

Article

Adaptive Reuse: Atmospherics in Buildings Repurposed as Coffee Shops

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Abstract: Opening a business in an existing building incurs lower energy and material consumption than constructing a new building. However, implementing this strategy in certain domains, such as retail and hospitality, requires operational changes. Despite an increasing focus on sustainability in these sectors, the primary objective remains creating appealing spaces for consumers, with companies frequently stipulating numerous requirements for their stores' new buildings. To promote sustainability, scholars have suggested that organizations, designers, and constructors find new uses for existing spaces. This study highlights how adapting buildings not built for commercial use can both promote sustainability and benefit new users. It explores a trend in European cities where existing buildings, often outside the usual commercial districts, are repurposed as cafés. Many of these projects provide attractive user destinations without requiring extensive renovations. Specifically, we investigate coffee shops in Copenhagen and the atmospheric characteristics that enhance their appeal. Based on observations and interviews, new and old atmospheric components and the atmospheres they jointly create are identified and divided into themes: capacious and accommodating environments, uniqueness, synergy between old and new, and appealing neighborhoods. Finally, user responses to these themes—such as lingering, revisiting, sharing narratives, influencing neighborhood development, and building communities—are described.

Keywords: repurposed buildings; adaptive reuse; coffee shops; new occupancy; sustainable store design; atmospherics; circular economy; customer experience; neighborhood consumption; community building



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1. Introduction

Rapid and substantial reductions in global carbon emissions, coupled with robust strategies for mitigating climate-related events, are necessary to remain within Earth's limits [1]. The construction and operation of buildings consume approximately 40% of the world's energy. Buildings are also the largest global consumers of raw materials and account for approximately 40% of global carbon emissions [2]. As climate change and its effects become increasingly conspicuous worldwide, the adaptive reuse of existing architecture emerges as more sustainable than the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new ones [3,4].

To remain within the planet's boundaries, scholars suggest to “avoid making new buildings, where and whenever possible” and propose addressing spatial needs by using existing spaces whenever possible [4] (p. 565). This calls for a renewed understanding of the value of both listed and non-listed existing buildings and balancing minimal material interventions with maximum experiential impact [4,5]. Kuittinen recommends adapting new occupants' requirements to the conditions of existing spaces. He suggests renovation as a backup preference and recommends extending buildings—for example, by adding extensions or new stories—as a third option. According to Kuittinen, constructing new buildings should be a last resort. To avoid construction, collaboration between clients, designers, constructors, and building and planning authorities is essential [4,5]. Moreover, alternative uses and users for existing spaces should be explored. Ideally, Kuittinen suggests, clients'

initial briefs should never state whether renovation or construction is required. Instead, designers and developers should begin any project by exploring alternative options for fulfilling spatial needs and identifying relevant users for existing spaces.

The retail and hospitality sectors are known for stipulating specific spatial requirements regarding the buildings that host their businesses. Retail and hospitality projects, such as stores, cafés, and restaurants, are known to be particularly resource intensive [6]. Their interiors often have short lifespans, ranging from a few days for exhibitions and pop-up shops to a few years for stores or restaurants. Additionally, they often have significant technical and operational requirements for the spaces in which they operate [7]. This sector is also intensely competitive, placing a strong focus on aesthetics and the deliberate use of atmospheric components to attract and retain customers [8,9]. Consequently, stores, cafés, and restaurants often change their interiors to remain relevant [7]. This creates tension between the objectives of commercial servicescapes and the growing imperative for sustainable practices [6,10].

Establishing new stores in old buildings addresses sustainability goals while simultaneously offering aesthetic benefits. In harmony with the current trend toward industrial-style design, abandoned industrial buildings are being redeployed for various purposes to great effect. As one researcher put it, “No longer is seediness ugly, it is now a sign of authenticity” [11] (p. 727). This trend is observable in various parts of the world. In Copenhagen, for example, the former meatpacking district has been transformed from a collection of slaughterhouses into a cultural hotspot with restaurants, stores, art galleries, bars, nightclubs, and cafés [12]. Elsewhere in the city, Villa Copenhagen occupies a former post and telegraph office, while Hotel NH Collection resides in the former headquarters of shipbuilder Burmeister & Wain. Many of these buildings have been renovated so extensively that the old and new features are barely separable. But there are also projects with less extensive changes to the existing structures—projects in which the building is reused largely as it is. For example, coffee shops have opened in remote, abandoned buildings with minimal changes to the existing structures. Such shops give new life to abandoned buildings and often to the surrounding areas, thereby becoming excursion destinations for tourists and residents alike [13,14].

Opening stores in existing buildings not originally intended for commercial use could accelerate the paradigm shift described by Kuittinen. However, this approach is at odds with how many businesses currently design their shops, by demanding specific features in the spaces they lease rather than adapting their needs to existing spaces. Therefore, this approach may create difficulties for the stakeholders involved in store implementation. Furthermore, repurposing buildings not originally designed as stores raises issues regarding government control, restrictions on physical adaptation, and lack of technical installations, which can make businesses hesitant to adopt this approach [7,15].

Most research on repurposed buildings has been based on expert evaluations; few scholars have investigated how users perceive these environments. Furthermore, most studies have focused on repurposing buildings that are listed as worthy of preservation or protected by authorities, while non-listed buildings have received less attention [16,17]; few researchers have examined the repurposing of buildings for commercial purposes [18] or the atmospheric effects of repurposed buildings on consumer experience. This indicates a need to explore the opportunities and benefits of repurposing buildings, which may be absent in conventional commercial constructions.

To fill this gap, this paper investigates the emergence of coffee shops in buildings originally intended to serve other purposes. We also seek to inform and inspire stakeholders in retail and hospitality regarding the possible benefits, beyond improved sustainability, of locating stores in repurposed buildings. This study does not focus on environmental benefits but takes them as a starting point for a necessary paradigm shift. We identify factors beyond sustainability that storeowners and consumers describe as valuable in the context of a specific type of store: coffee shops in Copenhagen. The aesthetic and experiential virtues of this small category of stores are discussed in the hope of inspiring

retailers, storeowners, policymakers, designers, and developers to explore the potential of using old buildings for new purposes. Thus, this study is guided by the following question: What benefits, apart from sustainability promotion, can repurposed buildings now used for coffee shops create for contemporary users in Copenhagen? Based on observations and interviews, old and new atmospheric components are identified, and four themes characterizing the atmospheres that arise through the combination of these components are outlined: capacious and accommodating environments, uniqueness, synergy between old and new, and appealing neighborhoods. Finally, we show how these atmospheres impact user responses, such as lingering, revisiting, sharing narratives, influencing neighborhood development, and building communities.

2. Background

2.1. Strategies for the Adaptive Reuse of Buildings as Stores

As an alternative to the production–consumption paradigm dominant since the industrial revolution, and as a solution to the challenges this paradigm has created, the circular economy (CE) has been proposed as an approach that is “restorative and regenerative by design and aims to keep products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times” [19] (p. 2). A CE decouples economic growth from resource consumption by keeping materials in circulation. When appropriately implemented, a CE offers a means of reducing reliance on material extraction as a condition for maintaining our current way of life [20]. The rubric of the three Rs—reduce, reuse, and recycle—is considered a core principle in the CE [21]. In the construction industry, efforts are underway to develop materials and systems that can be reused and recycled. However, research suggests that our environmental challenges, coupled with urbanization and a growing population, are so significant that a fully circular economy might actually be impossible [4,22]. Recent studies reveal that urgent action is needed to achieve rapid and substantial reductions in global carbon emissions and to develop robust strategies for addressing climate-related events. Consequently, scholars suggest avoiding new construction and using existing spaces as they are [4].

Brooker and Stone outlined three strategies for building renovation: intervention, insertion, and installation [23]. These strategies, originally formulated to describe the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, ignore retail stores. However, Plevoets and Van Cleempoel applied these strategies to retail projects, thereby highlighting their relevance in this context, and added a fourth category: “confirmation” [24]. In the first strategy, intervention, the existing building is transformed such that it can no longer exist independently of the store. The old and new become inextricably intertwined. In the second strategy, insertion, new and autonomous elements are installed within the confines of the existing building, but their dimensions are dictated by the existing structure; the new elements are built to fit the existing space. In the third strategy, installation, the old and new elements remain independent. New elements are placed within the boundaries of the old building. The design or arrangement of these elements may be influenced by the existing structure, but the fit is not exact. Should the installation be removed, the building would revert to its original state. This strategy requires few or no new construction materials, and if the tenant leaves the space, the furniture and decorative elements can often be reused elsewhere if not custom-made for the site. In the fourth category, confirmation, the new owner takes over an existing shop as it is, with the existing fixtures, and reuses the shop to sell new products. Projects that adopt the third and fourth strategies can, depending on how they are managed, be accomplished with minimal resource consumption. Thus, these approaches come closest to Kuittinen’s recommended strategy: using available spaces by adjusting users’ needs to fit them [4].

2.2. *Atmospherics in Store Design*

It is widely acknowledged that our physical surroundings affect us emotionally in diverse ways and shape our perceptions of objects and experiences therein [25–27]. In 1973, Kotler began to explore the subtler aspects of service environment design, drawing attention to what he called “atmospherics”, to describe “the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers” [8] (p. 51). Kotler believed that a store’s atmosphere can be even more important than the product, particularly in industries in which price differences are very small. Following Kotler, diverse scholars have studied the spaces in which products are bought or consumed [9,28–31]. These studies frequently employ Mehrabian and Russel’s stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) paradigm, which originated in environmental psychology [9], to explore how sensory stimuli (S), such as lighting and color, influence consumers’ emotions and assessments of the consumption environment (O), affecting aspects such as pleasure and leading to subsequent behavioral responses (R), such as spending behavior or dwelling time.

Turley and Milliman [9] identified 57 atmospheric variables—or components, as we call them—that influence consumers. They divided them into five categories: human, exterior, general interior, layout and design, and point-of-purchase and decoration. Since variables such as location, architectural style, surrounding area, and spatial design and allocation are included in these categories, it is reasonable to conclude that a repurposed building can influence the atmosphere of the shop it hosts.

While Turley and Milliman’s table of variables summarizes the elements of store design, it does not indicate how individual variables are assessed. However, Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz [32] proposed a framework for evaluating atmospheric variables based on instrumentality, aesthetics, and symbolism. Instrumentality refers to the function of the element, aesthetics pertains to its form and appearance, and symbolism alludes to the meaning or significance that users attribute to the element. These three dimensions have been used to provide conceptual frameworks for several studies on atmospheric components and their impacts on users [33,34].

2.3. *Design and Atmospherics in Stores in Repurposed Buildings*

Reusing and reinventing existing spaces are key objectives for many contemporary designers [35]. While there is extensive research on the synergies between historic buildings and sustainable design, the attention to these synergies in interior and retail design has been limited in scope [7,10]. Tucker advocated for a stronger relationship between historic preservation and sustainability in interior design. She encourages designers to draw inspiration from existing contexts and emphasizes that history can serve as a valuable source of information and inspiration for designers [10]. Even less research is available on store design in repurposed buildings [7]. Plevoets and Cleempoel argue that retailers often adopt a problem-based approach to dealing with heritage buildings. However, an opportunity-based approach holds significant potential for retailers and designers since the design quality, materials, structures, and atmospheres of heritage buildings can make them timeless and adaptable across generations and purposes. The design of such buildings can inspire contemporary storeowners and designers to look beyond fleeting trends and create spaces that transcend time while captivating new occupants [7,36]. Plevoets and Cleempoel describe how certain retailers can leverage the historic buildings they occupy, using both tangible aspects, such as physical characteristics, and intangible aspects, such as narratives and atmospherics, to distinguish themselves from others [7]. Kent explained that architecture can be a means for retailers to create unique experiences in both new and repurposed buildings [36]. Regarding reuse, he highlighted the importance of a rich, deep dialog between the old and the new; one that integrates and expresses each site’s history. Kent calls for further research on the connection between the new and the old, including store environments and atmospherics.

3. Methods and Analysis

3.1. Research Approach

Given the study's exploratory nature, a qualitative approach was adopted [37,38] to understand the rationales behind store locations and redesigns and assess their impact on users. Our interest spanned spatial designs and user experiences, leading us to adopt a multi-method approach that encompassed observations, media documentation, and semi-structured interviews.

The shops were first identified based on media documentation and field observations (see Section 3.3). Place and environment observations [39] and participant observations [40,41] were then conducted (Section 3.4), followed by 26 on-site semi-structured interviews with store representatives and consumers (Section 3.5). The observations and interviews were conducted between April 2022 and October 2023.

Allowing subjects to express their thoughts, intentions, and actions in their own words provides insight into how they experience and derive meaning from spaces rather than merely documenting specific responses or their frequency [38]. We adopted an inductive approach, which fosters the discovery of new concepts rather than reinforcing existing ones and avoids imposing predetermined constructs or theories on informant responses [42].

This approach allowed us to identify the factors that new occupants find valuable. By asking specific questions about atmospherics, we could determine which components in repurposed buildings contribute to their perceived value. Prompting informants to reflect on the differences between a café in a repurposed building and other establishments indicated that repurposed buildings have virtues that conventional commercial constructions lack.

By combining on-site semi-structured interviews with field observations, we could pinpoint the atmospheric components mentioned by informants and observe users' behavior in the spaces chosen. This helped us develop a holistic understanding of the environments rather than studying their components in isolation. To control outcomes, many studies of atmospherics have examined the relationships between a single atmospheric component or a few components and a certain outcome. However, atmospherics are experienced holistically. Each component is part of a complex fabric, and its effect depends on its interplay with other components. Researchers increasingly advocate for a holistic approach to studying atmospherics [43,44].

3.2. Case Selection

To identify all cafés in repurposed buildings in Copenhagen, social media posts, websites, and articles were studied to identify cues in text and photos that would indicate that the café was located in a building not originally intended for commercial use.

Casual observations [39] were conducted for the locations identified, and the surrounding neighborhoods were explored to identify other potential cases. We started conversations with locals and staff members, expressing interest in identifying cafés in repurposed buildings. The city's tourist agency, Wonderful Copenhagen, was also contacted.

Using this "snowball" method, cafés in repurposed buildings were identified. Shops about which uncertainty existed regarding whether the original building was intended for commercial use were excluded.

Cafés were found in many old buildings in the city center. If the ground floors of these buildings were always intended for commercial use, they were excluded. However, shops in industrial buildings in older, mixed-use residential areas near the city center were included, as their original purpose was not commercial but industrial use.

Only cases in which we could confirm through media documentation and conversations with locals that the building's original purpose was significantly different from its use as a coffee shop were included. Using this approach, we identified 21 coffee shops in repurposed buildings (Figure 1). The names of the cafés and the original purposes of the buildings are listed in Table 1.

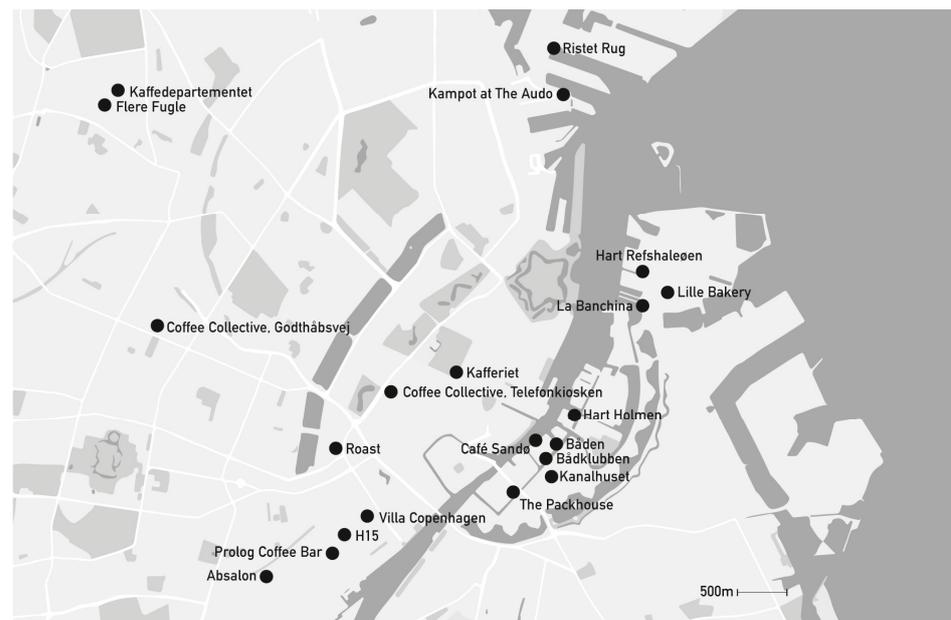


Figure 1. A map depicting the cases studied: coffee shops in repurposed buildings in Copenhagen (created by the author).

Table 1. The 21 coffee shops observed and the original purpose of each building.

Case #	Name of the Coffee Shop	Original Purpose
#1	Absalon	Church
#2	Bådklubben	Car repair shop
#3	Café Sandø	Office
#4	Coffee Collective	Factory
#5	Coffee Collective (in telephone kiosk)	Telephone booth
#6	Flere Fugle	Garage
#7	Hart Mærsehuset	March house
#8	H15	Freight terminal
#9	Kafferiet	Pavilion
#10	Kampot at The Audo	Merchant house for shipping
#11	Kanalhuset	Marine hospital
#12	La Banchina	Ferry waiting room
#13	Lille Bakery	Warehouse
#14	Prolog	Meatpacking district
#15	Ristet Rug	Warehouse
#16	The Packhouse	Warehouse
#17	Villa Copenhagen	Post and telegraph office
#18	Hart Refshaleøen	Industrial kitchen
#19	Båden	Train carriage
#20	Kaffedepartementet	Business property
#21	Roast	Train station

means “number”.

3.3. Place and Participant Observations

Observational research methods can be employed to study both people and physical environments [39]. Observations of all 21 shops were conducted, with a focus on observing each place’s location, building, interior, and participants.

In the place observations [39], the focus was on atmospheric components. The table of atmospheric variables created by Turley and Milliman [9] was used as a guideline to ensure that attention was directed toward the components known to influence atmospheres in shops. These observations provided insights into the character of each place. Additionally,

studying surfaces and materials provided some indication of the remodeling strategies employed in each case.

The participant observations revealed how each place was used and how the users behaved, including their activities. The focus was on identifying which areas of the shops were most used, which seats were most frequently occupied, and how guests interacted in the space and with the design features. Additionally, these observations enabled casual interviews with staff and customers and helped identify interviewees.

To counteract the risk of reanimating old habits or developing selective and predetermined ways of seeing the environments [41], all shops were visited several times at different times of the day and different days of the week by at least two researchers. Field notes were taken during the observational visits, and photos and videos were captured both inside and outside the shops.

3.4. Semi-Structured Interviews

On-site semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain both retrospective and real-time testimony from users experiencing the environments [38]. To acquire different perspectives on each building's impacts, we conducted interviews with customers and store representatives—such as owners, partners, or managers—who had been involved in the implementation process and thus knew the intentions behind the design and location.

Recruiting store representatives involved searching online for the names of the owners and partners and then inviting either them or colleagues involved in the remodeling process to an interview. When we managed to obtain an interview with a store representative, they were scheduled ahead of time via email and conducted at the cafés. Ultimately, two representatives were not available for their interviews; therefore, only customer interviews were conducted in these cases. The on-site interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The representatives were asked to share the reasons for choosing the site and their strategies and experiences during the remodeling process. They were also asked to share possible experiences with the differences between opening a shop in a repurposed building and doing so in a commercial building designed to house shops. Additionally, we asked which components they preserved, and which were added, how they perceived the overall atmosphere of their shop, and the atmosphere they sought to cultivate. These interviews varied in duration; the shortest was 10 min, and the longest was 60 min.

For the customer interviews, patrons were randomly approached in the stores and invited to participate in a study on in-store experiences. Those who agreed to participate were first asked to share information about their café habits and reasons for visiting that specific café. They were prompted to describe what they liked about the café environment and identify atmospheric components that caught their attention. We also sought comments on their awareness of the building's history and how it influenced their experience. This approach enabled the respondents to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. These interviews lasted between 4 and 15 min. Twenty-six interviews were conducted: 20 with customers and six with store representatives (Table 2).

Table 2. The shops in which the 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Case #	Name of the Coffee Shop	No. of Interviews with Store Representatives	No. of Interviews with Customers
#1	Absalon	1 (Manager)	2
#2	Bådklubben	1 (Partner)	2
#4	Coffee Collective	1 (Construction project manager)	3
#6	Flere Fugle	-	2
#12	La Banchina	1 (Founder and owner)	2
#13	Lille Bakery	-	3
#14	Prolog Coffee Bar	1 (CEO and co-owner)	3
#19	Båden	1 (Co-owner)	3
26 interviews in total		6	20

means "number".

3.5. Data Analysis

The interview transcripts, images of the shops, and field notes were analyzed using NVivo. Initially, the data were carefully reviewed, terms and codes were applied, and a comprehensive compendium of categories was compiled [38]. We then identified similarities and differences between these categories and structured the data accordingly. The data structure that best fit the topic consisted first of individual atmospheric components and then of groups of components under themes that described the holistically perceived atmospheres. Afterwards, observed and expressed consumer responses were linked to these atmospheric characteristics. To explain how an atmosphere was created through the combination of components from the original building and new features added with the coffee shop, these components were classified as old or new. Additionally, following the Turley and Milliman tables of atmospheric components [9], we categorized the components as interior or exterior. In this process, human variables were excluded, as the study focused on the physical environments and not staff and consumer characteristics. The general interior, layout and design, and point-of-purchase and decorative variables were combined into the “interior” category. These atmospheric components can be equated with sensory stimuli (S) in the S–O–R model [9]. Relationships were then built with descriptions of the perceived atmospheres, which can be equated with the organism (O) in this model. Finally, we determined how the emerging themes might help explain users’ responses (R) to the shop environments (Figure 2).

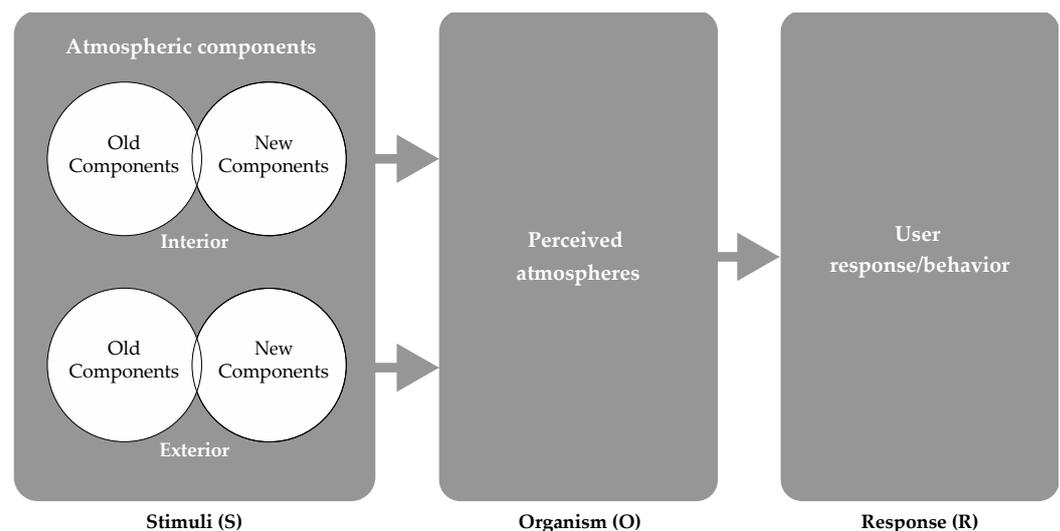


Figure 2. A perceived atmosphere is created through the combination of old and new components, which can be interior or exterior. These atmospheric characteristics impact users’ responses.

Three researchers familiar with the study analyzed and interpreted the data. When agreement on terms or connections was lacking, the data were revisited and discussed until a consensus was reached. Presenting both informant and researcher perspectives offers a qualitatively rigorous demonstration of the connections between data and emerging terms, themes, and responses [38]. This iterative process involved multiple rounds with ongoing adjustments to the organization of the components, atmospheres, themes, and responses. Initially, adjustments were made through manual sketching, and subsequently—as discernible patterns emerged—through digital sketching, ultimately yielding the data structure presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Data structure, Step 1. In the first column, the atmospheric components we identified are classified as either interior or exterior and as either old or new. In the right column, the atmospheres resulting from the mix of old and new components are listed. These descriptions of atmospheres are carried over to the first column in Table 4, which completes the data structure.

Atmospheric Components		Perceived Atmospheres (Created by Atmospheric Components)
Interior		
Old	New	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The building features high ceilings, large windows, and spacious interiors • Not too crowded • Less noisy than in commercial areas • Less crowded than in commercial areas • Old building structure preserved • Floors/surfaces preserved • Objects preserved (such as ceramics produced by former occupants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spacious café area • Added activities beyond coffee consumption • The café has various seating options • Visible old and new elements • Old surfaces preserved for functional or decorative purposes • Old components used as decorations • Installation of new furniture and equipment in existing settings • Preservation of existing structures: installation over intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cafés in former industrial buildings are often spacious • The café is welcoming, and customers stay longer than expected • The café is a versatile gathering spot for all ages and families • The café is flexible, hosting work, study, events, and socializing • The place is different than other cafés/has its own character • The place feels authentic • It is fun to introduce the place to others • It is a “hidden gem” (not known to everyone) • Resonance of heritage: captures the atmosphere of the former use • Peaceful and quiet environment
Exterior		
Old	New	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial buildings or other buildings with significantly different former uses • Facades with large windows/doors • Moderate building density • Less traffic than in the city center • Visit-worthy surroundings/location • Location outside the commercial district • Spacious, sunlit areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting, signage, and outdoor furniture attracts customers • Openness between interior and exterior • Seats offering a view of the surrounding area • Installation of outdoor seating area • Facade design based on the original facade; reuse of windows, roller shutters, doors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location and outdoor arrangement encourage spending time outside the shop • Appealing/pleasant/interesting destination • Remote yet rewarding neighborhood • Integrates the local character and existing community • Presence of stories about the building’s history • The environment highlights the former use • Buildings/elements/surfaces makes you feel a touch of the past • Peaceful and quiet surroundings

Table 4. Data structure, Step 2. The first column shows the perceived atmospheres (defined in Table 3). As some of these atmospheres are both interior and exterior, they are organized thematically. The themes in the middle columns articulate categories of design features, while the rightmost column presents consumer responses resulting from the perceived atmospheres.

Perceived Atmospheres (Created by Atmospheric Components)	First-Order Themes	Aggregate Themes	Consumer Responses
The cafés in former industrial buildings are often spacious Peaceful and quiet environment The café is welcoming, and customers stay longer than expected The café is a versatile gathering spot for all ages and families The café is flexible, hosting work, study, events, and socializing	Spaciousness Multifunctionality	Capacious/Accommodating Environment	
The place feels authentic The place is different than other cafés/has its own character It is fun to introduce the place to others It is a “hidden gem” (not known to everyone)	Authenticity Distinctiveness	Uniqueness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lingering • Working/Studying • Socializing • Revisiting • Sharing Narratives
Buildings/elements/surfaces makes you feel a touch of the past Resonance of heritage: captures the atmosphere of the former use The environment highlights the former use Presence of stories about the building’s history Integrates and embraces the local character and existing community	Traces of the Past Presence of Narratives Local Integration	Synergy Between Old and New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing Neighborhood Development • Building Communities • Neighborhood Consumption
Location and outdoor arrangement encourage spending time outside the shop Appealing/pleasant/interesting destination Remote yet rewarding neighborhood Peaceful and quiet surroundings	Inviting Surroundings	Appealing Neighborhood	

4. Presentation of Findings

In this section, the virtues of coffee shops in repurposed buildings (apart from sustainability promotion) are presented. The first column of Table 3 shows interior and exterior atmospheric components further classified as either old (meaning originally present in the building before the café was implemented), or new (meaning added with the café). The second column presents the perceived atmospheres created by these components.

Table 4 repeats the perceived atmospheres in the first column, but this time, they are categorized according to first-order themes (second column) and then divided into four aggregate themes: capacious and accommodating environments, uniqueness, synergy between old and new, and appealing neighborhoods. Only themes that could be attributed to the café's presence in a repurposed building were included. For example, we excluded the theme of "a welcoming atmosphere", which some users referred to, since it was not possible to argue that the welcoming feeling was related to a synergy between old and new components.

5. Presentation and Discussion of Themes

In this section, the themes identified and corresponding user responses are presented and discussed. The four aggregate themes serve as headings in the presentation of the findings: Section 5.1 reports on capacious and accommodating environments, Section 5.2 on uniqueness, Section 5.3 on the synergy between old and new, and Section 5.4 on appealing neighborhoods. The first-order themes serve as subtitles. In addition, the remodeling strategies identified are discussed separately in Section 5.3. We discussed whether remodeling strategies should have their own subsection at the beginning or end of this section, but we concluded that the presentation and discussion of remodeling fits well within Section 5.3, as this synergy is precisely what the remodeling process creates in practice. Therefore, we decided to introduce a subsection on remodeling strategies at the beginning of Section 5.3 to lay a foundation for understanding and transitioning to the following sections.

All the themes overlap in some respects. However, we have attempted to describe them separately wherever possible. The subtheme "local integration" could fit in Section 5.3 or Section 5.4, but it is introduced in Section 5.4 ("appealing neighborhoods").

The responses are listed in the last column of Table 4. As the responses also overlap across different themes, the responses are highlighted in bold and italicized rather than described separately; this is to make the descriptions of the themes more cohesive and avoid the repetition associated with listing responses separately.

Original quotes from the informants and photos are used to provide examples of the links between atmospheric components and perceived atmospheres. The rationale for presenting both quotes and images derives from differences between user perceptions of the atmospheric components and of the holistic atmospheres. Interviewees tended to describe the atmosphere in their café holistically to the point that they found it difficult to describe or account for individual atmospheric components. Even when asked to mention specific components that created or contributed to the atmosphere, many struggled to answer, referring instead to an overall "vibe". They used adjectives such as "nice", "cozy", "welcoming", or "comfortable", often in connection with the word "vibe". For example, "Yeah, it has a modern, open vibe to it", or "It has a bit of a hipster vibe". By presenting both photos and user expressions, we aim to provide a holistic representation of the environments while suggesting how these atmospheres are created by specific components.

5.1. Capacious and Accommodating Environments

Most of the shops were in former industrial buildings outside the busier commercial districts, and these premises were larger than those available in the city center. The data demonstrate how such spaciousness shapes users' perceptions of a welcoming environment that facilitates prolonged stays and accommodates additional activities besides drinking coffee.

5.1.1. Spaciousness

Spaciousness was commonly mentioned in reference to both outdoor seating areas (Figure 3) and interiors (Figure 4) as a source of pleasure: “I feel like it’s very, like, airy. I like that. In a sense, there is a lot of space. The ceilings are high. Like, you can breathe”.



Figure 3. An example of a large outdoor seating area outside a café in an industrial building. The seats are arranged so that customers can overlook the neighborhood, while plants and awnings are used to frame the outdoor seating area. Large windows and doors create a seamless transition between the café’s interior and exterior.

Exteriorly, some mentioned views of the surroundings and outdoor areas: “There is a big window area where you can sit and look out over the water”, and “I prefer a place where you can also sit outside. And they have a lot of space, so you can be sure that you find a table... Sometimes in cafés, they only have, like, two or three tables outside. So, it’s very nice to know that they have a big terrace”.

Interiorly, some referred to specific architectural elements, such as windows or the height of the room. For example, “The ceiling, it’s pretty high compared to other places”, and “There is a big window area where you can sit and look out over the water”.

Others referred to spaciousness as pleasant because it is less crowded: “What I like about it is that it is actually quite spacious. This is what I realized in other cafés that I went to, because I went to some that were very, very tiny, very crowded, very loud, and very noisy. It was not a nice atmosphere to just chill and just be. So, I think it is really nice here because one has so much space”.



Figure 4. An example of a spacious interior. The building’s high ceiling has been preserved. On the back wall, the room’s height is complemented by new full-height curtains and large, decorative branding elements. Within the space, large pendant lights are suspended, and plants are arranged on ledges. These new additions help create intimacy in an otherwise very large room.

Many interviewees explained how they tended to stay longer in the café than expected because they felt that the spaciousness encouraged *lingering*: “One of the things about this place is that, of course, there is a café, but it is spacious enough, so it’s ok that you just camp here and do your thing for whatever time. It’s great”, and “You can just do whatever you want. You can leave after five minutes, or you can sit here for a long time. I think it’s a really comfortable place”. Others expressed how the pleasant atmosphere made them forget about time: “We planned to be here for like an hour and then go climbing. But then we’ve been here for like three hours, four hours now, so I don’t think we will go climbing anyway. Yes, we are on our second round now”. Another informant said that had she visited another place, she might not have stayed as long.

Storeowners explained that they did invite people to *linger*: “You should feel like it’s your extended living room”. They pointed out that customers use the cafés for various purposes, such as *socializing*, *working*, and *studying*. However, some also expressed that they did not want people to use the shop as a home office only—“We don’t want this place to just be an internet café because it’s not very social”—thereby differentiating between people who come to work alone and those who come for group work: “Study groups, for example... That’s nice that, instead of being at university or at someone’s home, they decide to come here to work in a group”. They also mentioned that if the venue was suddenly full of people sitting and working with headsets on, they would have to do something about it. Another store representative said that they welcomed customers who want to work as long as they also contribute to the social atmosphere of the café.

5.1.2. Multifunctionality

In several cases, informants mentioned that spaciousness let them engage in additional activities apart from drinking coffee as a motivation for visiting the specific café.

They mentioned individual activities, such as *working* or *studying*, as well as *socializing* through activities such as partying, music bingo, readings, workshops, concerts, yoga, and weekend markets.

When describing their reasons for using the cafés to *work* or *study*, informants pointed out that it felt acceptable to stay longer and use the location, largely due to the spaciousness: “It’s obvious that people use this as a flexible workspace in the day hours. It’s great”, and “There’s not a lot of flexible, free spaces in the city, and I like the community feeling of it”.

A sense of *socializing* and *community building* was mentioned in several interviews. Some explained how they attended events planned by the café or the community: “It’s a great place... It’s also very versatile. So, in the evening, it becomes more, sort of a community place—like, a cultural spot to go where people go for concerts. We were actually here last night for a poetry reading. I like the diversity of it”, the participant said, indicating that added activities encourage *revisiting* a place. Several interviewees referred to an inclusive atmosphere that attracts people from different age groups: “There are people who have retired and hang with friends. There are people with babies, like *mødregruppe* [mom’s groups]... and people who do yoga... Everyone is welcome”.

We also recorded testimonies demonstrating how added activities might facilitate meeting new people: “I got to talk to some really cool people that I would not have gotten the chance to know otherwise”. Social interactions were also observed during the participant observations. The layout of the seats, particularly outdoor seats, was often arranged so that seated guests could interact with arriving guests or passersby (Figures 3 and 5).



Figure 5. This café, located in a former garage, features a large opening in the form of a garage door, allowing for a seamless transition between the outdoor and indoor areas. Indoors, the tables are smaller, creating a more intimate space, while outdoors, the long tables invite guests from different parties to sit together. For events that require a performance, the benches and tables are moved to the side to make room for a stage in the center.

Our observations revealed that the more spacious cafés could often offer comfortable lounge chairs, dining chairs, stools, and benches. Some store owners also mentioned that spaciousness allows for multiple seating options: “We have space for people to bring children and dogs, and we also intend to accommodate older individuals, for example, by having some comfortable armchairs”, a store owner said. Additionally, baskets with blankets, toys, water bowls for dogs, books, and children’s bikes were observed at numerous cafés (Figure 6).



Figure 6. An example of a café that set up a basket with blankets for guests to use and offered children the option of borrowing toys, books, or small bicycles.

Most furniture was movable and could be arranged according to the size of the party. Some cafés had long community tables (Figure 5), which, according to interviewees, provided a welcoming atmosphere: “It’s so big, and you are sitting by these long tables with other people close to you. So, it is very welcoming in a way”.

5.2. Uniqueness

The unique characteristics that emerge when new shops are opened in old buildings make these locations inherently distinctive. Regarding the use of the word “unique”, it is noteworthy that most of the cafés were situated in industrial buildings that are not listed as historically preserved. They are not extravagant, and aesthetically, they are relatively anonymous. Therefore, the term “unique” should not be understood to mean extravagant or luxurious but rather distinctive.

5.2.1. Authenticity

The word “authentic” was used by several informants to describe the atmosphere in the shops. Sometimes, it was used to describe an atmosphere that emerged from the heritage of the place: “It feels very authentic... because of or due to the heritage of the buildings”. More often, however, the term was used to convey the perception that an environment was different from that of other cafés: “It’s so different from the standard

cafés in Copenhagen. I would say it's authentic. They have their own style. Like, nowhere else can you find a place like this", or "It is more authentic than an impersonal location somewhere else in the world". Other informants used the words "more real" or "true to nature" to describe how the integration of the shop's original doors and preservation of the room height affected them: "It feels a little bit more, I don't want to say authentic, but it kind of feels a bit more real, I guess. Like, that you don't mess up the grounds that you have", and "I think it's very true to its nature... I think it's quite nice to sort of keep the environment, high ceilings, and this kind of garage place. So, I think it stays true to its nature", suggesting that the preservation of original structures can create engaging customer experiences.

5.2.2. Distinctiveness

It is widely recognized that corporate brands often adopt standardized store concepts across various locations to ensure uniformity in the shopping experience [30]. However, it is also a global trend to differentiate shop designs locally [45,46]. The cafés we studied reflected this trend, as the homogeneity of such projects was less obvious than the effort to create distinctive and unique environments. The buildings were created for purposes entirely different than hosting a café and often stood out as different; for example, as expressed by this interviewee: "It's very distinct, and it does pop into your eye". Despite a few of our cases being associated with smaller coffee shop chains, there were minimal similarities in the in-store experiences between these cafés and their other outlets, apart from products, services, and branding.

The shops' distinctive manifestations appeared to be actively promoted by the brands. A store owner put it this way: "We really enjoy that there is something unique about this". The distinctiveness was also appreciated by users: "I think it is quite cool because a lot of cafés in Copenhagen are very similar, and I think it's nice to explore places that are a bit more alternative". Certain consumers emphasized the distinctiveness of their shop and expressed a desire to share their experiences and recommend the place to friends. As such, distinctiveness inspires customers to recommend particular shops and *revisit* them with others.

Others pointed out that their shop, situated away from the main streets, was attractive because it was not widely known: "Tourists... would often go to [a corporate brand in the city center], whereas for me, [the corporate brand in the city center] is nothing special", indicating a distinction between guests familiar with these cafés and those who are not. "Here, we feel that we are more a part of Copenhagen than other people", another guest said, thereby demonstrating that there can be value in being part of a smaller community that appreciates a local spot: "I just think that it's a great place, a little gem, until it's found by everybody". Being situated in a less frequented or even remote location can be perceived both positively and negatively. While lacking accessibility to the public, these locations appear to transform this limitation into an opportunity for building communities with individuals familiar with and invested in the places.

5.3. Synergy between Old and New

Attempts to achieve some kind of synergy between the buildings' original structures and the new cafés' identities were noteworthy. This was manifested in interviews with store representatives and customers. Several store representatives conveyed that the space was intended to have a positive impact on the brand. They mentioned aesthetic aspects—for example, by referring to a "cool atmosphere"—or functional aspects, such as the size of the building being aligned with spatial needs: "When we first got this place, it was because we needed a bigger production facility. So, we needed space so we could roast". Other examples indicated how the previous tenant's installations had rendered the place attractive for the current occupant, as described in a case in which the previous owner, who ran a catering business, had incorporated an industrial kitchen into the building. Some customers described how the building influenced their experience of the brand: "I think it

[the café] probably wants to convey a message of sustainability and show that they pay attention to the history of the place”. Another customer contemplates whether it was the building or the location that affected him—“It could be that the location and the synergies that I created with the building play a role in my decision to come back to the place”—and thereby provoked a consideration of the experience of the atmosphere as a whole, and not just as an interior in a building, as will be further discussed in Section 5.4.

In terms of establishing a respectful relationship between the café and the building, some store representatives mentioned the symbolic value of their buildings and emphasized the need for balancing the original and current purposes of the building; for example, when a somewhat extreme difference between the original and current purposes of a place was described: “So, buying a church is a big thing. And changing that [the purpose] is a ballsy move. You can’t... put a nightclub in here, even though it is the perfect size for a nightclub”, indicating how respect for the former purpose and users was taken into consideration before deciding on the future purpose of the space. This suggests that the creative dialog between the old and the new that Kent highlighted [36] occurs in such cases.

5.3.1. Remodeling Strategies

To understand how the stores were integrated into the existing buildings, the existing buildings’ construction, materials, and surfaces were analyzed. Photos from stores and testimonies from store representatives about the remodeling process were included in this analysis. Specifically, we sought to identify Brooker and Stone’s strategies: intervention, insertion, and installation.

The most popular remodeling strategy was installation (Table 5). In these projects, the new occupants installed only a group of elements (furniture and fixtures) within the context of the existing building, as, for example, depicted in Figure 7. These elements could be easily removed, returning the building to its original state. In these cases, shelves and pictures were mounted on the existing walls and would leave holes in the wall if removed. While this is technically a change to the original building, we do not consider this change structurally significant, and thus classified such cases in the “installation” category.

Table 5. The buildings’ original purposes and the café strategies for building renovation.

Case #	Original Purpose	Remodeling Strategy
#1	Church ¹	Insertion/Installation
#2	Car repair shop	Installation
#3	Office	Installation
#4	Factory	Insertion/Installation
#5	Telephone booth	Installation
#6	Garage	Installation
#7	March house	Insertion/Installation
#8	Freight terminal	Installation
#9	Pavilion	Installation
#10	Merchant house for shipping ¹	Intervention
#11	Marine hospital ¹	Intervention
#12	Ferry waiting room	Installation
#13	Warehouse	Installation
#14	Meatpacking district	Installation
#15	Warehouse	Installation
#16	Warehouse	Installation
#17	Post and telegraph office ¹	Intervention
#18	Industrial kitchen	Installation
#19	Train carriage	Installation
#20	Business property	Installation
#21	Train station	Installation

¹ These cases were part of larger remodeling projects, which meant that the cafés were located inside buildings remodeled for purposes other than housing a café.



Figure 7. An example of a café with fixtures, such as furniture, lamps, and decoration, that can be removed without leaving any marks, except holes in the walls, thereby classifying it as an installation. The floor, walls, and windows are original. It is unknown when the recessed ceiling grid was installed. It is not original and was not installed by the current shop owners.

Some cases followed a strategy that we would describe as a cross between insertion and installation. This hybrid strategy mainly consists of elements that can be removed but borrows characteristics from the insertion strategy, such as glass walls customized to the space to create a boundary between the café and the roasting area (Figure 8). In addition, fixtures, such as counters, may be customized to fit the size of the space, but they can be removed without changing the space in any manner. For these reasons, we argue that the hybrid strategy leans more toward installation than insertion. A few cases employed the intervention strategy. In these cases, the cafés were part of larger remodeling projects—for example, a hotel or a showroom—where the main purpose of the remodeling was something other than the establishment of a café.

5.3.2. Traces of the Past

Storeowners had significant knowledge of their buildings' past, the original purpose, and the former owners, and they liked to share stories. When asked to characterize the differences between shops integrated into repurposed buildings and those in newly built spaces, the store representatives mentioned benefits such as added "charm" or "soul" and the fact that their building had a history that could be built on in the new project. With respect to implementation, benefits such as not having to begin from scratch were mentioned, which made the projects more manageable and the implementation more economically viable. For example, the buildings often had existing installations—such as facades, kitchens, power and water supplies, and drainage facilities—that could be reused. However, practical challenges were also mentioned (see Section 6.4).



Figure 8. An example of a shop in which furniture and glass walls have been implemented between the café and roasting area to fit the size of the space. These walls are customized for the café interior but could be removed without changing the original structure of the building, leading us to categorize this case as a combination of insertion and installation.

When asked whether they generally preferred to locate coffee shops in repurposed buildings, all store representatives answered that they appreciated the old buildings for atmospheric reasons. Some described how they chose to preserve and expose elements of the original building; often those that helped to convey narratives about its prior use or matched the intended brand identity, as in an example where the remodeling strategy and open layout of the space were intended to reflect transparency as a brand value. This topic will be discussed further in Section 5.3.3.

When describing the wish to preserve the buildings in their original condition, owners referred to functionality; for example, by mentioning that the size matched their needs: “We needed bigger production facilities”. They also referred to aesthetics, for example, by explaining that the style of the building was considered consistent with current trends: “I do like these old industrial windows, and it gives it an extra vibe that you can’t necessarily get if you build it from scratch”.

Some also mentioned how their building’s history added something meaningful to the in-store experience. For example, a store representative referred to a wall that remained untreated and thus displayed marks from benches that used to be in the room when the building was used as a waiting area for a ferry (Figure 9). In this example, preserving the original wall served as both a decorative and narrative feature, conveying a continuity from its former use to the current users.



Figure 9. In this café, a wall was intentionally left untreated, revealing through variations in paint that a bench once hung on the wall when the building served as a waiting area for the ferry.

Customers showed less knowledge about the history of the buildings. However, most customers we interviewed were aware that the café was located in a repurposed building. They often knew about the building's origin or were able to provide informed guesses. Like the store representatives, customers expressed appreciation for preserving the buildings: "I think it's nice to have a building that has kind of a history behind it", one customer said. She added that she does not have this experience in a new café. However, the interviews with consumers also revealed that the actual histories of the buildings did not influence their decision to visit them. For customers, the current atmosphere of the shop was more important:

I think it's the integration that is more important. So, it's not because it has a history... It's the way that they [the new shop owners] have embraced it and sort of made it their own... So, it feels a little bit more, I don't want to say authentic, but it kind of feels a bit more real, I guess... You don't mess with the grounds that you sort of have.

When asked directly whether they preferred cafés in repurposed buildings or modern buildings, many customers referred to a special "vibe" that they found in repurposed buildings: "I think it's the vibe that I get, and the environment as well... We [the local residents] don't like new commercial places as much as we like historical places".

The fact that both store owners and customers referred to a particular "vibe" suggests that, in addition to noticing spatiality and style, they also feel an emotional connection to the locations. Andersen referred to this phenomenon as an "attunement", which refers to the idea that architectural qualities, characterized by a specific "mood", convey values and meanings through an emotional resonance with the space [47] (p. 103).

Finally, the analyses also revealed that the preserved atmospheric components, which were identified as elements that conveyed the buildings' histories, originated not only from the building's original form but also from subsequent occupations. Each building and its history was taken as a whole, and the stories that the buildings told and the new users retold could come from different stages of the building's life. In these cases, it is not solely the building's original structure but some of the layers of life that history has imprinted on the building that stoke new users' interest in the place. This exemplifies Tucker's "palimpsest approach", which suggests that this diverse layering over time contributes to the current essence of a space [10] (p. 383).

5.3.3. Presence of Narratives

One feature that emerged in many of the interviews and visits to the coffee shops, and that is closely related to the traces of the past, was the presence of narratives about the histories of the buildings or the areas in which they were located. Our analysis indicated that storytelling takes place on different levels: through written or orally transmitted narratives regarding the history and characteristics of the location; through the preservation of physical objects and surfaces, which tell the story of the building's prior use; and through the transmission of information and guidance on the current and future state of the place and neighborhood.

One form of storytelling we identified was the presence of written or orally transmitted narratives regarding the building's history. Interviews with store representatives consistently revealed that they had studied the building's history and were eager to *share narratives* about previous occupants and function(s). The stories did not have to be grand tales; even small testimonies regarding the buildings' previous uses were appreciated by new users. Images were also occasionally used to convey the building's history to customers; for example, in a case where original construction drawings and photos of the original workshop were used as wall decorations (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Framed original construction drawings and photos serve as wall decorations, narrating the building's history and former use as a garage.

Conversations with staff members who were not owners and had not participated in the renovation process also revealed some level of knowledge. They could often point out traces of the buildings' previous lives. For example, a barista related that the former occupant was a ceramic studio and that objects produced in that studio are now used as decorative items in the shop (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Ceramics from a previous occupant are showcased on café shelves as decorative pieces.

Another form of storytelling is the transmission of narratives through the preservation of atmospheric components, such as objects and surfaces. The interviews with store representatives revealed that they endeavored to preserve traces of the buildings' previous uses and incorporate them into the new interiors. For example, a store owner highlighted a wall that was left untreated to show marks from the past (Figure 9); another example was a floor that once belonged to a garage (Figure 7). Moreover, as depicted in several figures, for example in Figures 3 and 5 the shops often reused original facades. In these examples, surfaces and building elements were used as visual reference points in the retelling of the buildings' histories. Another store representative expressed how their brand expected that showcasing the original construction of the building would also highlight the brand's emphasis on transparency: "That was the most important part of the rebuild", he said, "to ensure that we [the brand] became more transparent. We value transparency... and wanted to showcase what we do". In this example, exposing the original building structure and surfaces was utilized to reinforce the brand values of the current occupant of the space. A final form of storytelling we observed was related to guidance, which—unlike storytelling regarding the place's history and past—focuses on sharing information about the place's current and potential future position in the area. Often, staff were able to provide information and guidance regarding the surrounding neighborhoods to customers. For example, a barista explained that their shop was one of the first to open in the area and that there were now also a few restaurants, shops, and a museum nearby. She proceeded to indicate the locations of a few upcoming shops that had not yet opened. In another example, a café had a temporary lease in an old building scheduled for demolition to make way for a

new and larger structure. However, the building was declared to have historical value, and the demolition was postponed after citizens initiated a debate over the building's qualities and history. "I've heard that it was one of our customers who initiated the petition drive, which led to the issue being taken up politically", said a store representative. Examples such as these illustrate that new occupants can act as neighborhood hosts, disseminating information about their own spot as well as the surrounding neighborhood and thereby potentially *influencing neighborhood development*. This supports previous findings that social values are among the aspects that decision-makers take into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of adaptive reuse [48].

5.4. Appealing Neighborhoods

Many cafés were located in former industrial buildings situated outside commercial areas. The locations themselves, as well as the journey to and from these places, proved to be significant influences on users' experiences of the cafés. This suggests that it was not solely the coffee shop itself but also the characteristics of the entire neighborhood that played a role in the visitor experience. Such statements support Steadman et al.'s research from 2020, which indicated that the perception of an atmosphere is not only experienced statically in space and time but also influenced by the consumer's perception of the spot's surroundings; this includes interactions beyond the confines of the consumption environment, such as experiences on the way to and from the venue [49].

5.4.1. Local Integration

In relation to the cafés' placement and integration into the local environment, some customers appreciate the unobtrusive integration of a café into already existing buildings, as it seamlessly blends into the neighborhood: "It feels very natural for this place. It doesn't feel forced at all... because of, or due to, the heritage of these buildings and where we are [situated] locally and geographically. I think that makes a lot of sense".

Store representatives described how the integration of businesses into existing buildings can be valuable if the building is in an area that already has a community: "So, the huge benefit is that you are moving your business into a place that already has life. So, you're becoming part of a community; you're becoming part of an area, a history". For buildings located in residential areas, the advantage lies in the fact that potential customers already reside in the area: "You have people who have their daily lives there". Some highlighted how the presence of the café positively impacted the neighborhood and supported *community building*: "I live nearby. In this area, in Nordvest [the name of the neighborhood], there is not much that happens. So, I guess, whenever stuff opens, it's nice to support local businesses". On the other hand, remote locations make cafés harder to reach, which results in additional transportation time but also adds an element of exclusivity, as discussed in Section 5.2.2.

Some informants highlighted local integration: "We also have a lot of regulars that interact. So, we start to know each other. It's like when you go to a bar once a week, you get to know people. In a way, they come for the coffee, but in some way, they also become part of the community". Others mentioned how an interaction between the café and the community was already evident in the implementation process: "People approached us along the way and mentioned that they had things they thought we might be able to use, like old porcelain, for example". We also found examples of cafés engaging with the community through information boards presenting newspaper articles on the location, drawings, messages (Figure 12), and narratives of the buildings' pasts presented on the café walls (Figure 10). This final remark expresses a desire to foster community building through café design and indicates community engagement as the café owner's intention: "Copenhagen does not need more f* cafés. We don't need them. There are enough places to get coffee. They need social hubs. They need places that can give you a little bit more. And some cafés do that. We need to create that community".



Figure 12. Example of a café engaging with the community through information boards presenting drawings, messages, and newspaper articles on the café.

5.4.2. Inviting Surroundings

Some customers explicitly mentioned that the neighborhood influenced their wish to visit the specific café, saying, for example, “I like the area of Christianshavn because there is water, and it’s just a nice environment in general”, and “I like the surroundings. It’s near the water. If you want, you can sit outside, go swimming, or just enjoy the sun. Inside, it is very nice that you have a view of the sea”. This supports Steadman et al.’s finding that the perception of a place can be influenced by users’ perceptions of the surroundings [49].

Spaciousness, and the fact that many buildings were in less crowded areas without much traffic, were valued by users: “The vibe is just very easygoing. It is very inviting, calming, and easy”, a guest said, noting that it was relaxing even when sitting outside because of the lack of traffic. All shops featured outdoor seating areas and established a visual connection between the interior and exterior through large windows or doors (Figures 3, 5 and 13).

As they are often located in relatively remote areas that may be new to visitors, the design of these outdoor seating areas can be seen as a means of creating a safe haven from which customers can observe and gain confidence in the surrounding neighborhood before exploring it further. This observation supports findings that café surroundings are also consumed, giving rise to *neighborhood consumption* [14]. In other words, visitors not only consume coffee but also visually absorb the essences of places and their surroundings. Through the presence of a café, the neighboring area can unfold, extending the café space into the surrounding environment. This concept finds support in recent studies, such as one that indicated a trend toward implementing open, transparent facades in coffee shops in older neighborhoods in Hong Kong [13]. Another study presented outdoor seating areas as protected spaces from which visitors can explore new neighborhoods, adding to the unfolding of the café experience from a secure vantage point [50].



Figure 13. An example of a canal-facing café in which bar tables and inside seats are strategically arranged for guests to enjoy the neighborhood view. An outdoor seating area is implemented just outside the facade, nestled between the café and the canal. A sidewalk separates the outdoor area from the canal, allowing pedestrians or cyclists to pass by. When the café’s chairs are occupied, guests often order coffee and sit on the canal’s edge.

Another benefit of remote districts is that buildings are less densely packed, thereby offering access to spacious, sunlit outdoor areas. Unlike in the city center, low-rise buildings and the ample space between them allow sunlight to filter down between the buildings: “There are not that many places in Copenhagen where you have this much space”, a storeowner mentioned, explaining that his shop is in sunlight from eight in the morning to late in the evening. “This is unusual in Copenhagen. Usually, other buildings block the view or block the sunlight”, he said, and went on to explain that many of his regular visitors enjoy sitting outside in the sunshine.

Every café we studied had outdoor seating. The seats were arranged so that customers could look out onto the neighborhoods (e.g., Figures 13–15). Planters, parasols, and other objects were used to frame the outdoor areas and create intimate, protected outdoor spaces in the immediate vicinity of the cafés (e.g., Figures 3 and 15).

Observations at different times of the year revealed that outdoor furniture was often present year-round, even in seasons in which the temperature made outdoor seating unappealing. This suggests that the outdoor furniture was employed not only for its functionality but also to signal that the shop was open for business (Figure 16).

The option of sitting outdoors was mentioned as a virtue by most interviewees, while access to a swimming spot was mentioned in cafés close to the harbor: “I think that location is what matters and where you can sit in the sun and enjoy the water. I think that’s important for people”. The outdoor areas were also identified as a justification for prolonging stays and *lingering* in these cafés: “Yes, definitely [I have spent more time than planned]. But that is because one can swim. And it is in the sun”. And elsewhere, “So, when I go here, I normally hang out for hours. In other cafés, I would normally stay maybe one hour”.



Figure 14. A café located in a former industrial building in a quiet area with minimal traffic. The café itself is relatively small, but the outdoor area accommodates additional guests. The road in front of the café is exclusively for pedestrian traffic, with no provision for car or bicycle travel in the area, resulting in a tranquil environment free from vehicular traffic and other noise.



Figure 15. An example of an outdoor seating area with a view of the neighborhood, where planters and parasols are used to frame the café's outdoor areas.



Figure 16. An example of the all-year presence of outdoor furniture, even when the weather makes outdoor seating unappealing.

6. Discussion

6.1. Main Findings

Our findings indicate that, in addition to being considered more sustainable, repurposing buildings can offer various benefits to contemporary business owners and their customers. We illustrate how the combination of old and new elements generates distinctive atmospheric characteristics: a spacious and welcoming environment, uniqueness, synergies between old and new components, and attractive neighborhoods. We also highlight user responses to these specific characteristics. Furthermore, our research highlights that these atmospheres can be established with minimal or no alterations to existing buildings, consistent with the recommended approach for achieving climate goals [4].

6.2. Implications for Theory

While there is a significant body of extant research on building adaptation, limited attention has been devoted to repurposing buildings for commercial use and understanding the atmospheric implications on users.

This paper makes several contributions to the literature on atmospherics in repurposed buildings. The two main contributions are, first, the thematization of atmospheres that contemporary users value and that are characteristic of cafés in repurposed buildings. Second, the paper introduces an analytical model derived from an applied data structure. This model explains how the relationship between old and new atmospheric components creates novel atmospheres and demonstrates how these atmospheres can be correlated with user responses. This represents a valuable contribution to research in the fields of adaptive reuse, retail, and hospitality design. While the model is introduced in this paper as a framework for analyzing our data, it can also be applied as a conceptual framework for design processes or when exploring potential matches between existing buildings and future users, consistent with Kuittinen's recommendations [4].

The study conclusively affirms that the previously identified categories of remodeling strategies [23,24] are also applicable to café design. However, by identifying hybrids that fall between multiple categories, particularly in the realm of insertion/installation, we highlight the necessity of further specification of these categories. Additionally, we identify a gap in the understanding of the impact of consecutive remodeling on store atmospheres.

6.3. Implications for Practice

With the aim of inspiring stakeholders, including developers and designers, to initiate projects in which user needs are aligned with existing spaces without resource-intensive renovations or extensions, this study identifies a spectrum of atmospheric benefits of repurposed buildings. Beyond the previously recognized sustainability aspects, these benefits are pertinent to creating engaging customer experiences and could thus appeal to stakeholders in the retail and hospitality sector. As the study focuses on values identified by actual consumers and store representatives, it is expected to serve as an inspiration for the retail and hospitality industry.

In this industry, the typical focus revolves around whether store spaces are perceived as visually appealing or aligned with current trends. However, this study demonstrates that through the integration of new and old atmospheric components, seemingly anonymous industrial buildings have the potential to both attract and retain contemporary consumers. Many of the buildings studied were not officially recognized as worthy of preservation or protected by authorities but nonetheless possessed spatial potential for new purposes. This suggests that, if functional buildings are to be repurposed, the future emphasis could shift towards values generated through, for example, spaciousness, added activities, narratives, and local integration. In this context, it is anticipated that the identified themes may assist in assessing which buildings hold the potential for new purposes, even if this is not readily recognized.

The study also reveals that most café implementations primarily adopt the “installation” remodeling strategy. This strategy involves reusing the existing building structures as they are and implementing the new business with minimal resource consumption while still creating positive impacts for the new occupants. While we acknowledge that this may not be feasible in all project scenarios, we believe that these cases can inspire developers and designers.

Beyond the buildings and the cafés themselves, the study indicates that users also value locations. The experience of a café atmosphere, along with the experience of the café’s surroundings, contributes to a holistic perception of the place as a whole. This emphasizes the opportunity for dialog and collaboration between business owners, urban developers, and local politicians.

In our observations, interviewees tended to describe the atmospheres holistically and struggled to follow our encouragement to identify the individual components that contributed to these atmospheres. This validates findings from various previous studies in the field of atmospherics [43,44] which emphasize that atmospheric components are experienced not in isolation but as integrated wholes. Consequently, providing specific recommendations on which buildings are suitable for new projects and which aspects should be retained to create an appealing atmosphere is challenging.

Conversely, we propose that the ability to envision the final atmosphere as a whole is crucial in the design process. We view the development of this skillset as important for future designers and decision-makers, constituting a key aspect of interior design education. The suggested structure (Figure 2) for analyzing atmospheres, which links old and new components on both the interior and exterior and connects them with overall atmospheres, can be considered a relevant framework for such education. Testing the effectiveness of this approach could be a logical next step in advancing both practical implementation and design education.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

As with any research, this study has limitations. First, this study relies on data derived from 21 cases and 26 informants. While these cases offer valuable insights into the considerations and motivations underlying the development and patronage of coffee shops located in repurposed buildings in Copenhagen, the sample is not representative of all coffee shops within repurposed structures. The observed trend in Copenhagen is expected to be applicable elsewhere in the region, but further studies are required to confirm this assumption and explore potential variations across geographic locations.

The study specifically delves into the advantages of placing coffee shops in repurposed buildings, distinctly excluding other business types. Nevertheless, it is plausible that various forms of businesses could similarly achieve positive outcomes by establishing themselves in existing buildings. For example, investigating the benefits of introducing small boutique hotels or holiday accommodations in vacant retail spaces in provincial towns struggling with empty storefronts, or utilizing the unique existing spaces to create compelling user experiences for retail brands, could be deemed valuable. Future research endeavors could shed light on whether and why the identified benefits extend to other retail and hospitality projects.

Each case is inherently unique, making it challenging to formulate generalizations. Even within the identified themes, notable distinctions emerge. For instance, we introduce “spaciousness” as a theme, considering its prevalence in most cases studied. However, there were exceptions, such as Case #5, a compact telephone booth spanning only 1–2 m², and Case #21 a small café in a train station. Nevertheless, most cases were capacious. We acknowledge that a building’s size also influences its dynamics, although this was not explicitly addressed in this research. The presence of additional activities was also primarily confined to larger establishments, whereas such activities were not observed in smaller shops in central locations. These smaller shops predominantly catered to takeout customers, and despite the unique features of these smaller shops, they do not necessarily evoke the urges to linger and socialize, like their more expansive counterparts. It is worth mentioning that these smaller establishments were all part of local chains and thus formed integral components of the respective brands. Future studies could delve deeper into the business models and strategies of brands with diverse outlets.

The focus of this paper was on already established and successful businesses. However, we did not highlight the products, services, brands, or business models of the cafés. Future research could delve into whether a specific type of business is likely to be more successful in these locations by analyzing these factors.

This study also does not delve into the legislation governing the use of buildings originally intended for different purposes and legal categorizations of buildings based on their uses. However, such considerations are crucial when assessing the feasibility of such projects on a larger scale. Thus, further research is needed, especially at the local level.

Notably, this study does not include assessments of sustainability. Additional research is required to gauge the actual sustainability impacts of repurposed shops. Furthermore, local and contextual knowledge is essential to determine the genuine sustainability of solutions in specific contexts.

Furthermore, establishing stores in repurposed buildings entails challenges. Practical challenges were revealed in interviews with store representatives, encompassing issues such as temperature regulation, high energy consumption, plumbing and drainage, building size and condition, and acquired features, such as entrance doors. For example, one respondent explained that their shop’s existing doors were too narrow to meet the current accessibility requirements. These challenges are acknowledged, and further research in this area involving experienced stakeholders with practical experience from such projects is encouraged to seek solutions.

Additionally, old buildings often house various occupants and undergo multiple remodeling attempts, making the analysis of remodeling strategies complex. This study suggests that users do not pay much attention to whether atmospheric components result from a building's original construction or from subsequent occupancies. The most crucial aspect appears to be that the current atmosphere is pleasant. Future studies could illuminate the effects of consecutive remodeling strategies on the overall atmospheres of such spaces.

7. Conclusions

Scholars have proposed that, instead of constructing new buildings or performing extensive renovations to existing ones, businesses with spatial needs should consider using vacant spaces by adapting their requirements to fit these spaces. This implies that designers and developers should begin exploring various alternative options to meet their needs or try bringing new users into existing spaces. To explore the potential benefits (beyond sustainability) that store owners and consumers can derive from spaces originally intended for different purposes, we examined user perceptions of coffee shops located in repurposed buildings. Based on observations and interviews, old and new atmospheric components were identified, and eight themes describing the atmospheres that arise through the combination of these components were outlined. Four aggregate themes were then identified: capacious and accommodating environments, uniqueness, synergy between old and new, and appealing neighborhoods. Finally, the following user responses generated by these themes were identified: lingering, working/studying, socializing, revisiting, sharing narratives, influencing neighborhood development, building communities, and consuming neighborhoods. These responses were discussed in relation to the perceived atmospheres.

The study confirms that cafés in repurposed buildings can attract new users through various virtues, even with minimal changes to the existing structures. The benefits of spacious and accommodating environments are manifest. A larger space invites customers to linger and use the space for various activities, such as working, studying, socializing, and additional social engagements. Uniqueness arises from the distinctive qualities of buildings and their locations and the unique integration of the café experience into these surroundings. The cafés' distinctive characteristics influence how people perceive and treasure these places, prompting them to share the experience with friends. A successful synergy between old and new is achieved through the integration of old and new components and the presence of narratives, both of which link the café experiences with traces of the past. The power of opening a café in an appealing neighborhood emerged clearly because many of the studied cafés are situated in old industrial buildings in remote areas, which are often considered intriguing places to explore. Due to lower building density and reduced traffic, these locations are perceived as tranquil alternatives to urban areas, encouraging outdoor enjoyment and the exploration of new neighborhoods. The presence of café guests in such areas has given rise to what we term "neighborhood consumption", or the attraction of increased attention to the surrounding area. This heightened awareness can lead customers to appreciate the site's unique characteristics, with some even participating in petitions to assess their favorite spot's historical value for preservation.

Together, these benefits contribute to strengthening community bonds. Therefore, such spaces can be seen as fostering not only environmental sustainability but also social sustainability. This study contributes to theories of adaptive reuse, atmospheres in repurposed buildings, and remodeling strategies. By identifying key themes and establishing an appropriate analytic model, it encourages practitioners to apply and draw inspiration from the findings when exploring methods of meeting spatial needs and drawing new users to existing spaces.

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