

# Adaptation of places of worship to secular functions with the use of narrative method as a tool to preserve religious heritage

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## *Adaptation of places of worship to secular functions with the use of narrative method as a tool to preserve religious heritage*

Sacral objects are an important part of Europe's religious heritage. For centuries, temples have constituted a key element in the urban morphology; they fit into the urban fabric of European cities and are permanently embedded there. Due to the current laicization of Europe, the adaptation of sacred buildings into secular functions has become a necessity for economic reasons. Their owners, architects, conservators and historians are faced with a dilemma: whether to preserve an object or transform it into another function? Places of worship cannot be considered in solely economic terms due to the identity of the place, its current function and its symbolism. Sacred spaces, apart from their function, structure and form, also have meaning. In holy sites, the symbol becomes a narrative tool. The purpose of a narrative in the cultural context is related to the site, the narrator, the recipient and the time of the narrative. Narrative research into semantic architecture, as one of the means of researching sacred architecture, has potential both in analysis and as a tool to facilitate design processes for the appropriate transformation of sacred buildings to serve secular functions.

Keywords: adaptation; sacral buildings; semantic architecture; narrative research

## Introduction

Sacred architecture reflects changes taking place in the social and cultural life of a particular society. It plays a major role in the life of the individual because it “satisfies religious, spiritual and social needs as well as the need for affiliation”.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, sacred buildings have proven the achievements of architectural engineering; they have demonstrated the creative opportunities of architects.<sup>2</sup> In constituting a central place in the urban setting, they fit into the

<sup>1</sup> WIERZBICKA, Anna M. *Architektura jako narracja znaczeniowa* [Architecture as meaningful narration]. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej, 2013, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> SROCZYŃSKA, Jolanta. Social values in the protection of historical monuments – how to teach people to highlight them. In: *Journal of Heritage Conservation*, 2019, 58, p. 60.

urban fabric of European cities and are permanently embedded there. Often, they are hemmed by the urban structure of cities and towns, built as an aspect of the identity of the place. Today they also play a considerable role in the communal cultural identity of the nation. Historic churches – the symbol of community identity, culture and heritage – represent an essential part of collective memory. Hence, in addition to their historical, architectural and ethical values, these objects also have a cultural and social quality. Similarly to the assessment of secular architecture, of importance is the value of the Vitruvian Triad (function, structure, form), but the sacred, like other concepts of religious studies, is not subject to the same criteria as material utilitarianism. Architecture, “which is the carrier of the idea, becomes a silent narrator, while the recipient of the information is the viewer – the participant in the narrative”.<sup>3</sup> It may be argued that architectural objects form a certain story about events of the past years.

Europe is currently experiencing both the desecration of faith-related objects and the secularization of societies. This process is also evident in the urban setting; it reverberates into the conduct of the sacred space itself, including the interiors of churches. However, it is important to remember that churches and cathedrals are places of worship and spaces for meetings, the exchange of views and social memory, places where our civilization and cultural identity were formed.

In many European cities, due to the lack of believers and the high maintenance costs, churches are sometimes sold to private individuals and converted into cultural, residential or service facilities. The issue of changing sacred space concerns almost the entire territory of Europe. The related adaptation of sacred buildings is of a multidimensional nature. As reported by Wesselink, at least one-fifth (approximately 6,900) of Dutch church buildings have been converted to secular functions, and around 25% of Dutch churches built between 1800 and 1970 are now used for non-religious purposes, including as residential complexes, offices and cultural centers.<sup>4</sup> In England, for instance, “nearly 1000 listed places of worship, buildings of the highest heritage value, have been included on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register for 2016”.<sup>5</sup> In Germany, out of 21,000 churches and chapels that belong to the Protestant community, 16,000 still have sacred functions, while the other are used for non-religious purposes.<sup>6</sup>

The phenomenon of desacralization has occurred in all cultures and is not a specific feature of our times. Historic examples demonstrate that sacred objects have been constantly transformed over the centuries. The reason for the transformations was often the political game of the ruling camps, and not the secularization of society. Changes of the current purpose date back to Roman times: at the beginning of Christianity, basilicas and churches were erected in place of pagan temples. The Pantheon was dedicated in 609 to the Holy Mother, Queen of Martyrs, and the curia at the Roman Forum was converted into a Church for St Hadrian. The Byzantine temple of Hagia Sophia was transformed into a mosque following the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453; in 1934 this building was turned into a museum, and in

<sup>3</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> WESSELINK, Herman E. *Een sterke toren in het midden der stad: Verleden, heden en toekomst van bedreigde Nederlandse kerke-bouwen*. PhD Thesis, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> *National Church Trust*, accessed October 21, 2021, <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/1000-churches-historic-englands-heritage-risk-register>.

<sup>6</sup> GOTHE, Kerstin, NETSCH, Stefan. Abandoned and Re-Used Churches in Germany. In: *REAL CORP 2013. Planning Times You better keep planning or you get in deep water, for the cities they are a-changing*. Schwechat: Competence Center of Urban and Regional Planning, 2013, p. 1080.

2020 it again became a mosque. As a result of the October Revolution of 1917, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) took power over most of the territory of the former Russian Empire, and for them the fight against religion was a priority. Many churches, both Orthodox and Catholic, were demolished; others were transformed into factories, libraries, museums and planetariums; and some were turned into car garages, archives and warehouses. After the fall of the Soviet Union, some of them were restored and they once again fulfil sacred functions, but many others are still falling into ruin or are used for non-religious purposes.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that new religious buildings are constantly being developed, for example, in Germany, the Netherlands and France. This is a confirmation of the statement by Eliade, that “man is by nature a religious animal and in its essence strives to sacralize all space”.<sup>7</sup> Sacred architecture reflects the needs of humans who still have a desire for the sacred in its various forms expressed as a semantic narrative. Architecture related to semantics influences not only through aesthetic measures, determined largely by culture, but also by narration, that is, through a story or a form of a story that highlights history. Sacred architecture also has the quality of tradition: “it contains common values that are worth cultivating, which results from the importance of a given object for the community and the significance of the mutual relationship between the monument and its users, or from shared experiences or memories”<sup>8</sup>. One example is an artistic project completed in 2009 by Laurens Kolk, who designed a small white church high on an artificial hill on the edge of the suburb of Leidschenveen, near The Hague. The author used the archetype of the church to recall the lack of churches in these new suburbs. This can be viewed as a message, an appeal to the people. The building cannot be entered; it has been reduced to a church’s visual appearance and the electrical system that triggers the bells.

### The current state of research

The problem of adaptation of sacred buildings is not widespread in Poland, which is a country with deep Christian traditions, where almost 58% of the population attend churches. However, it has become the subject of public attention in Western Europe, the United States and Canada. Therefore, a wide range of scientific publications on this subject have been written there. These include the publication by Coomans (2018), in which the author addresses the issues of the heritage of monastic architecture in the secularizing Western society. Reference should also be made to a book edited by Cappani (2019), containing published articles that focus on current and widely discussed themes: specifically, the decommissioning of churches and the integral management of cultural assets. A book by Reistra and Strolenberg (2020) contains 88 inspiring, richly illustrated examples of contemporary adaptations of historic sacred buildings for secular functions in the Netherlands.

An important source of knowledge is the publication by Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019), which introduces adaptive reuse as a new discipline. It provides the tools to develop innovative and creative approaches that help rethink and redesign existing buildings. The book consists of a wide range of case studies, representing different time periods and strategies for intervention.

Some authors, such as Post (2020) and Verkaaik, et al. (2017), touch upon the issues surrounding the multifunctionality of rituals as challenges of contemporary liturgy, and analyse and criticise the religious space and places of celebration. Researchers Stükelberger (2019),

<sup>7</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. *Traktat o historii religii* [A History of Religious Ideas]. Łódź: OPUS, 1993, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 12.

De Wildt et al. (2019) and De Wildt (2020) analyse architecture and space as religion, the phenomenon of adaptation as a process, and the transformation of temples for other secular purposes.

The abovementioned publications concern the architectural, technical and historical aspects of the adaptation of sacred buildings for secular purposes, as well as the religious and liturgical aspects. However, they do not address this phenomenon in the semantic–narrative approach, in which sacred architecture is treated as a site of a story through semantic elements combined into a cohesive whole.

### Semantic narrative and architecture

Narratology and its methods were first applied to the field of semantics in literary research. Over time, narrative research was introduced to philosophy and psychology. The use of narrative in semantic research can be transferred to the analysis of architectural spaces, in which it has a major impact on the perception of the object. Elements of a sacred building can be regarded as a way of telling a story about an event. Narrative analysis, originally drawn from the humanities, can be an instrument to research and design objects connected with meaning. They fall outside the scope of aesthetic and functional research, with not only form and matter at the core of their interest, but also the semantic layer. In the analysis of ancient sacred objects, the narrative may be regarded as the canvas of a given story about the site of the event and history, in which all the elements (threads) of a story with a semantic character are intertwined into a harmonious whole.<sup>9</sup>

Narration is defined “as a set of coherent semantic elements present in a given object, creating an open channel for the flow of semantic information”.<sup>10</sup> Just like structure, which gives the whole unity, narration is also a junction that binds meanings in architecture. Narrative in architecture can be treated not only as the structure of a given object, which is often confused with the way a given form is built, but also as a thread that binds together all semantic elements in the object. As in literary research, the core issue of analysis is not the style or stylistic features of a given object, but the storytelling style with regards to an event, expressed through semantic elements. In this approach, the narrative in architecture can be a universal message in sacred spaces and carry the same meaning in them as symbols.

There is no architecture without context, just as there is nothing sacred without meaning. Semantic architecture can be treated as a carrier of a story that meets the pragmatic and metaphysical dimensions of culture.<sup>11</sup> The definition of narrative in architecture is not a straightforward matter. As in literature, psychology or philosophy, it is a blurred term that enters into semiological research. A creator and critic of narration, Bonenberg, defines the notion of architectural narrative as “the process of building meanings characterizing space, describing architecture in words or pictures”.<sup>12</sup> Narration, as Eliade notes, is said to be like a myth, “it is a product of culture – the recreation of history that restores meaning to past

<sup>9</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> RABIEJ, Jan. Universality of the Sacred – Architecture of the Metaphysical Culture. In: *Architecture. The Mute Transmitter of the Outspoken Emotions. The Integrating Role of the Spiritual Places for the XXI Century City Dwellers*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej, 2007, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> BONENBERG, Wojciech. Narracja architektoniczna a kontekst kulturowy. In: *Zeszyty naukowe Politechniki Poznańskiej. Architektura i Urbanistyka*, 2007, Zeszyt 9.

events”.<sup>13</sup>

In these investigations, the narrative in architecture will be treated not only as the structure of a given object, but also as a thread that binds together all semantic elements in the object (*connectens filum*), the field of mental images.<sup>14</sup> As such, every narrative is a structure, but not every structure is a narrative.

Contemporary researchers have been looking for a definition of the human by describing the motives of his internal actions. Eliade introduced the concept of *homo religiosus*,<sup>15</sup> Cassirer – *homo symbolicus*,<sup>16</sup> Mitchell – *homo narratus*,<sup>17</sup> and Hermans and Dimaggio – *homo dialogicus*.<sup>18</sup> All these terms are mutually compatible. Man, as a religious being, has a need for sacralization of space through symbols that are interrelated via narration, and which create language in dialogical forms.

Narrative structure is composed of interconnected semantic elements: signs and symbols. In semantic architecture, sign and symbol appear alternately, because each symbol is a sign, but not every sign is a symbol. The sign has a purposeful effect and an explicit reference to the creator's intention. An example of a semantic element that changes depending on the context is the sign of cross, which some recipients may perceive as merely a sign – a provider of information that the building is an object of Christian worship. The symbol in the context of the narrative structure in semantic architecture explains the recounted story, recalling the sacred meaning of past events. It is therefore an indispensable element of a sacred narrative.<sup>19</sup>

Just as an object never exists without a context, a symbol or a sign does not appear individually in an object, creating a hierarchical structure. Its basis is constituted by the natural symbolism of the cosmos, through which every person can come to understand the ultimate beingness.<sup>20</sup>

## Subject and purpose of research

The subject of this study is the analysis of the adaptation of former sacred objects in Western and Central Europe using the narrative method. The research is qualitative, not quantitative, and serves to explore the research problem, to elucidate the directions of transformation of specific sacred objects, and to elaborate on possible areas for further research. The territorial scope covers Western and Central Europe, as an area where the phenomenon of adaptation is widespread and where numerous controversial examples of adaptation of former places of worship can be identified.

The aim of this research is to draw attention to the important and often forgotten semantic aspect of sacred objects in the course of their adaptation to secular functions. The aim of narrative research is to attempt to enter the real, multi-layered, often hidden content of an object. As such, as noted by Eliade,

architectural narrative in places of the sacred grows out of culture, reaching for deeper

<sup>13</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. *Mity, sny i misteria* [Myths, Dreams and Mysteries]. Warszawa: KR, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. *Traktat o ...*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> CASSIRER, Ernst. *Symbol i język* [Language and myth]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogiki i Administracji, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> MITCHELL, W. J. T. *On Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press Journals, 1981.

<sup>18</sup> HERMANS, Hubert J., DIMAGGIO, Giancarlo. *The Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> BONENBERG, Wojciech. Narracja architektoniczna a kontekst kulturowy. In: *Zeszyty naukowe Politechniki Poznańskiej. Architektura i Urbanistyka*, 2007, Zeszyt 9.

<sup>20</sup> WIERZBICKA, Architektura jako..., p. 24.

archetypes, rooted in the structure of the universe. This desire to discover the truth and the constant and unattainable striving for balance results from man's constant longing for paradise – as a state of primeval beginnings.<sup>21</sup>

Narrative research (described in the next section) can be used to analyze selected examples of adaptation and to present a certain model of conduct during the adaptation of sacred objects. This model may prove to be of great help to certain legislative processes.

In the present study, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

(1) Adaptation of sacred objects should be considered on various levels due to the multidimensional nature of the building. Apart from their historical, aesthetic and cultural value, sacred objects also have semantic and religious significance that must be taken into account in adaptation for a secular function.

(2) The narrative method, which focuses on the semantic layer, can represent an important complementary tool, thanks to which it is possible to analyze various aspects of adaptation in a multifaceted manner in order to find a worthy destination for former places of worship.

## Narrative method

The narrative method, resulting from narrative research into contemporary semantic architecture, was formulated by Anna Maria Wierzbicka on the basis of the book, *Architecture as meaningful narration* (2013), translated into the field of research on the adaptation of ancient places of worship. This method consists of analysing selected objects according to the following aspects: history, place, time, purpose, creator of the narrative and reconsecration. In cult objects, some aspects of the narrative are constant, while others are changeable and constantly altered. The method assumes selected projects will be analysed in two periods: the creation of the object and its adaptation to a function other than the sacred one. This method allows an object to be examined in various aspects and on several grounds.

## History

The first important factor is the story told by the object. In Christianity, temples are associated with liturgy, and all narrative elements evoke the history of salvation revealed in Christ. Sacred places evoke a story – history as a collection of facts. The questions to be answered are: What event does a given object tell us about? What idea does it represent? What functions did the building serve? What community did it belong to – was it a monastery, a garrison or a parish building, for example? Has it been adapted to a secular function before? It is also essential to ask what story the building tells us after its adaptation: what it is for, what social group it belongs to, what event it tells about.

Sacred buildings and sites evoke the history of the origins of a given object. They might recall traumatic events (as with places of remembrance of, for example, the Holocaust, catastrophes and terrorist attacks) or they might be places of religious worship related to the value and image of God in a given religion and history of salvation. In Christianity, the church is treated as the house of God and the house of the people of God. The central narrative figure is Jesus Christ – all the symbols of the temple refer to him, as well as the narrative created thanks to them.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. *Traktat o ...*, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> HANI, Jean. *Symbolika świątyni chrześcijańskiej* [The Symbolism of the Christian Temple]. Kraków: Znak, 1998.

### *The site*

A second important factor of narrative in architecture is the site of narration – the location of the object in the architectural, urban and social context. When analysing an object, one should take into account the location in the spatial sense as well as the perception and reception of objects by the local community. What is the significance of the building in the urban layout of the city or district? The site becomes a holy place because it has participated in an unusual act – a revelation, an act of destruction, and so on – and the object is built at the site of the event, for example, where sanctuaries are created at and outside the place of apparition. Location in the architectural context and the surrounding context are crucial. Was the church built first or did the community need a place for prayer? Context is essential in an architectural interpretation. It helps us to understand that a sacred object can be a witness of historical events. It is also important to analyse the site during or after adaptation.

### *Time*

The third aspect is the object's time of origin. The historical and cultural context in which the object was created, the circumstances of its creation and the political period are also relevant, as is the moment of its creation in relation to the time of the event it commemorates. One example is the construction of the St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral between 1894 and 1912 on one of the most important squares in Warsaw, Saski Square. In the assumptions of the Russian partitioning powers, this cathedral was to be a symbol of Russian rule on Polish territory. It was finally demolished in 1926, after the Polish State regained independence in 1918. Also, the aspect of the creation of religious objects in the place of apparitions influences the spatial narrative, which becomes visible in places of worship where the profane space takes on a sacred meaning, e.g., the creation of sanctuaries after the apparitions in Lourdes (France), Fatima (Portugal) and Guadeloupe (Mexico). The aspect of time is also taken into account in the analysis of the transformation from a sacred function to a secular goal. In which political, historical and cultural period did it occur? Under what circumstances did the adaptation take place?

### *Creator of the narrative*

The fourth factor that influences the narrative is the creator of the object in relation to the story. This aspect is the most difficult to analyse because beliefs and intentions are often hidden, so the creative intentions are not always legible. What is important is the idea of the architect, the artist, the builder, their creative intentions, beliefs and intentions. Here, the storyteller's attitude towards the story, their nationality and worldview, as well as their personal experiences and creative achievements, are crucial.

The author's creative intentions are also of particular importance when adapting the temple. It is therefore important that the designer understands the cultural context and the historical, cultural and religious values of the former sacred object. It must be taken into account whether this person is religious or has atheistic views, whether they have a sentimental relationship with this place, and whether they have experience of working with former religious buildings.

### *Purpose*

The fifth element of this method is the purpose of the narrative. In places of worship, the purpose of the narrative is to evoke the history of salvation. If the temple was always used

for the celebration of the liturgy, the function of the adaptation may vary. The questions to be answered are: What is the former sacred object supposed to serve? Was the adaptation an attempt to save the building from destruction, or was the intention its utilitarian use and profit? How was this achieved? Was its history lost in the process of adaptation? The interior layout should be analysed, considering questions such as: To what extent has the functional layout been altered or preserved? How have new elements been integrated with the original monument? How have the liturgical furnishings (tabernacles, crosses, altars, paintings, etc.) and the new interior furnishings been adapted to the building's new functions?

### *Reconsecration*

The sixth factor, which is also key in narrative analysis, is the reconsecration of a formerly sacred object that currently fulfils a secular function. Here, consideration should be given to whether the desacralisation process is reversible. Is it possible to resacralise an object that has had a secular function? Does profanation occur at present – with the preservation of the original interior design and the introduction of a new function? Will interference with the internal structure of the building allow liturgical functions to be fulfilled inside the temple again in, say, 50 or 100 years?

### Discussion

Narration represents a kind of storytelling system. Sacred spaces, apart from their function, structure and form, also have a meaning. In sacred places, the symbol becomes a narrative tool. The purpose of a narrative in a cultural context is related to the site, the narrator, the recipient and the time of the narrative. The narrative, which is a structure, binds together all semantic elements that cannot exist autonomously in the cognitive category. In this case, architecture becomes the path to deeper cognition and self-awareness. The narrative, like the symbol, is accessible to every human being because it resides in human experience. In sacred architecture, the narrative has the characteristics of a common system based on categories such as continuity, transcendentality and apriority. In architecture, the narrative has parallel functions of experience and time, which are binding in the categorization of a given object. That said, the key narrative attribute is adequacy, which is related to the reception of individual semantic elements characterized by a significant congruence.

In analysing narratives in sacred spaces, a question arises about the purpose of such research. Narrative research can represent a direction of analysis and of the design process, and like other scientific inquiry, it is useful because it generates ideas. Narrative research is not only a useful aspect and multidimensional tool for analysing contemporary sacred architecture, but also a worthy approach to assess former religious sites. Signs and symbols are treated as part of the story in narrative analysis. The narrative method can be the starting point for determining the value of an architectural aesthetic masterpiece. In architecture, narrative constitutes a trace of history expressed by the semantic elements of matter. Narrative adequacy, in relation to the interpreted event, sacralises the space and gives value to the work.

Narration in contemporary architecture can be a research tool for phenomena in a constructed space. The universe is an image of historical processes, and in architecture, objects and groups of objects always create a story about the events of the past. There is no architecture without ideas and identity; a sacred object is a reflection of semantics.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> WIERZBICKA, *Architektura jako...*, p. 35.



The narrative approach to historical buildings is also confirmed by the architect and conservator Nigel Walter, creator of the narrative approach to monument conservation at the University of Cambridge. In his book, *Narrative theory in conservation: Change and living buildings* (2020), he articulates that the narrative approach to historical buildings allows the researcher to treat the building as a continuous and living narrative, demonstrating a coherent theoretical position for conservation that addresses the urgent question of how historic buildings that remain in use should respond to change.

### Case studies

Below, three projects to adapt former places of worship are presented and analysed using the narrative method. In all three cases, an attempt was made to enter the narrative, multi-layered, often hidden content of the object, showing the positive and negative aspects of the specific project (Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Analysis of selected examples of adaptation using the narrative method*

NM		Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3
		<i>The former St Peter's Church in Vught; now the DePetrus Meeting Center.</i>	<i>The former Church of St Willibrord in the Hooge Zwaluwe; now the Restaurant "Onze Kerk".</i>	<i>Former hospital chapel in Antwerp, Belgium; now "The Jane" restaurant.</i>
History	Religion Community	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic
	Ownership	Church owned	Private owned	Private owned
	Accessibility	Unlimited access	Unlimited access	Limited access
Site	Spatial Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built in the city centre</li> <li>Shapes the silhouette of the city</li> <li>Was not oriented to the east: the entrance was from the side of the church square</li> <li>Surrounded by greenery, partially fenced with a brick fence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural environment</li> <li>Shapes the silhouette of the village of single-family houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A chapel built as a part of a military hospital</li> <li>Connected to the other parts of the building by means of a covered corridor.</li> </ul>
	Neighbouring site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A concentration camp built in 1943 in Vught.</li> <li>There is now a Camp Vught memorial and museum on the site.</li> <li>There is a retirement home nearby, whose guests often come to pray.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A parish graveyard adjoined to the church.</li> <li>The presbytery was destroyed during World War II.</li> <li>Umbrellas and tables placed in front of the building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The former military hospital chapel as well as the surroundings were entirely renovated in 2014.</li> <li>Located in the very heart of a modern district.</li> </ul>
Time	Built	1884, in a period when returning to historical styles was fashionable, therefore the church was built in the neo-Romanesque style with neo-Gothic elements.	1865, in the neo-Gothic style. The tower was built later in 1920. Rebuilt many times in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.	1911, with a neoclassical facade scheme and interior, mixed with neo-Flemish Renaissance and neo-Baroque elements.
	Deconsecrated	2005, due to the poor structural condition of the building	2013, due to the small number of believers and lack of further maintenance opportunities	Abandoned 1993 Demolished 2009
	Reopened	2018	2015	2014
Creator of the narrative		Dutch architect Jan David Hanrath, specialist in building and designing public spaces and libraries. His plan for the chocolate factory in Gouda was recognized as the best library project in the Netherlands in 2015.	The investors, Willem Simonis and Dieuwke Stellinga-Simonis, were also the project's authors and builders. They employed local carpenters and builders for individual works. From the very beginning, as inhabitants of this village with an emotional connection to it, they knew that they wanted to keep the church for the inhabitants.	Designed by Piet Boon Studio. The stained-glass windows were designed by Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel of Studio Job. The Beirut-based design studio PSLAB designed the gigantic chandelier in the centre of the restaurant.

<b>Purpose</b>	New function	Cultural and meeting place that houses a library, museum, souvenir shop, reading room, café, cultural institution and offices.	Now a restaurant, “Onze Kerk” (in Dutch, meaning “our Church”). It also hosts business meetings and various celebrations – weddings, funerals, birthdays, etc. – as well as exhibitions, theatre and music performances, including organ concerts. There is also a day club for people with intellectual disabilities.	Now an exclusive restaurant, “The Jane”. Some of the corridors, symmetrical on both sides, have been incorporated into the food court.
	Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The external structure has remained unchanged</li> <li>• The construction of the church has remained intact</li> <li>• The mezzanine has been extended in the form of a roof over the restaurant pavilion</li> <li>• The building facade still has crosses as religious symbols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The external structure has remained unchanged</li> <li>• The construction of the church has remained intact</li> <li>• The cross has been replaced by the restaurant logo</li> <li>• The statue of the patron in the niche of the front elevation remained unchanged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The external structure has remained unchanged</li> <li>• The construction of the church has remained intact</li> <li>• A cross still dominates the front brick elevation of the building</li> </ul>
	Conservation works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovation of the masonry and joint work</li> <li>• Restoration of the roof constructions and the roof boards</li> <li>• Renovation of roof coverings and the lead work</li> <li>• Replacement of window frames, windows and doors</li> <li>• Restoration of a number of stained glass windows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovation of the masonry and joint work</li> <li>• Restoration of the roof construction and the roof boards</li> <li>• Renovation of roof coverings and leadwork</li> <li>• Installation of under-floor heating and replacement of floor tiles</li> <li>• Restoration of stained glass windows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovation of the masonry and joint work</li> <li>• Replacement of window frames, 15 stain glass windows and doors</li> <li>• Renovation of tile floor and walls</li> <li>• Conservation works on historic existing cellar</li> </ul>
	Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical murals, the finishes in walls have remained unchanged.</li> <li>• The historic interior is left completely intact. It is a large open space. The bookshelves are placed on rails, and can be moved to the side aisles in the church if needed (Fig. 1).</li> <li>• The Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the porch was left intact and is always open to the faithful (Fig. 2).</li> <li>• The side chapel contains displays of religious objects from the former church, including the historic baptismal font and the figure of Christ.</li> <li>• Elements of sacred interior furnishings, altars, reliquaries, tabernacles transferred to the Catholic parish in Ukraine.</li> <li>• Old tombstones displayed at the museum exhibition.</li> <li>• Modern mezzanine structure is independent and can be dismantled and removed at any time.</li> <li>• The upper floors are rented by private companies, which keeps the building going.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interior remained unchanged because the building had the status of a monument.</li> <li>• An open kitchen is set against the background of three historic stained-glass windows behind the altar.</li> <li>• The following items remain: neo-Gothic pews tailored to emerging needs, the organs, a confessional, a pulpit and two side altars (both from the last quarter of the 19th century), transformed into a site for storing cutlery (Fig. 3). The altar has been moved slightly deeper into the former chancel, and now serves as a kitchen table (Fig. 4).</li> <li>• The relics were taken from the church</li> <li>• The former baptismal chapel houses historical sacral elements from the old church: photos, figurines, paintings, vestments, rosary, candles, prayer books, historical photos of the church, kneelers and a box for the relics of St Gerlach. The modern mezzanine structure is independent and can be dismantled and removed at any time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The original ceiling conveys the pure to show the authentic sacred nature of the place.</li> <li>• High-quality natural materials such as stone, leather and oak were selected for the interior, prompting a specific palette for the light fittings.</li> <li>• The main hall of the restaurant is located in the nave, and the former presbytery is now replaced with an open kitchen (Fig. 5).</li> <li>• On the level of the choir, above the porch, there is a bar serving alcohol.</li> <li>• Plenty of signs related to the sacred function of the building have been retained: modern stained glass windows consisting of 500 unique panels<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 6), the former presbytery, where the altar once stood, is now dominated by a projected skull to which attention is directed.<sup>25</sup></li> <li>• The most distinctive feature of this interior is the giant chandelier in the restaurant centre.<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>
	Costs	€2.4 million. The municipality of Vught, the National Cultural Heritage Agency and the Province of Noord-Brabant provided a subsidy of €2 million.	withheld	withheld

<sup>24</sup> Despite the secular character of the interiors, the designers were inspired by the former sacred function of the chapel. The interior conveys a powerful message of the ideological content of the designed graphics. Archetypes from various worlds each tell stories of good and evil, rich and poor, life and death as well as good food and religion. The diversity of meanings indicates the interpenetration of various gastronomic forms, cultural archetypes and religious symbols.

<sup>25</sup> This replaces the role of the altar in the strict sense as regarding the specific place, but also in the figurative sense when it comes to adoration, recognition and praise. The restaurant’s chef, Sergio Herman, said, “Food is my religion.” The interior design presents a feast: the cult of food as a kind of “religious” cult.

<sup>26</sup> By installing this oversized lamp, the designers intended to create an intimate and “divine” atmosphere inside the

<p>Reconsecration</p>		<p>The transformation was carried out with respect to the historical and sacred tissue of the building. The church can, if necessary, therefore be re-sacralised and fulfil its original function, which is sacral. The preserved sculptures and other religious elements will find a suitable place in the church interior decoration.</p>	<p>The structure of the church has remained intact. The interior is designed so that it can be easily adapted to hosting events. The interior decoration, organs, main altar and side altars have remained unchanged. The modern mezzanine structure can be dismantled and removed at any time. As a result, the church can, if required, once again serve sacred functions. But for the time being, it is a profanation.<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>The construction of the church has remained intact. The interior seems elegant and luxurious, but the design shows the designers' ignorance of the cultural value and identity of this sacred place. For modern Europeans, such an interior is not iconoclastic, but numerous references to religious connotations indicate an attempt to sacralise the object, giving the cult of food a sacred character. The cultural narrative is broken, as can be seen in the mixing of Christian symbols with satanic and gastronomic ones.</p>
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**Figure 1:** *De Petrus Meeting Centre, Vught, The Netherlands. View of interior in the direction of the porch, 2019.*



**Figure 2:** *Chapel of the Virgin Mary in the porch of the former church, Vught, Netherlands, 2019.*

<sup>27</sup> An altar, whether fixed or portable, never loses its consecration or blessing. If an altar remains, it should be used only for worship. Therefore, using the altar as a kitchen table and the side altar as a place for storing cutlery is contrary to the Code of Canon Law (1983). The conservation decision of the preservation of interior fittings, especially the altar, in a church that is not fulfilling its function, is contrary to the Code of Canon Law (1983) and the Guidelines of the Holy See (2019).



**Figure 3:** View in the direction of the side altar, "Onze Kerk" restaurant, Hooge Zwaluwe, Netherlands, 2019.



**Figure 4:** View over the kitchen of the "Onze Kerk" restaurant in the direction of the former presbytery, Hooge Zwaluwe, Netherlands, 2019.



**Figure 5:** "The Jane" restaurant interior. View in the direction of the former chancel, Antwerp, Belgium, 2019.



**Figure 6:** Stained glass by Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel from Studio Job at "The Jane". View in the direction of the former chancel, Antwerp, Belgium, 2019.

## Results

The adaptation of sacred objects has become common practice in Western Europe.

Due to their primary liturgical function, sacred objects require a different method of transformation, modernization and adaptation compared to secular ones. The adaptation and modernization of sacred objects requires designers to pay attention not only to the aesthetic, historical and cultural values of the preserved tissue, but also to the sacred elements and spatial arrangements related to the sacred nature of the object. The last case study demonstrates that aesthetic solutions do not always take ethical issues (problems) relating to the space's former sacred nature into consideration.

The pre-conceptual design analysis of sacred objects can be supplemented by the method of narrative research, which allows for the analysis of various aspects of sacred objects in a multidimensional manner. The purpose of a narrative in a cultural context is related to the site, the narrator, the recipient and the time of the narrative. A narrative research approach semantic architecture, as one of the means for researching sacred architecture, can be a fruitful direction both for analysis and for the design process when formerly sacred buildings are assigned new secular functions.

Transformations of sacred objects must be carried out with respect for the existing historical tissue and the sacred tissue. Elements such as sacred furnishings, altars, reliquaries, tabernacles and tombs must be removed from the interior. Despite the good intentions of designers and owners of buildings, former places of worship are often profaned. Whether the aim is revitalization or modernization, the desacralization of sacred buildings must be undertaken in such a way as to allow for restoration of the sacred function at some unspecified point in the future.

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