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## **“They were built to last”: Anti-consumption and the Materiality of Waste in Obsolete**

### **Buildings**

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## **“They were built to last”: Anti-consumption and the Materiality of Waste in Obsolete Buildings**

### **Abstract**

Previous consumer research on waste has prioritized disposable and low-involvement possessions. The authors extend scholarship into the context of obsolete buildings as a means to better engage with the complex materiality of waste and to explore the role anti-consumption plays in consumers' valuations of end-stage consumption. This study focuses on the phenomenon of urban exploration, a subculture who seek to discover and explore derelict buildings. Drawing on an ethnographic study including in-depth interviews, the authors reveal how anti-consumption manifests in the urban environment in terms of alternative understandings of value. In contrast to the economic valuations that often dominate public policy decision making, this study highlights the need for policy makers to consider diverse, and perhaps conflicting, value regimes. The authors propose an Obsolescence Impact Evaluation that enables a systematic assessment of the stakeholders potentially impacted by redevelopment and demolition, differing regimes of valuation relevant to the decision and potential uses of the buildings. The authors suggest various ways that public policy makers can take advantage of this tool.

**Keywords:** anti-consumption, waste, resistance, obsolescence, ethnography.

Public policy makers increasingly face pressure to reduce waste in line with the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle). This has extended research attention from consumer acquisition to the often under-theorized end-stages of consumption (De Coverley et al. 2008; Parsons and Maclaran 2009). For example, prior research has focused on the scale and complexity of food waste (Block et al. 2016) and the various ways consumers seek to prolong the useful life of objects (Brosius, Fernandez and Cherrier 2013). Much of this research stream focuses on relatively low-involvement products. In this paper, we follow Prothero et al.'s (2011, p. 33) suggestion to expand the scope of consumption research into "significantly different contexts" and focus on obsolete buildings. We see this as an ideal context to better engage with the materiality of waste (Ekström 2015; Gregson and Crag 2010) and to explore the role anti-consumption plays in consumers' valuations of end-stage consumption.

Our study focuses on the phenomenon of urban exploration, a subculture who seek to discover and explore derelict buildings (Garrett 2014). Urban explorers engage with the materiality of waste and photographically document these buildings to highlight a fascination with decay. Garrett's (2014) work suggests that urban exploration is driven by a resistance against the privatization of civic space. More broadly, Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw (2012) explore how urban spaces can be appropriated by consumers as a resistance to consumerist and capitalist discourses in the mainstream marketplace. By moving beyond resistance, we explore how anti-consumption manifests in the urban environment in terms of alternative understandings of value. We are guided by the following research questions. How does anti-consumption manifest in the consumption of obsolete buildings? What values do consumers ascribe to obsolete buildings? What anti-consumption practices do consumers enact to express their appreciation of the alternative values of obsolete buildings? How can public policy makers use insights from anti-consumption to re-evaluate the significance of obsolete buildings?

Urban explorers see value in wasting buildings that is overlooked by other institutional stakeholders such as policy makers, urban planners and realtors. This highlights the subjective nature of value and illustrates the need for policy makers to consider diverse, and perhaps conflicting, value regimes. Türe (2014, p. 55) conceptualizes value regimes as “socially and historically defined contexts of valuation” that “allow objects to move across cultural boundaries, among parties with nonsimilar interests or standards of valuation.” Public policy makers and urban planners interact with the consumption cycle at a societal and community level in dealing with buildings that require restoration, redevelopment, and potentially demolition as properties move through their lifecycle. However, the value regime that often dominates in these decisions is an economic one. This overshadows the broader regimes of valuation that might shed an alternative perspective on these policy decisions. In particular, Ekström (2015) suggests that understanding the consumer perspective towards waste is necessary to generate effective interventions. By introducing theories of anti-consumption to aid our understanding of regimes of valuation, we demonstrate a broader perspective on the ways in which value is understood at end-stages of consumption.

It is important to consider what happens to buildings when they reach the end of their lifecycle, become obsolete and require disposal. Despite the durability of buildings in comparison to other consumer possessions, property is regarded as a “wasting asset” because of the ongoing maintenance needed to retain its investment value (Mansfield and Pinder 2008, p. 192). As Bryson (1997, p. 1444) suggests, “[i]n fact, as soon as a building is completed its obsolescence clock begins to tick.” Based on decennial census data from 2010, 8% of non-seasonal housing was vacant in the United States (Molloy 2016) and in England there were over 600,000 vacant dwellings in 2015, with approximately one-third of these being vacant long term (Department for Communities and Local Government 2016). Beyond housing, other components of the built urban environment, from industrial to community

spaces, are caught up in a dynamic cycle of value creation and destruction (Weber 2002). The environmental encumbrance of building stock points towards the need for greater sustainability in the maintenance of existing buildings and their recognition as a valuable resource (Thomsen and van der Flier 2011).

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we review relevant literature on anti-consumption, obsolescence, and value regimes. Next, we provide an overview of urban exploration to better contextualize the study and detail methods of data collection and analysis. Findings are organized around three central themes that emerged from our data; rejecting the modern, reimagining obsolescence and reclaiming value. Finally, we outline implications for public policy based around our Obsolescence Impact Evaluation.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **Anti-consumption and Obsolescence**

Anti-consumption refers to a means against consumption (Zavestoski 2002) and can manifest as an attitude, activity or behavior (Cherrier 2009; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009) that is orientated against consumption in general at the macro level, or against specific consumption activities, products or brands at the micro level (Cherrier, Black and Lee 2011; Iyer and Muncy 2009; Craig-Lees 2006). Consumers use anti-consumption to express both societal and personal concerns (Iyer and Muncy 2009). Lee et al. (2011) identify three categories of anti-consumption; reject, restrict and reclaim. Firstly, rejection occurs when consumers intentionally avoid or exclude certain products from their consumption habits, such as boycotting (Portwood-Stacer 2012; Lee, Fernandez and Hyman 2009), brand avoidance (Friedman 1999) and voluntary simplicity (Shaw and Moares 2009). Secondly, restriction occurs when consumers reduce or lower their consumption of certain products such as utility services (Lee, Fernandez and Hyman 2009) or social media (Anderson,

Hamilton and Tonner 2014). Thirdly, reclamation involves an alteration to the normal consumption cycle of acquisition, use and disposal, such as growing your own produce or upcycling products (Wilson 2016). Lee et al. (2011) suggest that these categories may overlap *within* consumption practices and *with* consumer resistance. Consumer resistance refers to “the way individuals and groups practice a strategy of appropriation in response to structures of domination” (Poster 1992, p. 1) and can be driven by an opposition to multiple power concerns (Lee et al. 2009). This is evident in Cherrier, Black and Lee’s (2011) concept of intentional non-consumption which is both an act of resistance against other careless consumers and anti-consumption positioned by the consumer’s own subjectivity.

Anti-consumption literature has explored consumption against wastefulness (Dobscha 1998), however, the materiality of waste has received little attention. One exception is Cherrier’s (2010, p. 259) discussion of anti-consumerism driven by an attachment to and custodianship of devalued objects “in order to rescue and safeguard material objects from being thrown away or wasted.” Cherrier (2010, p. 266) argues that objects carry social meaning where they are “loaded with membership significance to a time, a person, or a place” that enables consumers to demarcate modern throwaway objects and past objects that are charged with a sense of history, tradition, authenticity, and value.

Cherrier’s (2010) perspective is reminiscent of literature that depicts how old objects are valued beyond their “functional calculation, and answer to other kinds of demand such as witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism” (Baudrillard 1996). For Baudrillard (1996), antiques align with an atmospheric value of historicalness and a symbolic value associated with a myth of origins. For example, Borgerson and Schroeder (2007, p. 112) illustrate how the material and aesthetic dimensions of used books create meaning and value for consumers: “Used goods tell consumption stories and consumption stories sell used goods.” Similarly Parsons (2007, 2010) demonstrates how the history of objects can be an important source of

value within the antique market that drives dealers' passion and care for antiques objects. The cultural biography of things is therefore central to the commodification process, often bringing to the fore aspects which might otherwise be hidden (Kopytoff 1986).

Prior research on used goods focuses on contexts where material integrity is retained. In contrast, we explore end-stage consumption of buildings that are obsolete and in material decay. Literature has not theoretically engaged with obsolescence as an important state within anti-consumption. This informs our first research question: How does anti-consumption manifest in the consumption of obsolete buildings? To contextualize this research question, we now turn to the literature on obsolescence.

Obsolescence is emblematic of the end-stage of consumption as it marks an end or death where technology, communication and products are no longer viable (Fitzpatrick 2011). Obsolescence is "something out of date....displaced by modernization and progress" (Weber 2002, p. 522). The implications of obsolescence are far reaching as an outcome of capitalism (Maycroft 2015) and a throwaway society (Cooper 2016). This calls to mind Campbell's (2015, p. 29) discussion of the valorization of the new and the novel as a contributory factor to the unsustainable nature of contemporary (Western) consumer culture. Obsolescence is evident in the built environment, however, the meaning of property-based obsolescence is ambiguous, with Mansfield and Pinder (2008) critiquing the lack of research and poor understanding from a policy perspective. Within the context of buildings, Thomsen and van der Flier (2011, p. 353) define obsolescence as "a process of declining performance resulting in the end of the service life." The authors highlight the multidimensional nature of this process suggesting that building obsolescence can be due to physical and behavioral factors and internal and external factors. The interrelationships between these different dimensions is captured in their conceptual model of obsolescence (see figure 1). Whilst some of these factors are difficult to control, such as physical deterioration of buildings over time,

figure 1 also illustrates the potential role of human behavior in accelerating the end of a building's life. When behavioral involvement extends beyond the building's owners to other external stakeholders, the complexity further increases (represented by the diagonal arrows).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Arguably, the potential for policy intervention varies across these different manifestations of obsolescence. To illustrate, some of the examples in the top left quadrant might be regarded as natural processes somewhat similar to what Weber (2002, p. 533) describes as “time given material expression in physical space.” In such cases, policy makers have little agency to reverse the obsolescence process. In contrast, policy makers have faced criticism in other contexts for the role they play in location obsolescence. Existent literature typically regards derelict buildings as metonyms of deprivation, spatial inequality and social stigmatization (Apel 2015). This is referred to as territorial stigma where institutions such as public policy and media often proliferate a spatial taint on an area by reinforcing associations with poverty, degraded housing and crime (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014). Indeed, strategic stigmatization may be an attempt by municipalities “to stabilize inherently ambiguous concepts like blight and obsolescence and create the appearance of certitude out of the cacophony of claims about value” (Weber 2002, p. 520). In this sense, “[o]bsolescence has become a neoliberal alibi for creative destruction.” (Weber 2002, p. 532). We now explore “the cacophony of claims about value” in relation to the context of buildings.

### **The Value Regimes of Buildings**

Consumer research conceptualizes value as emergent, interactive and subjective (Holbrook 1999), based upon consumers' symbolic meaning-making (Shankar, Elliot and Fitchett 2009; Ventakesh and Meamber 2006). Türe (2014) suggests that value exists in social and historical regimes of valuation that allow objects to move across cultural



categories of value. Thus, value is eternally in flux and socially and culturally determined rather than being a quality of the object itself (De Coverley et al. 2008).

Consumer researchers have identified numerous types of value. Holbrook (1999) identifies three types of value including; aesthetic value as an experience of beauty or pleasure through form, moral value as a positive act to enhance welfare of others, and spiritual value where consumers encounter transcendental experiences. Further, semiotic value (Levy 1959) emerges as an exchange of signs between marketers and consumers, and linking-value refers to the shared interests or activities connecting people, groups and communities (Cova 1997). This body of consumer research locates consumers' value attainment in either value-in-exchange or value-in-use (Türe 2014). This is informed by a Marxian perspective of value where use value has general utility for meeting human needs and exchange value is determined by quantity as it enters an exchange relationship. In extension to this, Lanier, Radar and Fowler (2013) distinguish between 'value' that is determined by sociocultural market logics, and 'worth' that transcends market valuations. Worth is an appreciation or depreciation of the significance of something for its own sake that does not necessarily have subjective utility, and is characterized as highly transitory, idiosyncratic, and discrete (Lanier, Radar and Fowler 2013).

Weber (2002, p. 519) suggests that a range of state and nonstate institutions influence value in the built environment, stating that the "very materiality of the built environment sets off struggles between use and exchange values, between those with emotional attachment to place and those without such attachments." Heritage agencies often prioritize historical structures that are of ideological significance to national identity, but neglect obsolete buildings of the recent past because of their historical immaturity and physical deterioration (Pétursdóttir 2012). This often results in heritage prejudice that determines the types of buildings that are preserved and remembered and in turn perpetuates a distinctive heritage

value regime. In contrast, a real estate perspective tends to align with an economic exchange valuation with obsolescence viewed as a negative process that impacts on depreciation (Mansfield and Pinder 2008). Furthermore, derelict and obsolete property creates a barrier to the revitalization of urban areas, reduces the market value of surrounding properties and undermines the economic vitality of neighborhoods by increasing homeowner and commercial insurance (Accordino and Johnson 2000). Bryson (1997) discusses property development using the terminology of space-economy and considers building obsolescence as a consequence of the rent gap between the current building condition and its potential prime condition.

Similarly, local councils may also be concerned with exchange value, and, given their alignment with market rule, disregard obsolete buildings as nothing more than an answer to investor demands (Weber 2002). Another key perspective comes from urban planners who increasingly adopt a strategy of entrepreneurial governance as a response to de-industrialization (Miles 2010; Harvey 1989). This tends to involve an emphasis on style and image, and once again, the language of economics is central, for example, Miles (2010, p. 43) suggests that urban planners are primarily seeking to “build speculative confidence in the city as a fully functional economic organism in its own right.” While we recognize that there are competing social concerns such as the need for inexpensive housing or public recreational spaces, Groth and Corijn (2005) suggest that these are often subordinate in urban policy.

Chris Leslie’s (2016) ‘Disappearing Glasgow’ project provides a useful example which focuses on the demolition of high-rise tower block flats within the city. Local authorities, who are often the key decision-makers, present this as a way of looking to an economically prosperous future and eradicating the social problems of drug use and crime that are often associated with these buildings. However, the consumer perspective is a more emotional one and this remains largely absent from decision-making. As a prior resident of

one of the tower blocks commented, “Once I seen it demolished it tore a bit out of me, just to see a lifetime destroyed sort of thing and, all those people, where have they all gone? Where did everybody go?” Whilst many institutional stakeholders may care about social perspectives, they are often bound by economic constraints. In contrast, the dominant perspective for consumers is a personal one that is driven by life experiences and memories.

This highlights the need to integrate a broader sociocultural perspective into valuation discussions. In line with Pétursdóttir’s (2012) call for the democratization of heritage, our second research question asks what values consumers ascribe to obsolete buildings, and our third research question goes onto explore how consumers express their appreciation of these alternative values of obsolete buildings. In our conclusions, we then build upon the insights from our findings to discuss how public policy makers can re-evaluate the significance of obsolete buildings.

## **Method**

### **Research Context**

Urban exploration is a subculture of individuals who explore, trespass and photograph obsolete buildings. It is a highly dangerous activity that is committed illegally as explorers are not authorized to access buildings, nor have ownership of them. There are a range of competing motivations driving urban exploration including enjoyment of experiential and sensorial encounters (e.g. Garrett 2014), transgression as a form of recreational trespass (Garrett 2014), community status-seeking and establishing credibility (Mott and Roberts 2014), visual documentation for memory, commemoration and heritage conservation (Bennett 2011, Stones 2016) and visual appreciation of the aesthetics of decay (Paquet 2016). Urban explorers are often driven to travel long distances to document modern ruins from around the world. This has been popularized by failures of capitalism (Edensor 2005)

whereby deindustrialized cities are increasingly drawing the public gaze, resulting in a “ruin landscape” (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014, p. 4983) of derelict industrial and retail buildings, and abandoned communities. Some urban explorers see themselves as global citizens of neglected heritage and therefore build significant knowledge and expertise on disappearing architectural movements. In many ways, urban exploration is a grassroots effort that supports the democratization of heritage away from institutional authorities, who often prioritize ideologically based values of national identity and historical perseverance, and towards consumer stakeholders, who appreciate a more diverse range of values. In this sense, urban explorers hold a unique and valuable perspective on evaluating the built environment.

Urban exploration has sociocultural roots in Romanticism whereby ruins were believed to represent the sublime, the conquering of nature over culture. This enabled individuals to encounter aspects of wilderness and meet their primitive need for self-preservation. It has also been traced back to accounts of individuals exploring subterranean tunnels and skyscrapers in the Western world, such as Philibert Aspairt’s exploration of the catacombs of Paris in 1793 and Walt Whitman’s exploration of the Atlantic Avenue Tunnel in 1861 (Ninjalicious 2015). Urban exploration remained a relatively underground scene until the 1990s when it became a recognizable subculture with the publication of zines, books, photography and websites (Ninjalicious 2015), and has become increasingly more mainstream throughout the 2000s. In particular, ruin aesthetics have been co-opted by the market from tourist experiences of abandoned hospitals (e.g. Ellis Island Immigrant Hospital) to retail environments that use faux patina and reclaimed materials.

Urban exploration involves complex practices of researching place histories, discovering access to sites and the physical exploration of derelict buildings. Urban explorers practice a shared ethos of ‘take only photographs, leave only footprints’ that prevents them from altering or damaging these buildings. These buildings exist in a range of different states

of deterioration; some are derelict but remain in relatively good condition, others are obsolete and no longer have a viable purpose and some are beyond the point of repair and awaiting demolition. Urban explorers also act as archivists by textually and photographically documenting these often forgotten structures that they share with online community forums. This has re-established a cultural fascination with urban decay that has appeared in a number of art exhibitions, such as Tate Britain's 'Ruin Lust' (2014).

### **Research Approach**

Our findings arise from a three-year multi-method ethnography that draws upon a range of techniques including sensory ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing, and netnography. Throughout the data collection the first-author participated in urban exploration practices by exploring, researching and photographing abandoned buildings, and participating within online forums and social media. Despite the common practices of trespass in urban exploration, the researcher only explored those buildings that were publicly accessible. This approach allowed us to become immersed within the context of study and gain a holistic understanding of the practices and experience of urban exploration.

Data collection began with netnographic observations of urban exploration forums, Facebook groups and personal websites that were identified as "relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous, data-rich, and experientially satisfying" (Kozinets 2015, p. 175). These pages were extremely active with new posts being uploaded on average every hour. Regular monitoring of discussion threads, social networking pages and personal websites was undertaken on a weekly basis for one year. Throughout this process the research was overt and communicated through social media information and interactions with individuals.

The netnography facilitated contact with urban explorers who were invited to participate in an interview. Interview participants were identified through purposeful

sampling coupled with snowball sampling and were selected based on their experience of urban exploration and knowledge of the subcultural movement. Overall 28 participants were interviewed (see Table 1). Participants were all Caucasian and aged between 21-53 years old, with two thirds male and the remaining third female. Efforts were made to be inclusive of a range of ages, ethnicities and genders, however, this sample represents the limited demographic of the subculture, which is not ethnically diverse and is dominated by males (Garrett 2012).

Insert Table 1 around here

The findings within this paper primarily draw on interview data. However, the netnography and other ethnographic materials contribute to our understanding and interpretation of the interview texts. Ethnographic interviewing was used to gain richer understanding of consumers' experiences by locating the interview process within the consumption context (Heyl 2008; Holt 1997). Interviews were conducted at site locations where possible and over video-calling for geographically distanced participants. This face-to-face visualization was important to build rapport and afforded the use of auto-driven photo elicitation (Heisley and Levy 1991), whereby participants displayed and discussed their own exploration photographs. Interviews followed a semi-structured approach that covered broad topic areas to allow multiple topics to surface (Holt 1997). Participants were encouraged to use rich descriptions in explaining their practices, share stories about exploration trips and describe their perception of the buildings. They were also encouraged to reflect upon their experiences of urban exploration and the wider societal forces that enable and constrict their exploration habits. Following Holt (1997), emic terms created by the participant were probed to elicit deeper understandings of their grounded meaning. Interviews lasted between 90-120 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed in full, generating 630 pages of interview

data and 62 pages of interview fieldnotes that were used during the analysis and interpretation stages.

Data analysis followed an iterative process, allowing the researchers to move back and forth between emic terms and etic theorization. In particular we followed Glaser's (1965) constant-comparative method whereby intertextual similarities and differences across the data set were identified. Further, we focused on identifying recurring patterns and processes, and explored any alternative or negative cases (Miles and Huberman 1994). This allowed for greater sensitization to themes emerging from the field, rather than projecting predetermined meanings onto emic data (Thompson 1997). The interpretation was equally iterative and was achieved by tacking between fieldnotes and extant theory to learn from the social world during analysis (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). It also sought to recognize resemblances in meaning or emic redundancies (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993) across a range of situations and individuals (Spiggle 1994).

### **Findings**

Our findings are structured around our first three research questions: How does anti-consumption manifest in the consumption of obsolete buildings? What values do consumers ascribe to obsolete buildings? What anti-consumption practices do consumers enact to express their appreciation of the alternative values of obsolete buildings? Our participants' discourses of anti-consumption were confined to the context of urban exploration rather than broader consumption practices. In considering the subcultural practices of urban explorers, our study exhibits some parallels to Cherrier (2010)'s focus on a subtle form of anti-consumption. Similar to Cherrier's participants, the urban explorers who participated in our study engage with the materiality of waste as a form of protest against the consumerist ideology of newness. However, there are two key points of difference. First, whilst Cherrier

(2010) considers the consumer custodianship of material objects, we extend the focus from possessions to buildings with uncertain ownership. Second, most of Cherrier's participants discuss material objects that have the potential for future use. In our context of obsolete buildings, the potential of future viability is more ambiguous.

Our participants had awareness of the social stigma associated with derelict properties. In discussing the dereliction of his local high-rise, Rory suggests that derelict buildings become a “*symbol of the neglect of the full area*”. Such territorial stigmatization often symbolizes larger macro inequalities and changes in economic and social structures, such as deindustrialization. Whilst literature often suggests property abandonment is an indicator of regional disinvestment, Burchell and Listokin (1981) argue it is a symptom and disease that perpetuates urban decline. These areas become trapped in a cycle of inertia and degradation that extends beyond the city to rural areas. Simon's comments on rural Welsh farmhouses highlight the cyclical nature of neglect that he relates to wider societal shifts:

*I have done a lot research into Welsh life and the sociology of Wales and the different periods of the last century when people migrated to England and Australia basically. So it does tie in with a lot of these houses, farmhouses and cottages becoming abandoned because there was no work so they just left. After the war there was certain times in Wales that became very depressed so everyone legged it to other places in the 70s and the 80s. So in houses like that you feel very sad that they have just left and left everything behind, and you think well why didn't you take anything? No they don't take anything. (Simon)*

Simon's comments highlight the impact of agricultural decline and deindustrialization that begins a cycle of social problems that cumulatively marks a death of farm communities in rural Wales. This reflects location obsolescence in a rural context whereby an area suffers



devaluation and is made redundant (Thomsen and van der Flier 2011; Bryson 1997). Pockets of location obsolescence occur due to uneven capitalist development whereby regions that rely upon specific industries are vulnerable to economic fluctuations and deindustrialization. Notorious examples include the urban decay of the Rust Belt in the United States (Schilling and Logan 2008), the decline of shipbuilding in the North East of England (Hudson 2014) and the Glasgow Effect (Hanlon 2015) whereby waves of industrialization and deindustrialization have severe negative impacts on mortality, health and poverty.

Spatial taints extend beyond location obsolescence and also include the biography of buildings themselves. Nate talks about the “*stigma*” attached to Kings Park Hospital, a notorious asylum in New York, due to its ill treatment of patients:

*I think they would like to see some condominiums come in to boost the economy. It is also a stigma. People are like “you live where that old asylum is”. People can see it from their houses or whatever, and it is a constant reminder too. It definitely does not have a great association. Some people were genuinely helped at this facility but that is not really what is remembered of that place. It is kind of looked on as a dark mark in that place’s history and I think they would rather forget it. (Nate)*

From Nate’s comments, Kings Park emerges as a material reminder (Stevens and McGuire 2015) of economic and social neglect. Epp and Price (2010) suggest that the biography of a space can be a constricting force that shapes meanings and uses. Indeed, the biographic stigma of Kings Park has contaminated the surrounding area causing a vicious circle that discourages economic development that the community perceives as a means to cleanse the dark history of the region. According to Bradford (2009), consumers purge assets with negative associations by stripping them of indexical value and reallocating them prosaic value. Residents reallocate economic prosaic value to Kings Park Hospital in an effort to

purge the building of its negative indexical associations of the past. However, urban explorers view dereliction and obsolescence differently to dominant market logics, and, in the remainder of our findings, we build upon Lee et al.'s (2011) conceptualization of anti-consumption and consider how participants reject the modern, reimagine obsolescence, and reclaim value.

### **Rejecting the Modern**

Rejection behavior, as a form of anti-consumption, is often invisible as consumers avoid or exclude certain products and services through intentional non-consumption (Cherrier et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2011). This is a prime way for consumers to demonstrate consistency between their ethics and behaviors (Black and Cherrier 2010). However, as Moraes, Carrigan and Szmigin (2012) highlight, coherent inconsistencies may emerge between consumer attitudes and behavior that can be understood as signs of meaningful, albeit contradictory, interactions with markets. This is evident with our participants who readily espouse a rhetorical rejection of the cultural trend of disposability, a “*throwaway society*” (Paul) that is particular to the context of buildings, but does not necessarily extend to other consumption contexts. Our participants acknowledge the disposability of contemporary buildings and critique their poor design which is a characteristic identified by Thomsen and van der Vliet (2011) as indicative of building obsolescence. This is evident in Euan's discussion:

*[B]uildings are designed to have a twenty-five year life cycle. [...] Although really to maintain the life cycles of buildings maintenance should be a continual presence in the building's life. That is not what happens and buildings are neglected. (Euan)*

Euan's comments suggest an architectural institutional bias towards planned obsolescence which in turn drives replacement consumption (Campbell 2015). Similar to other anti-

consumption literature on possessions (Brosius, Fernandez and Cherrier 2013; Cherrier 2010), our participants would like to see building lifecycles prolonged:

*I think everything should be re-used. Everything. I always say we are a wasteful race. We would rather knock down good sturdy stuff and build cheap wobbly crap. It is like with houses, if I was going to be buying a house, I wouldn't buy a new build because you can't even stick a picture on the walls...You get these new houses and they are just built so shoddy. They have no feeling to them. (Ross)*

Ross rejects the reification of the 'new' within the built environment and positions himself in resistance to new-build housing that translates into behavior as he lives in a traditional period house. He distinguishes between old and new buildings and suggests that, despite their recognized economic value, new buildings do not deserve their dominant place in the market because they are not underpinned by any greater worth. For urban explorers, these new styles that are replacing old buildings are "homogeneous" (Sam), devoid of any character, "plain and uninteresting" (Matt) and associated with poor construction and low quality materials.

Similar to Ross, Simon avidly dislikes modern buildings that he deems to be disposable, characterless and devoid of enduring value. He elaborates upon this premise within his discussion of St Edmund's School for Boys:

*[L]ast year they demolished it which was very sad because you know now what will be built on it...Wimpy homes and Barrett homes. It is easier for them to just knock it down because the land is usually more valuable than the property. [...] They are just boxes really. In a hundred years' time they are just going to look boring and the same. They have no character. I am always moaning that the modern buildings have no character. They don't,*

*they are just crap. They go up in ten minutes and they won't last. [...] That is progress apparently. (Simon)*

Many participants share a common dislike for new or modern housing that is captured by Simon's comment on Wimpy and Barrett homes being characterless "boxes". This rejection of specific brands associated with the new build movement is reminiscent of Malvena Reynold's (1962) 'Little Boxes', which satirizes the conformity of suburban housing developments as "little boxes made of ticky, tacky... little boxes all the same".

What often troubles participants more than new builds is that the existing architecture is removed or erased to make way for these developments reflecting a hierarchy of value which they consider misplaced. Participants are troubled by the social disregard for traditional architectural designs and materials, and the lack of wider societal recognition of the worth that they place upon these buildings.

*In these old buildings they have got so much character, history, not just to the local towns but to the architecture, to the styles that were used to make them. (Ross)*

For Ross, old buildings are defined by their structural integrity, character and cultural history and as Larson and Urry (2011) suggest, they signify, for our participants, a solidarity against societal forces of destruction and continuity between generations. By seeing worth in these old buildings, participants move beyond rhetorical and behavioral rejection of the 'new.' Through intentional non-consumption, they collectively disrupt dominant market logics that determine value. As Portwood-Stacer (2012, p. 88) suggests "anti-consumption does more than directly subvert its object of opposition [...] it carries cultural and political significance for participants". Participants therefore seek to subvert the dominant hierarchies of the

marketplace and their urban exploration acts as a form of anarchism, a recognized radical alternative to traditional consumerism.

Participants locate blame on both the marketplace and individual landowners for the lack of recognition of important buildings and, as such, place themselves in opposition to these institutional stakeholders. Paul suggests that the “*people that own them just leave them to crumble so they can just sell the land off for development*” and Ross claims “*they want them to crumble, they want to knock them down because they want to use the land to build houses*”. Drawing on Lanier et al. (2013), a building’s cultural worth is cast aside for economic value. Whilst local communities may seek redevelopment as a means of alleviating territorial stigma, participants remain deeply skeptical of the motivations that drive these projects, cite land value as the main driver and reject the sanitized environments which replace their obsolete buildings. Within our findings it emerged that urban exploration is a means for our participants to ascribe alternative values to the built environment.

### **Reimagining Obsolescence**

In contrast to dominant market logics that privilege innovation and progress, participants find value in obsolete buildings on various registers. Whilst we acknowledge that the practice of urban exploration involves community-building (linking-value) and is highly experiential (spiritual value), our focus here pertains to the values consumers ascribe to obsolete buildings. As such, we focus on forsaken, aesthetic and terminal values as the most dominant and recurring within our findings. Obsolete buildings act as vessels to appreciate the used, neglected and discarded. In this sense, consumers reimagine obsolescence through countering the dominant economic regime of valuation.

#### *Forsaken Value*

Findings reveal that consumers ascribe derelict and obsolete buildings with forsaken value, whereby their neglected state makes them deserving of recognition and appreciation:

*For me it is about respect for the buildings. You are bringing attention to something that nobody really cares about. As someone with a mental health condition I know what it feels like to be abandoned. I can relate to these places. (Ariel).*

While Ariel draws on her distinctive personal experience of abandonment, she is not alone in finding worth in obsolete buildings to counter their societal neglect. Unlike the prevailing perspective which suggests that consumers are socialized into avoiding waste (De Coverley et al. 2008), urban explorers often empathize with wasting buildings and see them as worthy of attention. This is further reinforced by Luke:

*Things like old factories, they have still got memories for people even if they are not the prettiest. I think it is too easily forgotten about nowadays. Knock it down and build something made of glass...I don't get it, how can it be forgotten about and left? (Luke)*

Luke questions why buildings that have community significance are neglected given their capacity to be sites of individual and collective memory. In recognizing the cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986) of buildings, urban explorers can uncover cultural meanings that might otherwise be overlooked. A further example is provided by Josh who is critical of the classification system at play in macro responses to building obsolescence. In particular, he shares concerns about the neglect of the history of the working classes:

*I feel it has been neglected. We don't pay attention to that kind of history as opposed to other history. [...] In Scotland people obsess about the castles of Scotland. [...] Some of them are in ruins but they are well looked after ruins.*

*They have lots of people to look after them. They have visitor centers and cafes. You see lots of these equally historically important buildings...things like The Finnieston crane, which is iconic in Glasgow. Ok, it is looked after a little bit but it is not very well maintained or looked after for a historic monument. (Josh)*

Josh introduces heritage agencies as another institutional stakeholder with a specific approach to valuation. His comments on the neglect of industrial history highlight the forsaken value of these buildings that reflects the heritage prejudice that befalls many modern ruins (Pétursdóttir 2012). Many of our participants share a similar resistance to the power of such institutions for their seemingly narrow criteria used to inform preservation decisions. The heritage agency emphasizes grandeur and style, often prioritizing their resources towards those sites that have widespread appeal and are likely to attract tourist attention. In contrast, those sites that have more localized “*iconic*” status remain largely neglected. Prior research suggests that objects can be regarded as cultural resources that materialize individual identities and the preservation of such objects works in opposition to the consumption of the new (Cherrier 2010). We extend this perspective beyond the context of individual consumer possessions to a more collective level and find that our participants value iconic community buildings as reminders of a collective neglected past.

### *Terminal Value*

Unlike ruins that are protected by heritage agencies, derelict buildings often lie abandoned for years with an inevitable physical demise. This is evident in Nate’s discussion of his fascination with decay:

*Decay reminds us of an ultimate fate that nothing lasts in this world. I think that consciously or subconsciously resonates with us. We all realise, the*

*same way that we realise in a tragedy that it is doomed, these buildings are doomed. (Nate)*

For Nate, decay highlights the finite nature of human experience that is made evident in the degradation of these man-made structures. This is particularly pertinent for issues of end-stage consumption whereby terminal value may increase the appeal of objects. Indeed Türe (2014) demonstrates that the anticipation of loss can increase consumer attachment.

Beyond symbolizing death, these buildings have a real end-point and are quintessential artefacts of end-stage consumption. Being the last person to see a building has its own value, as Nick suggests:

*Some of the places I have been I don't think that many people are going to see them. I have seen some places in the UK that I don't think people will be able to see again because some of them are decaying and some are gone.*  
(Nick)

Nick highlights the finite character of these fragile buildings that will cease to exist in the near future. In this sense, these buildings have a terminal quality, whereby their immanent and inevitable demise increases their allure. Like limited edition products, urban exploration is a form of restricted consumption where scarcity increases value. The allure of derelict buildings emerges as the search for finite experiences that are often inaccessible and potentially unknown to the wider public. Terminal value is also associated with a particular aesthetic, as explored below.

### *Aesthetic Value*



In contrast to a local authority and urban planning perspective that deems derelict and obsolete buildings to be symbols of deprivation, poverty and crime, our participants find an aesthetic appeal to these places. This aesthetic appreciation is evident in participants' descriptions of decaying buildings as "*beautiful*" (Tom), "*stunning*" (Lydia) and "*photogenic*" (Seb). Participants find the aesthetic of obsolescence more appealing than modern buildings which offers an interesting contrast to prior understandings of aesthetically-related consumption which prioritizes the new (Campbell 2015). Liam dislikes "*the pristine*", believing that photographs of modern buildings make "*your pictures look like an estate agents' pictures*". Thus, in prioritizing an alternative regime of valuation, our participants see value that would be overlooked by other institutional stakeholders such as realtors. This is evident in his photograph of an abandoned hospital that was built in 1888 and has been neglected for over 25 years (Figure 2):

**Figure 2: Abandoned hospital, UK [courtesy of participant Liam].**

Insert Figure 2 about here

The visible presence of decay in this photograph is evident through the moss, water ingress and structural damage that characterizes its material demise. However, our participants still find aesthetic value in such buildings, as Lydia discusses, "*A lot of people would see decay as a negative thing. For me I actually thought it was quite beautiful. [...] When I say beautiful, I mean beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is a beauty in decay that I see.*" Lydia's comments on the beauty of decay reflect the notion of the 'paradox of ugliness' (Kuplen 2013) whereby aesthetic value can be found in things that are deemed to be positively displeasing. This notion draws upon Kantian aesthetics that suggest ugliness is not in opposition to beauty as it has its own aesthetic allure and value, whereas disgust opposes beauty as it physically repels the viewer through loathing (Feloj 2013). For urban explorers,

decay has an aesthetic quality that is deeply alluring. Our participants give examples of the beauty of decay relating to a diverse range of structures in the built environment at various stages of deterioration, including those which would not typically be considered as aesthetically pleasing such as derelict hospitals, abandoned houses and industrial ruins. This is evident in Simon's photographs of an abandoned residential house.

**Figure 3: Abandoned residential property, UK. [courtesy of participant Simon].**

Insert Figure 3a about here

Insert Figure 3b right about here

For Simon, the degradation of buildings is something that is beautiful to photograph: *“the wall is all crumbling and the wall paper is peeling down. Maybe there is some ivy coming down as well. If you can photograph these two things together then this is the perfect thing for me.”* This concurs with Lexi who suggests, *“I love the morbid colours of decay and the special light... the more decay and grime the more interesting a place is for me.”* In contrast to the generally accepted view of decay as out-of-place (Douglas 1966), our participants value the beauty of dereliction and obsolescence.

Nate highlights the depth of aesthetic value in discussing his involvement in producing a documentary about Kings Park Hospital in New York (see <http://www.projectsenum.com/videos/>). At the height of its use, the hospital was home to 10,000 patients but, since its closure in 1996, has remained abandoned:

*We obviously didn't do a straightforward documentary on the place. We didn't do the interviews with the people who were there because that is not the only value that this place has. It is not historical, but it is aesthetically when we think a gorgeous occurrence, a chaotic occurrence that wasn't necessarily planned this way that has innately brought on a beauty by itself. We thought that alone was worth documenting and sharing. (Nate)*

Nate's discussion illustrates the variety of values that could be associated with this hospital from the historical value related to previous approaches to treating mental illness to a personal storytelling value for the people who were treated in the hospital. Drawing on Baudrillard (1996), obsolete buildings embody and signify a prior time that is remote from current cultural systems. While Nate does not deny the existence of these values he is more concerned with the aesthetic value of this obsolete building. For Nate, the chaotic and tragic circumstances of Kings Park Hospital as an infamous site of disturbing psychiatric treatments have created its own beauty through its physical demise.

Another example of beauty in decay is offered by William who discusses his appreciation of a burnt-out castle:

*I found it fascinating because the summer light came in and it lit everything up and there were all these beautiful purples and stuff. [...] You are getting the best of both worlds in some cases cause if it was intact it would be completely boring but if it was completely done in then it might be pretty boring. So you are using your imagination of what it used to look like and what it is beginning to look like, so it is taking on another life of itself.*

*(William)*

William's comments are illustrative of how aesthetics can "inspire people's tacit knowing, feeling, and imagination" (Biehl-Missal 2013, p. 256). William offers a deeply sensory description of the materiality of waste. Reasons against consumption go beyond the intellectual and can also be experienced bodily, inspired by aesthetic forms of communication (Biehl-Missal 2013). Whilst Biehl-Missal (2013) considers artworks that have been purposefully created to encourage consumers to critically reflect on consumption, many of our participants are moved by buildings in their natural state without any intervention or transformation from an artist. Urban explorers approach obsolete buildings as canvases that

engender what Biehl-Missal (2013, p. 256) refers to as an aesthetic knowing or a “corporeal and emotional understanding of consumption.” Some explorers are so moved by the aesthetic value of obsolete buildings that it encourages them to take on the artistic task themselves in an effort to encourage others to be similarly inspired. This will be further explored in the next section.

### **Reclaiming Value**

This section explores how participants engage in reclamation as a form of anti-consumption which salvages the value of derelict buildings and highlights this value to the broader community.

In the previous section we demonstrated the aesthetic value of obsolete buildings. Urban explorers often use photography both as a means of recording this value and, in turn, reclaiming derelict buildings. In a discussion of derelict and redeveloped churches, Ross explains how he uses photography to create a living memory (Mah 2010), shared beyond his urban explorer peers into the local community:

*I am trying to document all of the churches now because obviously as I am sure you are aware of now, the church congregations are shrinking, faith is getting less and less so it won't be too long before the churches of different faiths disappear in some towns. I document them now, get the local community talking about them. (Ross)*

Ross donates his photographs to local community projects in an effort to raise awareness of these often neglected buildings. Similarly, Ariel uses photography to “bring attention to the place, even if it is just for half an hour” [...] “making history more personal to people”. For Ariel, photographing buildings is about acknowledgment and attention that she feels they deserve due to their forsaken value. Türe (2014) suggests that an object’s life can be

prolonged through disposition conduits that re-evaluate and (re)associate the object with new regimes. We extend this into the context of buildings by highlighting photography as a productive anti-consumption practice.

Ariel has further extended her individual urban exploring behavior by participating in a local “*heritage campaign group*” in Belgium. This group’s main purpose is to save the 150-year-old Chateau Miranda from being demolished: “*Anyone who hurts Chateau Miranda is going to face Hell from me.*” Ariel has been exploring the site for some time, sharing this within the online urban exploration community. However, this community is geographically disparate and though they share a common ethos, they often lack the agency to enact preservation. By creating an official group of relevant stakeholders, Ariel and the other campaign members seek to reclaim custodianship over Chateau Miranda. In doing so, this involves pluralizing discourses whereby multiple stakeholder voices are used to reinforce anti-consumption (Varman and Belk 2009).

Despite an adherence to the ethos of ‘leave only footprints’, in extreme cases some participants physically reclaim obsolete buildings and their contents. This includes behaviors such as applying their own padlocks to buildings in order to keep others out. As Ross explains:

*I have even known people to put on fresh padlocks after they have seen places. You know if they found a place stuffed with items, they will photograph a place and then put on their own padlocks to keep others out.*

(Ross)

Much like Curasi, Price and Arnould’s (2004) caretakers and Cherrier’s (2010) custodians, our participants seek to protect the buildings from vandals, metal thieves and arsonists who would destroy their remaining value. Other examples include explorers taking and removing

objects from properties in an effort to save them from damage and disposal. However, this kind of custodianship poses an ethical dilemma for explorers, as Simon's account suggests:

*I really hate the thought of someone coming along and buying the property and just taking everything in the house and piling it on a giant bonfire and burning it all. So there is always that ethical dilemma: do you take it? We all have that. [...] You could see the bonfire in front of the cottage. [...] There were beautiful antique binoculars, World War II first aid kits, really amazing stuff that should be in a museum. So I took the binoculars. I thought you are not burning them, no way. They are not worth anything; they are a bit damaged. So I thought I am rescuing them. (Simon)*

Simon's dilemma resolves as he believes he is "rescuing" the binoculars from a worse fate, similar to Cherrier (2010) who suggests that consumers' homes can become orphanages for abandoned objects. Findings reveal that placing an object at risk can highlight its significance and worth beyond economic value. Indeed, Türe (2014) argues that disposal can trigger deeper attachment to objects that may prompt consumers to use a protection strategy to safeguard their perceived value that is ambiguous or at odds with broader value regimes. This extends Lee et al. (2011) conceptualization of reclamation as a form of anti-consumption through new forms of consumption cycle alteration i.e. donation, safeguarding, rescuing and campaigning.

### **Discussion**

In contrast to anti-consumption discourse that emphasizes a non-material lifestyle, Cherrier (2010) suggests a subtler form of anti-consumption that involves salvaging material as a means of protesting against consumerist ideology. Waste scholars have also suggested that research on the materiality of waste can generate useful insights (Ekström 2015; Gregson and Crang 2010). In this paper, we have merged these two perspectives and demonstrated

how engagement with the materiality of waste can be a form of anti-consumption. In particular, we have considered how anti-consumption manifests within the context of the waste of obsolete buildings. Prior research on end-stages of consumption has focused on disposables such as food (e.g. Southerton and Yates 2015; Cappellini and Parsons 2013) or approaches to prolong the useful life of objects (Gustafsson, Hjelmgren and Czarniawska 2015; Brosius, Fernandez and Cherrier 2013). However, what is less well understood are social and cultural understandings of waste in other contexts beyond low-involvement and ownership. We consider the context of obsolete buildings which has certain unique characteristics that are absent in prior work on waste: (1) buildings are highly complex assemblages of materials that require specialized practices of maintenance and disposal, for example, asbestos disposal (Gregson, Watkins and Calestani 2010), (2) buildings are bigger in size than other consumer possessions generating a greater volume of waste, (3) buildings have greater capacity to generate economic value through the physical asset, the associated land value and rent value (Bryson 1997), and (4) buildings not only have personal meaning but can have greater societal and community significance than other consumer objects. These characteristics highlight the complexity of buildings as distinct assets that require more challenging waste management that involves and impacts a range of stakeholders.

Urban exploration has previously been identified as a form of resistance to authority and structures of society (Garrett 2014), but we see it as a marketplace resistance oriented against the consumerist ideology of the new. Our first research question asked how anti-consumption manifests in the consumption of obsolete buildings. In answering this, we suggest that urban exploration sits within what Lee et al. (2011) refer to as the blending space between anti-consumption and resistance. In this space, anti-consumption practices are driven by consumer resistance as an opposition to the power of institutions (Price and Peñaloza 1993). Beyond resisting legal authority, our participants are resistant to the power of

institutions that prioritize an economic market logic. This manifests through anti-consumption discourses and activities towards replacing and redeveloping old buildings with the new. In extension to the extant body of consumer research on rejection that takes an anti-materialist stance (such as in the cases of boycotting or voluntary simplicity), our research has revealed that urban explorers perceive obsolete buildings to have strong material value. Unlike new buildings which they perceive as homogeneous and characterless, old buildings engender an emotional attachment. In rejecting the cultural trend of disposability, urban explorers critique the planned obsolescence inherent in contemporary building design. This manifests in the anti-consumption of specific branded home developments that they see as representative of this new-build movement.

In research question two we asked what values consumers ascribe to obsolete buildings. We suggest that obsolete buildings shift between different regimes of valuation. Urban explorers reimagine value in abandoned buildings which might otherwise be left “in a timeless and valueless limbo” (Thompson 1979, p. 8-9). Our findings reveal that reimagining obsolescence enables obsolete buildings to move from waste status to worthy of savior. Hetherington (2004) suggests that waste exists in a region of flexibility and that conduits of disposal allow objects to transfer between regimes of value. Rather than conduits of disposal, we suggest that the alternative values which consumers perceive in these buildings prompts their movement between value regimes. Responding to De Coverley et al.’s (2008) call for research on new ways of visualizing waste, we have revealed that consumers reimagine value in obsolete buildings that have been discarded by the market as waste. They ascribe a range of alternative values to abandoned buildings that counter the dominant axioms of consumption, including forsaken value, terminal value and aesthetic value. This extends Lee et al.’s (2011) conceptualization of anti-consumption by introducing reimagining as an additional form of anti-consumption. Forsaken value counters societal neglect, rejects



heritage prejudice and celebrates local culture. Terminal value is driven by the finite materiality of obsolete building and through mechanisms of scarcity and inevitable demise. Aesthetic value encourages critique on consumerism through embodied knowing (Biehl-Missal 2013) and recognizes beauty in obsolescence.

In responding to research question three, we show how urban explorations express their appreciation of the alternative values of obsolete buildings through strategies of reclamation. Lee et al. (2011) define reclamation as an alteration to the normal consumption cycle. In our findings, this occurs in the form of photography, campaigning and physical reclamation. In enacting these strategies, urban explorers position themselves as caretakers (Curasi, Price and Arnould 2004) or custodians (Cherrier 2010) of obsolete buildings and their contents. The strength of our participants' feelings manifests in acts of transgression that work at the limits of legality, such as applying padlocks and removing items from abandoned buildings. They employ both virtual (photography, online forums) and physical (removing contents, campaigning) means in an attempt to protect and rescue these vulnerable buildings. Whilst not all of these practices are typically anti-consumptive in nature, they become expressions of anti-consumption rhetoric when they are driven by a rejection of dominant value regimes. This expression of anti-consumption can be a means of highlighting these buildings to broader stakeholder groups such as donating photographs to local communities and engaging them in campaigning endeavors. These are productive expressions of anti-consumption that reclaim obsolete buildings through introducing them into new regimes of value.

### **Public Policy Implications**

Our final research question asks how public policy makers can use insights from anti-consumption to re-evaluate the significance of obsolete buildings. This recognizes Campbell's (2015, p. 45) view that "it seems improbable that consumers, when acting on

their own, could possibly halt this apparently out-of-control consumption of the new.” In this section, we suggest practical ways in which public policy makers can support a re-evaluation of the role that obsolete buildings play in society.

Rather than traditional approaches to waste management that focus on diversion and prevention (Bulkeley and Gregson 2009), we suggest that research on obsolescence can benefit from a broader conceptualization of value that encompasses the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders. Public policy debates on urban regeneration tend to be dominated by economic valuations and do not adequately explore the consumer perspective. We propose a comprehensive Obsolescence Impact Evaluation that relevant decision-makers, including those in public policy positions, should complete as part of their demolition and regeneration appraisals. This Obsolescence Impact Evaluation would enable a systematic assessment of the stakeholders potentially impacted, differing regimes of valuation relevant to the decision and potential uses of the buildings. This follows Healey’s (1998) recommendation for collaborative planning and the inclusion of different forms of local knowledge in communities. It broadens the evaluation beyond a predominantly economic perspective in decisions of how to tackle old and obsolete buildings.

Insert Figure 4 about here

We suggest that qualitative approaches including focus groups, town hall meetings and online forums that bring together multiple stakeholders could be used to discuss and rank conflicting value regimes identified in the Obsolescence Impact Evaluation. We argue that this tool allows for a broader range of stakeholder voices to be incorporated in planning decisions. Urban explorers, for example, though they often sit outside of the local community have a distinctive perspective on the value of dereliction, developed through their exploration practices across numerous decaying sites and their voice is currently largely absent from planning decisions. Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013) suggest the inevitability of conflict when

different actors compete over the same space and highlight the need for public policy intervention to equitably manage this conflict. We do not advocate the primacy of any one individual perspective, we rather suggest that our Obsolescence Impact Evaluation is a practical aid to public policy makers that brings together multiple voices, competing value regimes and potential uses as a basis for more informed decision-making and action.

Our findings demonstrate that consumers use reclamation to afford them a degree of empowerment as they strive to highlight the significance of these buildings. This is a social endeavor, rather than legal ownership. Building on this recognition of consumer custodianship, we suggest that public policy makers should encourage community empowerment through various means. Andres (2013) identifies two forms of urban planning: weak planning or place-shaping whereby a watching stage (Andres 2011) is adopted when urban planning ideals cannot be achieved due to economic instability, and masterplanning or place-making that occurs when economic stability enables the design and execution of a development vision. We suggest that the Obsolescence Impact Evaluation would be a key part of both weak-planning and masterplanning. For example, weak-planning could encompass temporary use projects whereby local communities have the opportunity to use derelict or obsolete buildings for short time-periods. Such projects have been used in La Friche in Marseille, France where small commercial business and local partnerships were introduced, and Flon in Lausanne, Switzerland where retail and art spaces were temporarily installed (Andres 2013). Temporary use projects stimulate short-term economic growth and delay urban disinvestment. However, temporary use projects can also have long-lasting impacts on communities. In the case of Flon, temporary occupants participated in organic community-led regeneration by creating a village within the city (Andres 2013). This highlights that weak-planning can become part of the masterplanning process. In our research urban explorers valued a range of different buildings types, in different stages of deterioration

and with different ownership status which could limit the future use of such properties. However, we consider that the recent introduction of the Community Empowerment Act 2015 in Scotland is a good example of masterplanning that allows these differences to be tackled. This act enables certain community bodies to buy abandoned, neglected or detrimental land and property irrespective of level of deterioration or extant ownership status. This Act was introduced with a goal of increasing community ownership of the physical landscape and encouraging participation in place-making. We recommend that other public policy makers consider similar radical policy changes to enable obsolete buildings to regain use and occupation. This could be achieved by reducing legal barriers to use and providing funding for community-led redevelopment. We also consider that buildings do not necessarily need to be materially redeveloped to be put to use. Aesthetics of decay are currently popular in consumer culture and indeed are increasingly being simulated for commercial impact. Brinkworth, the design consultants for the All Saints fashion stores, describe creating ‘a mood of decadent decay and distressed glamour’ for the brand (<http://brinkworth.com/projects/all-saints>). However, we also see examples of genuinely decaying buildings being minimally changed to bring them back into use: The Pipe Factory in Glasgow has used this approach to create space for artists’ studios (<http://www.thepipefactory.co.uk>) and The Platform in London rents derelict space for community projects (<https://www.meanwhitespace.com/single-post/2017/09/12/The-Platform>). We consider that wider application of these minimal change projects could form part of a masterplanning approach.

Existent literature addresses the negative aspects of dereliction and obsolescence through embedded discourses, such as territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014). Public policy makers should attempt to de-stigmatize regions, districts and areas that experience location obsolescence (Bryson 1997; Thomsen and van der Flier 2011) to remove

negative associations that create the cyclical decline of an area. Our findings suggest that this could be achieved by altering institutional discourses that create territorial stigmatization to highlight the alternative social, cultural and historical values these buildings or places have for local communities. By shaping the sociocultural meanings of disuse, stigma may be reduced or erased from obsolete buildings allowing alternative values to emerge. One way in which this would be achieved would be encouraging the circulation of more positive discourses through traditional and social media.

Additionally, our findings demonstrate consumers find value in sharing the history of obsolete buildings with local and wider communities as a means to draw attention to discarded and abandoned cultural heritage. Public policy makers could take advantage of this by encouraging stakeholders to engage with legacy projects that document local memory to connect with community values. Within our findings, we reflected on the Kings Park Hospital documentary which focused specifically on aesthetic value, but we suggest that legacy projects could encompass a much broader range of values depending on the local context. This could be achieved by establishing partnerships with community, local and national stakeholders such as research bodies, heritage groups, and media and arts organizations. These legacy projects would be particularly relevant in cases where demolition is the only option for obsolete buildings and, in this case, could act as a smoothing mechanism that preserves collective memory.

These policy recommendations could act as means of extending the lifecycle of buildings by recognizing them as valuable resources. This would not only have a positive impact on the local community but would also have positive environmental impacts.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A limitation of our research derives from the secretive and individualistic nature of urban exploration. Although urban explorers share information and have some communal understandings underpinning their practices, we could not gather them together to discuss these values because of their strong need for anonymity even among their peers. We consider that this individualism could be a limiting factor in their voices being heard within public policy decisions. Urban planning needs to weigh competing stakeholder viewpoints but as yet urban explorers have no formal organizations or structures allowing them to lobby collectively. We suggest therefore that there is a need for future research to explore the communal values of fringe actors such as urban explorers, how communal voices can be developed and captured in the absence of formal organizational structures, and to understand how these communal understandings can be incorporated into the policy landscape effectively. Our research also considers only urban explorers views on the value of obsolete buildings and we recognize that there are many potential stakeholders within any planning decision. We consider that further research could map these different stakeholder groups understanding both their perspectives on obsolescence and also the respective power of their voices within important public policy decisions.

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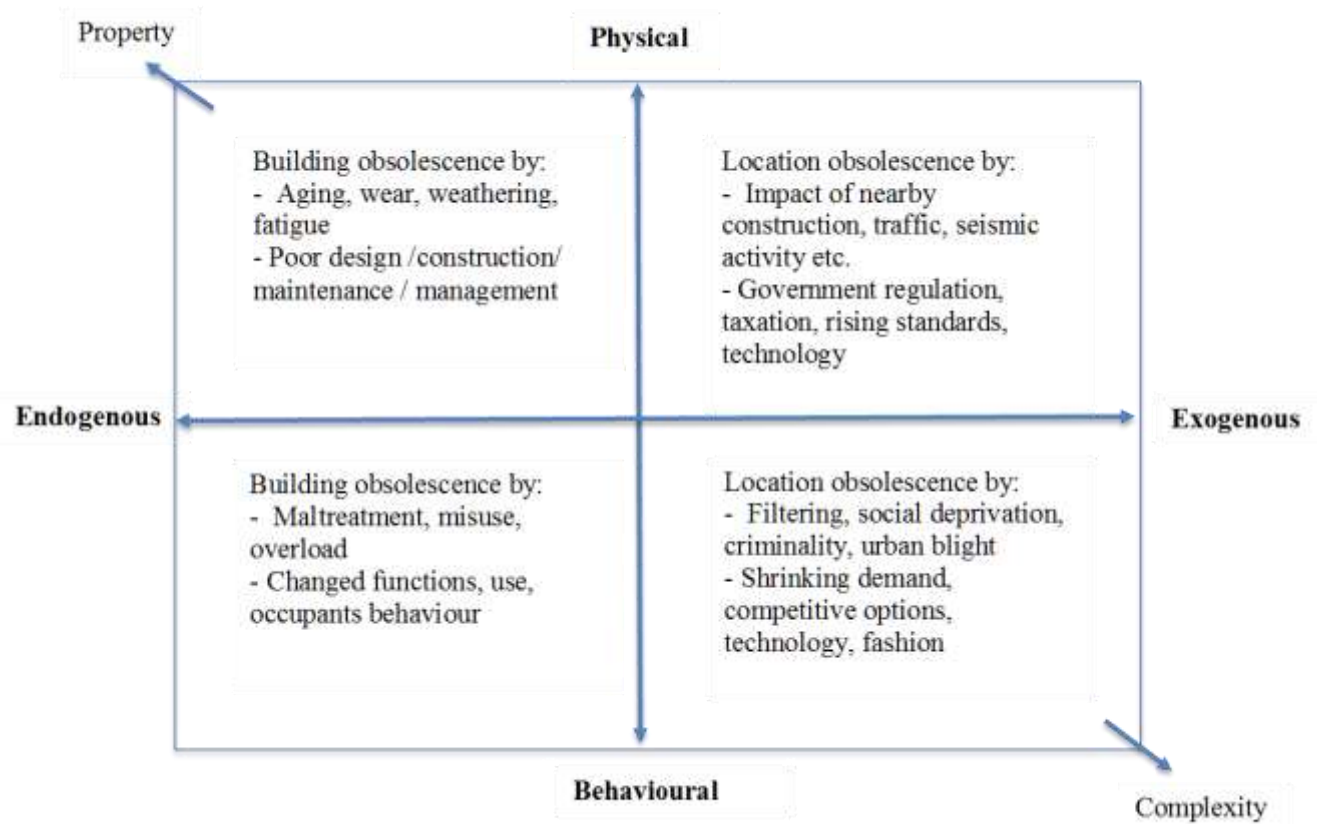
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**Table 1: Participant Information**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Josh	38	Male	UK	Artisan bike designer
Abby	23	Female	Germany	Postgraduate student
Matt	25	Male	UK	Postgraduate student
Lexi	32	Female	Germany	Professional photographer
Sam	27	Female	UK	Travel writer
Pete	30s	Male	UK	Government worker
Aaron	36	Male	Canada	Sales executive
Andy	21	Male	UK	Sportsperson
Connor	25	Male	UK	Computer technician
Mila	30s	Female	Germany	Freelance writer
Rory	30s	Male	UK	Professional photographer
Simon	30s	Male	UK	Mental health practitioner
Hanna	22	Female	Germany	Undergraduate student
William	53	Male	UK	Disability support worker
Euan	40	Male	UK	Freelance building surveyor
Liam	38	Male	UK	Manufacturing technician
Seb	26	Male	Italy	Professional photographer
Nick	33	Male	UK	Events manager
Lydia	50	Female	UK	Magistrate
Tom	40	Male	Canada	Advertising executive
Ariel	29	Female	UK	Historian writer
Paul	40	Male	UK	Professional photographer
Luke	32	Male	UK	Mechanical engineer
Nate	26	Male	United States	Advertising producer
Ross	38	Male	UK	IT technician
Rob	40s	Male	UK	Business executive
Max	40	Male	Netherlands	Sales manager
Jack	35	Male	UK	Self-employed contract cleaner

**Figure 1: Conceptual model of obsolescence** (Thomsen and ven der Flier, 2011, p. 355)



**Figure 2: Abandoned Hospital, UK (courtesy of participant Liam)**



**Figure 3: Abandoned Residential Property, UK (courtesy of participant Simon)**



**Figure 4: Obsolescence Impact Evaluation**

<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Potential Parties</b>
	<p>Who may be impacted by the building's redevelopment and/or demolition?</p> <p>Who may have a perspective on the obsolete building?</p>	<p>For Example:</p> <p>Public Policy Makers, including national and regional governmental bodies and local authorities.</p> <p>Urban Planners</p> <p>Regeneration organizations</p> <p>Realtors</p> <p>Local commercial community</p> <p>Local residential community</p> <p>Pressure Groups</p> <p>Building Owners</p>
<b>Value Regimes</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Potential Values</b>
	<p>What are the potential regimes of valuation which apply to obsolete buildings?</p> <p>What potential conflicts exist between competing values?</p>	<p>For Example:</p> <p>Economic</p> <p>Community and linking-value</p> <p>Moral</p> <p>Spiritual</p> <p>Semiotic</p> <p>Exchange</p> <p>Use</p> <p>Forsaken</p> <p>Aesthetic</p>
<b>Use</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Potential Uses</b>
	<p>In what ways can the obsolete building be used?</p> <p>How viable are each of these uses?</p>	<p>For example:</p> <p>Commercial use</p> <p>Accommodation</p> <p>Community projects</p> <p>Heritage and legacy projects</p> <p>Temporary use (pop-up shops, art installations etc.)</p>