Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

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R. Nottrot, J. van de Laar, H. van der Meel
**General**

**Personal information**

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**Studio**

Theme: Explorelab  
Mentors:  
Design mentor: Robert Nottrot  
Research mentor: Jeroen van de Laar  
Building technology mentor: Hubert van der Meel

Argumentation of choice of the studio: As a final graduation project I wanted to set up my own research and design project in which I am able to integrate my own fascination, namely the redesign and transformation of vacant churches.

**Graduation project**

**General information**

Title research: Experiencing the atmosphere: How to deal with the architectural elements when redesigning churches.  
Title design: Memento mori et novam vitam  
(\textit{Remember death and the beginning of new life})  
Theme: Redesign and transformation  
Subject: Vacant churches  
Location: Ammerzoden

**Problem statement**

Europe’s largest museum is for sale. The past few years, the number of churches and monasteries across Western Europe that are being forced to close their doors is increasing rapidly. The Church of England has to close around 20 churches per year. About 200 churches in Denmark have discontinued their services in the past few years. In Germany, in the past decade, the Catholic Church has had to close down roughly 500 churches. In The Netherlands this trend is even stronger. It is estimated that 1,000 Catholic and 700 Protestant churches will close within the next ten and four years, respectively.
The large number of closing churches reflects the rapid decline of faith in Europe. Figures show that the percentage of the Dutch population feeling affiliated with any religion has dropped from almost one hundred percent in the first half of the nineteenth century to almost fifty percent today. This trend has consequences for the whole society. Neighbourhoods will be confronted with these empty churches, which for many centuries have been the centrepiece of the community. Especially in small towns, often consisting of only a handful of public buildings and a few houses, the abandoned churches form a big hole in the town centre.

For most Christians the closing of a church is an emotional event. For generations they have practised their beliefs in these buildings and have felt both grief and joy there. However, even many non-religious residents feel upset when these churches fall into disuse and are threatened with demolition, as they represent important landmarks and have both great historic and cultural value in Western society. This issue establishes a question for communities, and governments: what to do with these holy, but now vacant buildings?

Research question

The challenge will be to redesign these vacant churches and repurpose them, without forgetting the great architectural values that are often present in these buildings. Based on this problem, the following research question is formulated:

“How can vacant churches be redesigned in such a way that the atmospheric aspects inherent to church design are maintained or enhanced?”

To answer this question, it is of importance to divide the main question into the following sub-questions:

“What architectural elements constitute such atmosphere in church design?”

“What type of interventions and modifications can be made in the redesign of a church?”

“What are the influences of these interventions and modifications for the atmospheric aspects?”

Design goal

The design goal for the Ruinchurch in Ammerzoden will be to make a redesign in which the strong atmospheric elements of the location will be used to accommodate the experience of the new building. The challenge will also be how to deal with the existing building, as sections of it have become a ruin over the years and part of the location is still a graveyard. In the design, I want to make the building part of the community again by combining the old and the new as a harmonious ensemble, while at the same time clearly showing the distinction between the two.
Process

Methodology

To answer the research question mentioned previously, the following methods will be used:

- Literature study
- Case study still in use
- Case study repurposed

First of all, to form a theoretical framework for my research, I will use existing literature about church design and atmosphere within architecture to determine what is already known about the subject. Next, the research will contain case studies of churches which are still in use, to answer the sub-question what the architectural elements are that constitute the atmosphere. After that, example churches that already have been redesigned set by, to identify different types of interventions and modifications and to analyse their influence on the atmosphere. This will all be done using images, diagrams and text.

Proposed literature


Proposed Precedents

Still in use:
- Petrus and Paulus Church - Maassluis
- st. John’s Cathedral - ’s-Hertogenbosch
- st. Servaas Basilica - Maastricht
- Abbey of Sint Benidictusberg - Vaals
- Pantheon - Rome
(and more)

Repurposed:
- Dominicanen bookshop - Maastricht
- Waanders bookshop - Zwolle
- Jopenchurch - Haarlem
- Broerechurch - Bolsward
- The Jane - Antwerp
(and more)

Reflection

Relevance

As society struggles to repurpose its vacant churches, some solutions are less reputable than others. People often want to restore the social function of bringing people together the church once had. The problem, however, is the high maintenance costs of these buildings. This often results in commercial projects occupying the space, whose interests lie with inexpensive and quick solutions, rather than making the most out of a building from an architectural point of view.

Although a lot of churches have already been redesigned in the past couple of years, a clear overview of the influence of interventions and modifications on the atmosphere has not been made yet. The goal of the thesis therefore, is to create a collection of types of interventions and their effects for architects to use when redesigning a church. This can act as a frame of reference for future design assignments.

Time planning

Week 36
- Start of the studio

Week 37 - 41
- Framing research topic/questions
- Choosing design and research mentors
- Visiting case studies

Week 42
- Choosing design location
- Visiting case studies
- Preparations P1 presentation

Week 43
- P1 presentation

Week 44 - 46
- Reflection P1 presentation
- Analysing case studies
- Visiting case studies
- Analysing design location

Week 46
- Deadline P2 admission
Week 47 - 49

Analyzing case studies
Visiting case studies
Plan of requirements design
First sketches design

Week 49

Building technology mentors meeting

Week 50 - 51

Analyzing case studies
Visiting case studies
First sketches design

Week 52

Christmas break

Week 1 - 3

Handing-in graduation plan
Sketching/concept design
Defining qualities to achieve for the design
Analyzing case-studies
Visiting case-studies
Preparations P2 presentation

Week 3

P2 presentation

Week 4

Holiday break to Rome
Visiting Pantheon (case-study)

Week 5 - 7

Reflection P2 presentation
Working on (preliminary) design, construction and climate design
Finalising research

Week 7

Hand in research thesis

Week 8 - 9

Work on Design
Preparations P3 presentation

Week 11 (Week can vary)

P3 presentation

Week 8 - 9

Reflection P3 presentation
Work on Design

Week 15

Deadline P4 admission

Week 14 - 19

Work on Design
Preparations P4 presentation

Week 20

P4 presentation (Deadline p5 admission)

Week 22 - 25

Reflection P4 presentation
Finalising Design
Models/Rendering/presentation drawings
Preparations P5 presentation

Week 26/27

P5 presentation