

falling into place

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18.05.2017



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## Falling into place //

Not often is the architect allowed to choose the programme or to even choose the demands of the future user. If such an opportunity occurs, it is of major importance to create the most ideal symbiosis between place and function. This situation is only obtained if all input factors of relevance to the place and wished programme are well considered. This report focusses on the relation between programme and place for the Roosenberg abbey, in order to come to a well formulated substantiation for a new intervention.

In the case of the Roosenberg abbey, several given factors are already in place. To structure the thoughts and discussions held during the meetings of this course, five distinctive relevant factors are chosen; the user, the location, the character, the tradition and the architecture. These five factors may not form an exhaustive list, but will help to find an argumentation for design decision making.

### // user

First of all, the future user; the Catholic University of Louvain is considered. The university bought the estate in 2016 to create the Campus Abdij van Roosenberg, which was intended to become a study and congress centre for education and reflection.<sup>1</sup> This rather broad definition leaves a lot of space for interpretation. Who will study at the campus? And what kind of congresses does the university have in mind? The university mentions two future functions that are in fact completely different.

A study centre could be interpreted as place where students and scholars can retreat to study and work. Such a centre would need a secluded place, a place that facilitates concentration rather than interaction. A congress building however should facilitate interaction and convention. Both options therefore require a different atmosphere.

With the ongoing digitalisation forcing students and scholars to be connected with the rest of the world. A place for retreat would very well fit the existing qualities of the site and meet the demands of the new user, the university. Considering the 'user factor', the starting point of the assignment is to fulfil the user's demands and thus create a study and congress centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Torfs, Rik. Universiteit wordt mede-eigenaar van Abdij Roosenberg en vestigt er studie- en congrescentrum, <http://nieuws.kuleuven.be/node/17443>, retrieved May 10th 2017.

## *// location*

With its remote location in an afforested area, far from the big cities of Antwerp and Louvain, the abbey is not suitable for daily regular use by the university students. A study centre will therefore differ from the university city libraries. Logically, the location is suitable to be used for special occasions, special events that make up for the travelling.

Another option is to temporarily accommodate the guests, in line with the abbey's history of 'gastenklooster'; combining contemplation with a temporary stay.

Topographically, the location demands a function that either requires the remoteness to be able to create a different atmosphere or uses it to form a new central campus between the different KU Leuven locations.

Considering these thoughts, a convention centre and study retreat both seem to be appropriate for the location. A convention centre would, in the case of congresses that entail multiple days, require accommodation for guests. A study centre would require this too, as the remoteness doesn't allow daily travelling.

## *// character*

With its two main actors; the abbey by Dom Hans van der Laan on the one hand and the pine woods on the other, the site offers a magnificent experience that breathes the spirituality of a sacred area. A new intervention should not only be very well carefully designed, the programme it embodies should also make optimal use of the character in order to not disturb it.

Considering the two mentioned functions, the study and retreat centre would fit the character of the existing abbey very well. The abbey was designed to be a place for contemplation and retreat from society, just as a new study centre could be. The congress function however would possibly disturb the quietness of the existing building. For this function a new extension could be more suitable.

## *// tradition*

The Franciscan sister order that inhabited the Roosenberg abbey are a contemplative community. Withdrawn from society, the sisters concentrated on reading, praying and religious studying. The Roosenberg abbey was also a 'guest monastery', where guests were welcomed and accommodated for short

retreats.<sup>2</sup> According to the interviewed monk Fons Boom, these guests were often Belgian students who traditionally withdrew themselves to finish their ‘masterproef’. A transition of the abbey into a study retreat centre for (PhD) students would therefore not be such a transition after all, but rather a continuation of a long tradition.

### *// architecture*

The architecture of Van der Laan creates, as analysed in report I, a monastic world, closed off from the more prosaic world. The building is therefore a very introvert structure, directed towards its own heart. Different stages of entering ensure the gradual transition between in and out. Between the prosaic world and a spiritual one. This particular quality needs to be understood and kept. A study retreat centre will benefit from this ‘sanctuary mode’, creating a new environment where concentration defeats distraction.

A congress centre would benefit less from the sanctuary mode currently present in the abbey. A new addition hosting the congress facilities can therefore be more extrovert, making the best of the lavish nature surroundings, incorporating the outside world into the architecture.

### *// symbiosis*

The five factors analysed in this report give a direction to the design task. As wished for by the University of Louvain, a study centre and congress centre can very well be combined, but both functions have different demands and should therefore perhaps be kept separate when it comes to the programme. The study retreat centre can very well be accommodated in the former abbey building, as the demands of the former function and the new one seem to overlap on many aspects.

A congress facility suits the location both topographically as atmospherically well. The abbey building itself however is less suitable for a congress function, a new addition would therefore be needed. This additional building can be more extrovert than Van der Laan’s secluded building, making a stronger connection with the woods.

The challenge therefore will be to create a symbiosis between two functions, both with their own demands, their own buildings, but unified in a single architectural composition. The two parts ideally form a coherent ensemble, but are not directly interconnected.

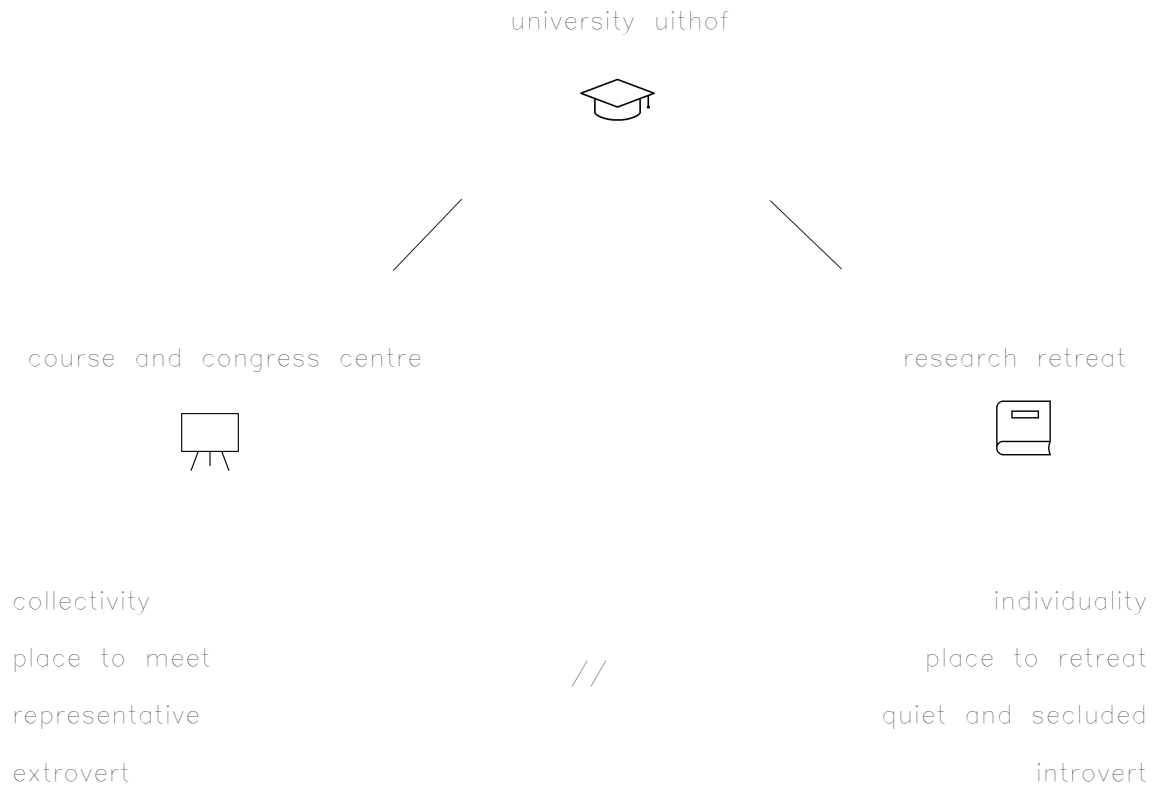
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<sup>2</sup> Torfs, Rik. Universiteit wordt mede-eigenaar van Abdij Roosenberg en vestigt er studie- en congrescentrum, <http://nieuws.kuleuven.be/node/17443>, retrieved May 10th 2017.

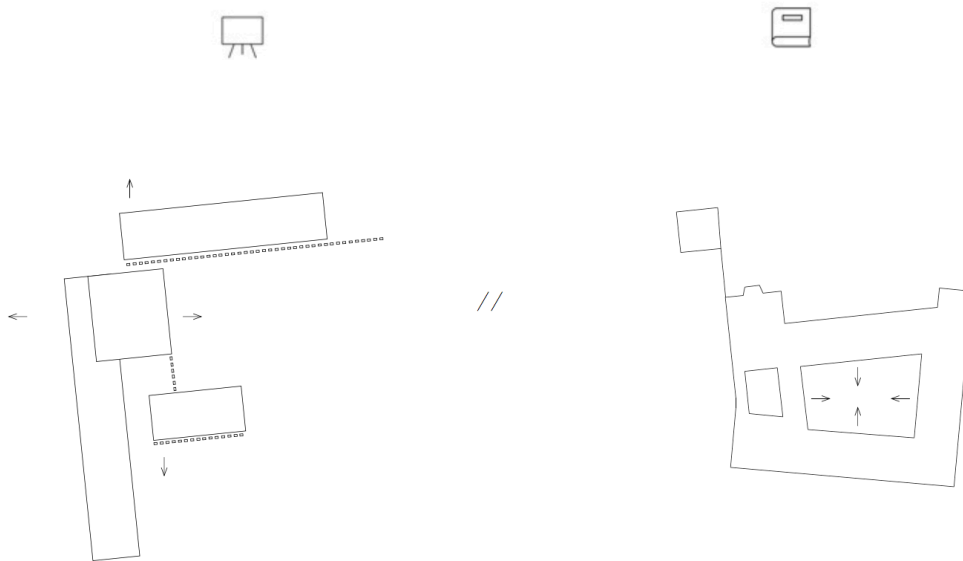
// two worlds

The creation of two symbiotic worlds within one composition leaves space for blending. Having analysed the needed spaces (report III) of the new function, it has proven that a separation can be made between atmospheres rather than strictly programme alone. The introvert and 'sanctuary' building of the existing abbey is in this perspective most suitable for the quiet 'contemplative' functions such as individual studying, sleeping and retreating from the daily life. The more extrovert extension part could host the more social functions such as the congress, restaurants, workshop and collective studying.

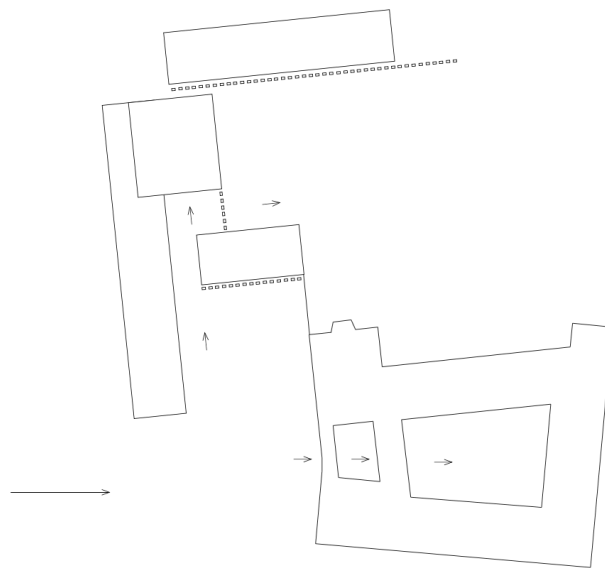
To clarify the allocated programme in a more physical way, some illustrations are given.



Programmatic separation and their main differences in character



Extroversion in the extension vs introversion in the original building resembles the programmatic difference



The original way of going from the prosaic world to the 'sanctuary mode' world in three steps, as intended by Van der Laan, is kept in the new extension. In the new part however, the courtyards are always semi-opened, to reflect the more extrovert character.

The new buildings remain separate from the original abbey building, to secure two different atmospheres. They are architecturally however very related, and form a composition together.



The new extrovert extension creates a relationship with the woods by introducing little half open courtyards in the wings, in which the forest intrudes the building.

Falling into the right place is in the case of Roosenberg a matter of respecting two aspects; the forest, and the legacy of Van der Laan. A congress centre and study retreat would very well fit the place if the specific qualities of the place are used well. Creating separate atmospheres with corresponding functions within a single architectural composition makes sure the programmatic demands meet the demands of the genius loci.