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Moderator

# Session Summary 3

## **Sub-Theme 3: Adaptive Re-use**

*In planning for change and management of that change, build in a mechanism to control the rate of change.* Laurence Loh

In Asia today, cities undergo change at a phenomenal rate; in fact, the pace of change is so great that Asian cities have been aptly described as “cities in a hurry”. Unfortunately, one of the dangers of rapid development is that buildings and places of community significance are dramatically changed or demolished without a clear understanding of their importance, and, especially, their role and meaning in the life of the community. Comprehensive planning for the sensitive adaptive re-use of buildings and places over a well-defined period of time can provide effective control over the *degree of change* and *the rate of change*. These were two of the issues discussed by the speakers in this session.

The first speaker in the session, Yongtanit Pimonsathean (“Current Issues Concerning Adaptive Re-use in the Conservation of Urban Cultural Heritage”), examined the three positive aspects of adaptive re-use in his paper: (1) preservation of historic buildings; (2) cost savings through recycling existing building stock; and (3) reduced use of natural resources (less exploitation). Yet, issues remain: how are appropriate new uses determined? What is the impact of existing legal limits? And, finally, what is the effect of gentrification? To help solve the issues, Yongtanit suggested there are three possible ways to make decisions: (1) top-down approach; (2) grassroots approach; and (3) partnerships formed by all involved groups.

The second speaker, Laurence Loh (“New Use – Old Fit”), believed that the most sustainable adaptive re-use of a building or place is one that is closest to the original use. By respecting the original use, the significance (value) of the building is maintained – both its static (tangible) values and its dynamic (intangible) values. To dramatically change the use of the building can affect all



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of the buildings attributes, especially if the level of intervention is high. The argument used for controlling the amount and rate of change is that, historically, cities grew incrementally over time. Change was controlled, if only by traditional means of construction. One of the keys to successful adaptive re-use today is to allow sufficient time for review and modification of ideas and policies.

The last speaker, Harold Kalman (“Adaptive Re-use: Learning from Vancouver”), took a different position and argued that “well-designed changes in use and appearance can be a good thing.” Through careful architectural “match-making,” rather dramatic new uses can be found for historic buildings. In Vancouver, adaptive re-use is part of an integrated approach to heritage conservation, and development is balanced by the community’s resolve to save its historic buildings and places. Not surprisingly, incentives, such as bonus density, TDR and zoning relaxations are used to encourage private conservation initiatives.

What are the lessons for Macao? What can be learned from the experience of our speakers? Yongtanit Pimonsathean (Thailand) shared his experience as a planner and reminded us, in his concluding comments, of the importance of the community’s participation in decision-making; Laurence Loh (Malaysia) shared his experience as an architect and reflected on each building’s “cycle of life”; and Harold Kalman (Canada) shared his experience as a heritage consultant and suggested that for every underused historic building there is a “match” or new use “out there”. For all three presenters, adaptive re-use is an opportunity for balancing development and conservation, especially when adaptive re-use is an integral part of the planning process.