

Housing Modern Rituals

Housing Modern Rituals: A contemporary
redesign for the St. Dominicus church



TU Delft

Delft University of Technology
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Kerkfotografie Nederland, 2016

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Keywords

Spirituality, zero waste, church,
The Netherlands, contemporary,
adaptive reuse

Case Study

St. Dominicus church
Oog in Al, Utrecht
The Netherlands

Research question

How can the social and spiritual
values of the St. Dominicus church
in Utrecht be embedded into a
contemporary redesign?

Sub-questions

- 1. In what way are modern rituals
and contemporary spirituality
integrated in the neighbourhood?
- 2. What are the current collective
rituals of the St. Dominicus church
community?
- 3. What architectural qualities of
the St. Dominicus church create a
spiritual experience?



Objective

More and more churches in The Netherlands have to close their doors, but what happens to those church buildings? The graduation studio Heritage & Architecture: Revitalizing Heritage - Zero Waste Church focuses on the values of heritage buildings to determine if building elements are heritage or waste. It is specifically about disassembling and repurposing materials, but as an addition to the required material analysis, this research also takes into account the church's function in the neighbourhood. The chosen case study for the studio is the St. Dominicus church in Utrecht, for which the assignment is repurposing. This research will help structure and guide that design process and the final design will function as a validation of the research. It consists of a study of the existing collective and spiritual values of the church, contemporary spirituality

in the neighbourhood, and spiritual experience through architecture. The objective is to find a way to introduce modern rituals into the existing building so spirituality can be separated from religion. This way, the spiritual values of the church can be preserved and embedded into a new design. This research will lead to possible programs that should continue to serve as a social and public space in the neighbourhood.

By separating spirituality from religion the current function of the church will change but some ethical dilemmas should be considered. Should we link spirituality to specific functions or will that take away the freedom and flexibility of spirituality? And if we house spirituality in a church building, wouldn't it become a form of religion again? These are questions that are taken into account during the research and design process.

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“Modern Rituals can Seperate Spirituality from Religion”

Introduction

Part of the secularization in The Netherlands is due to deinstitutionalization. Believers began renouncing the traditional precepts of their church community (CBS, 2020). But does this mean that the purpose of the church becomes waste? Or does it still have social values that can be repurposed in a more contemporary way? What values are left when we take away the religious services and authority? The purpose of this research is to examine the social and spiritual values of the case study: St. Dominicus church in Utrecht and facilitate a contemporary redesign. The majority of Dutch people are

no longer religious and this trend continues. Research shows that this makes the search for meaning and self-actualization an individual matter for most people. These non-religious people become part of a leftover group, they are not members of a church or believe in a traditional religious sense, but then what do they believe? This group of people can be separated into people who specifically regard themselves as non-believers (agnostic, atheist) and people who orientate themselves to contemporary spirituality (contemporary spirituals) (SCP, 2022). Instead of collectively believing, individual spirituality

becomes more accessible. How can people find a sense of community whilst retaining their individual rituals?

This brings us back to the main research: How can the social and spiritual values of the St. Dominicus church in Utrecht be embedded in a contemporary redesign? To answer that question this research will look into the role of modern rituals in the neighbourhood. The concept of rituals originates from religious practices and can be defined as “The performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree”(H. Penner, 2016).

However, there are more modern forms of rituals appearing that can separate spirituality from religion. These new rituals are increasing and old ones are being revised to include both traditional and non-traditional believers. University of Virginia religious studies professor Vanessa Ochs said the following about her studies in rituals: “Many rituals have emerged to accommodate people who want to experience the spiritual and find a sense of community through those experiences, without having to say they belong to a certain religion”. A few examples of these rituals include meditation, yoga, and retreats. Other, more collective

rituals are rituals of birth, death, marriage, and the celebration of a new year (C. Newman, 2017).

This research will focus on the definition of these modern spiritual and collective rituals as well as on how they can be translated into a space, using architectural qualities. Therefore the research will first analyse the collective rituals in the St. Dominicus church community. Then it will discuss the role of modern collective rituals and spirituality in the surrounding neighbourhood of the St. Dominicus church, to find out how those social and spiritual values of the church can be repurposed in

a more contemporary way. Finally, it will analyse the architectural qualities of the St. Dominicus church and how they can create a spiritual experience. Together, these three research topics will help structure the design process.

Methodology

In this research, the role of modern spiritual and collective rituals in the surrounding neighbourhood of the St. Dominicus church is examined and evaluated. The main research question is: How can the social and spiritual values of the St. Dominicus church in Utrecht be embedded in a contemporary redesign? To properly research this topic, the following sub-questions are asked: In what way are modern rituals and contemporary spirituality integrated into the neighbourhood? What are the current collective rituals of the St. Dominicus church community? And how can the architectural qualities of the St. Dominicus church create a spiritual experience? To answer these sub-questions, research will be conducted on the above-mentioned topics. The essay is divided into three chapters: 1. Modern rituals; 2. Current rituals and 3. Architectural qualities.

The first chapter focuses on repurposing the social and spiritual value of the church by studying contemporary spirituality and modern rituals. This will be done by theoretical research and analysing case studies to make a selection of possible programs for the church. This study will include case studies such as meditation centres, retreats and repurposed churches with similar functions. After defining the terms contemporary spirituality

and modern rituals, a qualitative survey will be conducted in the neighbourhood to find out how modern rituals and contemporary spirituality are already practised in the neighbourhood. This will be done by visiting public places in the neighbourhood, preferably places that already have spiritual qualities, and interviewing some of the people there. The interviews will focus on a small number of demographically comparable people. To properly investigate this, research must first be conducted into the demography of and functions in the neighbourhood. This will become clear from the ABC-Analysis, which was made in the first period of the studio.

The second chapter will determine the current collective rituals of the St. Dominicus church by conducting qualitative research on the rituals of the church community by observing and interviewing the church members. Another tool to discover relevant rituals is by looking at the social values of the value assessment that was made in the first period of the studio using the framework of Pereira Roders (2007). This will provide a list of current rituals and functions which will be compared to the modern rituals and contemporary spirituality in the neighbourhood that were analysed in the first chapter. Together they

will help determine a system for replacing or joining the current rituals with modern rituals.

The third chapter will focus more on the architectural qualities of the building. The spiritual qualities of the St. Dominicus church will be analysed by using the ABC-Analysis, the Bossche School theory of Dom Hans van der Laan and the book: Transcending architecture edited by Julio Bermudez (2015) as guidelines. This chapter will also include research on the architectural qualities and spiritual experience of case studies. It will include the case studies that have been analysed in the first chapter, along with projects from the Bossche School. This research will help to include new, and preserve current, spiritual values in the redesign of the church.

Using interviews as methodology, there is a risk that not enough people will participate in the research to reach an adequate conclusion. This is why the interviews will focus on quality rather than quantity. By formulating precise questions and focussing on two smaller and specific groups, the church community and the demographically prominent group, enough information can be gathered to form a conclusion.

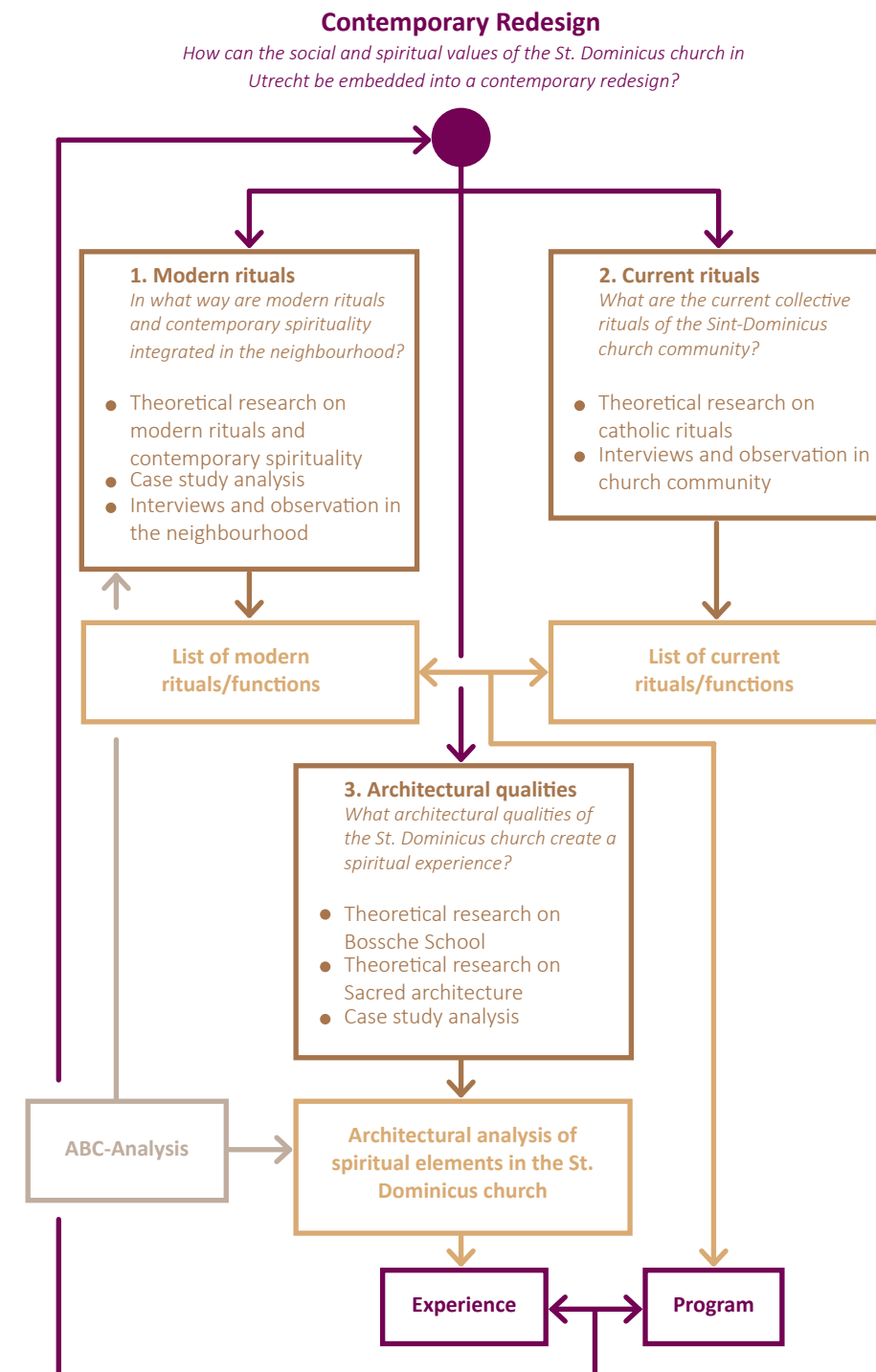


Figure 1: Methodology scheme

Relevance

Secularization in The Netherlands is a current issue when it comes to adaptive reuse. The challenge of conserving heritage is to implement sustainable strategies while at the same time considering the cultural values of the building (Adaptive Reuse, n.d.). Although this research is specific to the case study of the St. Dominicus church in Utrecht, it can further contribute to the general research in adaptive reuse. More specifically, this research focuses on churches and how to treat sacred architecture when repurposing a church. This research aims to preserve the spiritual values of the church and embed them in a sustainable contemporary redesign. The proposed project is feasible to perform and a design for the case study will be produced. Although the result might not solve all problems concerning this research, it can still serve as an example for future research projects.

Annotated Bibliography Literature

1. Modern rituals

Barrie, T., Bermudez, J., & Tabb, P.J. (2015). *Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315567778>

“The authors approach the subject from a range of disciplines and theoretical positions, all sharing interests in the need to rediscover, redefine, or reclaim the sacred in everyday experience, scholarly analysis, and design” (Routledge). This book links spirituality to design and can be helpful in this research. Unfortunately, only the introduction is available to read. A full document is still being sought to be able to use this source properly in the research.

Birch, R., & Sinclair, B. R. (2013). *Spirituality in Place: Building Connections Between Architecture, Design, and Spiritual Experience. ARCC Conference Repository*. <https://doi.org/10.17831/rep:arcc%y116>.

“This project uses the notion of “spirituality in place” to seek out the qualities of the built environment that contribute to places which, through their physical design, allow users to find greater meaning in their surroundings. Designers and architects often talk about meaning, beauty, poetics, connection, atmosphere and other ethereal, invisible aspects of a place. It is the objective of this research project to make more visible these invisible qualities of the built environment” (Birch, R. 2013). This essay provides a framework and strategies for architecture with spirituality in mind and shows different perspectives. Although it is not lengthy or in-depth research, it can contribute to this research.

Clot-Garrell & Griera. (2019, October 16). *Beyond Narcissism: Towards an Analysis of the Public, Political and Collective Forms of Contemporary Spirituality*. *Religions*, 10(10), 579. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10100579>

“The main aim is to explore the ways in which holistic spiritual actors engage in civic actions and how they explain and justify their activism. Drawing on an ethnographic study of two cases—the teaching of yoga in prisons and the organization of public meditations in streets and parks—we show that social actors are not only involved in these altruistic initiatives but that a holistic worldview is at the core of their engagement since they use these holistic practices as means for social and political transformation” (Clot-Garrell, 2019). It is not yet sure how this article can contribute to this research but the analysis of spirituality in the public context can be intriguing.

de Hart, J., van Houwelingen, P. & Huijnk, W. (2022). *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (ISBN 978 90 377 978 0958 2). <https://www.scp.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/03/24/ontkerkelijking-leidt-tot-nieuwe-verhoudingen-in-de-samenleving>

“This part examines the spread and impact of forms of spirituality that are not linked to the church and the philosophy of the unchurched and non-believers. It is striking that the number of contemporary spiritualists is not increasing (anymore) and it may seem that contemporary spirituality is more a portal to secularization than a new form of religion” (de Hart, J. 2022). This report shows the current situation regarding contemporary spirituality in the Netherlands and can mean a lot for this research.

Laing, J. & Frost W. (2015). *Rituals and traditional events in the modern world*. Routledge.

“This book aims to explore the role of traditional events and rituals in the modern world. The 16 chapters cover a range of case studies of the performance of ritual through events, including their historical antecedents and development over time, as well as their role in society” (Laing, J. 2015). Parts of this book can be used to help define modern rituals and find examples for this research. However, this book includes a variety of cultures and places and is, therefore, less relevant for this particular case study but some of the information can be valuable.

Versteeg, P. (2003, December 31). *Meditatie en subjectieve betekenisgeving. Meditatie als rituele vorm binnen nieuwe christelijke spiritualiteit. Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek*, 19. <https://ugp.rug.nl/jvlo/article/view/38066>

“Religious ritual outside the churches, however, is still a relatively unknown area of research. What is particularly interesting in this context is what takes place in centres for Christian spirituality, because these centres move between the Christian tradition and the alternative sense-making circuit” (Versteeg, P. 2003). This article focuses on a spiritual centre and meditation. It shows a modern way of finding meaning but the publication date should be considered when using this source for the research. Additional research must be conducted to confirm that the information is not outdated.

Interviews with people from the neighbourhood Oog in Al.

Happinez magazine (2022). Can be used to find examples for contemporary spirituality and possible case studies.

Becker, E., Adams, L. & de Kimpe, P. (2022). *Mystiek: Rituelen. Verstillig. Extase*. Limburgs Museum. October 15, 2022 - March 19, 2023.

“The exhibition shows how people have been trying to transcend everyday reality for centuries. Through prayer and meditation, through rosaries, music, scents and yoga poses...” (Limburgs Museum). This exhibition might provide valuable information about modern rituals, religion and spirituality.

Bordeaux, E. (2022). *Spirituele Urgentie*. Stedelijk Museum Schiedam. November 26, 2022 - April 10, 2023.

“Spirituality is alive and well among a new vanguard of creators. Young, interdisciplinary artists embrace, celebrate and spread the value of spirituality in their own way. With Spiritual Urgency, the museum zooms in on the meaning of spirituality and challenges you to go on a holistic journey through the museum” (Stedelijk Museum Schiedam). This exhibition might provide valuable information about modern rituals, religion and spirituality.

2. Current rituals

Bouma, J. Homsma, A. & van Zandvliet, M. (2022). ABC-Analyse.

Groenen, M. (2022, September 29). Interview Architect. (M. v. Zantvliet, J. Bouma, & A. Homsma, Interviewers)

van Leusden, A. caretaker Sint-Dominicuschurch. Personal communication.

Interviews with the St. Dominicus church community.

3. Architectural qualities

Bermudez, J. (Ed.). (2015). *Transcending architecture*. Catholic University of America Press. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/lib/delft/detail.action?docID=3135192#>

“How should we construct sacred spaces, the places where we worship? Transcending Architecture considers the mysterious, profound, and real power of designed environments to address the spiritual dimension of our humanity. By incorporating perspectives from within and without architecture, the book offers a wide, critical, and nuanced understanding of the lived relationship between the built and the numinous worlds” (The Catholic University of America Press, 2015). This book addresses the architectural qualities of spirituality and can be used as a framework for this research.

Geva, A. (2018). *Modernism and American Mid-20th Century Sacred Architecture* (1st ed.). Routledge.

“Mid-20th-century sacred architecture in America sought to bridge modernism with religion by abstracting cultural and faith traditions and pushing the envelope in the

design of houses of worship. Modern architects embraced the challenges of creating sacred spaces that incorporated liturgical changes, evolving congregations, modern architecture, and innovations in building technology” (TU Delft Library). This book can contribute to the analysis of the architectural qualities of spirituality. Examples can be drawn from this to help the analysis. Although these examples focus on architecture in America, they can still be useful in this research.

Theorie & Praktijk. (2019, February 13). Dom Hans Van Der Laan. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://domhansvanderlaan.nl/nl/theorie-praktijk/>

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Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport. (2022, March 21). *Ontkerkelijking leidt tot nieuwe verhoudingen in de samenleving*. Nieuwsbericht | Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau. Retrieved 10 October 2022, from <https://www.scp.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/03/24/ontkerkelijking-leidt-tot-nieuwe-verhoudingen-in-de-samenleving>

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Case studies

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Other case studies depend on the research and will follow...

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