary ongoing maintenance can be difficult, especially in areas with high property values. This economic pressure can lead to a trade-off between affordability and quality, potentially compromising the living standards of residents (Rasnaca & Rezgale-Straidoma, 2019). Figure 2.2 shows the social housing share of Latvia compared to other EU member states.

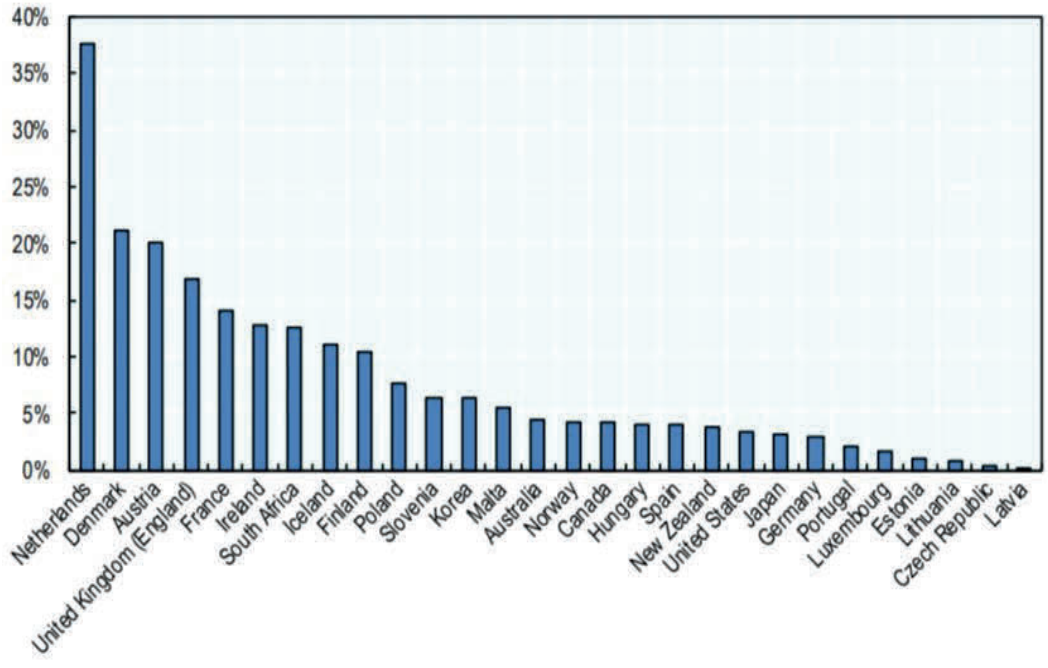

Fig. 2.2. Social housing share of Latvia compared to other EU member states (CECODHAS, 2012).

2.3. Regulatory and Legal Hurdles

The regulatory environment surrounding property reuse for social housing is often complex and can present significant barriers to implementation. Zoning laws and building codes may not be conducive to adaptive reuse of properties, particularly when changing the use of a building from commercial or industrial to residential. Garcia and Kwon (2021) point out that navigating these regulatory frameworks can be time-consuming and costly, often requiring special permissions or variances.

Heritage protection laws, while important for preserving cultural assets, can also complicate property reuse efforts. Restrictions on modifications to historically significant buildings can limit the extent of renovations possible, potentially conflicting with the need to create functional and accessible living spaces (Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022).

Furthermore, liability concerns related to environmental contamination in former industrial sites can deter developers from engaging in brownfield redevelopment projects. The potential for costly remediation and ongoing legal responsibilities associated with contaminated properties present a significant risk factor.

2.4. Social and Cultural Challenges

Public perception and community resistance can pose substantial barriers to property reuse initiatives. The "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome often manifests in opposition to social housing projects, with local residents expressing concerns about property values, neighbourhood character, and perceived increases in crime or social problems (Luciano et al., 2020).

Stigmatization of social housing and its residents can also hinder community integration and support for property reuse projects. Overcoming these social barriers requires extensive community engagement and education to address misconceptions and build local support (Buffel & Phillipson, 2019).

Cultural attitudes towards housing can also influence the acceptance of adaptive reuse projects. In some contexts, there may be a preference for new construction over renovated properties or resistance to non-traditional living arrangements that may result from property reuse initiatives (Sengers & Peine, 2021). Figure 2.3 shows an age-friendly ecosystem, which illustrates how various age-friendly initiatives can foster alliances and interactions in response to the ongoing trend of population ageing.

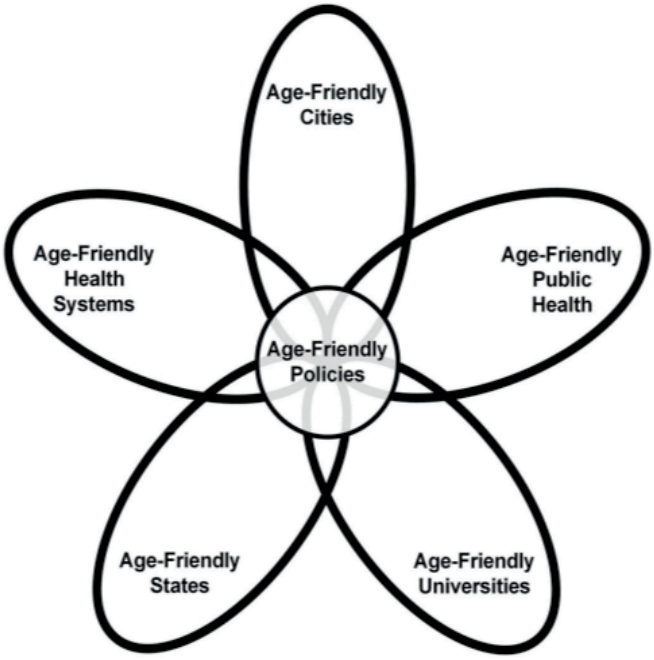

Fig. 2.3. The age-friendly ecosystem (Fulmer et al., 2020; Van Hoof et al., 2021).

2.5. Environmental Sustainability and Building Performance

Adaptive reuse offers significant environmental benefits, aligning with principles of sustainability and circular economy. Bullen and Love (2011) note that reusing existing buildings minimizes the need for new construction materials, thereby reducing the carbon footprint and resource consumption. This is particularly relevant in the Latvian context, where many Soviet-era buildings require substantial upgrades to meet modern energy efficiency standards.

The integration of sustainable practices in adaptive reuse projects not only reduces environmental impact but also enhances the long-term viability and affordability of housing projects (Treija & Bratuškins, 2019). Retrofitting existing buildings with energy-efficient technologies can significantly reduce energy consumption and operational costs, providing long-term economic benefits through reduced utility bills.

2.6. Environmental Considerations

While property reuse generally aligns with sustainability goals by reducing the need for new construction, it also presents environmental challenges. The presence of hazardous materials in older buildings, such as lead paint or asbestos, requires careful handling and disposal, adding to project costs and complexity.

Achieving high levels of energy efficiency in older structures can be challenging, potentially conflicting with goals to reduce the carbon footprint of housing. Balancing heritage preservation with environmental performance improvements presents a particular challenge in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings (Foster, 2020). Figure 4 shows an innovative and theoretical age-friendly framework (CASE). The CASE framework has the potential to represent a district

or suburb within a city or town. The eight centrally located hubs within the framework vary in size (small, medium, or large) based on the positive and negative impacts indicative of the respective district.

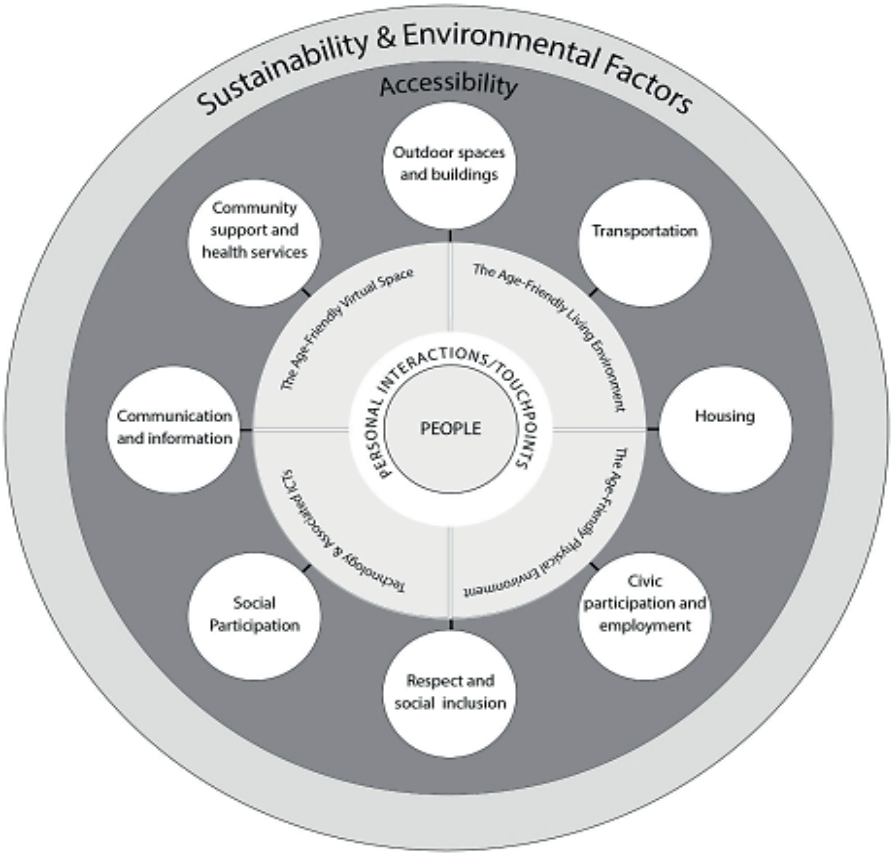

Fig. 2.4. The CASE framework (Van Hoof et al., 2021).

2.7. Organizational and Governance Issues

The successful implementation of property reuse for social housing often requires coordination among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, private developers, community organizations, and residents. Van Hoof et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in creating age-friendly housing solutions. However, aligning the interests and capabilities of these diverse stakeholders can be challenging, often leading to delays and inefficiencies in project execution.

Governance structures and decision-making processes may not be well-suited to the complexity of property reuse projects. Traditional siloed approaches to urban planning and housing development may struggle to address the interdisciplinary nature of adaptive reuse initiatives (Moulaert & Garon, 2016).

The lack of specialized expertise in property reuse within many organizations involved in social housing development can also hinder project success. There is often a need for professionals with skills in both heritage conservation and modern

housing development, a combination that may be scarce in the labour market (Yung & Chan, 2012). Figure 5 shows spatial requirements in several domains of the Ageing Well Urban Planning Model, as identified by Chao (2018) and Van Hoof et al. (2021). These domains include transportation, outdoor spaces and buildings, and housing, each necessitating specific spatial considerations to enhance age-friendliness in urban environments.

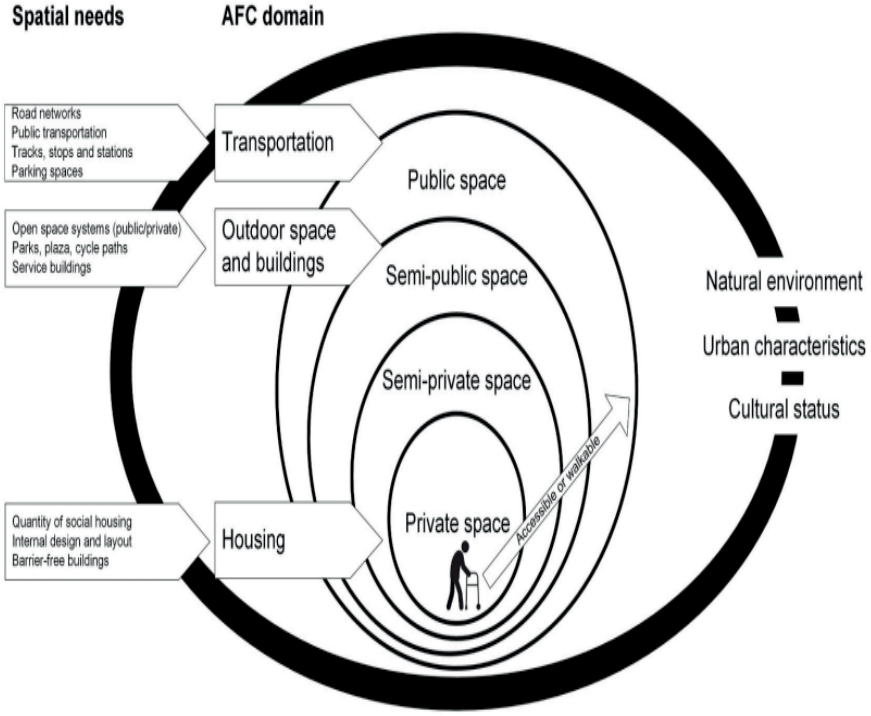

Fig. 2.5. The Ageing Well Urban Planning Model (Chao, 2018; Van Hoof et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the challenges and barriers to property reuse for social housing are multifaceted and interconnected. Addressing these obstacles requires a holistic approach that considers technical, economic, regulatory, social, environmental, and organizational factors. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of property reuse in creating sustainable, affordable, and culturally rich housing solutions make it an important strategy to pursue. Future research and policy development should focus on innovative approaches to overcome these barriers, fostering more widespread adoption of property reuse strategies in social housing development.

3. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review reveal the multifaceted and interrelated nature of challenges facing property reuse for social housing development. While adaptive reuse offers significant potential benefits in terms of providing affordable housing, preserving heritage, and promoting sustainable urban development, the

obstacles identified are substantial and require comprehensive strategies to overcome.

The technical challenges highlighted in the literature underscore the need for innovative engineering and architectural solutions. The high costs associated with addressing structural issues and meeting modern standards suggest that targeted financial support and incentives may be necessary to make such projects viable. Furthermore, the emphasis on energy efficiency and accessibility modifications points to the potential for property reuse projects to contribute to broader goals of sustainability and inclusivity in housing.

The economic barriers identified reveal the complex financial landscape of property reuse for social housing. The high upfront costs and challenges in securing funding highlight the need for innovative financing models and public-private partnerships. The potential impacts on local property markets also suggest the need for careful planning to balance the benefits of urban regeneration with the risks of gentrification and displacement.

Regulatory and legal obstacles emerge as critical factors that can either facilitate or hinder property reuse initiatives. The findings suggest a need for more flexible and adaptive regulatory frameworks that can accommodate the unique challenges of adaptive reuse projects while still ensuring safety and quality standards are met. The complexities around heritage preservation requirements highlight the need for balanced approaches that respect historical significance while allowing for necessary adaptations.

The social and cultural challenges identified underscore the importance of community engagement and education in property reuse projects. Addressing stigma and community resistance requires proactive communication strategies and efforts to demonstrate the benefits of social housing to local communities. The need to match available properties with housing needs also highlights the importance of thorough needs assessments and flexible design approaches.

Environmental considerations in property reuse projects present both challenges and opportunities. While issues such as contamination and hazardous materials can pose significant obstacles, the potential for adaptive reuse to contribute to sustainability goals through reduced resource consumption and embodied carbon savings is notable. The emphasis on climate adaptation needs also points to the potential for property reuse projects to enhance urban resilience.

Finally, the organizational and governance issues identified highlight the need for capacity building and improved coordination among stakeholders involved in property reuse initiatives. Developing expertise in adaptive reuse, fostering effective collaboration, and ensuring policy coherence across different levels of government emerge as key priorities.

In conclusion, while the challenges to property reuse for social housing are significant, they are not insurmountable. The findings of this review suggest that successful initiatives require integrated approaches that address technical, economic, regulatory, social, and environmental factors simultaneously. Future research and policy development should focus on developing innovative solutions to these challenges, with a particular emphasis on context-specific strategies that can be adapted to local conditions and needs.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review has highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of challenges and barriers to property reuse for social housing development. The findings underscore the interconnectedness of technical, economic, regulatory, social, environmental, and organizational factors that impede the widespread adoption of adaptive reuse strategies in addressing housing needs. Despite these obstacles, the potential benefits of property reuse in creating sustainable, affordable, and culturally sensitive housing solutions remain significant and worthy of pursuit.

The technical challenges identified, particularly those related to structural adaptations and modernization of older buildings, call for innovative engineering solutions and interdisciplinary collaboration. Future research should focus on developing cost-effective techniques for retrofitting existing structures to meet contemporary housing standards, especially in the context of creating age-friendly and accessible living environments.

Economic barriers, including high initial costs and uncertain long-term viability, emerge as critical obstacles. This highlights the need for novel financing models and policy interventions to make property reuse projects more financially attractive to developers and investors. Further exploration of public-private partnerships, tax incentives, and community-based funding mechanisms could yield valuable insights into overcoming these economic challenges.

The regulatory and legal hurdles identified in this review point to the necessity of policy reform. Streamlining approval processes for adaptive reuse projects, creating more flexible zoning regulations, and developing specific guidelines for the conversion of non-residential properties into housing could significantly facilitate property reuse initiatives. Future research should examine successful policy frameworks from various jurisdictions to inform best practices.

Addressing social and cultural challenges requires a concerted effort in community engagement and education. Further studies on effective strategies for building community support and overcoming NIMBY attitudes could provide valuable guidance for practitioners. Additionally, research into the long-term social impacts of successful property reuse projects could help in building a stronger case for these initiatives.

The environmental considerations highlighted in this review underscore the need for a balanced approach to sustainability in property reuse. Future research should focus on developing methodologies for assessing and optimizing the environmental performance of adaptive reuse projects, considering both embodied energy savings and operational efficiency improvements.

The organizational and governance issues identified point to the need for new models of collaboration and decision-making in property reuse initiatives. Further investigation into successful multi-stakeholder partnerships and integrated planning approaches could yield valuable insights for improving project outcomes.

In conclusion, while the challenges to property reuse for social housing are substantial, they are not insurmountable. The potential for this approach to contribute to sustainable urban development, affordable housing provision, and

community revitalization makes it a crucial area for continued research and policy development. Future studies should focus on:

- developing innovative technical solutions for adapting older buildings to modern housing needs;
- exploring new financing models to improve the economic viability of property reuse projects;
- examining policy reforms that can facilitate and incentivize adaptive reuse for social housing;
- investigating effective strategies for community engagement and overcoming social resistance;
- assessing the long-term environmental and social impacts of property reuse initiatives;
- exploring new governance models that can better support the complexity of adaptive reuse projects.

By addressing these research gaps and continuing to build our understanding of the challenges and potential solutions, we can work towards more effective implementation of property reuse strategies in social housing development. This approach holds promise not only for addressing housing shortages but also for creating more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban environments for future generations.

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