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Urban Impacts of Commercial Development in the Context of Brownfield Regeneration: The Northern Cyprus 1001 Airport Mall Case Study

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ABSTRACT:
Brownfield revitalization aims to support both spatial sustainability and the urban economy by repurposing underutilized or poorly used urban spaces. This study examines the 1001 Airport Mall case in Northern Cyprus from an architectural and urban planning perspective. It has been observed that the project area is currently permanently closed; however, it has been determined that active use of the area occurred approximately between 2015 and 2020, after which urban transformation aimed at constructing modern apartment buildings and residential blocks in place of the commercial structure came to the forefront. According to the information shared, the transformation process was formalized with the complete demolition of the shopping mall; thus, the area has the potential to transition from a commercially focused building identity to a new established land use arrangement within a framework closer to a mixed commercial-residential transformation approach.
The aim of the study is; (i) to reveal the effects of the derelict state resulting from the cessation of commercial use on the surrounding land-use patterns, functional continuity, and public/semi-public space use; (ii) to evaluate how the project's proximity to the Ercan Airport area and major transportation axes may shape the urban outcomes of the transformation; and (iii) to discuss how the residential component in brownfield transformations can create a "re-activation" mechanism in terms of continuity of use and integration with the city.
In this case study, Google Earth images, on-site photographic records, and observational findings were evaluated together. The findings show that the area currently bears traces of derelict physical forms and that the inactive use creates an "urban impact gap" around it. However, with the introduction of new residential/residential-focused use, the possibility of continuous use around the area and daily access-based urban revitalization is strengthened. In addition, the residential component-based re-functionalization approach can be interpreted as an important mechanism for promoting urban integration, primarily by re-establishing continuity of use in brownfield areas.

Keywords: Brownfield, urban, land use, residential transformation, accessibility, Northern Cyprus.

1. Introduction

Derelict areas arising from the need for urban transformation are often associated with environmental risks, functional discontinuity, and economic inefficiency. Current research on the regeneration of derelict areas treats them not merely as areas requiring physical cleaning or improvement, but as complex, holistic intervention areas involving the re-establishment of use, the restructuring of the urban fabric, and management processes aligned with sustainability goals (Cai et al., 2026; Han et al., 2026; Tang et al., 2026). In this context, studies that systematically evaluate environmental benefits and

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address the transition from "area-level regeneration" to "system integration" are particularly noteworthy (Tang et al., 2026). In addition, evaluating regeneration in relation to its financing mechanisms and cost structures emerges as another important factor shaping feasibility and guiding policy design (Skrabal et al., 2026; Turečková & Nevima, 2026).

Governance and participation are also central themes in brownfield regeneration discussions. Comparative studies indicate that governance models grounded in community participation can strengthen the social legitimacy, acceptance, and long-term sustainability of urban transformation processes (CNear East Universityai et al., 2026; Kang et al., 2026; Malý et al., 2023). From a spatial perspective, the effects of regeneration on the urban fabric are typically interpreted through continuity of use, functional diversity, and the degree of interaction with surrounding land uses (Jarczewski & Koj, 2023). Moreover, housing-oriented re-functionalization strategies are frequently emphasized in the literature as a means of connecting brownfield areas with housing provision and infrastructure development (Letsuwa et al., 2026). Relatedly, the literature also discusses how adaptive reuse and architectural/planning strategies may help generate continuity and connectivity—particularly through the re-functionalization of derelict structures (Golobostanfard, 2025).

This study investigates brownfield regeneration from an architectural and urban planning perspective through the case of the 1001 Airport Mall in Northern Cyprus. According to the information provided, the site was actively used between approximately 2015 and 2020. After this period, the mall was demolished and a new development process commenced, involving the construction of modern apartment buildings and residential blocks as part of a mixed-use commercial-residential transformation. This specific trajectory provides an opportunity to examine the perceived impacts of brownfield transformation at an urban scale, as well as its potential contribution to urban integration through the continuity (and re-establishment) of use.

The empirical component of the research blends spatial observation and site analysis with a participatory survey strategy to cross-examine physical urban shifts against stakeholder viewpoints. Given the site's strong visibility and recognition as a reference point on the island, a total of 75 participants were surveyed: 25 experts, selected through purposive sampling due to their background in urban planning and architecture, and 50 members of the public, gathered via random sampling among local residents and regular visitors. While sampling procedures were tailored to fit the distinct nature of each cohort, the underlying survey instruments were strictly aligned to allow meaningful comparisons. The collected data were subsequently analysed through comparative evaluation between the two groups, matching observational records of spatial transformation with empirical survey responses to gauge social acceptance. acceptance. This methodological choice is consistent with studies indicating that participation in brownfield regeneration is important for understanding social acceptance of transformation and its urban consequences (Cai et al., 2026; Kang et al., 2026).

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2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Holistic approaches in brownfield regeneration: sustainability, environmental benefits, and system integration

Brownfield regeneration is considered a holistic process encompassing not only physical improvements on-site but also the assessment of environmental benefits, their correlation with sustainability goals, and reintegration into the urban system. This approach emphasizes that the transformation moves beyond being a "site-level intervention" and focuses on broader-scale outcomes (Tang et al., 2026).

Discussions on sustainability assessment point to the need to address environmental benefits through various indicators and monitor their impact over time. In this context, it is stated that integrated assessment approaches contribute to more consistent output production in brownfield transformation by supporting decision-making processes with multidimensional data (Cano et al., 2026).

The discussions surrounding the "paradigm evolution" in assessing environmental benefits in Brownfield regeneration also stand out: a shift from a remediation-focused approach to a more systematic and integrative reading is emphasized (Tang et al., 2026). Furthermore, linking regeneration to sustainable growth and urban development goals provides a crucial framework for understanding the spatial consequences of the application (Höftberger et al., 2023).

Brownfield regeneration should be understood through the systematic assessment of environmental benefits and integration into the urban system.

2.2 Goverance, participation and social acceptance: stakeholder-based approaches and implementation capacity

The success of Brownfield regeneration is not only evident at the design/planning level but also in the way governance and participation processes are established. The literature indicates that participatory governance models influence the legitimacy, social acceptance, and long-term sustainability of urban transformation (Cai et al., 2026). Therefore, participation is not a "complementary process"; Social acceptance is seen as one of the main variables shaping the outcomes of the transformation (Kang et al., 2026). In Northern Cyprus, where formal avenues for public engagement in spatial planning remain underdeveloped, securing grassroots social acceptance becomes even more critical for private sector-driven brownfield developments.

The relationship between community acceptance and implementation is also discussed in experiences related to local brownfield governance. In post-socialist contexts, the efforts of local governments to create community "centers" under free-market pressures make visible the link between community needs, acceptance dynamics, and implementation capacity (Malý et al., 2023). By the same token, in small island environments like Northern Cyprus, converting a well-known focal point—such as the former 1001 Airport Mall—into a residential-commercial node illustrates how market-led projects must navigate local identity and civic expectations.

In brownfield transformation, the financial/material sustainability of implementation plays a critical role, as does governance. Access to funding sources and public support/planning tools are seen as determinants affecting the feasibility of the

transformation (Turečková & Nevima, 2026). However, it is emphasized that economic and fiscal aspects should be evaluated through cost structures and policy outcomes (Skrabal et al., 2026). Regarding the 1001 Airport Mall, private capital primarily propels the transformation, showing how financial viability interlocks with localized planning constraints and regional infrastructure capacities.

In brownfield transformation, community acceptance and governance should be considered together with implementation capacity, particularly when translating broad sustainability principles into context-specific urban interventions.

2.3 Spatial Transformation and implementation tools: housing/apartment-based re-functionalization and -functional outcomes

The urban fabric's reflection of brownfield regeneration is understood through the spatial design decisions and functional framework of the transformation. In particular, the literature discusses how housing/apartment-based development strategies contribute to the re-establishment of land use and its connection to established life in brownfield areas (Letsuwa et al., 2026).

Functional diversity and spatial factors are considered important criteria in understanding spatial outcomes. Evaluations based on spatial determinants affecting functional diversity in renovated brownfield areas indicate that the impact of the transformation should be read not only within the boundaries of the area but also at a relational level with surrounding land uses (Jarczewski & Koj, 2023).

While strategies such as adaptive reuse (e.g., revitalizing derelict buildings with new functions) are noteworthy in terms of implementation tools, the main focus in your case is the dynamic of "housing/apartment-based resettlement." Therefore, the potential for integration of the transformation with the city should be considered through the lens of residential use. Furthermore, studies on process design and implementation frameworks highlight the need to collaboratively design the management/design processes of brownfield transformation (Ramezani, 2024; Tomei et al., 2026).

Residential/apartment-based repurposing can be considered a critical mechanism for ensuring continuity of use and integration with the city in brownfield areas.

3. Methods

This study utilized a participatory survey method, in conjunction with spatial observation and field research, to measure stakeholder perceptions regarding the transformation of 1001 Airport Mall (Brownfield). The survey was designed to directly collect data on the urban impact dimensions of the transformation process (use, daily life, accessibility/integration with the city, quality of life, functional continuity, suitability for residential use, social impact and safety, and general attitudes).

A total of 75 participants, including 25 experts and 50 local residents, participated in the survey. The survey was conducted between March 2026 and May 2026. While this cohort size supports an exploratory evaluation of varied stakeholder views, the sample size and structure introduce certain methodological boundaries. Specifically, having fewer expert participants (n=25) compared to public respondents (n=50) may constrain statistical power and limit direct generalizability to broader island-wide populations.

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Nevertheless, considering the site-specific nature of the 1001 Airport Mall project and the specialized insight needed from urban design professionals, this sample offers sufficient empirical depth for exploratory analysis rather than broad demographic generalizations.

The survey form consisted of two sections: (i) S1–S2 questions to determine the participants' descriptive characteristics and (ii) S3–S10 Likert scale items measuring perceptions of the transformation.

The evaluation scale was a 5-point Likert: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree.

• S1 (Residence/Visit Status): The participant's level of engagement with the area was determined by categorizing residency on the island, regular visits (frequent visits), and infrequent visits.

• S2 (Participant Group): Participants were classified as experts and members of the public.

• S3 (Regular Use): Perception of the level of regular use of the 1001 Airport Mall area/surroundings.

• S4 (Daily Use and vitality) Assessment of how the transformation increased the daily use and activity of the area.

• S5 (Urban Integration): Perception of how the transformation increased the integration of the area with the city (ease of access and usability).

• S6 (Quality of Life): Assessment of how the transformation positively impacted the quality of life in the surrounding area.

• S7 (Functional Continuity): The belief that the post-transformation use will be sustainable in the long term.

• S8 (Housing Suitability): Opinion on the suitability of a residential-focused repurposing for this location.

• S9 (Social impact and safety): Assessment of the positive impact of predominantly residential use on security and social aspects in the environment.

• S10 (Overall assessment): Overall level of positive assessment of the transformation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed based on responses to Likert scale items. In the first stage, descriptive statistics were calculated; the mean (Avg), standard deviation (SD), median, and min-max values were reported for each item. In the second stage, the distribution of participant responses was evaluated as a percentage (%) for each item, and trends in Likert categories (1-5) were explained. In the final stage, expert-public comparisons were made; statistical tests were applied considering group means/distributions.

The findings were interpreted to evaluate the similarities/level differences in expert and public perception on an item-by-item basis.

4. Findings and Discussion

In urban transformation processes, the reclamation of abandoned or defunct areas (brownfields) is a critical planning problem in terms of integration into the urban fabric, quality of life, and sustainable use. The 1001 Airport Mall area serves as a concrete example of this discussion; how the area is perceived by users and experts after its functional transformation is crucial in evaluating the success of the transformation.

The aim of this study is to measure the perceived success of the transformation from the perspective of different stakeholder groups. In this context, the opinions of experts familiar with the area are compared with the opinions of the public who use/visit the area. The study seeks answers to two fundamental questions: (i) How is the transformation evaluated in terms of daily use, urban integration, quality of life, and functional continuity? (ii) Is there a statistically significant difference between the evaluations of experts and the public?

4.1 Data collection instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising an eight-item attitude scale (S3–S10) and two demographic questions (S1–S2). Attitude items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (Table 1)

Table 1: Evaluation scale

Score	Meaning
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly agree

The internal consistency of the scale was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The calculated value of $\alpha = 0.894$ for the eight items indicates that the scale has a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.80$ is considered very good). This result suggests that the items consistently measure the same underlying construct (perception of transformation).

Comparative analysis: Item scores of expert and public groups were compared using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test recommended for ordinal Likert data; a Welch independent samples t-test was also reported for confirmation. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4.2 Research design and sample

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design. The sample consisted of 75 participants: 25 experts (33.3%) and 50 local residents (66.7%). Participants' relationship to the field (S1) and group affiliation (S2) were recorded as demographic variables. (Table 2 and Table 3)

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Table 2: Participants' relationship with the area (S1)

Residence / Visit Status	Frequency	Percentage
• I reside in the area	39	52.0%
• I visit the area frequently	24	32.0%
• I visit rarely	12	16.0%
TOTAL	**75**	**100.0%**

Table 3: Distribution of participants by group (S2)

Participant Group	Frequency	Percentage
• Expert	25	33.3%
• Public	50	66.7%
TOTAL	**75**	**100.0%**

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Across the sample, item means ranged from 2.95 to 3.80. The highest mean was observed in item S4 (Daily use and vitality, mean = 3.80), and the lowest in item S3 (Regular use, mean = 2.95). Participants largely viewed the conversion positively; however, they were relatively more cautious about regular use of the area. (Table 4. And Figure 1.)

These favorable scores for daily vitality (S4) and urban integration (S5) resonate with recent urban literature showing that residential-led brownfield redevelopments can successfully reactivate underused land and strengthen spatial connections across urban fabrics (Cai et al., 2026; Kang et al., 2026). Conversely, the noticeable gap between active daily presence and lower regular usage (S3) reveals a nuanced dynamic. This discrepancy mirrors discussions in functional diversity research, which argue that housing-led repurposing without adequate public or commercial programming often struggles to cultivate habitual, long-term civic engagement (Malý et al., 2023). Hence, while the 1001 Airport Mall case reinforces literature on immediate spatial revitalization, it points to a recurring challenge in brownfield planning where physical integration moves faster than routine community habits.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for Likert scale items (n = 75)

Questions No	Question Descriptions	N	Mean	Standart Devision (SD)	Median	Min	Max
S3	Regular Use	5	**2.95**	1.01	3	1	5

Questions No	Question Descriptions	N	Mean	Standart Devision (SD)	Median	Min	Max
S4	Daily Use and Vitality	5	**3.80**	0.96	4	1	5
S5	Urban Integration	5	**3.76**	1.00	4	2	5
S6	Quality of Life	5	**3.47**	1.00	3	1	5
S7	Functional Continuity	5	**3.43**	0.99	3	2	5
S8	Housing Suitability	5	**3.47**	1.07	4	1	5
S9	Social impact and safety	5	**3.67**	0.92	4	2	5
S10	Overall assessment	5	**3.68**	1.07	4	1	5

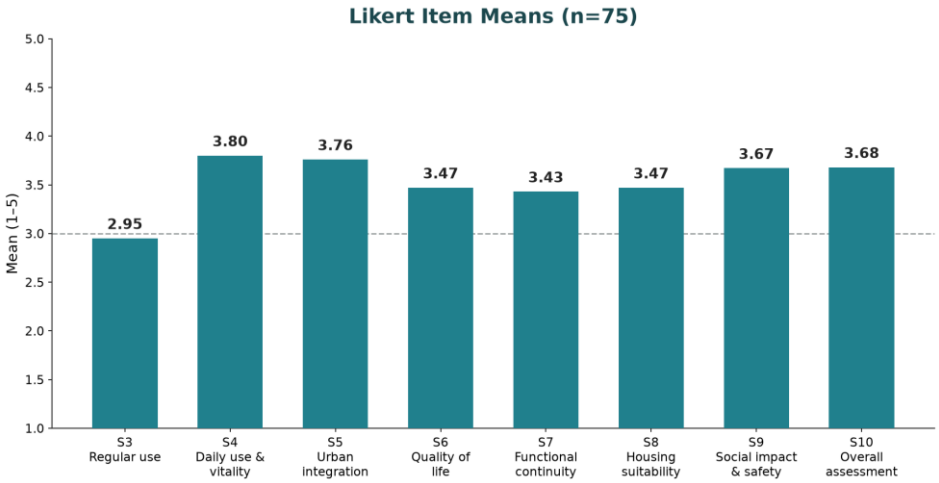

Figure 1: Likert item means (dashed line = midpoint, 3.00)

4.4 Response Distributions

When the percentage distribution of response categories is examined, it is seen that positive responses (4 and 5) are dominant in most items. However, in item S3 (regular use), the share of undecided and negative responses is higher compared to other items. (Table 5. And Figure 2.)

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Table 5: Percentage distribution of Likert responses (%)

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
S3	8.0	24.0	38.7	24.0	5.3
S4	1.3	8.0	25.3	40.0	25.3
S5	0.0	13.3	24.0	36.0	26.7
S6	1.3	16.0	34.7	30.7	17.3
S7	0.0	20.0	33.3	30.7	16.0
S8	2.7	18.7	25.3	36.0	17.3
S9	0.0	12.0	28.0	41.3	18.7
S10	1.3	14.7	25.3	32.0	26.7

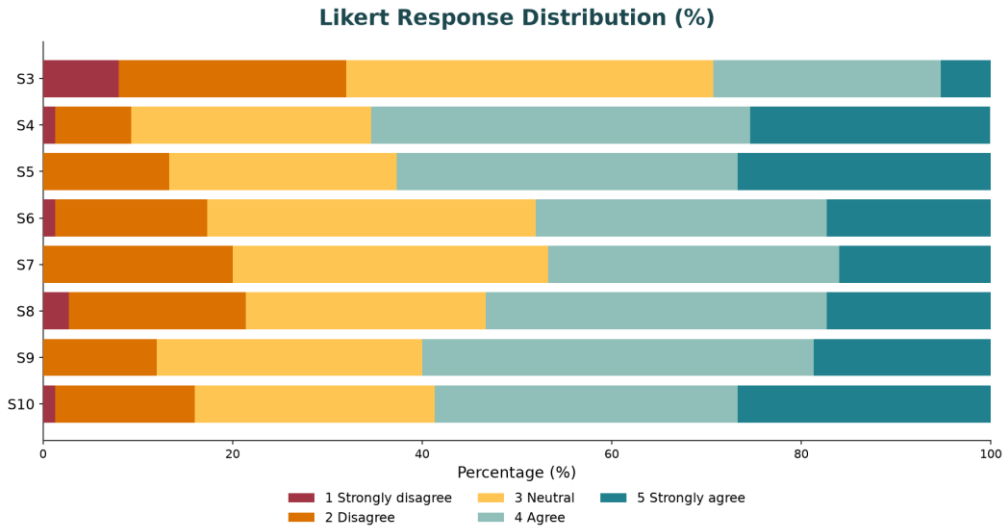

Figure 2: Likert response distribution by item (%)

4.5 Expert-public comparison

In the intergroup comparison, a statistically significant difference was found in 1 out of 8 items. The item(s) with a significant difference were S9 (social influence and safety, U p = 0.039). Public participants gave more positive evaluations in this dimension(s) compared to experts. In all other items, the intergroup difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$); this indicates that expert and public perceptions largely overlap in these dimensions. (Table 6. And Figure 3.)

Table 6: Expert–Public comparison (Mann-Whitney U and Welch t-test)

Item	Description	Expert M±SD	Public M±SD	U	U p	t p	Sig.
S3	Regular use	2.76±0.88	3.04±1.07	508.0	0.171	0.232	No
S4	Daily use and vitality	3.84±0.69	3.78±1.07	614.5	0.906	0.771	No
S5	Urban integration	3.96±0.79	3.66±1.08	717.0	0.283	0.177	No
S6	Quality of life	3.40±1.04	3.50±0.99	608.5	0.851	0.692	No
S7	Functional continuity	3.24±0.97	3.52±0.99	523.5	0.237	0.248	No
S8	Housing suitability	3.24±1.16	3.58±1.01	520.0	0.222	0.220	No
S9	Social impact and safety	3.40±0.76	3.80±0.97	450.0	**0.039**	0.056	**Yes**
S10	Overall assessment	3.56±1.08	3.74±1.07	570.0	0.525	0.498	No

M = mean; SD = standard deviation; U = Mann-Whitney U statistic; p < 0.05 considered significant (pink row).

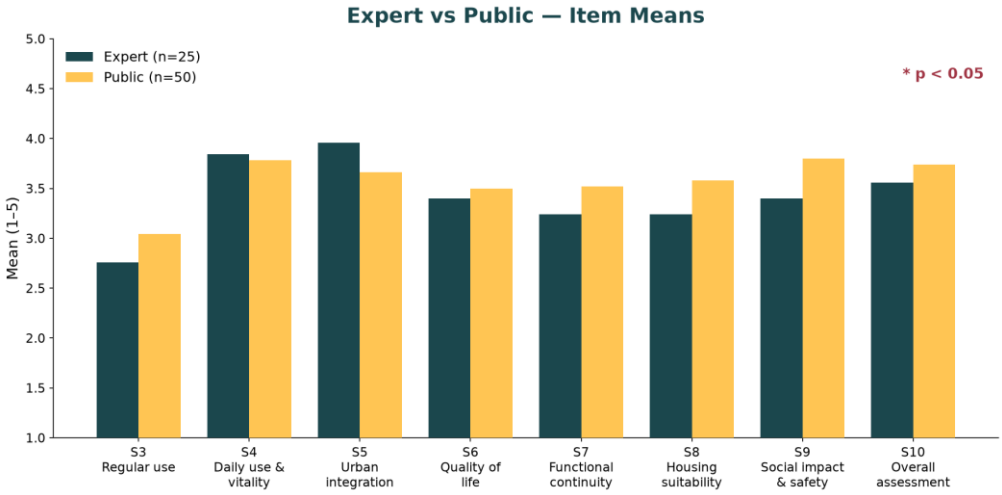

Figure 3: Item means for the expert and public groups

The results indicate that the transformation of the 1001 Airport Mall is generally perceived positively by both stakeholder groups. The high mean scores for **daily use and revitalization (S4)** and **urban integration (S5)** suggest that the transformation has improved the area's accessibility and mobility and has strengthened its connection with the surrounding urban fabric. In contrast, the comparatively lower mean for **regular use (S3)** may imply that, although the site is revitalized, this improvement has not yet fully turned into a consistent everyday usage pattern.

Overall, expert and public evaluations largely align across most dimensions, pointing to a broad consensus regarding the transformation's outcomes. The only dimension where a statistically meaningful divergence emerges is **social impact and**

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safety (S9). In this dimension, public participants assess the effects of the predominantly residential function on perceived safety and social interaction more positively than experts. This difference may stem from experts' more cautious approach, reflecting concern over potential risks associated with factors such as residential density and the balance of mixed uses. This key point of divergence opens up valuable avenues for future inquiry. To unpack why residents view local safety and social cohesion more optimistically than planning professionals, subsequent studies should incorporate qualitative interviews alongside longitudinal monitoring. Tracking user perceptions as the site fully matures—combined with larger, more diverse participant groups—will help determine whether expert concerns reflect real operational friction or if public optimism signifies lasting community satisfaction.

In summary:

- The transformation is evaluated positively overall.
- The measurement scale demonstrates high reliability.
- The strongest dimensions are daily revitalization (S4) and urban integration (S5), while the weakest dimension is regular use (S3).
- Expert and public perceptions are largely consistent, with significant differences only in social impact and safety (S9).

Accordingly, activity and access arrangements should be strengthened to support more stable regular use. In addition, monitoring strategies are recommended to address expert concerns related to safety and social interaction.

5. Conclusion

This study assessed how the transformation of the 1001 Airport Mall (a brownfield site) is perceived by different stakeholders, namely 25 experts and the general public 50 person. Overall, the results show that the transformation is evaluated positively. Participants tended to assign higher ratings to aspects related to daily use and revitalization (S4) and urban integration (S5). At the same time, their evaluations were more conservative with respect to regular use (S3), suggesting that while the area has improved and gained momentum, this improvement may not yet have fully developed into a stable everyday usage pattern. This suggests that while the transformation increased usage intensity and daily mobility in the area, additional measures/incentives may be needed to ensure regular use becomes more stable over time.

The lack of significant differences between expert and public evaluations across most dimensions indicates broad consensus on the perceived impacts of the transformation. However, a significant divergence was found in the S9 (social impact and safety) dimension: public participants rated the residential-focused repurposing more positively than experts in terms of safety and sociality. This difference can be explained by the more cautious approach of experts to potential risk areas of transformation (density, mixed-use balances, etc.).

From an empirical perspective, the findings highlight a clear divide: while spatial connectivity and immediate urban vitality are well-received, long-term routine engagement and safety evaluations diverge between experts and the public. To address these findings effectively, actionable planning and design strategies should be tailored to specific professional roles:

- For Urban Planners and Municipal Bodies: To close the gap in regular use (S3), local agencies should introduce targeted public programming, transit connections, and ground-floor commercial zoning that encourage routine daily visits rather than temporary passing traffic.
- For Architects and Urban Designers: To ease professional concerns regarding density and safety (S9), design practices should prioritize active frontages, clear sightlines, and pedestrian-friendly public spaces that physically enhance social security.
- For Municipal Assessment Frameworks: Local authorities should institute ongoing post-occupancy evaluation tools to monitor how residential density impacts neighborhood infrastructure over time.

In conclusion, the study reveals the necessity of considering not only physical interventions but also how stakeholders experience dimensions such as continuity of use, urban integration, and perception of social security in brownfield transformations during the planning process. In the implementation and monitoring processes, access, programming, and activity proposals that will support the strengthening of regular use, as well as design/operational improvements aimed at reducing stakeholder concerns in the context of security and sociality, should be planned.

This study, using the 1001 Airport Mall example, contributes to a stakeholder-based reading of transformation success indicators by comparing the perception of brownfield transformation from expert-public perspectives. Thus, it provides a framework for monitoring the "acceptance/perception" dimension in planning decisions with concrete data. Furthermore, it is expected to contribute to urban planners, architects, engineers, and government representatives working on brownfield areas.

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