

Preserving Historic Catholic Churches: The Case for Adaptive Reuse in Future Conservation

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the heritage approach of adaptive reuse as a way to preserve and protect abandoned churches in Limburg. For this, a discussion is had on the social and cultural dynamic and history of Limburg. This is a province in the Netherlands with a deep historical connection to the Catholic religion. This paper explores the province's formation under the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1867, and the continuous influence of Catholicism as a unifying force in the region. In recent decades, however, the region has witnessed a great decline in Catholic engagement. This has led to the closure of many historic churches. Adaptive reuse has emerged as a strategy to adapt and repurpose these now abandoned historically important spaces to preserve their architectural, cultural, and social significance, while also meeting the new needs of the community in which these churches are located. This research explores how adaptive reuse can contribute to the social environment and the culture in these communities, offering a practical solution for the preservation of historic church buildings. Through a case study of the reuse of the Dominican Church in Maastricht as a bookshop, this paper shows the use of adaptive reuse as a heritage approach to revitalize historic churches and create a social connection between the inhabitants of the province. Ultimately, adaptive reuse serves as a bridge between past traditions and present realities. Making sure that Limburg's religious and cultural heritage remains vital and relevant in today's day and age.

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Introduction

In the twentieth century, the religious landscape in the Dutch province of Limburg changed significantly. Ever since the early Middle Ages the province has had a predominantly Catholic population. In the last 100 years or so there has been a significant decline in the number of people actively involved with the Catholic faith. This change has led to many problems and challenges for the Catholic church in Limburg. Firstly, there are fewer Catholics, and thus also fewer people willing to become priests to run the Catholic churches. Secondly, because fewer people are visiting the churches, the financial support of the church has also decreased. All this poses a great risk for the continued existence of the Catholic Church in Limburg¹.

This raises the question of what to do with these historic Catholic churches so that their historic value is not erased. Unfortunately, in the current religious landscape in Limburg, it is no longer possible to keep historic churches running the same as they were. In many cases, church buildings have had to close due to a lack of funds and volunteers. Because many churches face financial problems, demolition is a very attractive option for owners of an empty church. The downside of demolition is that the social and cultural value of the church is demolished along with the building². However, there is the third option of *adaptive reuse* that can benefit the church building financially and socially.

While current literature mainly highlights the economic and sustainable merits of adaptive reuse, particularly emphasizing its economic advantages, the social benefits often go unrecognized. Using the example of the Dominican Church in Maastricht this paper explores the social and cultural benefits that adaptive reuse of historic church buildings can offer and will demonstrate how adaptive reuse can be the most ideal solution to conserve the heritage values of these buildings for the future. This paper starts by looking at how the Catholic Church has influenced Limburg's history and the problems churches face today because of it. Then, we'll see what material and immaterial values church buildings still hold. Finally, we'll discuss adaptive reuse as an approach to preserve these old Catholic churches, using the Dominican Church in Maastricht as an example. This study aims to illustrate how repurposing these sacred spaces can not only safeguard their heritage value but also contribute to the economic and social vitality of the region. Ensuring that these buildings do not only remain relics of the past, but living monuments that contribute to today's society as they did in the past.

¹ Carl Sterkens, "Contemporary Church in the Netherlands Current Challenges and Opportunities for Dutch Roman Catholic Parishes in 2008", *Melintas* 23, nr. 2 (1 januari 2007): 181–201, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v23i2.979.183-212>.

² Joost Ankone, "The Production of Reused Church Buildings" (thesis, Radboud University, 2016).

Literature review

Historic church buildings in Limburg currently face a lot of challenges such as a declining catholic population, a decreasing number of volunteers and priests, and less financial support³. In many cases, this leads to the church becoming vacant and the owner of the church having to choose between demolition, museumification, or adaptive reuse. Often, because of the financial problems of the owners of churches demolition is an attractive option⁴. However, adaptive reuse can also offer great benefits financially. This literature review examines the option of adaptive reuse as a way to socially benefit the area around the project. This review seeks to address this gap by delving into the cultural implications of adaptive reuse, particularly within the context of Limburg's rich history and cultural heritage.

Existing literature predominantly emphasizes the economic and sustainable advantages of adaptive reuse^{5,6,7}, with a notable focus on the economic aspect. However, the social benefits of adaptive reuse are frequently overlooked. Considering the concept of sacred space, which is inherently tied to cultural heritage and history⁸, it becomes evident that discussions about the reuse of historic churches should incorporate this cultural heritage. Yet only very few studies have thoroughly explored the cultural benefits that adaptive reuse can provide for a community. The cultural side of adaptive reuse is often looked at through case studies and present-day cultural or social benefits and thus only a very limited view of the cultural benefits is provided.⁹

This research seeks to address this gap by offering an exploration of the cultural benefits of adaptive reuse, particularly in the context of Limburg's history and cultural heritage^{10,11,12}. By exploring how history shaped cultural identity in Limburg and its implications for historical Catholic church buildings in the region, this study aims to provide a new and deeper perspective on the cultural significance of adaptive reuse.

³ Carl Sterkens, "Contemporary Church in the Netherlands Current Challenges and Opportunities for Dutch Roman Catholic Parishes in 2008", *Melintas* 23, nr. 2 (1 januari 2007): 181–201, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v23i2.979.183-212>.

⁴ Joost Ankone, "The Production of Reused Church Buildings" (thesis, Radboud University, 2016).

⁵ Rayman Mohamed e.a., "Adaptive Reuse: A Review And Analysis Of Its Relationship To The 3 Es Of Sustainability", *Facilities* 35, nr. 3/4 (7 maart 2017): 138–54, <https://doi.org/10.1108/f-12-2014-0108>.

⁶ Mohamed e.a., "Adaptive Reuse: A Review And Analysis Of Its Relationship To The 3 Es Of Sustainability".

⁷ Gillian Joanne Foster, "Circular Economy Strategies For Adaptive Reuse Of Cultural Heritage Buildings To Reduce Environmental Impacts", *Resources, Conservation And Recycling* 152 (1 januari 2020): 104507, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2019.104507>.

⁸ Kirsten Velthuis en Dirk H. R. Spennemann, "The Future Of Defunct Religious Buildings: Dutch Approaches To Their Adaptive Re-use", *Cultural Trends* 16, nr. 1 (1 maart 2007): 43–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548960601106979>.

⁹ Zdzisława Elżbieta Niemczewska, "The Sociocultural Impact Of Adaptive Reuse Of Immovable Cultural Heritage From The Perspective Of Direct Users And The Local Community", *Journal Of Cultural Heritage Management And Sustainable Development* 11, nr. 3 (24 augustus 2020): 240–61, <https://doi.org/10.1108/jchmsd-07-2019-0093>.

¹⁰ Pam Porthoine, "From Spiritus Sanctus Towards Spiritus Novus: The Role Of Heritage Values in The Redevelopment Of Catholic Heritage Buildings in Eindhoven And The Wider Region." (thesis, Utrecht University, 2021).

¹¹ Erik Sengers, "Although We Are Catholic, We Are Dutch'-The Transition Of The Dutch Catholic Church From Sect To Church As An Explanation For Its Growth And Decline", *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 43, nr. 1 (11 februari 2004): 129–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00222.x>.

¹² P.J.H. Ubachs, "Een Franse Uithoek. Limburg 1794-1814", *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis Der Nederlanden* 104, nr. 4 (1 januari 1989): 654–64, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgm-lchr.3174>.

Methodology

This research employs a dual-method approach, combining a comprehensive literature review with a case study. The research begins with an extensive literature review of theses, books, and articles. This aims to establish a context in which to conduct further research. The literature research provides insights into the roles of churches in Limburg, the values attributed to historic churches, the evolving significance of the Catholic Church post-1867, and the potentials and limits of adaptive reuse. The primary sources in this study center on the case of the Dominican Church in Maastricht, demonstrating a real-life example of the broader themes that are discussed in the literature review. These sources are historical- and more recent articles found in the historic archives through Delpher, as well as personal interviews with both visitors of the current adapted former church and one of the architects who oversaw the adaptive reuse of the Dominican Church into a bookshop.

Religion as a unifying force until 1867

To understand the social climate of the Dutch province of Limburg and its community, it's essential to recognize the relatively recent formation of this province. The area that is now known as Limburg was formed and unified under the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1867¹³. Prior to this unification, the region comprised disparate Duchies, each with its own distinct identity and governance structure. Before being integrated into the Netherlands, these Duchies operated independently and were often subject to the rule of different kingdoms or empires, including France and Germany. Despite this fragmented political landscape, there existed a common thread that bound these territories together: the Catholic faith.¹⁴

Amidst the geopolitical disconnectedness, Catholicism served as a unifying force, shaping the cultural and social fabric of the region. Regardless of the Duchy to which they belonged, inhabitants shared a common religious identity, fostering a sense of cohesion and shared heritage across Limburg. This shared religious affiliation played a significant role in shaping the collective identity and social dynamics of the Limburg community throughout different periods of history and different rulers. During the French Revolution in the late 18th century, for example, the French pushed for secularization and the separation of church and state. Despite this pressure, communities residing in the area of present-day Limburg remained firmly Catholic, maintaining their religious practices and customs even in the face of French scrutiny. Also, when Dutch Limburg belonged to Germany, where Protestantism was a big part of the religious landscape, from 1839 until the unification with the Netherlands the catholic faith never wavered in these duchies. This shows the enduring significance of Catholicism in the resilience of the Limburg territories¹⁵. The catholic faith influenced daily life for the people living in these places. Church traditions, festivals, and rituals were deeply ingrained in society, shaping social interactions and cultural norms. Despite the official disconnect of the duchies in the region, Catholicism served as a unifying cultural thread, contributing to the development of a shared and distinct cultural heritage among the inhabitants of Limburg.

These traditions, rituals, and festivals also call for a space to celebrate them of course. So, the catholic church came to life in church buildings. These usually imposing, impressive, and beautiful structures are found all over Limburg from the biggest cities to the smallest villages. Physical churches were essential for the thriving catholic faith in the social and cultural landscape. One reason for this is that architecture serves as a tangible embodiment of memory¹⁶. Churches represent religious memory and an unwavering spiritual significance. Secondly, these buildings allowed the congregations to form a physical connection to God and it allowed the community to come together and form a bond, host events, and worship

¹³ "Limburg Hoort Al 150 Jaar Bij Nederland", Binnenlands Bestuur, z.d., <https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/limburg-hoort-al-150-jaar-bij-nederland#:~:text=In%201866%20viel%20de%20Duitse,en%20een%20westelijk%2C%20Belgisch%20deel>.

¹⁴ P.J.H. Ubachs, "Een Franse Uihoek. Limburg 1794-1814", *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis Der Nederlanden* 104, nr. 4 (1 januari 1989): 654–64, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmg-nlchr.3174>.

¹⁵ Ubachs, "Een Franse Uihoek. Limburg 1794-1814".

¹⁶ Jennifer Clark, "'This Special Shell': The Church Building And The Embodiment Of Memory", *Journal Of Religious History* 31, nr. 1 (20 februari 2007): 59–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2007.00545.x>.

together¹⁷. Next to that, there would also be other services connected and adjacent to churches where the community was served such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages. Thus, a church unlocks a sense of belonging and peace in a community¹⁸. Which, in the case of the people in Limburg who for centuries were passed around between countries, was very important.

Recent secularization and abandonment of the church

Relatively recently, the religious landscape in Catholicism has undergone a profound transformation, characterized by a notable decrease in engagement. This change did not happen overnight. It has been a gradual evolution shaped by a multitude of factors, making it challenging to identify a singular catalyst responsible for the current state of instability within the catholic church. The change in the people's attitude towards the catholic religion is a consequence of many circumstances combined, both within and outside of the church's control. Firstly, as mentioned before, Limburg was only connected by a shared religious and cultural background before the unification with the Netherlands in 1867. After this unification of these duchies, the need for a shared religion to form a sense of community became less important. Then, in the past century or so, the whole world started to modernize. This process of modernization has sped up the secularisation of the population of Limburg significantly as traditional religious values and practices have gradually given way to more secular lifestyles¹⁹. While after the Second World War culturally society changed, the church has historically held on its conservative views. For example, women were encouraged not to take birth control, and communists and socialists were shunned by the church and were told that they would get eternal damnation²⁰. Additionally, the catholic church also had its fair share of scandals. In 2011 the diocese of Roermond, which despite its name encapsulates the entire province of Limburg, established a reporting point for sexual abuse cases from within their parishes after earlier rumors and reports about the abuse. In that year, there were 3712 reports of sexual abuse, of which 1002 were eventually confirmed²¹. These conservative views and terrible scandals have made a large number of Catholics disillusioned with the catholic faith and its religious leaders. This has driven mainly young people to reconsider their faith and leave the catholic faith²².

The disillusionment among Catholics has led to a significant decline in people adhering to the catholic faith, resulting in fewer churchgoers, fewer church volunteers, and fewer pastors available²³. Next to the decrease in faithful catholic Christians, the modernization of society and religion since the 1950s has also caused a decrease in the pressure for Christians to attend church every Sunday²⁴. So even the religious community is less involved in the church than they may have been at the beginning of the 19th century. This dwindled enthusiasm for the catholic church can best be seen in the comparison between the celebrations of the

The parishes today are struggling to survive with this low attendance. In 2023, the diocese of Roermond reported that 90 percent of the parishes have been operating at a loss and they have had to close 75 churches already²⁵. This means that historic churches all over the province have been closed. As these historic religious structures are vacant and abandoned, questions are emerging regarding the future of these churches and the broader implications for the Catholic faith in the region. The decreasing presence of the Church in the lives of the population in Limburg emphasizes the need for self-reflection and adaptation within Catholic institutions to remain relevant in this continuously changing world.

¹⁷ Matthew French, "The Debate on the Necessity of Church Buildings Through the Lens of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral" (thesis, Methodist University, 2017).

¹⁸ Clark, "This Special Shell: The Church Building And The Embodiment Of Memory".

¹⁹ Carl Sterkens, "Contemporary Church in the Netherlands Current Challenges and Opportunities for Dutch Roman Catholic Parishes in 2008", *Melintas* 23, nr. 2 (1 januari 2007): 181–201, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v23i2.979.183-212>.

²⁰ Admin, "De Ontbinding van de Rooms-katholieke Kerk", *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, 7 april 2020, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/de-ontbinding-van-de-rooms-katholieke-kerk/>.

²¹ Paul Bots, "Misbruik Kost RK Kerk in Limburg 7 Miljoen", *De Limburger*, 18 december 2017, https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20171218_00052494.

²² "Kerk in Limburg: Krimp en Sluiting", *Mariabode*, 19 oktober 2023, <https://www.mariabode.nl/kerk-in-limburg-krimp-en-sluiting/>.

²³ Carl Sterkens, "Contemporary Church in the Netherlands Current Challenges and Opportunities for Dutch Roman Catholic Parishes in 2008", *Melintas* 23, nr. 2 (1 januari 2007): 181–201, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v23i2.979.183-212>.

²⁴ Sterkens, "Contemporary Church in the Netherlands Current Challenges and Opportunities for Dutch Roman Catholic Parishes in 2008".

²⁵ "Kerk in Limburg: Krimp en Sluiting".

Material and immaterial values

The perception of places by individuals is influenced partly by physical and mental characteristics inherent in the unique identity of a place. These characteristics can be tangible, also known as *material*, such as paintings or stained-glass windows. Or they can be intangible, or *immaterial*, such as cultural heritage or aesthetic appeal²⁶.

The material values of a church are all tangible elements; the things we can see, touch, or hear with our senses. Some examples are artistic features such as paintings and sculptures, or historically significant commemorative plaques. There are many tangible elements in a church that are still valued today for their architectural or aesthetic appeal. To give a practical example of material values in a historic catholic church we can take the case of the Dominican church in Maastricht, a former gothic church completed around 1294 which currently functions as a bookstore. SatijnPlus Architects, who carried out the restoration of the church before its transformation carefully considered what tangible elements would be important to restore when transforming the church. The drawing in Figure 1 shows the material values that were damaged during the church’s history, and which needed mending before the new transformation and restoration²⁷. These valued elements included the finial, the natural stone facade, and the pinnacle. All these elements show the gothic architectural style of the 13th century in which this church was built and are crucial to preserving the architectural history of the region.

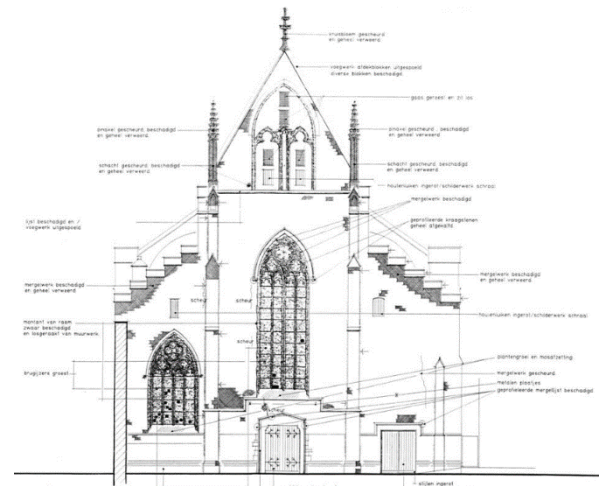


Figure 1. Dominican church elevation showing material values that needed mending.

Beyond the material values, churches also possess more abstract immaterial values. As mentioned before, the Catholic religion and churches have had a significant impact on the history of Limburg. Still today, more than 60% of people in the province consider themselves catholic Christians²⁸. For these people, churches are an integral part of their lives. These buildings are a physical place for them to practice their faith and to connect with their community. Especially young people today have expressed the immaterial value of the church to be mainly social values. Research by the Christian College Ede and the Theological University Utrecht has shown that 84% percent of the respondents aged 25 to 35 have expressed that the connection that is formed with other churchgoers is important to strengthen their connection with their faith²⁹. 47% of these respondents even indicated that if this social aspect were to fall away, they would probably also not be Catholic anymore³⁰. Another aspect that was found very valuable by churchgoers was that churches are places of rest and calmness. People can come there to find refuge from their daily busy lives³¹. Also, for the non-believing portion of the province churches still have a lot of value. While Limburg is becoming increasingly secular, church and society remain close through a shared and intertwined history. As mentioned before, until recently catholic churches have been closely linked to a regional identity and culture. These catholic structures are usually tall buildings placed in the center of a

²⁶ Pam Portheine, "From Spiritus Sanctus towards Spiritus Novus: the role of heritage values in the redevelopment of Catholic heritage buildings in Eindhoven and the wider region." (thesis, Utrecht University, 2021).

²⁷ Rob Brouwers, Dominican church elevation showing material values that needed mending, z.d., Satijnplus, z.d., <https://www.satijnplus.nl/bouwkundige-tekeningen/>.

²⁸ Hans Schmeets Marieke Houben, "5. De Religieuze Kaart", Centraal Bureau Voor de Statistiek, 6 april 2023, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2023/religieuze-betrokkenheid-in-nederland/5-de-religieuze-kaart>.

²⁹ Mirjam Hollebrandse, "Wat Motiveert Jonge Mensen Om Naar de Kerk te Gaan?", De EO, 23 november 2023, <https://www.eo.nl/artikel/wat-motiveert-jonge-mensen-om-naar-de-kerk-te-gaan>.

³⁰ Hollebrandse, "Wat Motiveert Jonge Mensen Om Naar de Kerk te Gaan?"

³¹ Hollebrandse, "Wat Motiveert Jonge Mensen Om Naar de Kerk te Gaan?"

city or town and are often surrounded by cultural activities³². For believers and non-believers alike, churches function as a point of recognition for their city. An example is Maastricht, the capital of the province, where the main churches, the Sint-Theresia Church and the Dominican Church, can be seen reaching into the sky from far out of the city³³. The architecture of these churches, whether the building still fulfills its original religious function or not, is a valuable icon for most cities.

As discussed before, the catholic church has also had a great deal of influence in creating a unified heritage and culture in Limburg. It is not possible to speak about this cultural and religious heritage without speaking about the *collective memory* of the population of Limburg. Collective memory was a term first coined by French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs. He argued that individual memory is always influenced by the groups we belong to, such as our family, our community, or our nation, and that our memory is constructed within a social framework³⁴. This also means that collective memory is shared within a group or community through tradition and these collective memories are maintained and transmitted through social interactions, rituals, and cultural practices³⁵.

Heritage buildings, and in this case historic Catholic Churches, are an embodiment of Limburg's collective memory. Religious architecture is deeply intertwined with Limburg's social dynamics, reflecting the immaterial values: the beliefs and identity of the communities that built and used these structures. Beyond their original religious function, the architecture of these historic churches can embody cultural symbolism and historical narratives that have shaped the collective memory and identity³⁶ of the people of Limburg. Therefore, religious architecture not only fulfills spiritual needs but also plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Adaptive reuse as a cultural savior

As we have seen, due to secularization in Limburg many churches have abandoned its religious function. Churches are facing the dilemma of no longer having a function that is useful for the non-religious community, while still being historically and culturally relevant. Adaptive reuse of the historic catholic church buildings in Limburg has emerged as a powerful solution in response to the challenges posed by declining congregations, changing religious practices, and the preservation of architectural heritage. This practice not only conserves the architecture but also transforms it into once again accessible and functional spaces.

Because churches have been so culturally and socially significant, it makes sense to look at the benefits that adaptive reuse can offer from a social angle. As touched upon a few times in this paper, churches are usually attractive architectural icons in their area. Having this iconic historic architecture increases the aesthetic appeal of the streetscape in a city. This creates more vibrant and attractive places where people will feel more inclined to gather and make use of³⁷. Communities also attach a lot of importance to historic churches as for them they contain a part of their important history. The integration of heritage architecture in a city encourages community support, participation, and a sense of pride³⁸. The abandonment, and perhaps even demolition, of a church not only robs the cultural hub that often surrounds these buildings of a crucial public space but also reduces the community's motivation to utilize this public area. Adaptive reuse lends itself very well to reinstating these city centers back to the hubs of community activity as they once were. Additionally, adaptive reuse frequently also protects the architectural importance of these churches, preventing further deterioration through renewed maintenance efforts.

³² Luuk Van Den Einden, "Maastricht Wil met Kerkenvisie Voorsorteren op Toekomst Religieuze Gebouwen: 'We Zijn Zoekende' - Katholiek Nieuwsblad", Katholiek Nieuwsblad, 8 juni 2023, <https://www.kn.nl/nieuws/lokaal/maastricht-wil-met-kerkenvisie-voorsorteren-op-toekomst-religieuze-gebouwen-we-zijn-zoekende/>.

³³ Van Den Einden, "Maastricht Wil met Kerkenvisie Voorsorteren op Toekomst Religieuze Gebouwen: 'We Zijn Zoekende' - Katholiek Nieuwsblad".

³⁴ Maurice Halbwachs en Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory*, 1992, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA18953806>.

³⁵ Halbwachs en Coser, *On Collective Memory*.

³⁶ Sílvia Aulet en Dolors Vidal, "Tourism And Religion: Sacred Spaces As Transmitters Of Heritage Values", *Church, Communication And Culture* 3, nr. 3 (2 september 2018): 237–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2018.1542280>.

³⁷ Aksel Nichols, "Making the Social Impacts of Adaptive Reuse Projects in Copenhagen Visible" (Thesis, Aalborg University of Copenhagen, 2019).

³⁸ Nichols, "Making the Social Impacts of Adaptive Reuse Projects in Copenhagen Visible".

The Dominican Church which was discussed in the previous chapter is a very successful example of adaptive reuse. To know why this adaptation was so successful, it is important to first dive into the history of the Dominican Church and how this was translated into the eventual new design. For this, the author has interviewed architect Rob Brouwers who worked on the transformation project of the Dominican Church³⁹. Brouwers explained that the Dominican Church on the edge of the center of the city has been an abandoned church since 1805 and has been adapted and transformed into a bookshop in 2006. Before this transformation, the church had many different temporary functions. The city of



Figure 2, *The Dominican Church as city storage, 1884*



Figure 3, *The Dominican Bookshop interior, 2015*

Maastricht, until the 1970s, did not have a large indoor space. This is why, when the church was first abandoned, the municipality jumped at the chance to use this space as a city storage for the long ladders of the fire brigade. During this time the church of course did not fulfill any public function. This lasted only for a year, after this the church hosted many different events, companies, and festivals. But there was one overarching theme in all its functions: they were all, in one way or another, public. There was an exhibition space in 1925⁴⁰, a political speakers event in 1954⁴¹, and many more. More recently, the church was used as a post office and every year Limburg's typical festival of Carnival was hosted inside the former church. However, because all these functions were only temporary, the church was never actually intentionally adapted to this new use. Consequently, it suffered from neglect and interior damage. It wasn't until 2006 that the church underwent a meticulously executed adaptation, restoring it with great care.

According to Brouwers, adapting churches to another, especially public, function is relatively easy⁴². These buildings were built for grand public functions in the past and their spaces ask for this publicness again. The architects took great care to preserve the ambiance of the church while integrating it with the new commercial bookshop. They accomplished this by leaving one half of the church exposed and restored while concealing the other half with what they termed "book flats." This design strategy aimed to evoke the original atmosphere of the building: when visitors enter and see one-half of the church, their brain will automatically complete the image, allowing the old spirit of the building to live on in these new experiences. When the author interviewed students of Maastricht University who were familiar with the bookshop, they expressed that the bookshop's serene atmosphere, which was inherent to church buildings, has made it a popular destination for students to gather and study⁴³. The adaptive reuse of the Dominican Church has created a permanent, attractive public space in the city center. This former church now draws the attention of many locals and tourists visiting Maastricht. The bookshop with its unique design is now recognized internationally as one of the most beautiful bookshops in the world⁴⁴. The successful transformation of the Dominican Church into a bookshop represents how careful restoration and innovative design can breathe new life into historic architecture and create a sense of continuity and connection.

³⁹ This interview was conducted on 8 April by Axelle Maassen

⁴⁰ Delpher, Provinciaal Dagblad. "DE TENTOONSTELLING HANDEL EN NIJVERHEID Te Maastricht," 1925.

⁴¹ Delpher, De Volkskrant. "P.v.d.A. voorzitter sprak in Dominicanenkerk," 1954.

⁴² This interview was conducted on 8 April by Axelle Maassen

⁴³ Students of Maastricht University interviewed by Axelle Maassen on 26 March and 6 April

⁴⁴ Pan Macmillan, "The Most Beautiful Bookshops in The World", Pan Macmillan, 1 juni 2022, <https://www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/fiction/most-beautiful-bookshops-from-around-the-world>.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the adaptive reuse of historic Catholic churches in Limburg is a multifaceted approach that not only addresses the challenges of secularization and declining churches, but also serves as a means to preserve, protect, and celebrate the rich cultural and architectural heritage of the province.

The adaptive reuse of these sacred spaces will breathe new life into the buildings that have played a central role in the social, cultural, and religious fabric of Limburg for centuries.

The historic churches have been transformed in the form of functioning, readily available facilities serving their community's changing needs as a result of adapted reuse. Repurposed spaces are becoming a dynamic hub of activity, promoting social interaction, community engagement, and the dissemination of culture. Adaptive reuse ensures that these buildings continue to serve as icons of social significance in their respective cities and towns by maintaining the architectural integrity of these buildings while adapting them to new uses. Furthermore, a sense of pride and connection among the residents is fostered when heritage is integrated into public spaces through efficient reuse. Additionally, the integration of heritage in urban spaces through adaptive reuse fosters a sense of pride and belonging among inhabitants. The reused churches are not only a physical reminder of Limburg's rich history, but they also provide tangible links to the collective memory and identity of their inhabitants. They represent the lasting spirit of Limburg's cultural heritage as symbols of resilience and continuity.

The potential for adaptive reuse to deliver lasting and meaningful contributions to urban life can be seen in the successful transformation of the Dominican Church into a bookshop. By carefully restoring the church's architectural features while adapting it to new commercial use, the project has created a dynamic and inviting space that attracts visitors both locally and globally. Recognized internationally as one of the most beautiful bookshops in the world, the adaptive reuse of the Dominican Church has not only revitalized a historic building but has also revitalized the surrounding city center, drawing locals and tourists alike.

In order to preserve the legacy of Limburg's historic churches and ensure that they remain relevant in a world undergoing rapid change, adaptation reuse is an ideal bridge between past and present. Limburg reaffirms its commitment to the preservation of our culture and architecture treasures for generations to come through adaptive reuse as a heritage approach.

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