

# RESEARCH PLAN

An Investigation into the role of the Transition zone in the Transformation of the Grote- of Mariakerk towards a public interior, whilst maintaining its heritage values



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# INTRODUCTION

Within the graduation studio ‘Revitalising Heritage: Zero Waste Church’, new functions for endangered vacant churches are being sought. In addition to this main theme, the graduation studio also looks at how students position themselves on zero-waste: “Is it heritage or is it waste?” (Quist, W & Dos Santos Gonçalves, J, 2022).

This document covers the research plan of the entire graduation studio and focuses on the role of the transition zone in the transformation of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel into a public interior, whilst maintaining its heritage values. It contains literary research, comparative research by means of case studies and experimental research by means of testing the theory on the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel. In the first period of the graduation studio, an ABC analysis is conducted in cooperation with Levi Steevensz in which, among other things, zero-waste design and heritage values play a major role. The ABC analysis provides input for this research into the transformation of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel into a public interior and the two are intertwined in this way.

# PROBLEM STATEMENT

Churches have always been in the centre of the Dutch society. (De Kruijf & De Roest, 2010). It was a place of gathering where people from different backgrounds in society came together under one roof. The villages and towns are often characterized by the churches that stand as major landmarks in its environment. (M. Kloos, 1993, p. 17). Nearly every place in the Netherlands, from big cities to the smallest villages, has its own church and often even several churches. In 2022 the Netherlands counts 2501 residential towns (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022) and from the year 1200, the Netherlands has built about 19,000 churches of which 7,000 church buildings are still present in the Netherlands today (Kerk Zonder Grenzen, 2022).

However, the population's religious involvement has declined sharply in recent decades. *"Between 1970 and 2010, the Dutch population increased by 28%. In the same 40 years alone, the number of Dutch people registered with a church denomination decreased by more than 3.1 million, a contraction of one third."* (De Hart, J & Van Houwelingen, P., 2018, p. 150). Declining church attendance and church membership make the maintenance of church buildings too expensive. *"Churches depend on voluntary contributions from the faithful and they cannot raise the financial resources to maintain their parish churches."* As a result of this, many congregations were combined, making other churches become vacant. (De Hart, J & Van Houwelingen, P. 2018).

The vacancy of churches is increasing rapidly. The Taskforce on the Future of Church Buildings calculated that two churches per week will be closed in the coming years. (De Hart, J & Van Houwelingen, P. (2018), p.36). Although many churches are closing, both religious and non-religious people consider them as valuable. (Church magazine, 2022). This has to do with the fact that *"Historic buildings play a key role in the socio-economic and cultural development of a society by providing a physical link and progression of cultural evidence to the past."* (Yakubu, E, et al., 2017, p.2). This is also the case in the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel, which will lose its function as of October 2022. The Protestant community of Meppel had two churches at their disposal, the Grote- of Mariakerk and the Samenstroom. The maintenance of both church buildings could no longer be afforded by the church community. Therefore, the church community has moved to the other nearby church, the Samenstroom, and the Grote- or Mariakerk has been vacant ever since.

It is of great importance to find a new use for churches that are already vacant in time, and churches that await the same fate in the near future, in order to avoid long-term vacancy and additional maintenance costs. This is also important because churches still have a large impact on social cohesion in societies (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020; Kalmar, 2010). Taking care of cultural heritage together can ensure that society builds up a sense of responsibility, persistence and respect for the knowledge and values of other residents. This strengthens social cohesion within a society through cultural heritage. (Kalmar, 2010)

The Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel is considered very valuable and therefore listed as a national monument. It lies in the heart of Meppel, is surrounded by retail and catering functions and its adjacent square is used by as a public space. The vacancy of buildings in such prominent areas of the city, like the case-study of Meppel, will detract from social and physical quality of these areas (De Kruijf & De Roest, 2010). To prevent this from happening, a transformation of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel is necessary.

The secularization of the Netherlands has ensured that the function of the church has changed (Kennedy, J. C. K., 2010) and nowadays people walk into a church less and less. In addition, according to Van Engelshoven, the churches are *“just too often locked”* (Church magazine, 2022). Nevertheless, churches do still fulfill a central function within a city, village or neighborhood. (Kerkmagazine, 2022) currently. According to Van Engelshoven, Minister of Education, Culture and Science, it is *“crucial for the preservation and restoration of churches that the buildings remain in use and retain a relevant function in society.”* And if the churches are no longer used for church services, Van Engelshoven argues for a public function. (Church magazine, 2022). The Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands also believes that the church should not withdraw from the public domain (Kennedy, J. C. K., 2010).

This is also the case in Meppel, so the municipality and residents of Meppel want to keep the building. but its function must change. I am interested in studying the possibilities of transforming the Grote- or Mariakerk into a public interior. Kloos (1993) describes public interiors as buildings in which *“the city’s public space is, in a certain sense, continued. These buildings’ interiors are intended to be temporary, comfortable, covered alternatives to one’s own home.”* By this transformation, I am trying to give a contemporary twist to the original church idea in which the church is for the entire society. In this way, the transformed church can once again be accessible to everyone, whether religious or not, instead of being vacant. The public character of buildings is strongly linked to the façade of the building (Martinelli, P. M. (2019) and therefore the research focuses on the transition zone, which is located around the in- and outside of the façade. Because the church is listed as a national monument, it is of great importance that the heritage values that the church possesses are also taken into account when transforming the church. In this way, the church does not lose its heritage value and the quality of Meppel city centre does not decline. Instead, the transformation of Grote- or Mariakerk can be an addition to the existing city centre of Meppel and improve the social and physical quality of its environment. Cultural heritage plays an essential role in developing strategies for enhancing the image of contemporary cities (Naheed, S., Shooshtarian, S., 2022). The transformed church can also contribute towards tourism in Meppel, since old historic buildings provide evidence of the origins and identity of a distinct society (Yakubu, E, et al., 2017, p.2).

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

***“What role can the transition zone play in the transformation towards a public interior, whilst maintaining its heritage values, when redesigning the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel?”***

To answer the main question, I pose the following sub-questions:

*“What role can the transition zone play in the relationship between public interior and public space?”*

*“How has the transition zone contributed to the connection between the public interior and public space in existing church transformations?”*

*“How have the heritage values been incorporated in these examples of church transformations?”*

*“Which design approaches can be applied to the Grote- of Mariakerk when transforming it towards a public interior?”*

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research aims to give insight to the role of the transition zone in the transformation of the Grote-of Mariakerk in Meppel towards a public interior. Therefore it is necessary to understand the existing theories about the topics that are critical to this research. By doing so, this research can be positioned in a broader context.

## Public Interior

Architect Manuel de Solà-Morales was one of the first designers to stress the importance of public interiors, and he describes them as *“places that are used as public spaces although they might belong to a private owner.”* (M. de Solà-Morales, 1992). Public interiors aren't particularly defined by its ownership, but by the way people use the building. In line with this, Kloos writes that public interiors continue the public space of a city and that they create a temporary, comfortable, covered alternatives to one's own home. (Kloos, 1993).

American urbanist and sociologist William Whyte mentions the key of success or failure of a public interior is its design and mainly its connection to the street. According to him, the best used and best-liked public interiors have strong visual tie with the outside. (M. Harteveld, 2014, p.128). Besides its visual tie with the outside, public interiors only work as public space if they're able to attract people. (M. Harteveld, 2014, p.130). Kloos also writes about this attraction and says a good public interior should have *“attractive designed entrances so that you walk inside in a natural manner”* (Kloos, 1993, p.26)

*“The public interior is the stage of many casual encounters”* (Kloos, 1993, p.26)

Kloos (1993) also writes there is a growing need for encounters on 'neutral ground'. It is important that 'neutral' encounters can take place in public interiors, the function of the building is inferior to this idea. Therefore, according to Kloos (1993, p. 19), a good public interior consists of the following features:

- It lies on an urban route
- It is easily accessible
- It is in principle accessible to everyone
- Entering is non-committal and implies no compulsion
- It is covered to protect public from the climate
- The site has to be warm
- Possibility to obtain refreshments is appealing
- Temporary form of privacy must be possible
- Visitors don't need to concern themselves with the management of the building



## **Transition zone**

The social and functional diversity of urban buildings is reflected in their facades. Since the facade is directed to the public sphere, it enters a relationship which may be physical, spatial, or visual. (Jürgehake, 2014). Yet, according to Martinelli the façade doesn't belong completely to the interior, or the exterior, but is part of the relationship between these two worlds. (Martinelli, P. M. (2019, p. 58).

Architect Jan Gehl calls this area surrounding the façade, its interior and its exterior, the 'transition zone' and he mentions that gentle transitions between different degrees of publicity are important. According to Gehl, transition zones should be clearly defined, yet accessible and easy to traverse. (Gehl, 2011, p. 21)

*"If the edge works, so does the space"*

(Gehl, 2011, p.150)

In line with this Gehl also writes about The Edge Effect, where people want to stay close to transition zones to avoid open spaces unless the edge zones are fully occupied. Martinelli also mentions the public spaces contribute to the defining quality of the façade. (Martinelli, P. M. (2019, p. 57). Therefore it is important to also integrate the public space, and especially it's edge to make a good transition zone.

# METHODOLOGY

## Literature study

A literature study will be carried out to ensure the topics and terms are understood. This literary study is necessary to be able to understand the case study of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel.

Initially, the topic 'Public Interiors' will be explored by means of different theories which give a broader perspective on the concept and its features. The book '*Public Interiors*' (M. Kloos, 1993), '*The Public Interior as an Idea and Project*' (M. Pimlott, 2016) and '*Public Space: On the Mazes of the Network of an Urbanist.*' (M. Harteveld, 2014) will be used.

The concept of the transition zone will be explored by literature study. The transition zone consists of the façade of a building and the adjacent territories, in our case the public interior and the public space. Therefore this topic is divided into the façade and the public space.

The role of the façade as an intermediary will be explored by literary study. For this '*de Gevel - Een Intermediar Element Tussen Buiten En Binnen*' (Jürgenhake, B., 2016), '*The Façade A Reflection on the Change of the Public Sphere*' (Jürgenhake, B., 2014), '*Close encounters with buildings*' (Gehl et al., 2006), '*Life between buildings*' (Gehl, 2011), '*Lessons for Students in Architecture*' (Hertzberger, 1991), '*Inside The Façade: The Inhabited Space Between Domestic and Urban Realms.*' (Martinelli, P. M., 2019) will be used.

To gain a better understanding public space and its relation to the façade, '*Life between buildings*' (Gehl, 2011), '*The Global Toolkit on Public Space*' (UN-Habitat, 2014), '*Designing Urban Squares.*' (Memluk, M. Z., 2013) and '*A Pattern Language*' (Alexander, C., 2018) will be used.

## Comparative Research

To get a broader perspective in which ways the façade can contribute to the connection between public and private, case studies will be used. In addition, it will be examined how heritage values have been dealt with in these transformations. The findings can be used to determine which elements of the transition zone influence the connectivity between inside and outside. This will help to create an indicator list for the redesign case and criteria for testing. The case studies will be selected by means of the following criteria:

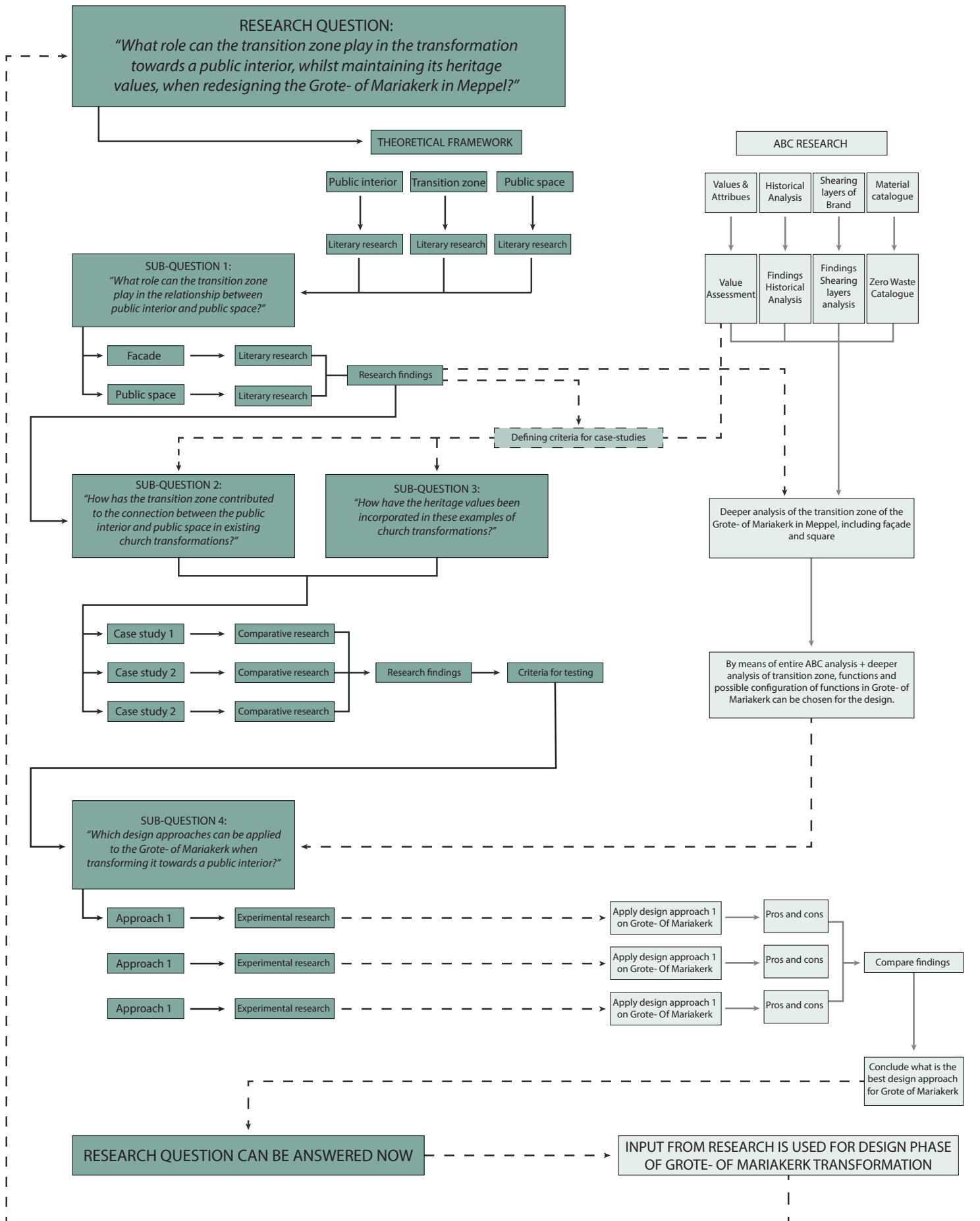
- The building doesn't have to be a church, but must be cultural heritage
- The building must qualify as a 'public interior'
- The building is already transformed into a public interior
- The transformation which is made had effect on the transition zone

## **Experimental Research**

In addition to the comparative research, the design approaches of the case studies will be tested on the case study of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel. Some of the elements might function in a certain case-study but might not be suitable to the case of the Grote- of Mariakerk in Meppel. By testing what works and what does not work at the Grote- or Mariakerk in Meppel, it becomes clear which criteria the Grote- or Mariakerk in Meppel must meet in order to have a positive influence on the connectivity between inside and outside. In this way a design strategy can be developed for the church.

# RESEARCH

# DESIGN



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