

PARTICIPATORY CHURCHES

A Participatory Design Approach to the Redesign of St. Dominicuskerk in Utrecht

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Research Proposal

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MAIN QUESTION

“How can participatory design with the church community of St. Dominicuskerk help in the conservation of the social function of the church?”

SUB-QUESTIONS

1. “What methods of participation design are there, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each method?”
2. “What type of participation design methodology is most suitable for the different stakeholders involved in the redesign of the church?”
3. “What are the primary and secondary demands of the church community and other stakeholders for the redesign of the St. Dominicuskerk?”

CASE STUDY

Sint Dominicuskerk
Oog in Al, Utrecht
The Netherlands



INTRODUCTION

Churches are experiencing a steady decline in churchgoers in the past decades (CBS, 2020). In response to this, churches are shutting down with vacant churches as result. The still-existing church community mostly consisting of elderly people, lose its spiritual and social space. Finding a new community might be difficult due to the decline of available churches and the increasing distances between churches. Therefore, the closure of the church can cause loneliness among elderly people (Ennor, 2007). Ideally, the former church retains its social function after the spiritual function has abstained. Architects usually tend to work from a top-down approach. However, full support from the neighbourhood and existing church community are needed for a social function to thrive. To involve these communities, participatory design (P.D.) methods can be applied in the redesign of the church. This research focuses on the different P.D. methods applied to religious communities in redesigning religious buildings.



Kerkfotografie Nederland, (2016)

Goldenberg (1995) defines participatory design as a design approach that places a premium on the active involvement of stakeholder practitioners in the predesign and decision-making process. According to Maisel et al. (2018, p. 13) “applying participatory design usually results in a more integrative solution that is less expensive.” To apply participatory design accordingly, the various methods of participatory design will be analysed. Each method’s advantages and disadvantages will be identified. With this, an appropriate participatory design method will be selected for the church community of St. Dominicuskerk in Utrecht.

This case study functions as an experiment of the chosen participatory design method. The church community, alongside the involvement of the neighbourhood, could express their vision regarding the redesign in different stages of the design process. After the completion of the final design, the selected participatory design method will be evaluated.

Keywords:

participatory design, methodology, churches, communities, stakeholders, social function

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The existing church community could lose their social space. A social gathering space could be defined as a space where social events can take place in which a diverse group of people can interact and socialize. The church community will be involved in the redesign process through participatory design to prevent this from happening. The church community can then guide the architect through the redesign. From this, the following question arises:

“How can participatory design with the church community of St. Dominicuskerk help in the conservation of the social function of the church?”

A clear overview of various participatory design methods is needed to answer this question. With the sub-question **“What methods of participation design are there, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each method?”** This sub-question will be answered through the literature study and case studies analysis. With this information, interviews can be conducted with architects who have experience with participatory design.

After listing the different participatory methods, a selection will be made of what method is most suitable for the case study and its stakeholders. The second sub-question is therefore as follows: **“What type of participation design methodology is most suitable for the different stakeholders involved in the redesign of the church?”** Here it is important to assess what the desires are per stakeholder group and in what way they wish to participate and what available resources they are willing to invest.

After determining a suitable P.D. methodology, the participation process can be started beginning with assessing the various demands of the stakeholders involved. The third, and last sub-question is as follows: **“What are the primary and secondary demands of the church community and other stakeholders for the redesign of the St. Dominicuskerk?”** The different demands will be analysed per stakeholder group, together with the acquired value assessment using the framework of A.P. Roders (Roders & Spoormans, 2020), and the compatibility or contradicting demands will become clear.

By answering all the sub-questions, the selected participatory design methods will be applied to the redesign of the St. Dominicuskerk in Utrecht. During different stages in the design process, the church community will be involved to re-evaluate the design decisions made. In the end, the process [fig. 1] will be evaluated to see whether the chosen participatory design methodology assisted in the conservation of the social function of the church.

METHODOLOGY

SUB-QUESTION 1

Various reports have been written regarding the inclusion of communities in the design process. The books ‘Inclusive design; implementation and evaluation’ by Maisel et al. (2018, p. 13-45) and ‘A dialogical model for participatory design’ by Jeng (1995, p. 59-135) facilitate a theoretical foundation. Besides literary sources, religious buildings designed together with communities could be analysed. With both the literary foundation and case study analysis, various architects with P.D. experiences could be interviewed.

Methods: Literary research, case study, interviews

Products: Various participatory methodologies

Risks: methods could be time consuming

SUB-QUESTION 2

Each participant has a different desire and available resource. In what way do they want to be involved, and how do the participants want to contribute during and after the design process (ex. financial investment or participatory involvement)? The church community shall be the subject of qualitative interviews. Due to time constraints, stakeholders in the neighbourhood shall be involved through quantitative surveys.

Method: Interviews (church), surveys (neighbourhood)

Products: Oversight of methodology per stakeholder

Risks: Cooperation is required from everyone involved

SUB-QUESTION 3

To answer this sub-question, each stakeholder involved is asked their demands regarding the function if the church were to be redesigned. The selected P.D. method used should flow out of sub-question 2. This data will be analysed and compared according to who demanded what, what their involvement is, and whether the demands are compatible or contradicting with one another.

Method: Interviews (church), surveys (neighbourhood)

Products: Mapping of demands

Risks: No risks anticipated

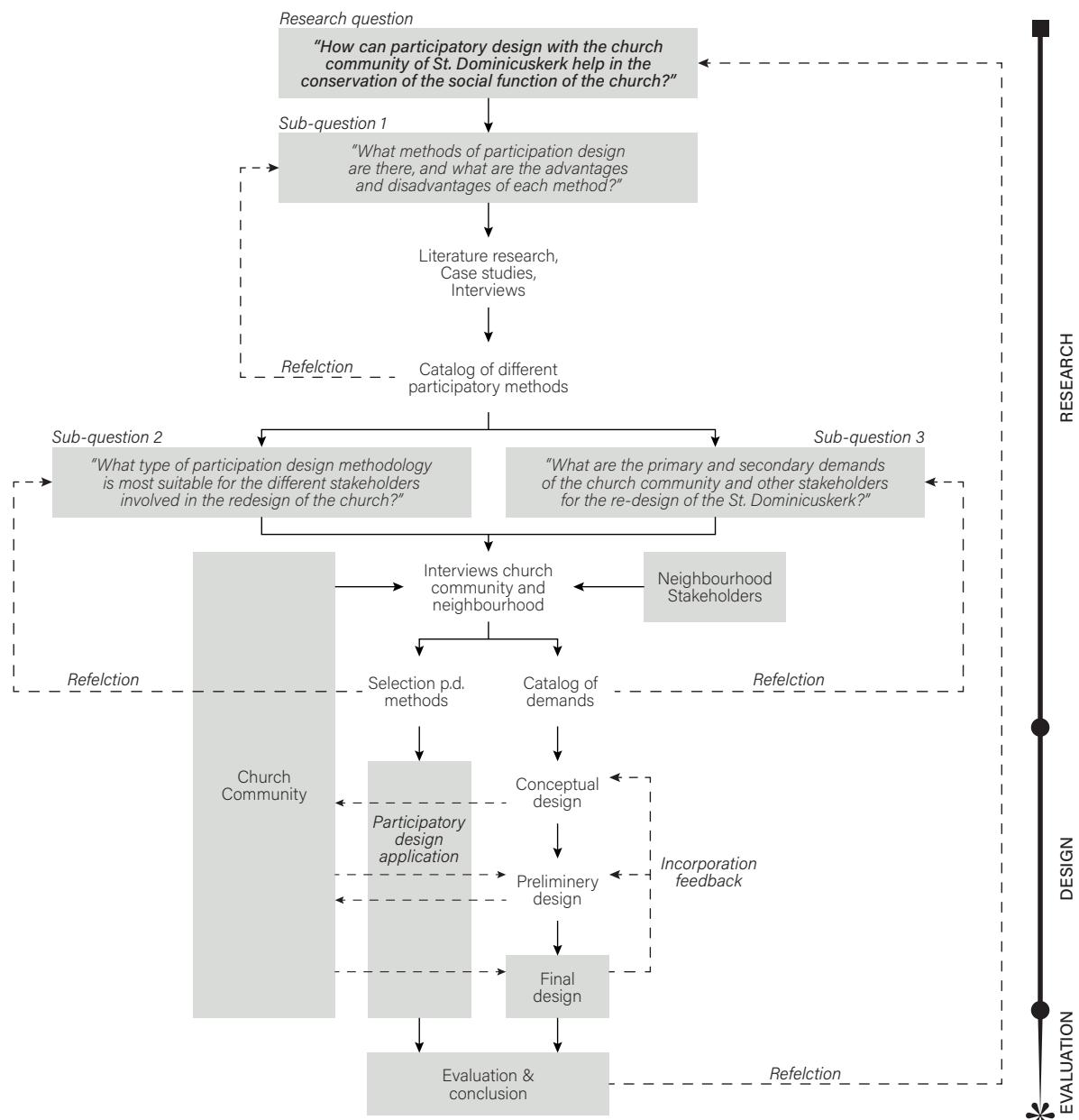


Figure 1: Research and Design scheme

RELEVANCE

Participatory Design is described in an article by Mahabadi et al. (2013, p. 15) as a designing approach that originates from Scandinavia in the 1960s and 1970s. The participatory design principles are rooted in the concerns regarding the impact of technologies on the health and rights of labourers. By supporting this approach as designers, all participants involved in participatory design can express themselves which improves the functioning and longevity of the design after finalization and future utilization according to Maisel et al. (2018, p. 13). Utilizing this intangible resource of communal knowledge and experience is one way to represent the uniqueness of a project. In this research, optimization is sought after for participatory design with communities of religious buildings. This knowledge could thereafter be applied to other redesign projects of religious buildings.

FRAME OF REFERENCE

In this research, various stakeholders can be involved. Given the limited timeframe, only the existing church community shall be involved in the redesign process of the St. Dominicuskerk. Other stakeholders in the neighbourhood of Oog in Al shall be involved in the redesign through other methods such as surveys or other quantitative data collection methodologies. The topic of participatory design can be quite broad. For this reason, in practice, participatory design projects are considerably longer in the early stages of the design (Maisel et al., 2018, p. 13). Since time is not a luxury in this research, the participatory design process shall only focus on what social functions are wanted and where in the church alterations can happen. The available resources from the community, such as financial investments, are to be considered in this process also. Due to time constraints, the neighbourhood stakeholders shall only be involved in the determination of what functions are desired and what resources are available. The church community shall also be involved in the determination of where in the church alterations can happen.

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In Maisel et al. (2018, p. 13-45) book 'Inclusive Design; Implementation and Evaluation', the different prerequisites are addressed regarding the involvement of communities in the design process. The process is divided into four chapters 'predesign', 'design', 'construction' and 'occupancy'. The first chapter would be the most interesting for this research. In this chapter, the correct sample group (p. 17-18) and methods of user input (p. 19-22) are addressed.

Jeng, H. E. (1995). A dialogical model for participatory design: a computational approach to group planning (1st ed.). Delft: Publikatiebureau Bouwkunde.

In Jeng's dissertation, a methodology for urban participation is developed. In the third chapter (p. 59 – 136), different methodologies are reviewed and problems are highlighted. This information can function as an academic foundation on which a variety of participatory methodologies can be based. This book is similar in research structure, be it more in-depth, and can function as an example for this research.

LITERATURE

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