Background

Why are buildings demolished? The phenomenon of demolition is more than a set of technical problems (design strategies, deconstruction / recycling, waste reduction, financial management, etc) requiring investigation. The governance ('institutional regime' comprising a complex set of legal, financial, commercial and operational rules, drivers and barriers) is a significant influence on demolition requiring investigation. The large amount of embedded natural, social and financial capitals in the built environment mean that the linked topics of building survival and demolition are vital in any understanding of sustainability and the long term management of a significant resource.

The distinction between deconstruction, demolition and destruction made in this Building Research and Information (BRI) special issue is a first attempt to classify and refine the reasons, the objectives, the form and the context of demolitions. Theoretical and evidence-based research approaches are presented to understand not only the drivers but the impacts as well.

Objectives Special Issue

The objectives of this BRI special issue are to understand why the issue of 'demolition' has become increasingly important, to connect 'demolition' to adjacent concepts, to consider how the different types of definition could be analysed and classified and to suggest what future research is necessary. The pressing concerns of managing shrinking cities, clearing old districts for rapid urbanisation, financial pressures for redevelopment as well as managing existing assets and reducing a large waste stream
mean demolition is a key research area with potential
to influence policy and strategy. The demolition
problematic is clearly a societal problem with multiple
facets.

A large field of research is opening which combines
top-down theoretical approaches (e.g. a theory of
obsolescence), concepts from social-ecological system
analysis (adaptation, resilience), approaches from social
science (e.g. social capital, collective memories) and
others still to be articulated. In parallel and to
complement the top-down approach, bottom-up
studies are emerging about process of urban
transformation e.g. shrinkage under different forms,
survival analysis of particular building stocks, actor-
oriented approaches.

Overview and Articles

The following titles are included:

- Matching Construction and Demolition Waste
  Supply to Recycling Demand: a Regional
  Management Chain Model.
- Understanding Obsolescence: a Conceptual
  Model for Buildings.
- Demolition in the Bijlmermeer: Lessons from
  transforming a large housing estate.
- Demolition and Preservation in Shrinking US
  Industrial Cities.
- Consequences of Massive Housing Destruction:
  the New York City Fire Epidemic.
- The Post-war Destruction of Swedish Cities.

How to find this Special Issue online

To find this Special Issue online (from 30 June 2011)
see here Building Research & Information Volume 39,
Number 4 (July 2011)

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