Across Canada, many important heritage buildings have become home to social economy organizations. These buildings are used in a variety of ways, from affordable housing and artist co-ops to social and human services non-profits; from women’s shelters and halfway houses to community radio stations; from youth training centres to social enterprises; from consumer co-operatives to administrative spaces for progressive social economy organizations, foundations, charities, and non-profits. Examples include the Charlotte Street Arts Centre, Fredericton; the Court Street Fire Hall/Multicultural Centre, Thunder Bay; the Robertson Building, Toronto; the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (The Cultch), Vancouver; the CN-Angus Shops, Montréal; the Fire Station for Youth at Risk, Moncton; and Hilltop House, Edmonton. Although one might not expect a relationship to exist between heritage buildings and what is broadly known as the social economy (Fairbairn 2009), the intersection of specific needs have conspired to create an association. Cash-strapped social economy organizations are frequently looking for an affordable home, while heritage-building owners (private, non-profit, or government) are often in need of tenants who are sympathetic to heritage values. But is this relationship purely a market coincidence, or have other priorities brought these diverse groups together under a heritage roof?

In her research on heritage buildings and non-profit tenancy in the United States, Vinokur-Kaplan (2001) found that donors were reluctant to give funds to non-profits for rent or for the capital costs of a new building. To compensate,
non-profit organizations often collaborated with heritage-building landlords (both private and municipal or state), inhabiting and taking good care of heritage space in exchange for a longer term lease with affordable rent. Landlords benefited in at least two ways: they reduced their property taxes, and the presence of tenants protected the heritage buildings from vandalism. The moral and social capital of the social economy tenants also brought vitality to underused buildings and even improved the livability of neighbourhoods. This is a decent quid pro quo.

Ecological sustainability has also been taken up by heritage actors as a way to control building operation costs (Roberts 2007) and as a response to the challenges of urban sustainability (Dannenberg et al. 2011; Onyszuk et. al, 2001; Rypkema 2005). Owners and tenants now retrofit heritage buildings with efficient heating, lighting, water, and building-envelope technologies. This practical work converges with political work by activists to promote energy and material conservation via the reuse, renovation, and adaptive repurposing of existing buildings and to preserve historically compact urban form and walkability (GHPNS 2006).

This chapter explores the ecological dimensions of the sustainability of heritage buildings as well as the intangible social and cultural dimensions (Ross 2006). We argue that conservation of key built structures provides continuity between past and present political and social life. Connecting current community initiatives with physical artifacts that invoke memories of past civic or national commitments to human dignity, human rights, and social justice nourishes contemporary imaginations of social sustainability and the solidarity economy (Fennell 2009, 149; Lewis 2007).

**HERITAGE BUILDINGS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY TENANTS: STORIES FROM ALBERTA**

Canadian stories drawn from the province of Alberta provide examples of the common purpose and collaboration among social economy activists, heritage preservationists, and sustainability advocates. Each narrative exemplifies innovative and well-considered use or re-use of heritage architecture and the adaptation of an older building into the contemporary urban fabric in ways that align with ecological, economic, and social sustainability. Visitors to these buildings can feel the unique affinity and synergy between sustainability, heritage preservation, and the social economy. Each of these stories encourages stronger collaborative efforts toward sustainability.
The Gibson Block, Edmonton

The Gibson Block in Edmonton, Alberta, also known as the Flat Iron Building, houses the Women’s Emergency Accommodation Centre (WEAC). Located on Jasper Avenue in the Boyle Street community, a transitional neighbourhood on the eastern edge of the downtown, the building was registered as a Provincial Historic Resource in 1995 (HERMIS 2013). The WEAC provides housing for up to seventy women. Constructed in 1913, the upper three floors of the Gibson Block are residential. The main floor at one time housed a café and various retail operations, including a lively neighbourhood fruit and vegetable store. The basement was home to a Turkish bath and remained a bath house until 1978. The building slowly declined, along with the original downtown core, and became “derelict, decaying and seemingly destined to be a forgotten footnote in time” (Herzog 2003). It was boarded up for ten years and was finally rescued in the autumn of 1993 by a collection of community members. Heritage planner Darryl Cariou worked with the City of Edmonton at the time:

One day I got a call from a building inspector saying, “Darryl, I just want to give you a heads up. We’re about to issue a demolition order for the building because they had a report that there were bricks falling off the cornice onto the street below.” So that raised the issue to the red alert level. . . . Mayor Reimer asked her executive assistant and me to organize a public meeting in one of the meeting rooms on the main floor of City Hall. Because the meeting was coming right out of the mayor’s office, there were a lot of big wigs there, movers and shakers from downtown Edmonton, bankers and lawyers, etc., and Martin Garber-Conrad was there. I presented what I knew about the building, some basic information about the history. I showed pictures of the inside so that they would know what condition it was in. I had some original floor plans, I think, so people had a sense of what was there. It was just sort of an open discussion about what to do with the building. Afterward Martin came forward and said, “I’m interested in this building.”

(Interview with authors, April 13, 2012)

In the 1990s, Martin Garber-Conrad—currently the CEO of the Edmonton Community Foundation, a municipal agency that provides donor-based funding to charitable programs and activities—was the director of the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (E4C), an ecumenical charitable organization dedicated to community service. Founded in 1970 by four inner-city churches, E4C was formed according to one of its Edmonton originators “as a voice for the voiceless,
to empower the disinherited downtown” (Ivany, 2000, 5). E4C had, since its inception, managed a women’s shelter in leased spaces and had, at the time the issue of the Gibson Block became public, recently secured funds for a new purpose-built shelter. Garber-Conrad offers this insight, from a community activist point of view, of the collaboration with heritage activists:

I got the bright idea that perhaps we could do two things at once. Perhaps we could put this building to a social use and preserve its historical significance. . . . The justification I saw for compromising the social purpose with a historical or heritage purpose was that I thought it would be very exciting to get the community of people that supports arts, heritage, cultural and historical stuff also interested in homeless women, and if possible to draw resources for the project not only from the traditional housing sources, but also from the historical and cultural sources. I think we demonstrated that it’s possible to do, but it certainly wasn’t easy.¹

E4C combined their recently acquired building funds with City and provincial heritage dollars to restore the Gibson Block. E4C now owns the building, and it remains the home of Edmonton’s Women’s Emergency Accommodation Centre.

Figure 9.1 Aerial view of the construction of the Gibson Block.
Photo: Tim Ferguson, courtesy of Eye in the Sky Aerial Photography.

During an interview with a neighbourhood newsletter Garber-Conrad described how the former grandeur of the building and its link to the original downtown played a role in garnering support and collaborators:

The building’s broad appeal has brought many parts of our community together to return a vacant landmark to worthwhile service. The revitalized Gibson Block means we will be able to help more of the growing number of homeless women, who are among the neediest of our city’s needy. At the same time, we all can enjoy seeing a wonderful remnant of Edmonton’s past restored to its previous beauty. (Boyle McCauley News, 1994)

The improved accommodation in the women’s shelter “immediately paid back all the effort, as the increased privacy and the new attitude of dignity affected the staff and clients alike” (Ivany 2000, 20). Today, that part of the city is once again at the forefront of urban renewal, including the development of a new hockey arena. As Garber-Conrad mused, having an asset provides the social economy entrepreneurs with other options: “maybe someday, it will be cost effective to let somebody buy it out and turn it into some other use.”

The story of the Gibson Block points to issues of social sustainability beyond conservation—and to the role of heritage buildings as catalysts for social renewal. One caveat, though, is the problem of gentrification. While urban renewal in the
1960s took the form of demolition and modernization, today’s gentrification generally includes not building demolition but the removal of undesirable elements, uses, demographic groups, and classes. A partnership between heritage preservation and social economy actors holds the potential for organizations with a social justice mission to shape urban renewal in socially just and ecologically sustainable ways that resist social exclusion.

**The Alexander Taylor School, Edmonton**

Named for one of the founders of the City of Edmonton, the Alexander Taylor School is on the inventory of the City of Edmonton Municipal Historic Resources. Its core tenant is the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation (E4C), an inner-city social services agency. Construction of the school began in 1906, and it opened two years later. The Edmonton School Board closed the Alex Taylor School in 2001 to consolidate resources, since the number of children in the neighbourhood had declined.

![Figure 9.3 The Alex Taylor School, Edmonton.](image)

Originally a middle-class neighbourhood of early Edmonton, the community slipped downwards socio-economically over the years and became more multicultural, with a significant Chinese and Asian population. Today, it remains an ethnically and socio-economically mixed neighbourhood in the Boyle Street area, one of Edmonton’s poorer inner-city neighbourhoods, with a range of challenges. In 2002, E4C began to run a number of school programs for children out of the building (see figure 9.3). They used their connections with the school board to negotiate in 2002 for a twenty year lease (for $1 a year) and retrofitted the building with $1 million grant from the Muttart Foundation (Herzog, 2002).
The building was repurposed into an office and community complex for non-profit organizations. It also became the new home for E4C, as well as a cluster of other social economy agencies. The building now houses the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, the Centre for Non-Profits, a training space for Kids in the Hall Bistro, Head Start classrooms for children under four years, a garage for a community bus program, and a meeting space for community groups.

E4C consolidated its operations from four different locations into the one neighbourhood where they focus many of their services—food, housing, youth outreach, and job training for members of the inner city. As Garber-Conrad explained:

We had been in rented high rises on Jasper Avenue in the heart of the business district for our entire life while all our work was east of the downtown in the inner city. And we began to think, “What if we moved actually into the area we served? What if we took our experience with the Gibson Block and heritage buildings and used it on this heritage school to preserve what could be preserved, but repurpose it from a school into an office and community complex?”

Garber-Conrad was also quick to note the continuities at play in taking over the building. For thirty years, the school had the same principal, Steve Ramsankar, who had turned it into a community school for the neighbourhood. As Garber-Conrad explains, E4C’s proposed uses for the Alex Taylor School aligned with historical uses in other ways as well. In the 1970s, under Principal Steve Ramsankar, the school became the Chinese seniors’ centre and a drop-in centre for scared and abused children. It became an early school lunch program centre. “So, at the philosophical or metaphoric level we were not in fact developing a new use for the building. . . . And in addition to everything else we actually had children back in that school.”

Today, E4C has grown to a $13 million organization with many new programs. Two projects added recently are a large community garden on the playgrounds and more extensive community and school lunch and snack programs (now supplying twelve high-needs schools). Both are activities close to the hearts of activists involved in sustainability and food security issues. Unlike private owners, who often look to invest and increase the value of their capital assets in conventional ways—maintaining a heritage building façade while adding density and converting use to expensive and profitable condominiums, for example—the social economy organizations invest in their building to grow their social capital assets—for example, through a community garden or outreach programming. In other words,
private owners most often seek heritage buildings to increase private assets, while social economy agents do so to increase public or social assets. Social assets, in turn, increase the moral or political capital of the organizations inhabiting the building. Over time, this increase in other types of capital can protect the heritage asset against assault by economic market forces.

**The Old Y Centre, Calgary**

The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Calgary was founded in 1907 to provide accommodation for unmarried women who had recently arrived in the city. Housed initially in rented property, the organization had by 1909 raised enough money to purchase land and begin construction of a permanent home, today known as the Old Y Centre (see figure 9.4). The three-storey brick and sandstone building, built in 1910 and 1911 in the Georgian Revival style, was financed in part through the YWCA’s “dollar campaign,” which exhorted Calgarians each to contribute a dollar toward the construction of the building. As Alice Jamieson, one of the original supporters of the Calgary YWCA, recalled, “No one was asked for more than a dollar. Imagine if you can, Calgary in those days. There were no pavements or sidewalks, and the mud was everywhere. Those were the days of long skirts. Yes, we spoiled our clothes, shoes, and tempers the first day” (Calgary Public Library 1988). Suffragette Nellie McClung, one of the Famous Five who fought for the right of women to be treated as “persons” and was a resident of the community, said this about the fundraising campaign: “In many masculine minds there was a grave doubt as to their wisdom. However, in a year or so, when property values began to soar, the stout-hearted board of the YWCA was the recipient of many congratulations on their excellent judgement” (Calgary Public Library 1988).

A Calgary alderman, together with the YWCA’s president, laid the cornerstone of the building, and the event included a lively public debate by two prominent citizens about the role of women in society (Calgary Public Library 1988). The main floor of the building consisted of a library, parlors, a dining room, a gymnasium, and a swimming pool. The two upper floors were devoted to bedrooms and reading rooms, which opened off of large airy corridors. Within months of its official opening in February 1911, the new facility, designed to accommodate sixty-two girls and women, was full and additional space had to be rented to meet the demand (Calgary Public Library 1988).

---

2 According to the Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator (which goes back only to 1914), $1 in 1914 would be about $21 today.
The Y, as it became known, helped women to find employment and offered classes in physical training, swimming, dress making, cooking, millinery, music, and Sunday bible classes. Almost immediately after opening, the association established the Traveler’s Aid program, and for years, YWCA representatives met every train that arrived in Calgary. By 1915, four hundred women and girls had been taught to swim at the Y, “debunking the myth that swimming was unladylike” (Calgary Public Library 1988).

By 1941, the mortgage had been retired, and in that same year, the Y became the first billet for the newly formed Canadian Women’s Army Corps. In 1944, the residence was remodelled, and in 1954, a two-storey brick annex, which included a swimming pool and gymnasium, was officially opened. In 1971, the YWCA moved to a new facility and the old Y was taken over by the City of Calgary. The City’s Social Services Committee was given responsibility for its operation. By the late 1970s, the building had deteriorated to such a state that the City seriously considered proposals to demolish it.

In 1979, the twenty or so tenants of the Old Y put a proposal to the City to form an association, the Old Y Action Groups, that would operate the building for non-profit office space. It was agreed that the society would pay an annual rent of $1 and embark on a five-year renovation plan. The Old Y was declared a Provincial
Historical Resource on 27 May 1982, the same year that the association changed its name to the Old Y Centre for Community Organizations.

The Old Y, now maintained and managed as the CommunityWise Resource Centre, offers “affordable working and meeting space while preserving, restoring and maintaining the historical aspects of the building” (Beltline Urban Society 2014). The building is home to a diverse collection of non-profits. At the time of writing, thirty-seven members of CommunityWise, which is managed by “a tenant board of directors and a small staff collective,” rent space in the building, and fifty-three additional organizations are non-renting members (CWRC 2014a). Current members include the Alberta Disabled Foundation, Amnesty International, Calgary CarShare (CATCO), the Sustainable Calgary Society, the Ethiopian Community Association, Pride Calgary, and Calgary Underground Film Festival. CommunityWise focuses on strengthening the collaboration among member agencies and raising funds for the preservation and renovation of the building. Like the Alex Taylor School, the Old Y has a social justice history reflected in its current usage.

The Old Y is a hub of community activism and social service activity. It provides shelter for non-profits struggling for survival in a booming economy and facing soaring real estate markets and fierce competition for experienced workers. Commenting in 2015, the executive director of the Old Y, now called CommunityWise, said “We hear from many of our member organizations, including SMART Recovery and Calgary OutLink, that they are able to pay better staff wages and provide much needed programs and support to hundreds of clients and community members because they pay below market rent for their offices here” (Interview with authors, April 14, 2015).

The Old Y is located just south of the heart of downtown Calgary in a community known as the Beltline. Now the densest community in Calgary, with ambitions to be “Calgary’s Manhattan,” the Beltline has seen tremendous change over the past twenty years and has been through several boom-and-bust cycles. Galvanized by the most recent economic boom, the municipal government has turned toward more sustainable long-range planning (City of Calgary 2007). The result has been a neighbourhood renaissance. On an adjacent block to the east of the Old Y, the historic Memorial Park received a $25 million facelift. Across the street from the Old Y is a new IBM office building. One block to the west, along 1st Street, three new high-rise condominium projects have sprung up, complete with upscale street-level retail shops. On the block directly to the south of the Old Y, the historic

3 For details on Memorial Park, the Nellie McClung residence and other historic sites in the Beltline community, see City of Calgary (1986).
Haultain Park has undergone an extensive renovation, making it a centrepiece of efforts to attract families into the inner city.

All of this holds both opportunity and threat for the building and CommunityWise. The land where the building sits is now prime real estate, and it will require significant investment to survive into the future. At the same time, the Old Y and its active social economy tenants fit well in the middle of a community that is being revitalized—they offer a living memory of the social solidarity that was at the heart of the building’s construction.

**The Hillhurst Cottage School, Calgary**

The Hillhurst Cottage School is a two-storey wood-frame structure located in a well-treed upscale residential neighbourhood, one of the oldest in Calgary. Within walking distance of the downtown core, the streetscape is largely unchanged since the early 1900s.

Seventeen cottage schools were built in Calgary prior to 1912. Typically, cottage schools were deliberately designed to look like the residences of the period so that the schools could be converted to private residences once a larger school building was erected. The Hillhurst Cottage School is one of two remaining cottage schools in the City of Calgary and the only one of its particular design (Canada’s Historic Places). Built in 1910, the Hillhurst Cottage School (see figure 9.5) functioned as a school until 1965. It was leased by the Canadian Youth Hostels Association from 1970 to 1990. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) began its occupancy of the building in the early 1970s when it sublet the building from Hostelling International. In 2015, the AWA purchased the building from The City of Calgary.

The AWA, founded in 1965 by backcountry enthusiasts, is the oldest wilderness conservation group in Alberta. Most of its 3,500 to 3,600 members are Albertans, but the organization is also supported by members around the world. Following its mandate, “To defend wild Alberta through education and action,” the AWA promotes the protection of wild areas of Alberta so they may be preserved in their natural state. Both paid staff and volunteers work to restore wild natural ecosystems and to enable Albertans to communicate effectively with government, industry, and citizens concerning wildland issues. The AWA educates Albertans on the value, ecologically sustainable use, and conservation of wild lands and fosters a sense of connectedness to and passion for wild places, wildlife, and natural landscapes of Alberta. The association has five full-time and three part-time staff, occasional contract staff, and over two hundred volunteers province wide (Lee 2009). The executive director of the AWA talked about the difficulty of acquiring...
resources, financial and otherwise, to support the organization. Given the activist nature of the AWA in its work to protect Alberta’s natural heritage, ongoing government funding is hard to come by.

During the tenure of the AWA in the building, the basement has been converted into a Wilderness Resource Centre (with one-time grants from the Province of Alberta Community Facility Enhancement Program). The Resource Centre, run with volunteer support, keeps the building alive with visitors and maintains a connection to the original educational use of the building. In 2000, the main floor was restored and is now an inviting space used for meetings and public talks. The executive director describes the AWA as “healthy” at this point in time and as an organization that prides itself in supporting other non-profit groups in Calgary by endorsing other groups’ events and providing office and meeting spaces free of charge. She also contends that the AWA contributes to “ideological diversity” that may foster resilience in times of change (Lee 2009).

The Hillhurst neighbourhood is undergoing rapid gentrification. Old houses in good condition are being torn down and replaced by large, upscale homes.
Without heritage designation and a long-term tenant with a high profile in the community, this building would probably be privatized and replaced by a McMansion. As a result of the direct efforts of the AWA, it is now fully registered as a heritage property. AWA members consider themselves stewards of the building. The organization enjoys its location in the Sunnyside-Hillhurst area of central Calgary for the opportunities it affords to engage with other like-minded organizations in a vibrant, sustainability-oriented community (Lee, 2009).

The AWA has achieved a level of stability in part by inhabiting and championing a heritage building, thus enhancing its capacity to achieve its central mission of natural heritage conservation. In addition, the core strategy of the organization’s conservation agenda—education—provides continuity with the building’s historical role as a public school.

**BENEFITS OF CONNECTING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY WITH HERITAGE CONSERVATION**

Each of the above examples demonstrates benefits derived from collaboration among those involved in heritage conservation, the social economy, and sustainability. We focus here on three such benefits: (1) contribution to environmental sustainability, (2) recognition of non-market-based definitions of value, and (3) preservation of authenticity, place, and collective memory in the built environment.

**Contribution to Environmental Sustainability**

Although older buildings are often very well built, they are not all of high quality. Canadian heritage specialist Darryl Cariou is cautious about overselling the idea that preserving historic buildings necessarily contributes to a sustainable environment. Sometimes the replacement of a heritage structure with new construction makes sense in terms of energy and materials conservation. Cariou argues, however, that building quality has to do with more than energy efficiency.\(^\text{4}\) Heritage buildings often exhibit workmanship, aesthetics, cultural value, and materials that are not found in contemporary buildings (Roberts 2007; Shipley 2007). We can learn sustainable design “tricks of an old trade” from heritage architecture (Bubelis 2009).

Weighing the demolition and construction costs for a new building against the costs of retrofitting is only one of several factors in the decision to preserve. More

---

\(^{4}\) Darryl Cariou, interview with Noel Keough, Calgary, April 13, 2011. Calgary.
significant considerations are lifetime operating and maintenance costs, which range from ten to twenty times the capital construction costs (Cole and Kernan 1996). If a building can be retrofitted to the operating standards of a new building, its chances of being economically viable and environmentally sustainable are much higher than those of a newly constructed building.

An Athena Institute study for Parks Canada compared demolition and construction to heritage conservation and retrofit for four heritage buildings in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Ottawa. In each case, the life cycle analysis found that heritage conservation resulted in the avoidance of “significant environmental impacts” (ASMI 2009, ii) through savings in energy use and GHG emissions. The report demonstrated that heritage-building conservation not only avoids building demolition and landfill impacts but also protects the embodied energy or energy investment of the existing building’s materials. Conversely, reuse avoids the energy costs of extracting and processing new building materials, even allowing for renovations. As markets emerge for GHG credits, reduced GHG emissions may become part of environmental accounting protocols and accumulated credits may provide income for heritage building owners.

Beyond the energy and GHG implications of heritage conservation is the quality of heritage-building construction. Embedded in the Flat Iron, Alex Taylor, and Old Y and Hillhurst buildings is the often overlooked skill and artisanship of the original builders and labourers. To re-create in new construction the art and aesthetics of the architectural features of these heritage buildings would be very energy intensive. The Athena study shows that heritage buildings can outperform new buildings in terms of embodied life-cycle energy use and that “such embodied effects are unlikely to be overshadowed by operating energy concerns if a building has been properly renovated” (ASMI 2009, ii). The greenest building may well be the one never built, although numerous variables must be considered in the environmental cost-benefit analysis of preservation versus new construction.

In assessing the environmental sustainability of heritage conservation, urban design must also be considered. Wilson (2007) recommends measuring the transportation energy intensity of buildings, arguing that daily access to centrally located buildings creates a much lower energy footprint than similar access to new suburban construction because the latter is more auto dependent. Wilson describes eight factors that have the potential to reduce the energy intensity of a building—such as density, pedestrian connectivity, and transit availability—and recommends that these metrics be incorporated into environmental ratings for buildings. The idea of transportation energy intensity could be applied to
heritage-building preservation. If, for example, the Flat Iron or Old Y building had been demolished and replaced with a vacant lot or surface parking rather than leased to non-profit and other groups, there probably would have been a net energy cost. If, however, heritage-building demolition results in a new building, then the energy cost difference is not as clear-cut.

Density bylaws are another complicating factor in the preservation-versus-demolition debate. When a land-use bylaw allows for high-rise construction, low- and medium-rise heritage buildings are often in a precarious position. The Athena Institute study supports the idea of environmental sustainability through demolition, pointing out that where there is considerable unused allowable density or air-space above an existing building, an old building can be replaced by one with many more square feet (ASMI 2009). Some urban design practitioners counter this argument with assertions that mid-rise development, as exemplified in the Flat Iron and the Old Y buildings, is more socially sustainable in that it preserves a human scale to the built environment. It maintains connection to the street, is sufficient to support densities for transit-oriented design, and is optimal for vibrant street and community life (Gehl 2011).

The Recognition of Non-Market-Based Definitions of Value
As with the economy in general, private sector investment in heritage buildings far outpaces social economy investment. The capitalist model defers to the hidden hand of the market for decision making. Yet it is widely accepted that the market mechanism is deeply flawed. There are certainly instances in which heritage building conservation makes sense in the market, but most often, the case for preservation has to be made on social, cultural, political, or ecological grounds. Many preservation tools implicitly recognize these other dimensions of value and allow owners to convert those values into financial capital via tax breaks, grants, and land and density swaps. The use of such tools is often positive for heritage-building preservation, but it can also be perverse. Some crafty capitalists have begun to acquire heritage properties in order to take advantage of heritage preservation legislation and municipal heritage programs for unsustainable development. Developers now routinely exploit heritage planning tools in ways that result in the preservation of architectural aspects of heritage buildings at the expense of social and embodied heritage. Examples include preserving heritage-building facades and constructing attached high-rise office and residential development for upwardly mobile classes; privatizing and/or converting to condominiums existing heritage apartment buildings; and increasingly, participating in density swaps,
through which a developer preserves a heritage building in the urban core but transfers the associated density credits to a second project elsewhere in the city in order to be allowed to exceed the local zoning density in that neighbourhood. The swap thus conceals a sleight of hand in which sustainability gets traded away for apparent preservation. Robert Shipley and colleagues discuss the dynamics of this private development process in the province of Ontario (Shipley, Utz, and Parsons 2006). The analysis highlights how private sector actors are able to extract profit from heritage conservation either by converting social, natural, cultural, and political capital into financial capital through tax and grant incentives or by extracting higher rents from heritage properties.

This is not to say that the private sector does not play a positive role in heritage conservation. The danger is that social, natural, cultural, and political capitals are not weighed equitably in private sector calculations of heritage preservation feasibility. Randall Mason (2008) addresses this issue by making a cautious call for heritage advocates to engage economic valuation beyond the use of the term “priceless” to describe heritage buildings. David Throsby (1995) bases his argument for the inclusion of cultural capital in economic decision-making on a set of principles that bring together sustainability, economics, and culture—with heritage-building preservation being one aspect of culture. Mark Anielski (2009) has created a robust model of valuation based on the recognition of five varieties of capital assets: natural, human, social, and built, in addition to financial. Heritage conservation, social economy, and sustainability actors share a more open attitude to the consideration of multiple capital flows than do those invested in conventional economics (Wendt 2009). Willing to factor in social, natural, cultural, and political capital into decision-making about the value of heritage-building conservation, this alliance of actors recognizes not only the value of multiple capitals but also the opportunity to generate much-needed new social capital. While municipal and provincial bylaws and policies protect designated heritage buildings, they are also vulnerable to free market logic and the political process. By involving social economy and non-profits in ownership and management of heritage buildings, communities generate new social and political capital that can be mobilized in instances where capitalists armed with market logic threaten heritage conservation designations and bylaws.

In contrast to many capitalist landlords and real estate managers, social economy landlords practice within models of shared-equity building ownership and shared governance; they also use leverage tools such as land trusts to protect the integrity and affordability of buildings in perpetuity (Lewis and Conaty 2012). Such
arrangements support the practice of participatory democracy and the vital political and cultural capital that such a practice creates. The buildings and their tenants/owners become a visible presence in the community and represent alternative ways of organizing that are in tune with principles of social sustainability.

**The Preservation of Authenticity, Place, and Collective Memory**

*Authenticity.* According to the conventional interpretation of authenticity, authentic individuals are people who are true to themselves. The notion of authenticity in heritage architecture is more in keeping with Charles Taylor’s notion of true authenticity. Taylor (1991) situates individuals as social beings within what he calls “horizons of significance” (39)—wider contexts in which we act and live, an awareness of which is likely to lead to respect for others and the natural world. In this way, Taylor’s view of authenticity connects the individual to larger political, social, or religious sources of meaning without which a person suffers what Taylor (1991) calls the “malaise of modernity.”

The Declaration of San Antonio was developed out of the Inter-American Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage held in Texas in 1996. It asserts that “the understanding of the authenticity of a heritage site depends on a comprehensive assessment of the significance of the site by those who are associated with it or who claim it as part of their history” (ICOMOS 1996, 42). The concern is more with the authenticity of the collective emotion (the past experiences, historical events, and community memories) than of the material fabric of the monument or building itself. Heritage, as defined by the Charter for the Preservation of Quebec’s Heritage, is “a possession of the community” (Deschambault Charter 1982).

In a similar vein, Dolores Hayden has demonstrated that heritage architecture also has a role to play in illuminating political struggles that have shaped our communities. Her work emphasizes that the preservation of heritage architecture celebrates not only the conventional founders and builders of our communities but also the political, class, and ethnic and gender struggles that have shaped who we are (Hayden 1997). Social economy actors have an inherent interest in unearth- ing, communicating, and celebrating those layers of our history and culture. These struggles become embodied in our recollection of places in time, in what is valued and what is remembered of a place (Schwartz 2010)—what we might call the “memory commons.”
Place. Social geographer Doreen Massey (1994, 154) urges us to imagine places as “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.” John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987, 45) argue that “attributes of place are achieved through social action, rather than through the qualities inherent in a piece of land, and that places are defined through social relationships, not through nature, autonomous markets, or spatial geometry.” Architects, planners, and urban designers often describe their work as place making, the assumption being that place has both an immaterial and material dimension. Architecture cannot independently create place, but it does give place material form and thus can embody cultural, social, political, and ecological processes and qualities of place. At the same time, architecture contributes to the evolution of these same processes and qualities. Architecture gathers and materializes the spirit of place, and the best architecture does this over time as buildings live and grow.

The Salmar Community Theatre
Kailey Cannon

In late 1945, several locals from the mid-sized community of Salmon Arm, BC, decided to honour the efforts of their war veterans. Seven individuals from various professional backgrounds set their sights on purchasing the local Rex Theatre with the intention of directing all profits generated by the theatre toward building a memorial ice rink. For the initial purchase, the group enlisted the help of the broader community through the sale of debentures. They bought the Rex in 1947 and ran it for two years before it burnt to the ground. Fortunately, those two years were highly successful, and the group built the Salmar Classic Cinema in 1949. The Salmar was a good business, and the goal of subsidizing a memorial arena was realized in 1958. Impressed by the group’s achievements, the city gave the group land to operate a drive-in theatre and the Salmar Community Association (SCA) was formed, a registered non-profit committed to providing affordable entertainment and employing local youth.

When the popularity of drive-in theatres started to wane, the SCA sold the land to the BC Department of Highways and placed windfall profits in a holding account. At this point Roger Ayles, a successful businessman in the video rental and movie industries, convinced the association to expand the Salmar Theatre before Cineplex or Famous Players
came to town. Following Ayles’s advice, the association secured an initial loan through the bank, later switching to the Salmon Arm Savings and Credit Union for a lower interest rate. In 1997, the dream of a non-profit community-run four screen theatre—unique in North America at the time—was realized. In early 2000, the SCA saw an opportunity to both rekindle its initial goal of supporting local veterans and address the shortage of theatre parking. The aging Legion building adjacent to the theatre was in disrepair and the local Legion branch in danger of folding. The SCA entered into an agreement to build the legion a new building in exchange for their land to use for parking.

Today, the SCA is financially self-sufficient and earmarks 10 percent of its net income for various community initiatives. In 2010, for example, the association had a net income of $125,322 even after giving $18,500 in grants, $12,000 in scholarships to local high school and college students, and $3,500 and numerous free movie passes in sponsorship of various community events and organizations (Joan Sholinder, interview by the author, 28 June 2011).

The old Salmar Classic Theatre remains a fixture in Salmon Arm’s historic downtown. In addition to housing the SCA’s new 3D projector, it provides a space for community events and the screening of various award-winning movies from around the world by the Shuswap Film Society.

The SCA has served as a model for other communities exploring similar local cinema schemes. Some examples include the now completed cinemas in Dauphin, Manitoba (www.countryfestcommunitycinema.ca), and Burns Lake, BC, (www.bltheatre.com), as well as the proposed cinema in Merritt, BC (http://merrittmovietheatre.com/project-progress/).

Cannon, Kailey. 2011. Interview with Joan Sholinder, Salmar Association Director. 28 June.

Heritage buildings embody the history of places and can evoke an emotional attachment, a caring that translates into engagement, participation, and empowerment: “affective bonds to places can help inspire action because people are motivated to seek, stay in, protect, and improve places that are meaningful to them”;
furthermore, “processes of collective action work better when emotional ties to places and their inhabitants are cultivated” (Manzo and Perkins 2006, 347).

Collective memory. People who share experiences and events in a place add something not only to their personal memories but also to the broader, collective history (memory) of the place itself (Boyer 1994). Memory binds people together, “recharging their commonality by reference to the physical spaces and previous instances, often founding a moment, of that collective identity” (Crinson 2005, xiii). This more collective sense of memory is written into the landscape through architecture. As Donovan Rypkema, the founder of PlaceEconomics, a real-estate development consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., observes, “The city tells its own past, transfers its own memory, largely through the fabric of the built environment. Historic buildings are the physical manifestation of memory—and it is memory that makes places significant” (Rypkema 2010, 4). One artifact of this social layering is the “collective memory” that is physically, texturally, and metaphorically embedded in architecture, which affects and is affected by the trends, beliefs, and values of each social era. In The Architecture of the City, architect Aldo Rossi claims that “a city remembers through its buildings” (cited in Crinson 2005, xiii). But, as Dolores Hayden (1997) reminds us, memory is not unitary. In the city, she argues, memories are shaped by the diversity of experience of a place’s citizens. Advocacy groups and environmental organizations often take on the task of recuperating these diverse memories, while heritage buildings offer a unique opportunity for such agencies to give these memories a concrete presence (Hayden 1997). Our examples of the alliances between social economy actors and those involved in saving heritage buildings show how collaboration not only saves buildings but also brings back a part of what philosopher John McMurtry calls the civil commons. Embodied in many heritage buildings, and shared with previous generations of citizens, is a social democratic ideal. Workers, unions, marginalized classes, and the general public recognize in these buildings, and in the activities that have occurred within them, their own investments, as Canadians, in social justice (Kennah 2008). When buildings like schools, fire halls, or hospitals are repurposed for social economy practices, we align heritage with social democracy.

Consider some of the positive outcomes of non-profits locating in heritage buildings. Authenticity and continuity of the buildings’ role in the community seems palpable. In many cases, the structure shelters almost the same services for which the building was originally built. Alex Taylor School, for example, had
a long history as a community school and as a place that provided outreach programs to new Canadians and hot lunch programs for children in various schools in the multicultural inner-city neighbourhoods. Today, many of the same food and drop-in programs continue. Alex Taylor is a social economy hub that shelters and co-locates a cluster of progressive organizations working in the inner city. Urban fragments like Alex Taylor or the Flat Iron in Edmonton, or Calgary’s Old Y “provide a context in which the more obvious heritage assets are located, but should not be treated as mere context, because it is often the ensemble of objects and their context that create value” (Tweed and Sutherland 2007, 63).

In urban landscapes that are under pressure for renewal and gentrification, social economy actors in heritage buildings become legitimate advocates for heritage preservation. They represent not only a historic and aesthetic asset but also a political asset—the social democratic values that originally shaped these inner-city districts. This is all the more important in this age of globalization, when narrow calculation and financial capital flows dictate much decision making. Calgary’s Old Y building is one example of a structure that has been linked with the city’s social development since its inauguration. Since 1911, the YWCA provided a safe hostel for single women arriving to the city. “The building became the “Old Y” in 1971 after the YWCA vacated the premises and completed their new building on 5th avenue. . . . Since that time, the Old Y building has housed dozens of diverse community-serving, grass-roots and non-profit agencies” (CWRC 2014b).

When the building was threatened with demolition in 1979, “the groups renting offices united to form a tenants association called the Old Y Action Groups. Together they rescued their beloved building from demolition” (CWRC 2014b). The tenants worked to designate the building with provincial heritage status and the Old Y became a registered historic resource in 1982. The tenants grew closer, changing the name to the “Old Y Centre for Community Organizations.” Since 1982, the building “has functioned under the umbrella of the tenant organization as affordable office space for dozens of diverse grassroots and non-profit agencies, in sectors ranging from arts and culture, immigrant community associations, youth agencies, LGBTQ community resources, environmental groups, social justice advocacy and more” (CWRC 2014b). In 2012, the Old Y changed its name to Community Wise as a sign of “the role that the facility plays in linking all these diverse groups together, through Calgary’s past, present and future” (CWRC 2014b).

The Old Y and the Alex Taylor School are particularly good examples of authentic expression of heritage values. Both are good, but not outstanding, candidates for architectural heritage. Their heritage strong suit is their social and
cultural roles and the alignment of current uses with the activities of people who inhabited these buildings in the past. For both places, contemporary use by social economy actors rehabilitates the building’s authentic original function and role in the community. Conservation protects the building and maintains recognition in the public mind of the deep historical continuity of social justice, volunteerism, and social innovation in the inner city. This convergence of authentic representation of place, as remembered and enacted in heritage buildings by social economy practitioners, confers “ontological security”—a sense of continuity and purposeful existence through time—on members of the community (Grenville 2007).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the well-being of our communities can be better served by more deliberate attempts to link the practices of social economy and sustainability with heritage conservation. We identified three important dimensions of this intersection. Heritage buildings are saved from demolition and both buildings and neighbourhoods are given a new life. At the same time, social agencies are given new space and visibility, often in socially significant and dynamic or transitioning parts of the city. And finally, embodied energy and building values are conserved. The success stories told in this chapter suggest the potential for future alliances (beyond lodging or co-location solutions) as cities and communities meet the challenges of rising social inequality caused by the disruption of economies and societies. We have been inspired by those working from within the social economy to consider heritage buildings at more than architectural or economic face value and seeking instead their value as embodied social history and their intrinsic socio-political worth. Conserving architecture conserves solidarities with the most vulnerable sectors of the Canadian public. It defends and keeps active the memory of Canadian social democracy. It establishes continuities in our commitments to fairness and equality in urban politics and urban design.

REFERENCES


