

NEW USE OF HISTORIC CHURCHES : RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN GHENT.

By Marcus van der Meulen. DRAFT.

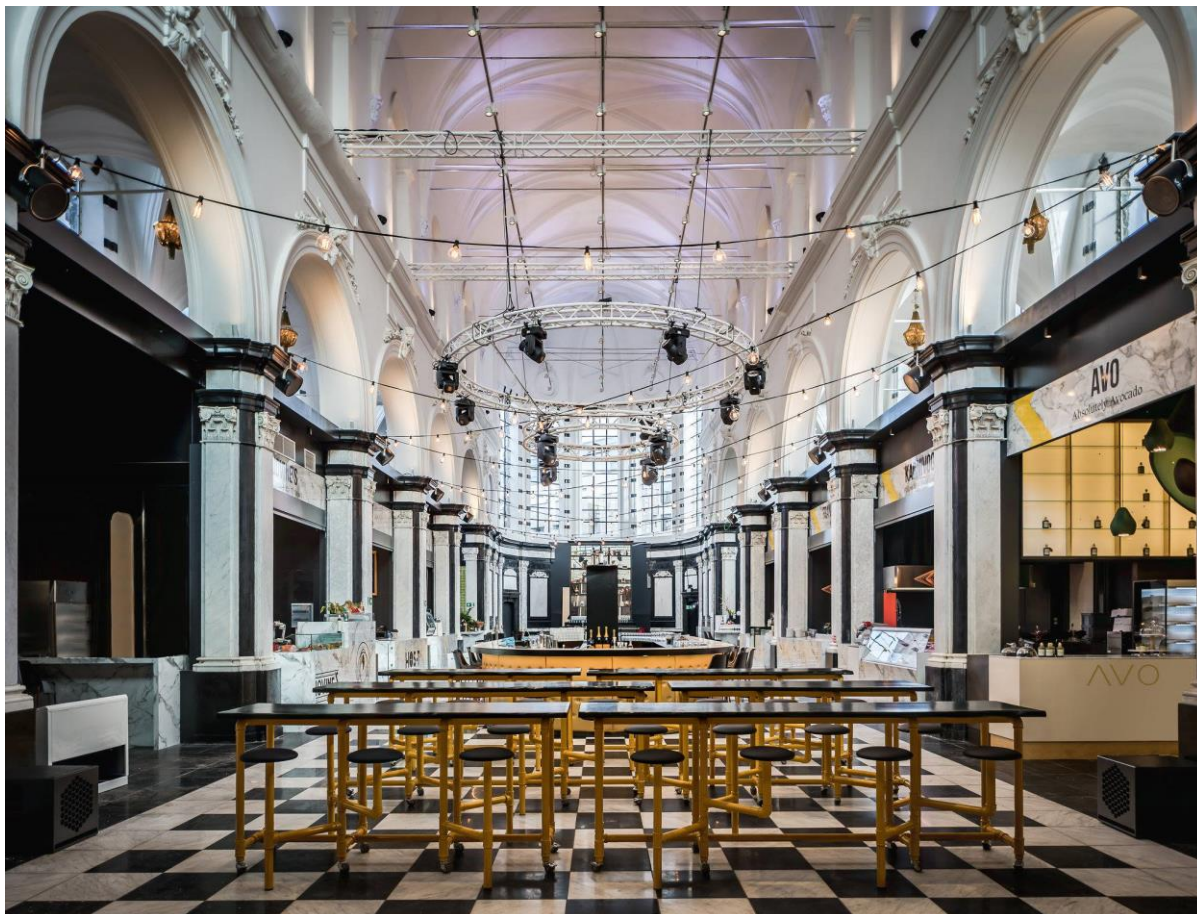


Figure 1 The former Cistercian Abbey church of St Bernard was reopened in early 2017 as a luxury food court. Photo Holy Food Market

Abstract

Holy Food Market is a food court which opened last year in the former church of St Bernard in Ghent, Belgium. An enormously successful concept attracting many visitors, this reactivation has reconnected a long abandoned building with the public. A renovation has brought back the church to a former glory and the new function will secure funds for future maintenance. The sacred character of this church, however, has been changed dramatically.

This paper wants to explore recent developments in reuse of historic churches in Ghent, Flanders. Property developers and others are attracted by the unique character, space and location many historic churches in towns and cities have. Authentic details give commercial

spaces such as bookshops, restaurants, bars and furniture stores a unique character. The fourteenth century Wool Weaver's Chapel is an example. Original fittings and fixtures have been sacrificed reducing the religious atmosphere. The material fabric may be preserved, the sacred character of the building is transformed. Extended or new use as a venue for cultural events is an option to retain much more of the original character, the church of St Colette of Ghent is an example and currently St Joseph's church is being converted as a cultural centre. The nave of the thirteenth century church of St Nicholas is again a public space for public events. In today's multicultural society other denominations reuse a redundant church as their place of worship. The historic church of St Elisabeth is now the house of worship of the

Anglican congregation. And new use of the Franciscan church as a social work restaurant serving affordable meals for the poor and jobless illustrates serving foods and drinks in an ecclesiastical setting can be in character of the church.

INTRODUCTION.

Ghent is a typical historic city in Europe. Layers of history are reflected by a built heritage of which the religious buildings are a significant part. Due to modernisation the traditional need for parish churches, monasteries, beguinages and chapels of different kinds is changing. The last beguine died ten years ago in 2008, concluding a tradition of religious life of seven centuries. In 2004 the last monk left the Franciscan monastery, ending a presence of this order in Ghent since the thirteenth century, and the number of weekly worshippers visiting the parish churches continues to drop. Simultaneously the understanding these places of worship are part of a shared heritage worth preserving is increasing. Finding new uses for these vacant buildings is vital for their conservation. Finding a relevant and meaningful new use can be challenging. Especially for places which have an abundance of historic buildings which need repurposing. In this paper the various attempts to find new functions is reviewed. The word church is used as a generic term for house of worship. In this paper these places of worship are parish churches, monastic chapels, college and school chapels. Historic buildings are of edifices which have heritage value. This value can be architectural, art historical, historical, it can be the value within an urban landscape, it can be part of Baukultur. In the first section historic examples of new use and their current function is discussed. Adaptive reuse of religious buildings is not a new phenomenon and the city of Ghent has some interesting examples dating back to the late eighteenth century. The function of these reused religious buildings have today, however, has changed, reminding the present generation historic buildings, if well maintained, will outlast its new function. Architectural interventions for adaptive reuse today should be done with this in

mind. In the second section parish churches will be discussed. Decreasing number of weekly churchgoers pressure the need for the current amount of parish churches. To tackle the difficulties municipality and diocese sat together and compiled the Pilot Plan Parish Churches including individual tracks proposed for each parish church in Ghent. The third section will take a look at chapels, the places of worship of schools, colleges and monasteries that are no longer needed. In the current discussion about new use of churches this group is often overlooked, however, in many areas form a large segment of the religious buildings losing their original function. Finally the appropriateness of the new uses will be discussed.

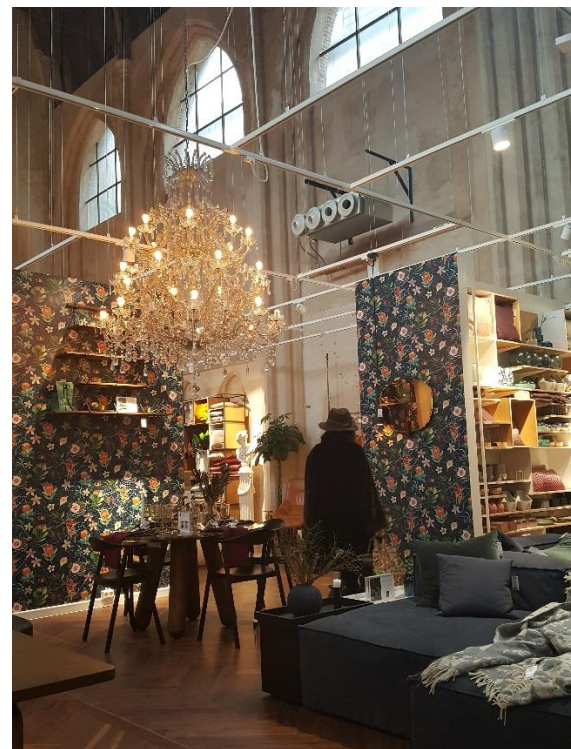


Figure 2 The Wool Weavers Chapel hosts a furniture store. Photo by author

SECULARISATION. MODERN TIMES.

In the late eighteenth century Ghent became capital of the Escaut department within the newly created French Republic, ending the period of the Ancien Regime in the ancient capital of Flanders. Religious buildings lost their original function, monasteries, abbeys and convents were abolished, chapels and parish churches were no longer needed. In their enthusiasm about the new secular society some started to pull down the symbols of the Ancien Regime, in Bruges the

cathedral of St Donatian was sold and dismantled, leaving a void in the historic centre until this day. In Ghent the thirteenth century church of Our Lady was pulled down. This wave of demolition instigated the drafting of the first report of appropriate new use for redundant religious buildings presented in 1797. This period also marked the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Flanders. Ghent became the first industrialised city in continental Europe. In this the person of Lieven Bauwens played a leading role. Bauwens brought the spinning mule to Ghent and installed it in the Carthusian monastery of St John-in-Eremo he had acquired, turning it into a textile factory in 1800. A few years later he repeated this with the Benedictine abbey of Drongen, today a suburb south-west of Ghent. Redundant monasteries proved an ideal location fitting the modern textile industry and many followed. An example is the Chapel of St John-in-Oil. This reused chapel has become a well-known illustration of industrial reuse. Later it became an Anglican house of worship and today it is used as an antiques shop.

St Leonard's Chapel of the Wool Weavers guild is an example of the many chapels of almshouses established by the guilds that were found in the medieval city. Most have been demolished. The fourteenth century chapel of St Leonard was given a new function and was used as a butchers hall during most of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century the chapel was used as a music theatre for performing operettas and musicals. During most of the twentieth century it was a cinema and about a decade ago the former chapel was renovated and turned into retail space. Today it is used a furniture store. In a formal way this is an example of successful reuse as well as conservation. All objects have been removed, benefiting the successfulness of the new functions, however, the medieval wall paintings, sacrament and piscina niches, and the fourteenth century wooden vaults have been preserved. The latest interventions have been reversible, the materiality of the chapel has largely been preserved, and the historic building has been opened up to the general public. The appropriateness of this retail related reactivation can, however, be debated. A distinction between a formal conservation of the materiality and a spiritual reactivation of a chapel can be made. The period details of the chapel attract the new function.

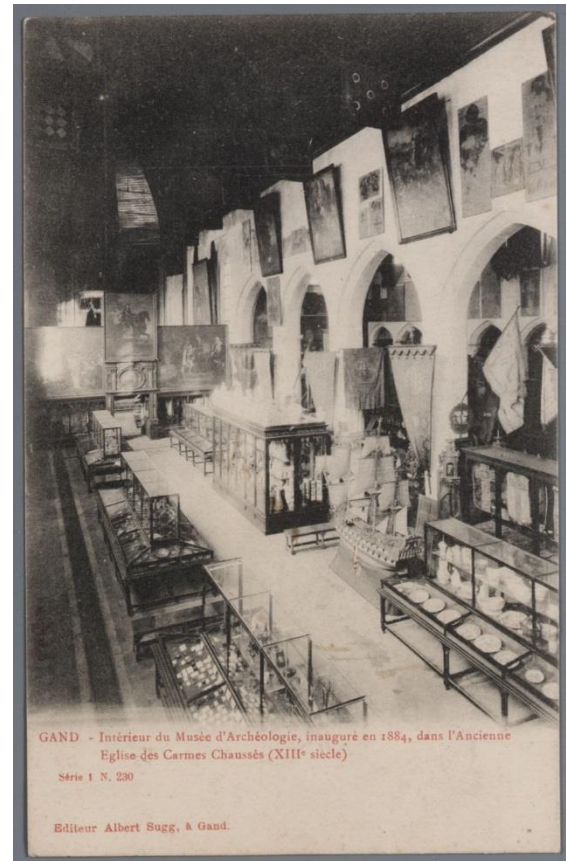


Figure 3 The Carmelite church in use as the municipal museum of archaeology in the late nineteenth century. Courtesy Ghent University Library

As mentioned above the redundancy of monastic buildings coincided the arrival of modern industry in Ghent. The *Carmelite monastery* dating back to the late thirteenth century was converted to a textile factory in 1814. For some decades the vacant chapel of the monastery was used as a warehouse. But in the second half of the nineteenth century the municipality bought the Carmelite chapel and converted it into a museum for antiquities. In 1981 the municipality bought the remaining monastery, and the church was turned into the exhibition space of the Province of East Flanders in 1998, of which Ghent is the capital city. Today it is the cultural centre hosting some very diverse and interesting exhibitions, ranging from contemporary art to exhibitions about the restoration of the Altar piece *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. The interior has been stripped of all original features, which mostly were relocated to the nearby Dominican church. Arguably, this has contributed to the successfulness of the current use as an exhibition space. Strong typology of this medieval chapel mean it is still identifiable as an ecclesiastical

building. The Gothic brick exterior has been preserved remaining part of the urban landscape. The new use has opened up the interior space with a relevant purpose to a wider public. As at the Wool Weavers Chapel, the wooden ceilings, niches and wall paintings have been preserved. Its new function as the exhibition space of the province has contributed to the regeneration of the impoverished neighbourhood of Patershol.

The third and final place of worship in this section is the *Cistercian church of St Bernard*, colloquially known as *Baudelo Abbey*. After the Fall of Calvinist Ghent in the late sixteenth century catholic religious orders which had left Flanders in exile returned. The Cistercians of Baudelo relocated to their former refuge within the city walls. Ultimately the abbey was abolished in the late eighteenth century. First the chapel of St Bernard was used for revolutionary celebrations but soon became the place for storing books.

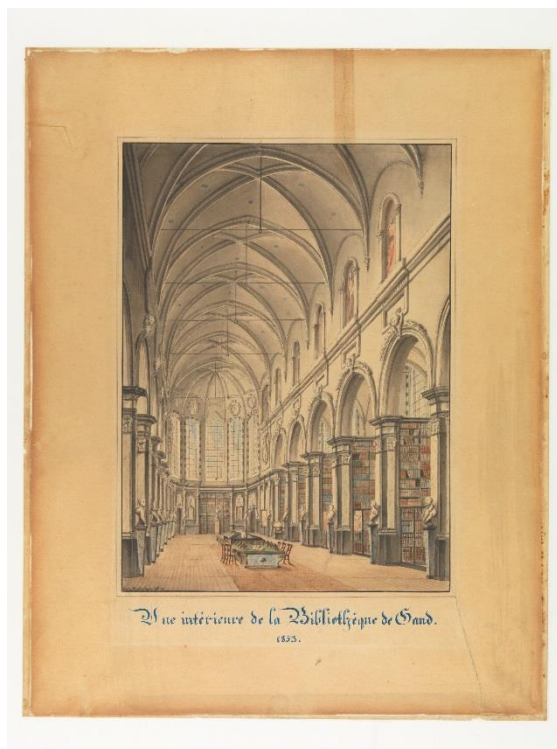


Figure 4 The university library by Roelandt in the former Baudelo Abbey church. Courtesy Ghent University Library

This new use of St Bernard's church as a library was the result of a report by the local government to explore potential new uses for redundant religious buildings. In 1797 Bernard Coppens

and Charles van Hulthem presented their account arguing the conversion of the abolished Benedictine Abbey of St Peter into the museum of the Escaut department, the Augustinian Convent into its Academy, and the Cistercian Abbey into the departmental centre of knowledge with the Central School in its main buildings, a botanical garden in its grounds and the central library in its church. The brutal redesign removing altar pieces, pulpit and images to install the bookcases brought over from the many monastic libraries was by Jean-Baptiste Pisson. After the reestablishment of Ghent University in the early nineteenth century, this church was re-purposed as the university library. An architectural revamp of the church by Louis Roelandt added new layers of meaning. A neoclassical design complementing the existing interior and placing bookcases in the aisles creating room full of books, and the nave as a the central reading room. The busts of twelve prominent persons from Flemish culture can be seen as replacements for the twelve apostles. Ultimately after nearly two centuries in use as a library the church once again became vacant. After over 150 years used as a library, modern needs had changed again and the building was again vacated.

Baudelo Abbey was owned by the municipality of Ghent, who after the abandoning of the building by the municipal library in the early 1980s, had been looking for a new purpose. Initial attempts to redesign it as the polyvalent space of the adjacent school, still located in the buildings of the former monastery, came to naught. After a few parties held in the vacant church around the turn of the millennium parts of the vault crumbled and scaffolding was placed inside the building. A renovation was needed and the municipality decided to sell the property. Conditions of the transaction were not only an adequate restoration but also the opening up of the built heritage to the general public. Finally an investor was found and it was decided to form a food court inside the former Cistercian church. Financed by the investor, the municipality and department for monuments were part of the decision making board. In the choir now sits a bar serving champagne, the aisles contain food booths serving delicatessen and the nave is used for seating. This new function is hugely popular, attracting many visitors and there are ideas to copy the concept in other cities. In a formal way the new use is very successful. It has been successful in achieving private investors to

restore and maintain religious heritage, opening up the building to the general public and contributing to the rejuvenation of the district. Arguably the new function is generating the gentrification of an area that had been for decades the hipster district of Ghent. Serving champagne and delicatessen is spiritually not a continuation of purpose of the previous functions as a monastic place of worship or a library. However, the exterior and interior have been preserved and renovated, the new interventions are reversible and the building has become part of contemporary city life.

Conclusions.

The Holy Food Market, as Baudelo Abbey Church is now known, is a challenging project in some respect. It remains questionable if this new function, which is far removed from the original use as a monastic place of worship and later as a library, is appropriate. However, all interventions are reversible. The contemporary black and white marble additions even contribute to the neoclassical interior design scheme of the church. The brutal adaptation of the ecclesiastical space by Pisson in the late eighteenth century would be unthinkable today. But maybe his ruthless redesign removing all religious connotations has contributed to the effectiveness of the later new use. And adapting to changing realities is a constant in the history of buildings, places of worship are not an exception.

These three historic examples illustrate new use can preserve much of the material fabric of religious buildings. As part of the urban landscape the buildings have remained identifiable as ecclesiastical. The interiors have been adapted and the function dramatically transformed the atmosphere as well as the place the building has in society. An almshouse chapel now a furniture store or a monastic place of worship now a popular temple for luxury delicatessen. Attracted by the period details, the size and central location in the city centre these buildings offer, investors and retailers see opportunities for the retail and hospitality industry. This preserves the materiality of these buildings. Arguably, it also alters how the sacred buildings are perceived.



Figure 5 The Carmelite church is today used as the Caermersklooster, exhibition space of the province of East Flanders. Photo by Demeester

This first generation of reused churches can teach us some vital lessons. The material fabric has been preserved and the buildings have retained their place in the urban landscape. A transformation in the sense the building can no longer be regarded an ecclesiastical structure has not been the case, the archetypical typology of these buildings defines them as ecclesiastical regardless its use. The same cannot be said from the interior, which has dramatically been changed and lost much if not all of its sacred atmosphere. A second lesson is the old building will outlast the new function, and this seems especially true for retail use. Reducing the religious atmosphere of these buildings has contributed to the success. Altar pieces and organs, pulpits and paintings, images and statues have been removed, relocated or sold. The interiors, however, have lost some if not all of its sacred atmosphere. The sacred space was reduced or even erased, by the removal of fittings and fixtures, by the new use. Today, the concept of preserving the ecclesiastical ensemble is increasing.

SECTION 2. PARISH CHURCHES

Historic cities such as Ghent display many different kinds of places of worship. A significant number of these are parish churches. One of the main parish churches of medieval Ghent is *St Nicholas in Corn Market Square*. The present building dates largely from the thirteenth century. During the years of the Calvinist Republic in the late sixteenth century, the church of St Nicholas had been used as a horse stable. This probably intentional inappropriate reuse of a redundant Catholic place of worship by protestants is today regarded as the beginning of a decline that ultimately resulted in the restoration works which started in the mid-twentieth century and have lasted for many decades. The central tower originally carried a tall spire which collapsed in the seventeenth century further damaging the building. In the early twentieth century a revamp of the city centre was carried out. This project included a new bridge, a promenade architecturale connecting the three towers of Ghent and the creation of new squares. For St Nicholas this meant the demolition of the houses which were built against its walls and a superficial restoration for the 1913 World Exhibition. After the end of the Second World War the building was in an alarming state and its demolition was briefly discussed. Ultimately a major restoration of this monumental place of worship was begun. After over thirty years of restoration works mass was celebrated in the newly reopened choir of St Nicolas in 1992. The presbytery and transepts were reopened and used as a parish church, however, the numbers of worshippers living in the vicinity of this church has been declining for decades. The renovation of the nave was carried out with the understanding this part of the historic church would not regain its original function as a place of worship. Instead it would become a polyvalent space open to the general public, more or less in the spirit of how a church nave would have been used in the thirteenth century, when it was constructed. It is known market churches such as St Nicholas were also used as covered markets, chapels as offices of the guilds. Today the church of St Nicholas is a public place. The choir is used for daily services and regular concerts, the ambulatory hosts exhibitions and the building has become a stop for many visitors. The nave has become a polyvalent space, regularly used as a book market, hosting occasional antiques markets and

exhibitions of various kinds. It is also used as a public space during events such as the Light Festival, with information booths placed in the aisles. Architectural interventions have been limited. A glass wall divides the nave from the transept and choir, separating the secular from the religious. The latest addition to this medieval church is the conservatory. Last year a temporary glass building was erected on the site of some of the smaller houses which originally were placed against the northern walls of the nave on Klein Turkije Street. This conservatory is an initiative by local entrepreneurs and is used as a meeting point, a place to have a drink and space for events such as weddings. It is an interesting example of a contemporary addition to historic buildings. Adding new structures with new functions to existing buildings is also a continuation of a historic reality of the built environment. This urban conservatory an example of contemporary addition which is reversible and not intervening with the historic building. Preventing a historic building from becoming a defunct monument the addition of new structures for relevant new use can be considered.



Figure 6 Church of St Nicolas with the temporary addition, a conservatory. Photo by RAY

More recently the *Pilot Plan Parish Churches* was presented, a comprehensive strategy for all parish churches of Ghent. Arguably the restored

nave of St Nicholas and its new use initiated a process in Ghent to reconsider how parish churches are used today. When the Pilot Plan was launched in 2013 there were 46 parish churches in the care of the municipality of Ghent. Typically the municipality is the owner of parish churches in Belgium. In Ghent these parish churches can be grouped in four categories; medieval or pre-Reformation places of worship (built before the Calvinist Republic of Ghent) the second group much smaller group was built during the Counterreformation, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A large third group of parish churches was built in the long nineteenth century, mostly in a Gothic Revival style, and finally a handful of twentieth century modernist buildings. It has to be emphasized the cathedral of St Bavo is not a parish church and is subsequently not part of this pilot plan. The reason for the Pilot Plan project is the reality of high maintenance costs, decreasing numbers of weekly worshippers and a lack of priests. Result of this project was a document where individual tracks for each parish church were recommended, taking into account heritage values, reuse potentials and location within the city. The Plan is the outcome of a dialogue between the four stakeholders, municipality of Ghent, diocese of Ghent, department of monuments and the Centre for Religious Art and Culture (CRKC). A photo exhibition at STAM, the museum dedicated to the history and actuality city of Ghent located in the buildings of the former Cistercian nunnery of Our Lady of the Bijloke, actively asked the participation of the citizens in tackling the problems of finding new use. Suggestions have been made by locals for their parish churches and these have been discussed by the principle stakeholders and final decision makers, the municipality and diocese of Ghent. Methodology will not be discussed in detail in this paper. The concept was to develop a strategy including all parish churches. An individual track is suggested for churches, first establishing their values as living parish church and as historical monument. Secondly the potentials for relevant new use in the local community was researched. The Pilot Plan is regarded a process which will develop in time.



Figure 7 The nave of ST Nicolas' Church. Photo by Meyaert

This study to look at what the potentials for (adaptive) reuse are was important in establishing which parish churches could continue their historic use, extended with culture use, and which could be given up for new use or even for demolition.

The outcome was a categorization of the 46 parish churches in use at the time in four groups. The first group will retain its original use as place of worship. A division will be made in three categories, Anchors, Presentations and Specific Projects. St Nicholas' is an example of the latter, as a city church and place of contemplation without a defined parish. Most of these parish churches are historic buildings and living parishes; tourism and culture as extended use was included in suggested tracks. The second group are those places of worship that will no longer be used as a parish church yet will retain

some of its original status and use as a place of worship, possibly with extended new use. The third group comprises of parishes that will be extinguished. For the moment these places of worship will continue to be used as parish churches but will lose their function in the years ahead. New uses are debated in dialogue with stakeholders and potential buyers. The final group of parish churches will be decommissioned and given up. These are places of worship with a diminishing parish and the lowest heritage values. (In the final decisions however a more pragmatic attitude was shown). This last group also includes those buildings which, according to the heritage values check list used, could be demolished. Of the 46 parish churches in use at the beginning of the Pilot Plan only 20 were officially protected as monuments, however, at this stage there are no intentions to pull these buildings down and reuse is the preferred track for all redundant churches. A re-evaluation of religious buildings including all contemporary heritage values is important. Although not officially protected as monuments, stakeholders are aware of the contemporary heritage attitudes. Final decisions regarding the future of each parish church will be made by municipality and diocese of Ghent.



Figure 8 Church of St Elisabeth, founded in the early thirteenth century by Countess Joan of Flanders as the house of worship of the beguinage, became a parish church in the nineteenth century. Recently it was handed over to the Anglican community.

Several parish churches have shifted their congregation to communities with migrant backgrounds, one church is used by the Polish community and another by the African Catholic community. Other parish churches have been handed over to other denominations. The Pilot

Plan sees the redundancy of 17 churches. Some have already been given a new use, others are either in a process of conversion or are for sale. A vast majority of these parish churches date from the nineteenth or twentieth century; St Elisabeth and St Anthony Abbot in Meulestede are the exceptions. St Anthony Abbot is an eighteenth century church originally built in the northern suburbs and today located in the port area of the city. The local community is in dialogue with the municipality to convert this parish church into a local centre for culture.

In drafting proposed tracks for each individual parish church the group of stakeholders looked at the outcome of a list expressing the heritage values and reuse- potentials of each individual church, and their sociodemographic situation. Three districts of Ghent will be discussed in more detail, clarifying the concept. The three districts are Bruges Gate, comprising the historic areas of Rooigem, Ekkerghem and Malem, in the west, in the south the district of St Peter's-Strop, and finally the north-western district of Rabot, including Prinsenhof and St Elisabeth. At the beginning of this project there were four parish churches in use in Bruges Gate. St Martin's is one of the oldest parish churches in the city, first mentioned in 967. The building dates largely from the high middle ages. The track chosen for this church is retaining the original function as place of worship and valorisation, with tourism and culture as a potential extended use. St Martin's is designated by the diocese as one of only three Anchors. St Theresia's is potentially appealing for new use. Presently it will retain its function as a place of worship, although not as a full functioning parish church but as an affiliate of St Martin's. Ideas for new use related to the nearby school are being discussed. Finally the gothic revival church of St John-the-Baptist, a building in a poor condition and located in an area with a high migrant background. Stability problems with the tower suggest pulling it down is a reasonable solution. It is currently for sale, however, there has been no interest shown by any partners to buy the property. Size, condition and the location of this church make a feasible commercial sale difficult. St John-the-Baptist has been decommissioned and it is the only place of

worship in Ghent where demolition is a possibility. Potentially the choir could be saved. Historic value of this church is limited and in the current local community the building has little value apart from being part of the urban landscape. Potentially the state of this building will mean demolition is the only reasonable solution. The youngest church in Bruges Gate is the post-war *Our Lady Queen of Peace*. The main value of this church is in its representation of the rebuilding period after the Second World War, an essential part of the design of the rebuilding district Malem and as a rare example of traditional architecture before the modernist movement. Our Lady Queen of Peace was sold in 2015. Recently it has been redesigned as a circus school reaching out to the youngest members of the local community. A socially inspired new use, the re-baptized Circus Church wants to be an active part of the local community in this post-place where kids and youth can gather and learn in a non-formal environment. The interior was stripped of its religious connotations, fittings and fixtures relocated. Architectural interventions have been limited.



Figure 9 The young and restless find refuge in the Circus Church. Photo WM for HLN

In St Peter-Strop there were two functioning parish churches at the beginning of the Pilot Plan in 2013. The first is Our Lady - St Peter, the former church of St Peter's Abbey, founded by King Dagobert and St Amandus in the early seventh century. The present building is one of the finest examples of Flemish baroque architecture and is a listed monument. Its size and location make the church a place for high attendance funerals, ranging from cyclist

Weylandt in 2011 to the singer Luc De Vos in 2014. The track chosen for this historic house of worship is as Presentation, not a full functioning parish church but with festive celebrations of the liturgy. The local choirs and society for the famed organ in Our Lady's contribute to these masses. Proposed are also reaching out to the students of the nearby faculties and colleges, and tourism and culture as extended use. For the nearby church of *St Colette of Ghent* a different track was suggested. St Colette is a Gothic Revival church with a listed interior. The church was designed as an ensemble, including the altar pieces, the organ and the statues, and listing the building as an ensemble can be justified. The idea of protecting a church as an ensemble is a of relative recent date. The new use is an experiment of preserving the interior and involving both the adjacent home for the elderly and the local community. Last year the building was handed over to the St Colette Care Centre for the elderly. The choir remains a place of worship, for Sunday services and funerals used by the community of St Colette Care Centre. The remaining space, the nave and aisles, is used for a variety of functions. In the aisle connected to the Care Centre a community restaurant-tearoom is planned, served from the kitchens of the Care Centre. Apart from performance space, the nave will be used for exhibitions and side chapels will be rented out. The use as a practice space for local musicians has been very successful and there have been performances by local theatre societies. The internal appearance of the church is generally unaltered. From a viewpoint of conservation this is very successful new use. The historic church dedicated to local medieval saint Colette has been opened up to the general public, local community and the elderly meet at the café installed in the aisles, funds for maintenance are generated by renting the nave to local musicians as practice space.

Finally in this section the north-western district of Rabot-Prinsenhof. Prinsenhof or Princes Court in English was the site of the palace where in 1500 the future emperor Charles V was born. In 2013 when the Pilot Plan Parish Churches was launched there were three parish churches in use. A fourth, the post-war modernist Maria Goretti had already been handed over to another denomination. Only one of originally four parish

churches will retain its function as a place of worship, in the category Special Projects. St Stephen's is a historic church renovated after damages during the Reformation in the sixteenth and Secularisation in the late eighteenth centuries. In recent decades it has been use by the Spanish speaking community, who have added some images such as a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Part of the track is popular devotion, the church houses some relics of St Rita that have retained their popularity. Extended use is found in culture. Organ concerts are organized by the society for organ music connected to this church.

Founded as a beguinage church in the early thirteenth century by Countess Joan of Flanders, St Elisabeth is the most historic of all parish churches given up by the RC diocese of Ghent. The building was handed over to the growing Anglican community in 2016. The function as a place of worship is continued and the interior could be preserved. For the nearby large Gothic Revival church of *St Jozef* a very different track was proposed. As written in the report by the Dean of Ghent-Centre, the dramatically changed sociographical situation make the vast church too large to continue operating as a parish church. A new social use for the area was proposed. The main stakeholders commissioned a feasibility study. Students from the local St Lucas School of Architecture have made studies. Finally a strategic new function was chosen for this decommissioned house of worship. Located on the boundary of a gentrifying area and a neighbourhood with a high population of migrants, mostly from Turkey and Bulgaria, St Jozef is being converted into community centre. It will be a public building with multiple functions. The vast crypt will host a social restaurant. Unlike St Colette where the interior including fittings and fixtures was safeguarded, St Jozef was stripped from its many statues and altar pieces, reducing the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the building. As a shrine of Gothic Revival this stripping of the interior has reduced the heritage value of the building, however, the new use of St Jozef once completed will connect community and become a tool for regeneration of the area.



Figure 10 St Peter's square with the church of Our Lady-St Peter. Photo by the author

CONCLUSIONS

Of the 17 parish churches that have been decommissioned or given up by the diocese for worship only a small number have been given a new use. Feasibility plans have been commissioned for some, and many are currently for sale. These sales can only proceed after an approval of the new use by the municipality, thus safeguarding relevant and feasible reactivations. The Pilot Plan Parish Churches is thought as process developing as it proceeds. St Jozef in Rabot district and St Colette in St Peters-Strop display two different attitudes to tackle similar problems. Every case is unique and context is a significant part of establishing which track is favorable for which church. At St Colette, the building could be safeguarded as an ensemble and be reactivated becoming a living building within the local community, mainly the elderly living next door. In the migrant district where St Jozef is located the building will be spiritually preserved and reactivated as a community centre becoming a tool for regeneration. The price for this is beyond the financial. Arguably the church as a unique ensemble has been sacrificed to regain a relevant place within the local community. Currently the eclectic church of St Anne is in the process of new use. The track chosen is a cultural new use, preferably a concert hall, and the municipality is in dialogue with potential candidates. St Anne's is protected as a monument, including its interiors, since 1980. The Pilot Plan, however, has shown many of the nineteenth and twentieth century churches have

no form of formal protection. Even the heritage check list used is a partially traditional and has a strong focus on materiality and art historical values, neglecting the role of the building in the urban landscape or the value of the interior. The pragmatic attitude displayed by the stakeholders, however, shows awareness is there.

The Pilot Plan Parish Churches is a process which means an active dialogue between the four stakeholders and consultation of other actors such as locals and potential investors. Adapting the proposed tracks to changes is part of this process. A photo exhibition in the museum of the city, STAM, encouraged citizens to participate in the dialogue coming forward with suggestions. Originally St Anthony Abbot, a modest eighteenth century building, and the post-war modernist Christ the King, were supposed to retain their function as parish church. The locals however have come up with feasible ideas to adapt St Anthony Abbot into a community centre strongly rooted in the neighbourhood. A relevant use for these decommissioned places of worship that can reach out to the diverse community and become a tool for regeneration is a track that will be proposed for many parish churches that currently are in the extinguish phase. The project has also revealed problems for finding new relevant use for some churches due to their size, location and typology.



Figure 11 Photo exhibition about the 46 parish churches of Ghent at the STAM museum in 2014. Photo STAM, Ghent.

The active dialogue between stakeholders, mainly but not exclusively the owner the municipality of Ghent and the traditional user the diocese of Ghent has been good and productive,

looking at the potentials churches have within their specific context. Meaningful new use potentially rejuvenating the district is the preferred track for redundant churches. Reaching out to children and teenagers in a social district, connecting with the elderly and locals at St Colette, and a cultural centre in a district where people with a migration background meet an area of gentrification. Developments are in its first stage and rapidly evolving.

SECTION 3. CHAPELS.

A third group of places of worship, after the parish churches and the historic reused houses of worship, is formed by the monastic, college and school chapels. Typically these are privately owned, unlike the parish churches in Belgium which are usually state owned. Since the relocation of St Amand's College and the conversion into apartments of the old buildings, the chapel of the former College has been for sale. This baroque chapel has an interesting interior and is a fine example of the counterreformation during the seventeenth century in Flanders. It is a listed building located in the heart of the historic centre of Ghent. The chapel has been for sale for years and is waiting for a new purpose. It is only one of many chapels currently vacated and neglected. There are, however, various examples of new use of these type of places of worship. In the same street as the one mentioned above is a chapel of a former monastery -beguinage which is now used as a restaurant. The monastery itself functions as a hotel. Interventions have been limited and much of the historically valuable Gothic Revival interior could be preserved. *The chapel of St Paul's college* was redesigned as a sports facility, a relevant new use to the students of St Paul's. All religious connotations were removed and the stained glass relocated to another institution. There are other examples in Belgium of similar reuse known. The presbytery is now used for storage. Architectural interventions have been restricted to the interior conversion.

Controversial was the new use of the former chapel of the Redemptorist monastery. Built in 1927 the house of worship was decommissioned in 2010 and reactivated as a party centre. It is mostly used for wedding festivities, a place where people get married in an ecclesiastical

setting. A continuation of the house of worship as a place for rituals such as marriage. The architectural intervention was restricted to the removal of most religious connotations such as images. This new use is in part problematic due to the location of the building in a mainly residential area. Especially visitors arriving and



Figure 12 Former beguinage chapel now used as the restaurant of a hotel. Photo Monasterium Poortackere.

leaving by car can cause problems. In the discussion about the new use of the Redemptorist chapel, however, the controversial new smaller house of worship of the reduced convent is omnipresent. Replacing the old buildings of the monastery is a contemporary building including student rooms, a small convent for the remaining monks, and rooms for assisted living. Part of this new complex called Clemenspoort, or Clement Gate, is a contemporary chapel with a challenging stained glass depicting among others the evolution theory and a gay couple. New use and new building can have effects for many different stakeholders and others who feel involved. From a formal perspective of conservation this has been a successful reactivation. The appropriateness of the new use can be debated. Visitors of the party centre cause trouble and traditional Catholics feel offended by the new

chapel. Taking into account a wider context and a dialogue with all people involved can prevent possible irritation.

The new use of the early twentieth century Redemptorist chapel has opened up the building to a public and preserved not only the exterior as part of the urban landscape, it has also preserved the essential parts of the interior. This cannot be said about the former Jesuit church. Long abandoned by the Jesuits, this chapel is part of St Lucas School of Arts, until recently part of St Lucas School of Architecture. The exterior is stripped of its original features and plaster. The overall appearance of the exterior this historic chapel is neglect. Inside the internal space of the former chapel is unrecognizable apart from the columns. This intervention has erased all memory of the religious space internally by adding several floors, rooms and corridors in the building and removing all religious connotations. A sacred atmosphere has been sacrificed, a sacred space is non-existent. A transformation that has internally resulted in the disappearance of the original place of worship. Opposite in location as well as concept is Parnassus, the former *chapel of the Franciscan monastery*. In 2004 the last monks vacated the buildings, concluding a presence of Franciscan monks in Ghent since the thirteenth century. A new purpose was found for the former chapel in a spiritual continuation of this house of worship. Unlike the two other examples the interior of this monastic place of worship is virtually untouched ; altar pieces, pulpit and organ, all have remained in their original location. A large modern lighting fitting has been installed. It is this new addition that has turning the sacred space into a community refectory. Parnassus is a social work project of the municipality. Jobless are offered an education and experience in the hospitality industry, cooking meals, and the meals are offered against reduced prices to poor and jobless. A project that is in the spirit of the original work of the Franciscans.



Figure 13 Chapel of the Redemptorist monastery is today the venue for weddings. Photo ALTAR

SECTION 4. DISCUSSION

Preservation of cultural heritage began at the end of the eighteenth century. Growing awareness resulted in the report and acts by Charles van Hulthem regarding the appropriate new use for redundant religious buildings which safeguarded the Cistercian Abbey buildings, among others. The views expressed in this report suggest a cultural reactivation benefiting the community. The Cistercian abbey complex revived as a centre of knowledge, a place of learning with a school, botanical gardens and a library were a spiritual continuation of the original.

In current society historic places of worship cannot all retain their original use. Adapting to changing realities is adopting new ideas. This adapting can be regarded a continuation of the historic adaptation to changes in demography or to changes in liturgy. Many places of worship are given up and reactivated for new purposes. Religious heritage is different from other built heritage as it is sacred architecture. The interior is formerly a sacred space. In a formal way the roman-catholic place of worship loses this sanctity when it is desacralized. Yet many consider a church or chapel to be sacred architecture regardless its official status within the Church. Typology is part of this. Not all find any new use appropriate for a formerly sacred space. The notion what is an appropriate new use, however, can be complex. From a formal and conventional heritage viewpoint a protected building should remain untouched. This prevents buildings from adapting to changing needs and can even be regarded untraditional. In the past places of worship have always adapted to changes in demography or liturgy, to opinions about architecture and indeed appropriateness. Reformation and Counterreformation have

removed medieval images from the church interior that at the time were thought inappropriate. The formal heritage viewpoint of non-intervention potentially hinders a place of worship to continue its function as a parish church in the tradition of adapting to changes. Adding a new window to a historic church to commemorate an event in the First World War can become difficult.

What is an appropriate new use depends on various factors. A minimal intervention has been the traditional stance in heritage conservation. This is potentially degrading every listed building to defunct monument. For many historic buildings the chosen track was to lock the building and preserve it as found. Opening up to the public has recently been introduced as a positive aspect. In finding a new use for redundant historic buildings ideas that open up the heritage property to the general public are preferred. Developers are attracted by the period details and authenticity, as well as size and location that many historic places of worship have. Retail spaces such as the furniture store in the Chapel of the Wool Weavers has opened up the building. The size and location as well as the unique setting is appealing for the new user. However, the new use has little relevance for the community and this transformation is potentially disconnecting people from the heritage. The relationship people have with retail space is different from the relation people experience with a sacred space. At St Paul's College, the place of worship redesigned as a sports facility better suited contemporary students than the former use as a college chapel. The exterior has been preserved, the physical appearance of the college complex has remained intact. This intervention may seem radical, it has given back the building a relevant place within its original community, the students of St Paul's College. Non-intervention or full intervention of a chapel, it is the use and subsequently the place a building has in the community that makes the function appropriate.

New use can imply a redesign, radical or moderate. At Baudelo Abbey church a brutal architectural revamp by Pissone to enable the storage of bookcases has changed the interior of this building. The adaptation to a university library by Roelandt has, however, contributed to the heritage value of the building today.

Architectural quality of the intervention is one part of this, another essential part is the function.



Figure 14 Chapel of St Paul's College redesigned as a sports facility. Photo CRKC

A relevant new use reaching out to a community is important. Built heritage can become a motivator for development if an appropriate new use is chosen. An appropriate new use becomes a continuation of the original place the church had as a relevant player within the community. Parish churches have traditionally been the centre of local social and cultural life. For St Jozef this meaning as centre of social and cultural life of the community in Rabot has been chosen as the appropriate track. This means a redesign that reduces the Gothic Revival ensemble of the church. The new function will be part of a regeneration. These interventions can be justified as they will contribute to the successfulness of the new use and are reversible.

Establishing appropriate new uses is an individual track taking into account context. The historical context of the church or chapel as well as the contemporary sociodemographic context. A relevant function of the building is an adaption of the original use to the changing needs of the users.

CONCLUDING.

Historic cities have many historic buildings to reactivate, a strategy and management is needed to come to a comprehensive and successful idea. This strategy is the result of a dialogue between stakeholders. Developers may be attracted by some historic buildings for their size, location and period details, an understanding the new use will be outlasted by the historic building urges to restraint. Wijesuriya stresses the difference between religious heritage and other built heritage because of their difference in values. The value of churches is not in predominantly and exclusively in their materiality, but in their position and meaning role within society. As a place of gathering or of learning, a location for rituals regarding marriage or death, a site for celebration and for contemplation. Sacredness of architecture is in its function.

Heritage conservation is a modern concept that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. Demolition of significant religious buildings has contributed to an understanding. Conventional conservation strategy is focused on a material preservation as found reducing built heritage to defunct monuments. A spiritual reactivation is a continuation, adapted to changing realities, of the original place and meaning in society. A cultural reactivation for the culturally important churches and the understanding a conservation of the material fabric can hinder the building from obtaining a meaningful place within society.

Present society values its historic places of worship as part of their heritage. They can have relevance as part of the identity of place, as part of the urban landscape, a personal connection. The use of these historic places of worship needs adapting to retain their relevant place in society. For each of these churches and chapels individual tracks need to be determined. Heritage values and context, as well as reactivation potentials differ. In Ghent the city has been an active player in establishing tracks for its religious heritage. This was done in the past by Charles van Hulthem, safeguarding among others the Cistercian Abbey of Baudelo. Today, the Pilot Plan Parish Churches is a similar project establishing heritage values and potential new uses for redundant parish churches. The material fabric is safeguarded as much as possible, however, some sacrifices are made if this

contributes to the successfulness of a socially valuable reactivation. The city of Ghent has been equally active in finding an appropriate new use of the reused Baudelo Abbey church, or the redundant Franciscan chapel. Different tracks related to heritage values and context, both

historical and sociodemographic, has resulted in some stimulating and successful examples of new use. A new use that not only safeguards the historic places of worship but has become a part of regeneration of the community.

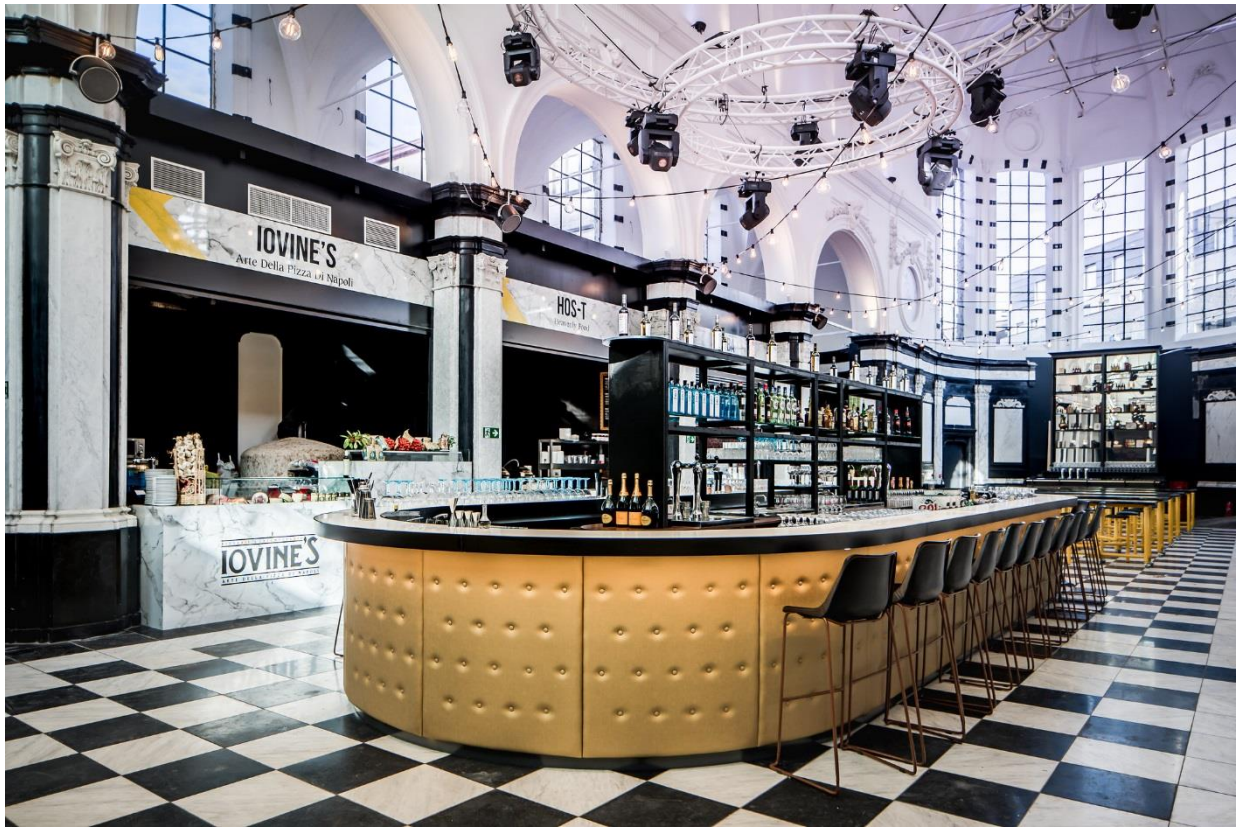


Figure 15 Baudelo Abbey church, today a food court. Photo Holy Food Market

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