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The future of Defunct Religious Buildings: Dutch Approaches to their Adaptive Reuse

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Abstract

Across the western world membership in the established organized churches is on the decline with a concomitant reduction in the need for churches and church halls. As redundant and unused churches are the focus of vandalism and decay owners and heritage managers are looking for options to adaptively reuse such buildings. This paper reviews the literature on the reuse of churches in the Netherlands, which has long history of innovatively addressing the problems. The options available range from reuse for religious purposes by other denominations or faiths to community use (multipurpose, sport, music etc) and private use either commercial or residential. The attitudes of the community and the original property owners have a major role in which adaptive reuse is successful. Because of its long history, the Dutch experience in adaptive reuse of religious buildings has much to offer heritage managers in other countries just faced with this emergent management issue.

Keywords

Heritage Management—Sacral Architecture—Cultural Policy

Introduction

As the popularity of the established Christian denominations continues to drop in many countries of the western world, and as remote rural communities experience a continual population loss, the number of Christian churches becoming redundant is on the increase around Australia, the United Kingdom, the USA and elsewhere in the European(-influenced) world. If they are not demolished or sold immediately, these unused churches are easy targets of vandalism and environmental decay. The demolition or decay of the church however may have negative impacts on a community's emotional well-being (Latham, 2000) as many in the community, Christians and non-Christians alike, value the building for a whole range of reasons. Reuse, rather than demolition of churches means that at the least their physical survival is ensured, and at its best, reuse may even revitalise a community physically, economically and mentally.

In a densely populated country such as the Netherlands, where space is generally too valuable to be left unused and where the housing shortage is pressing, adaptive reuse of churches is a common practice. Some however feel that the Dutch approach to adaptive reuse of churches is too radical (Dubois, 2002) and with so many people in the community attaching different values to the building, conflict over its future use seems inevitable. It is this common practice that ultimately may provide heritage managers in countries other the Netherlands with opportunities to reflect and consider aspects of adaptive reuse of churches and to selectively adopt some of the solutions.

This review of the literature will identify the various views of and attitudes towards reuse of the church in the Netherlands. First will be a description of adaptive reuse in general. An introduction on the history of and trends in religion in the Netherlands will then set the scene

for a discussion on the scale and causes of redundancy. Options after redundancy are to leave the building unused, demolition or adaptive reuse and of these, the latter will be looked at in most detail. The next section will cover an analysis of different types of adaptive reuse. Finally, the opinions of various stakeholder groups on adaptive reuse will conclude the literature review.

Following a general contextual introduction of adaptive reuse, the literature drawn on in this review is predominantly in Dutch and it was located within the religious, architectural and history discipline areas. With the exception of Ambachtsheer & De Booij (1979), which may be dated by now and Pollmann (1995), there has not been a study focusing solely on adaptive reuse of churches in the Netherlands. This literature review provides an updated, wide ranging synthesis of the subject.

2 Adaptive reuse

In a broad conceptual framing, cultural heritage is the result of humankind's interactions with the environment and one another. The outcome of these processes is reflected in a number of forms and is generally divided within two typologies of tangible (built environment, sites, landscapes, objects and artifacts) and intangible cultural heritage (language, folklore, skills and customs) (Pearson & Sullivan 1995). The community, from local to international, ascribes values of varied strength and importance to these expressions of cultural heritage (Spennemann 2006a-b). Heritage managers assess the values projected onto cultural heritage places by the public against predetermined criteria to determine their significance (cf. Marquis-Kyle, Walker & Australia ICOMOS 1996; Australian Heritage Commission 1999). Preservation theory holds that this process enables that important aspects of the past can be identified, protected and managed for the benefit of present and future generations (Pearson & Sullivan 1995; Murtagh 1997).

The whole *raison d'être* of cultural heritage management is to manage heritage places in place—and to the degree it is reasonably possible—also unchanged. For historic preservation the three-dimensional, tangible sites that are imbued by the public with significance, it is these sites that can be used as tangible evidence (in the literal sense) to present and interpret the past for present and future generations. Problems occur when the preservation in place and unchanged is not an option forcing heritage managers to resort to adaptive reuse.

2.1 Definition

Change is an inevitable part of human society, and whether change is regarded as positive or negative is totally subjective. Buildings are built with a specific function in mind but they often outlive their purpose (Dubois, 2002). When they do, there are various options for their future. One such option is adaptive reuse. Reuse refers to the renewed use of the building in its original function or to the recycling of its material (Asselbergs, 1996). Adaptive reuse more specifically refers to the process of giving a building a new existence (Asselbergs, 1996) and function (Bogie et al, 1999) when it is no longer used or suitable for use in its original

function (Debets, 1985). A change in function frequently, though not always, results in changes to the structure or interior of a building and Asselbergs (1996) points out that adaptive reuse and development actually go hand in hand. Adaptive reuse, then, is a process of change and requires a certain amount of creativeness and inventiveness, not just from the architects involved in finding a way to fit a new function for the old building, but from all those involved in the process of adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse has more recently been referred to as creative reuse by Latham (2000)—quite a change from terms such as redevelopment and adjustment commonly used in the past (Debets, 1985). This increasingly nuanced approach clearly shows that adaptive reuse has extended from the realm of developers and architects into a broader, more public arena.

2.2 History of adaptive reuse

Adaptive reuse is not a recent phenomenon by any means; reuse occurred in the past simply because demolition and the construction of new buildings would simply require more time, energy and money than reuse. The Athena Temple in Syracuse, changed into a church by about 800, and the Marcellus Theatre in Rome, transformed into apartments in the Middle Ages, are early examples of adaptive reuse (De Vries, 1990). In the Netherlands, demolition of unused buildings does occur but adaptive reuse has become more common in recent times (Berends, 1995), to the point that, according to Stevens (1986) there now is no town in the Netherlands that has not seen adaptive reuse in some shape or form. Many feel that this is a positive trend: it has resulted in a built environment that is an enriched mixture of different times, architecture, interiors and uses (Asselbergs, 1996) and it adds to the diversity and confusion of the city landscape (Geurtsen 1988 in Koster, 1989). In the words of Dubois (2002, p. 70), the process of reuse

“is an essential part of the lie of a town or a city, and is precisely what gives it its fascinating complexity.”

2.3 Reasons for adaptive reuse

The main reason for adaptive reuse, according to Stevens (1986), is the severe housing shortage that exists in the Netherlands. In a country with such a high population density it does not make any economical and practical sense to leave a building unused. Latham (2000) notes that reuse is often cheaper than new development as it is a way of

“banking our built investment, and husbanding the resources, labour and energy that they comprise.” (p. 8)

Van ‘t Hof (1999) feels that while economical considerations have been the main drive behind adaptive reuse in the Netherlands, nowadays other motives are increasingly being considered. Stevens (1986) for example points towards the growth of appreciation of the built

heritage that started to take shape in the early 1980's as causing a huge growth in support for adaptive reuse; according to Koster (1989) adaptive reuse of heritage listed buildings in particular seems to be more about the heritage values than about the functional value of the reused building.

Adaptive reuse is also considered worthwhile from an environmental perspective. Not only will the building materials continue to be used rather than wasted by demolition (Van 't Hof, 1999); demolition is becoming increasingly expensive due to environmental taxes. Governmental subsidies also exist for environmental reuse of some buildings (Bogie *et al*, 1999). Furthermore, Latham (2000) mentions that environmental reuse of a building also extends to the updating of the building so that it has modern environmental features and will be more economical in the sense of energy efficiency, life span and comfort.

Adaptive reuse may also occur as an alternative to demolition where a building holds certain values to society. For example, the building can be architecturally significant or be aesthetically pleasing. It has also been recognised that the continuity of a place is beneficial to the psychological well being of a community, because older buildings *"have a past firmly rooted in the community"* (Latham, 2000 p.6) and because people generally have the desire to feel at ease in a familiar environment.

The reasons for adaptive reuse are many and varied, but it is widely accepted that reuse often would not happen without a strong desire from within society to conserve and reuse a building. This has been very well captured by Latham (2000, p. 12/13), when he states that:

"The real limitations are not archaeological, aesthetic, economical or functional, but psychological: the limits created by preconceptions, and by lack of imagination. Once the will is there, the skill and ingenuity will follow."

3 The church in the Netherlands

3.1 Religion in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a highly secular nation. In the 2001 census 40% of the population stated that they were not affiliated with any religion (CBS, 2005, p. 38); in Australia this figure was 26% for the same year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Figure 1 shows the religious affiliation in the Netherlands in 2003. It shows that the Christian faith is by far the largest religion in the Netherlands, with the Roman Catholic denomination most popular. In 2003, the Protestant denomination consisted of several groups, notably the Dutch Reformed and the Orthodox Calvinists.

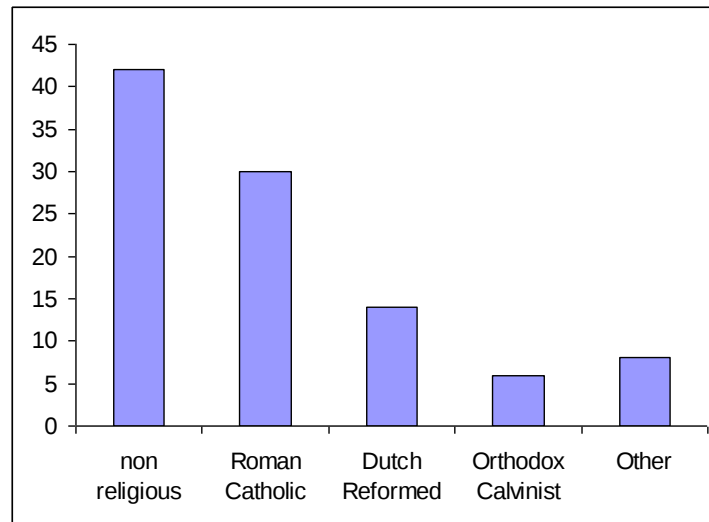


Figure 1: Religious affiliation (%) in the Netherlands in 2003 (after CBS 2005)

The first evidence of Christianity in the Netherlands is found in Nijmegen and dates back to the Roman era, but the religion did not take ground properly until the 4th century AD when Saint Servatius, the first Dutch bishop, settled in Maastricht. Starting from the 7th century however, the town of Utrecht became the centre of Catholic Christianity, as the seat of the bishop of Utrecht (Van Schaik, 2005).

The first Protestant voices were not heard until the 16th century when Luther and Calvin started criticising existing Catholic theological ideals and practices and started emphasising the individual responsibility of faith keeping. Calvin became the founding father for the Dutch Reformed and Orthodox Calvinist schisms; Luther for the Evangelic Lutherists (De Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, 2005).

In the 16th century, the growing Protestant voices, combined with political and social unrest, led to a war against the Spanish Roman-Catholic rulers of the Netherlands. The result of this war was the foundation of a Dutch republic in the northern half of the Netherlands and the establishment of Protestantism as the state religion. Though Catholicism was officially outlawed, in reality the religion was condoned as long as it was kept out of the public eye. Many Catholic churches were secularised or handed over for Protestant use whilst the Catholics had to make do with makeshift churches, hidden behind the facades of houses or other non-religious buildings. This situation lasted until well into the 18th century; not surprisingly it was followed by a burst of Roman-Catholic church construction when it finished. (Burger, 1994; Van Schaik, 2005; Rauti, 1989).

In 2004, after 40 years of deliberation, the Protestant church has seen the reunion of the Dutch Reformed, Orthodox Calvinist and Evangelic Lutheran denominations (De Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, 2005).

3.2 Trends

In the 20th century, the Christian faith has started to show a reduction in followers, a trend which is continuing into the 21st century. Whilst in recent years there has also been a rise of non-

Christian religions such as Islam (Van Schaik, 2005), the overall trend in the Netherlands has been that people move away from religion and claim to have no religious affiliation (Figure 2).

While more orthodox denominations such as the Orthodox Calvinists and the Roman Catholics have more or less maintained their ‘market share’, the greatest decline occurred among the Dutch Reformed denomination. From being the dominant denomination in the mid 19th century (with 55%), the share has decreased to a mere 14% in 2003. The main growth occurred among those claiming to have no religious affiliation. From a mere 2% at the end of the 19th century, the percentage of that group climbed to 8% after World War I (census 1920), and to 14% in 1930. The 1970s saw a dramatic increase so that by 1989 no single denomination could claim to have more members than those claiming to have ‘no religion.’ That trend is poised to increase. The data in the shaded area on the right side of figure 2 are based on predictions for 2020 by the Catholic research institute KASKI as detailed by Becker & Vink (1994).

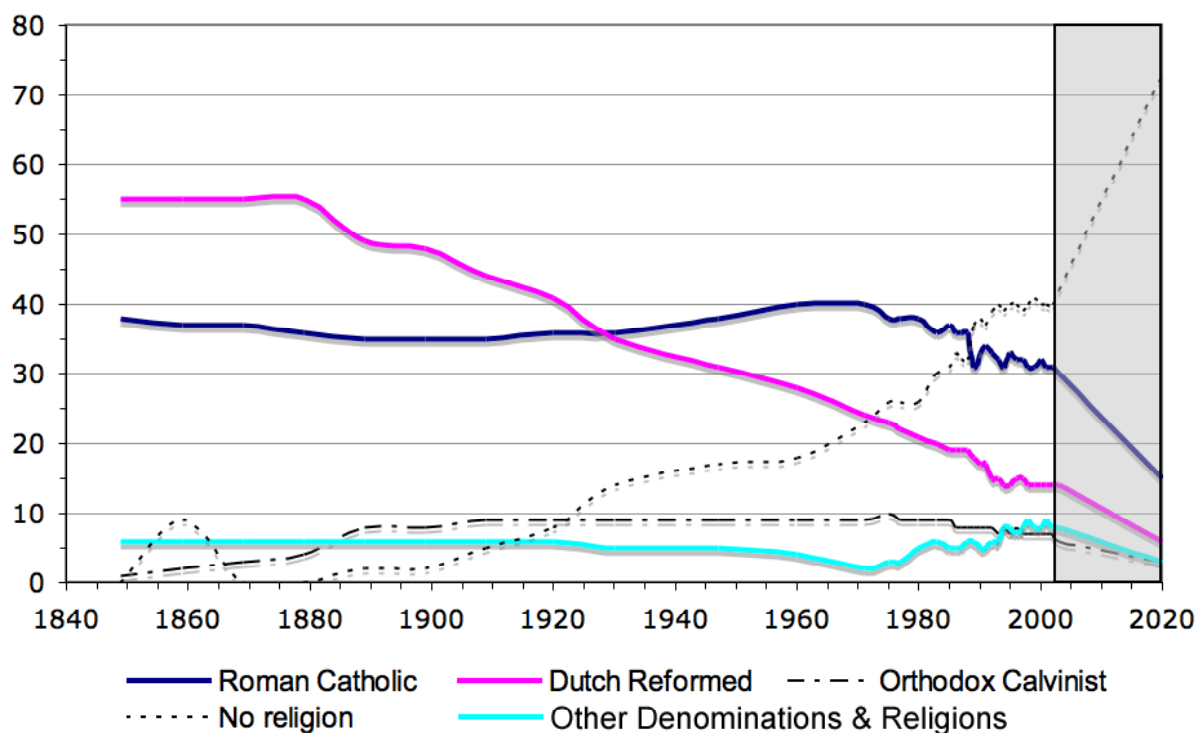


Figure 2: Religious affiliation (%) in the Netherlands

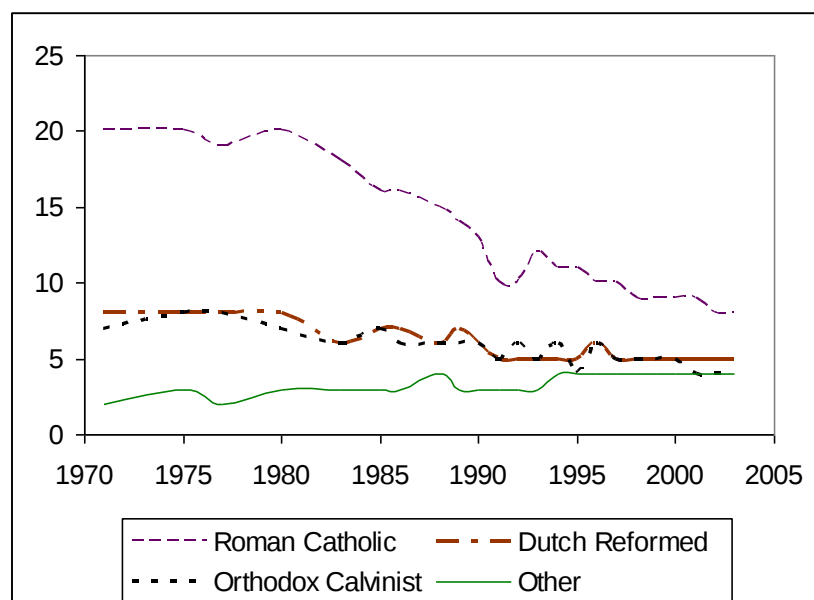
(CBS, 2005; Becker and Vink, 1994)

There are many explanations for the past temporal changes within the Christian faith, but societal changes seem to be the common factor, in the Netherlands as elsewhere in western nations. Powell and De La Hey (1987, p. 6) point out that after WWII, there was “*a new mood of rationalisation and of hostility to established ways*” and note that in Britain church-going as a social custom started to decline from that point onwards. Intriguingly, the opposite trend occurred in the USA with reaffirmation of Christian faith in the 1950s.

From the perspective of the use of churches, the 1930s are important period. At that time the share of the Dutch Reformed had declined below that of the Roman Catholic church, thus making a number of churches no longer viable. Increased redundancy followed soon after, interrupted by the events of World War II.

Overall 'market share', however, is only one aspect of the picture. While the Roman Catholic church largely maintained its overall share of people affirming their religious affiliation in the census, the actual church attendance tells another story. Between 1970 and 2000 the attendance had halved among the Roman Catholic church (figure 3), thus making a great number of churches no longer viable.

But the reduction pervades in many aspects of a religious organisation, including in the amount and size of parishes, and the number of priests / ministers (Kregting, Spui & Schepens, 2002).



**Figure 3: Church attendance ($\Rightarrow$ 1/month)(%)
in the Netherlands (CBS,2005)**

According to Van Hemert (1995), an important change has been that people no longer let their choices be decided by tradition, religion and family but instead, make their own choices and are increasingly individualistic and egocentric. Such values of course do not fit into the Christian tradition of caring for and sharing with others.

It is expected, that the current trend of reduction within the Christian faith will continue to go on well into the 21st century. Becker & Vink (1994) predict an increase in non-religious people to a staggering 73% by 2020 (see figure 2). It must be noted however that their predictions for 2000 (projected 63% non-religious, actual 40%) turned out to be greatly overestimated and their expectations for 2020 will therefore need to be adjusted accordingly.

The ageing of the general population and of the church going population in particular coupled with a reduction of young people turning to religion has been put forward as explanations for the predicted reductions within the Roman Catholic church (Kregting, Spui & Schepens, 2002). It is not unlikely that the same can be said for the Protestant denominations. On a regional level, it has been noted that the Roman Catholics in the north of the country are more orthodox and involved in the church, but are also losing numbers faster than their southern counterparts (Schepens, 1991).

4 Redundancy

4.1 Scale and trends

The rate of redundancy is on the increase and all denominations have been affected (Rauti, 1989). Where in the early 90's about forty churches annually have become redundant, in the late 90's this increased to about seventy per year. In total, 623 churches became redundant between 1993 and 2003. It is predicted that a further 550 churches will need to be made redundant by 2010, that is a loss of 8% of all Protestant and 17% of all Catholic churches in the Netherlands (Kraaijeveld & Globert, 2005).

The Roman Catholic denomination made 251 churches redundant between 1973 and 2003 but it also built 152 new churches in the same period. According to De Vries (1990), the fact that the Roman Catholic denomination has such a great amount of redundancy can be explained by a much stronger reduction in church attendance compared to the Protestant denominations. An additional problem is that in many places, and particularly in the dioceses of Roermond and Den Bosch, there is a Catholic church in almost every neighbourhood (Arons, 2002). This problem has also become apparent in the town of Nijmegen, where the Catholic research bureau KASKI condemned 10 of the 24 local churches to redundancy within a five year period (Pantus, 1993). It is clear that the situation is grave in the city but it is not solely an urban issue; the ongoing shift of the population away from the country means many country congregations are becoming too small to warrant ongoing use of a church. Bouma (2003) notes that the redundancy of the Protestant church is particularly problematic in the rural provinces of Friesland and Zeeland, but also in more urbanised North Holland.

4.2 Causes

The trend of secularisation described above only goes part of the way to explain the ongoing redundancy of churches. Church redundancy occurs when a church building becomes superfluous and stops being used for church services and other religious practices. The issues surrounding church redundancy have been discussed extensively in the literature, and various causes have been identified. The most important are:

- Reduction of church attendance. This may be due to changes in the need to be in a church to have a religious experience and due to secularisation. Town planning can also have an impact on church visitation (Ambachtsheer & De Booij, 1979), as does the population shift from the country to the city (Powell & De La Hey, 1987) and from the inner city to the suburbs (De Vries, 1990).

- Financial difficulties. A reduction within a congregation will result in less money for the church. Renovations, ongoing maintenance and regular user costs may have resulted in large debts. The CIO-K (1999) notes that a variety of governmental policies are also making it financially hard for the church. In the end the church organisation is faced with a dilemma: use the limited funds for the church as a building or the church as a community? The latter seems to be the preferred option in most cases (Bogie *et al*, 1999).
- Reduction in usability of the church, caused by the higher requirements of comfort, health and safety, acoustics, lighting and heating. Furthermore, changes in liturgical requirements have also had an impact on the usability of the church. This has particularly affected Roman Catholic churches and more specifically the 19th century, neo-gothic churches (Ambachtsheer & De Booij, 1979), which were built in large numbers after the ban on the Roman Catholic faith was lifted. More recently, various new churches have been built to replace older churches not considered user-friendly anymore (Rauti, 1989).
- Reorganisations within the church community, such as the combining of congregations, dioceses or even entire denominations. In the Netherlands, many churches were built to accommodate all religious groups that came into existence after schisms within the Christian faith (Rauti, 1989). The rise of the ecumenism movement, aimed at bringing unity between the various denominations of the Christian religion, also did not help (Powell & De La Hey, 1979). The coming together of three Protestant denominations in 2004 is one example of a reorganisation that is likely to have a large impact on the amount of church redundancy in the Netherlands (CIO-K, 1999).

5 Options after redundancy

5.1 Leave unused

A church may be left without an active function. For example, the building may be preserved for its heritage (cultural, architectural or historical) values. Another possibility that has been discussed in the United Kingdom is the natural or aided deterioration of a church into a ruin (Binney & Burman, 1977). Proponents point out that a ruin has a great romantic appeal and that can be particularly beneficial for the tourism industry. Some just feel a church is better off becoming a ruin rather than a heritage building kept frozen in time (Binney & Burman, 1977) but the Church of Ireland just prefers a future as a ruin to “prevent unworthy use or vandalism” (Rauti, 1989 p. 31). Rauti (1989) suggests that the ruin option may only be suitable to churches damaged by war or natural disasters.

Critics point out that the appeal to let a structure fall to ruin and decay is no longer a viable option given the issue of public liability. While the concept of ‘romantic ruins’ is deeply ingrained in public mythology and reflected in some heritage thinking in Europe (cf.

Huyssen 2006), it is not applicable to countries where public liability issues and building codes intervene (eg Australia and the USA).

The conservation and ongoing existence of churches should not have to depend on whether an use for it can be found immediately, finds Steensma (1981); this idea has support with those valuing the building beyond its financial opportunities. At the same time Bogie *et al* (1999) are some of many warning against the desire to save buildings just for the sake of preservation and nostalgia. Even as Stevens (1986) and Van 't Hof (1999) for instance point out that the community should accept that heritage values escape cost-benefit analysis; they still feel that it is may better for a building to be used rather than left unused. Bogie *et al* (1999) note that it may be a good idea to leave a church unused temporarily as a way to stop it from being demolished before options for different uses have been properly considered. This happens where the building has become a financial burden to the owner due to maintenance costs and lack of income. The general consensus is that an unused building will deteriorate at a fast rate due to acts such as vandalism, destruction, theft or disappearance of furnishings and artefacts, fires, and the natural elements (Ambachtsheer & Booij, 1979) and as the search for potential new uses can be time consuming and a building is likely to deteriorate in this time. Thus temporary stewardship, such as by the government or by stakeholder organisations, may be a good idea (Van 't Hof, 1999).

The most poignant point of view about leaving a redundant church unused however, and one that is widely accepted in the Netherlands, is that:

“Vacancies in a densely populated country like the Netherlands are unthinkable. The [Dutch] business instinct cannot handle that nothing is done with a building. Not even because the building deteriorates, but because it is not financially profitable. The project developer is not concerned about the building itself, but about what would be most profitable on that location. Demolition and development in other words” (De Vries, 1990 p. 19, English translation)

5.2 Demolition

Predictions are that about 60% of all redundant churches will end up being demolished. Of the remaining redundant churches three quarters are expected to be reused for residential purposes; the rest will be reused for commercial purposes (Kraaijeveld & Globert, 2004). Financial considerations are common reasons for the sale and demolition of a church; the grounds on which a church stands is generally valuable and the sale may even help a financially struggling religious community out of debt altogether (Ambachtsheer & De Booij, 1979). Quite often, a demolished church makes way for development and road construction. But as Bogie *et al* (1999) point out, not everybody agrees that demolition is a financially sound decision. They note that some feel demolition is a waste of investment as the already invested maintenance and building costs and building material are lost; furthermore sometimes the cost of demolition is higher than the cost of the overdue maintenance.

There are other reasons why some religious denominations are not averse to see their church demolished. Whilst in the Middle Ages a church was used invariably as a multifunctional community place, the reformation and counter-reformation resulted in ever

increasing restrictions on secular uses. This came to a point where, according to Rauti (1989, p. 24):

“In both Protestant and Catholic areas a stiff, almost puritanical attitude developed as regards to the use of churches characterised by the opinion in many rural areas (...) that a church is a church (only to be used for services) and when it is no longer used as a church, it has best be demolished.”

It should be noted that the Catholic denomination is generally a stronger proponent of this attitude than the Protestant denominations because the Catholics consecrate their churches and therefore consider them holy places, unsuitable for other uses (CIO-K, 1999; Ekhardt, 1993). And there are plenty of examples of where the church authorities have preferred the demolition of their church over a potential undesired reuse of the building, such as the diocese of Den Bosch, discussed in Rooijakkers (2003). Overall, demolition of churches appears to be getting less common; heritage legislation and the protection of heritage buildings have been named as potential explanations for this reduction (CIO-K, 1999; De Vries, 1990). While heritage listing means a church cannot be demolished, until recently only buildings from before 1850 were heritage listed. This means that more recent churches have a higher chance of demolition. The net effect of the above trends is that Catholic churches, especially churches less than 150 years old, are more affected by demolition than Protestant churches. Within the Protestant denomination, estimates indicate that one in five Orthodox Calvinist churches will be demolished one in twenty Dutch Reformed churches (Kraaijeveld & Globert, 2004). Of course, community pressure can also stop proposed demolition, such as in the case of the Gerardus Majella church in Amsterdam (Debets, 1994) and local communities are in fact becoming more involved and active against the destruction of local churches (Van der Harst, 2000). There seems to be the feeling that a church belongs to and in the community, and that

“almost every church demolished (...)is a tombstone to a scattered and dismembered community” (Binney & Burman, 1977, p.171)

Church demolition also affects the former church congregation and local church ministers. The congregation has emotional attachments to the place where they have been experienced such major personal events as baptisms, weddings and funerals; often they have also invested large amounts of time, effort and money into the church as well. The closure and demolition of their church has been described as painful, traumatic and *“an extremely precarious process, bordering on robbery and mourning”* (Arons, 2002, English translation). The same author also notes that conflict between the church authorities, who want to see a building demolished, and the local congregation who fight tooth and nail to save it, is not uncommon. At present no statistical data exist that can explain in whose favour the conflict will be resolved.

5.3 Adaptive reuse

Whilst the church authorities sometimes prefer demolition over adaptive reuse of a church, Powell & De La Hey (1987, p. 16) point out that

“such sentiments are at odds with public opinion. Most people would welcome the constructive reuse of a historic building.”

And whilst adaptive reuse of churches is by no means a new concept, it is changing from a solely practical solution to increasingly become an ideological solution (De Vries, 1990). Adaptive reuse then may be more about safeguarding the values that people attach to the building than it is about saving the building for its own sake or for other practical reasons. As an example, Bogie *et al* (1999) notes that through adaptive reuse, not just the building but also the atmosphere and character of the building, and the identity of the locale are saved; and that adaptive reuse is an excellent medium to retain characteristic architectural and historical elements of society. Koster (1989) and Pantus (1993) both point out that adaptive reuse is in fact the only way to save buildings of heritage value such as redundant churches; and Latham (2000) discusses the advantage of adaptive reuse on the health of communities. A more detailed analysis of the various opinions on adaptive reuse can be found in section 7, but first the most common types of adaptive reuse of churches in the Netherlands shall be discussed.

6. Reuse types

6.1 Religious reuse

It has been argued that churches are best retained for their original purpose, if not in whole then at least in part (Latham, 2000; Van 't Hof, 1999). Not only will this option be easy and cheap as it requires few if any modifications to the building (Ibelings, 2002); it will also minimise the loss of values attached to the building. Furthermore, because the internal space of the church remains unaffected, this is most desirable type of reuse (Powell & De La Hey 1987). Conversion of churches to other Christian denominations is as common in the present as it has been in the past, and in fact the Netherlands has already experienced religious reuse at a grand scale during the Reformation in the 16th century, when many Catholic churches were taken over for use by Protestants (Van Schaik, 2005).

Since the 1950's, there has been a movement known as ecumenism aimed at creating greater unity, communication and cooperation within the Christian faith (Ort, 1994), but though it has opened up the possibility to co-use churches between various Christian denominations, this option is not widely practiced (De Roy & Spruit, 2002).

According to Powell & De La Hey (1987) conversion of redundant churches to other Christian denominations generally occurs without much controversy. The opposite has to be said for conversion to non-Christian religions, particularly Islam, a religion currently looking for religious space (Van Schaik, 2005). While Islam has a long and venerable tradition of taking over Christian churches, the most famous being the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the current political climate post 9/11 is not very conducive to such actions. *“Islam is too political in the Netherlands at the moment”* is one opinion (Klok, quoted in Bouma, 2003); and this is evidently so as there are various examples of successful and reasonably uncontroversial conversions that occurred in the 1980's (Pollmann, 1995). The opposition can come from the church authorities as from the congregation or even the community itself (Bouma, 2003; Ibeling, 2002; Pantus, 1993). The Catholic Church authorities generally

disallow non-Christian religious reuse in their churches (Bouma, 2003) and there have been cases (such as the Theresia church in Nijmegen) where the church is demolished despite requests by the local Muslim community to take over the church (Pantus, 1993; see also CIO-K 1999). Protests from within the congregation have included the notion that to hand the church over to Muslims will sow doubts about the strength of the Christian faith (Binney & Burman, 1977).

But there are also many who support reuse of churches by non-Christians. The Center for Architecture and Town Planning Tilburg (CAST 1996) for example point out that the government should force church authorities to allow this type of adaptive reuse, because not only will it save the cultural and historic values of the building, but also because religious organisations generally look after their buildings very well and it will help the integration and acceptance of the non-Christian religious community within the Dutch society.

On a more practical level, many redundant churches occur in areas with a high number of non-Christian migrants such as in city centers (CIO-K, 1999), where religious reuse would make good sense. Pollmann (1995) also concludes that most decisions by church authorities on reuse are not adequately rationally justified; principles and emotions still play a large part.

6.2 Community reuse

After religious reuse, community reuses, such as education, arts and culture, are generally found to be amongst the more suitable solutions for redundant churches; this is due to the fact that most cultural uses make use of the characteristic spatial features of the redundant church (Dubois, 2002) and because it fits in with the idea of a church as a public building (Rauti, 1989). Overall, the reuse of redundant churches as community assets of some description is more successful in urban areas where demand for such spaces is far greater than in rural areas.

6.2.1 Multipurpose, sports and education

Multipurpose use is particularly suitable where there is a lack of facilities within that community; it can be used by various community groups who may have special requirements (such as performing arts groups) but generally don't have the funds to build their own spaces (Latham, 2000), or for groups with special needs, such as immigrants. As the church is often a large building it can also be very suitable as a multipurpose community centre which should have

“multiple functions and multiple users alongside one another or (...) a cluster of identical destinations” (Bogie et al, 1999 p.97)

In a way, adaptive reuse of churches as multipurpose community centers can be interpreted as a type of social planning. An example is the Sion church in Groningen, which was saved from demolition because it was considered to be in an area of high unemployment and crime that lacked local community facilities. The church now houses a sport center, a women's center and a library (Ekhart, 1993). Use of churches for indoor sport has also been advocated elsewhere, such as by the British Sports Council (Binney & Burman, 1977). Not

only do they feel that churches often have the high ceilings and uninterrupted spans necessary for indoor sport venues, they also need little modification. Furthermore, redundant churches occur mostly in city centres and rural areas, where the need for indoor sporting facilities is highest. Many sports can be accommodated in an adapted church, though “*some religious objections may be raised over potentially violent sports*” (Binney & Burman, 1977 p. 194).

Educational reuse, such as for libraries and study is also a possibility. Although there are various examples of such reuses in the Netherlands, there is relatively little general discussion on this type of reuse within the literature. What has been noted is that the use of churches as exam centres is more the exception than the rule and only occurs under special circumstances (De Roy & Spruit (2002).

6.2.2 Music

Music has always been part of the religious experience and the reuse of a church for musical performances, according to Powell & De La Hey (1987, p. 92), is ‘*singularly appropriate*’. It is even considered to be the most suitable multifunctional use where the church is still being used for religious purposes (Dubois, 2002). Steensma (1981) points out that music is already the most common use of a church after religious services. This should come as no surprise as the acoustics are generally excellent and there is a suitable amount of space which make for suitable reuse (Bogie et al. 1999; CAST 1996). De Roy and Spruit (2002) have calculated that three out of five Catholic churches in the Netherlands are used for cultural musical purposes alongside religious use, depending largely on the amount of seating and the size of the parish. Such multipurpose use it also occurs more in frequently rural than in urban churches. Steensma (1981) notes that organ concerts are most common, followed by choir pieces, chamber music, and practice space for bands and schools. One potential issue of musical reuse may be the type of music as some people may take offense to profane music in the church, particularly if the church is still being used for religious services (Dubois, 2002).

6.2.3 Theatre

The layout and architecture of a church can influence decisions as to whether a church is suitable for theater performances (Bogie et al. 1999). Those churches that have been designed according to the auditorium principle are particularly appropriate (Powell & De La Hey, 1987) and indeed a design with galleries, raked seating and a good view to the pulpit is quite similar to the design ideas of a theater (Bol 1999). As the Protestant church design has traditionally focused on the spoken word (Ort, 1994; Smaal, 1979) it is likely that theater productions may be more suitable acoustically to Protestant churches than Catholic churches. According to a British performing arts organisation, there are also artistic and financial benefits from using a church:

“We are seeking to presents events in an aesthetic way. Some churches have a marvellous atmosphere -with subtle lighting you can get better effects than on a stage, more cheaply.” (Courtyard Arts Trust, quoted in Binney & Burman, 1977 p. 118)

Theater performances in a church are not as common as music however, perhaps because Protestant Christians have traditionally seen plays as sinful or because the church authorities may not be familiar with a play and be concerned about its contents (Steensma, 1981).

6.2.4 Exhibition space

Use as an exhibition space such as a museum is

“the ideal solution for a fine redundant church. Throughout history, churches have housed works of art and enshrined the history of communities and nation.” (Powell & De La Hey, 1987, p. 96)

Their tradition as great patrons of art makes churches a very appropriate venue to display works of art and history (Binney & Burman 1977. Moreover a church can also be used to store art. This is of course very useful considering that many religious artworks become homeless when a church is made redundant. Church authorities generally agree that they have a responsibility to current and future generations to preserve and pass on their cultural heritage; the cultural heritage which frequently owes its existence to the support of generations of church-goers (Van Zanten, 1994). Whilst in the past, church art may have easily disappeared into private hands after redundancy; it is nowadays not uncommon to see guidelines prescribe the dispersion of church fittings after liquidation. The Catholic Church sees other churches as the preferred new owner of the redundant church fittings and utensils (Van Zanten, 1994).

Steensma (1981) notes that whilst the church as an exhibition space for religious art is common, there are also many churches in smaller towns which have taken on the role of a community cultural space. Generally, these uses are accepted, but issues may come up where there is a suggestion of commercialism, such as in case at art fairs.

De Roy & Spruit (2002) note that use of a church as an exhibition space is not very common (only 1% of churches have had regular exhibitions alongside religious use), and that it occurs most frequently in older Dutch Reformed churches. They also found it to be more common in urban churches than in rural churches. The latter is probably a reflection of the make up of the community and its interests.

6.3 Commercial reuse

Whilst reuse of redundant churches for religious or community purposes means that the building remains a publicly accessible community building, reuse for commercial purposes on the other hand results in the building passing into private hands and, in many cases, becoming off limits to anyone but the owners. Furthermore, the church building generally undergoes a fair amount of changes before it can be used for commercial purposes and commercial reuse can bring out strong reactions within the community. As Powell and De La Hey (1987, p. 84) explain:

“the whole concept of commercial re-use has been tainted by controversy, partly because of the attitude towards ‘suitability’ and partly because many commercial uses implemented to date have set sorry examples. Many find it difficult to reconcile the idea of a profit-making concern with the consecrated status of a church”

Concerns about the number and extent of changes required for successful adaptation to commercial use relate particularly to the division of the spatial features of a church. Ambachtsheer & de Booij (1979) note that where a church already has some smaller side spaces, such as aisles and chapels, these should be used rather than subdivision of the main space. Division of spectacular churches such as the Vondel church in Amsterdam was ruled to be out of the question, even though it only entailed internal glass partitions for office spaces (De Vries, 1990). The problem with partition, as argued by critics, is that it will disguise the original church (Latham, 2000). De Vries (1990) notes that internal horizontal and vertical divisions are more acceptable solutions if the streetscape and townscape values of the church are more significant than the interior values. There have been some cases where commercial developments have been criticised, but one has to consider: is it not better to save a church in any way rather than see it demolished? (Powell & De La Hey, 1987).

Commercial reuse appears to be more common than other forms of reuse (Ibelings, 2002); maybe this is not a surprise considering that economic considerations have been noted as the main drive behind adaptive reuse in the Netherlands (Van ‘t Hof, 1999). After all

“a commercial function would bring greater guarantees for financial success than the frequently applied cultural reuses” (Bogie et al, 1999).

Greater consideration should in fact be given to the financial feasibility of adaptive reuse of churches, concludes Pollmann (1995), after finding that in many cases adaptively reused churches do not financially succeed and end up requiring government funding to keep going. Overall the extant literature does not deal adequately with the question of economic viability. This remains an obvious, and central area of future research.

6.3.1 Residential

There are various types of commercial reuse, but by far the most common is reuse for residential purposes (Stevens, 1986). Though this type of reuse may not always be appreciated within the community, it has been put forward as an option particularly suitable to country churches which otherwise may be demolished or used as low grade storage (Latham, 2000; Powell & De La Hey, 1987); both futures which are less appealing to some church authorities than residential use. Debets (1994) notes that local government zoning plans restrict light commercial and office use in residential areas often and thus, in effect, only allow residential reuse as a possibility for the adaptation of those redundant churches in inner city areas that cannot be maintained as community assets of some description. On the other hand, stringent government policies (Bogie et al, 1999) and a lack of imagination and flexibility from local government or land owners can also limit the extent or creativity of residential reuse in city areas. Many private owners buy a church over a normal house because it is cheaper, but then only have a

small budget left for very basic changes (Binney & Burman 1977). Most authors however would argue that too many changes are more problematic, as it may affect the integrity and values of the church (Powell & De La Hey, 1987), as described here by Dubois (2002, p. 71):

“The essence of the architecture is eliminated, leaving only the outer shell. From that moment, the church is reduced to nothing more than a large shelter, a shell that has been retained for economic reasons or in order to preserve the townscape”

The use as social housing is also a possibility, and one that may fit in better with the idea of a church as a community space as one could argue that:

“this use preserves some of the humanistic principles enshrined in an ecclesiastical building and for others the meaning of the word church as a place of sanctuary.”(Latham, 2000, p. 95)

A church, with its single and open interior space, the lack of doors and especially the lack of levels may be perfectly suitable for people in wheelchairs (Binney & Burman 1977). Inner city churches may also be suitable as affordable low income & student accommodation (Debets (1986). Koster (1989) however notes that in cases like reuse for social housing, where there is both a small budget and more strict building regulations, there is a tendency to make too many concessions in an effort to fit more into the building.

6.3.2 Other commercial

Other commercial reuses of churches discussed in the literature are conversion to offices, storage facilities, shops and hospitality venues. The discussion in the literature about reuse for offices focuses largely on the architectural aspects and the changes required. An advantage of this type of reuse is that it is so radically different from its former use that architects will find little need to consider the relationship between the old and the new use (Ibelings, 2002); giving them more freedom. Latham (2000) however feels that offices are relatively flexible spaces and that it is possible to maintain the open plan spatial features of a church even with the addition of a second level. Despite the fact that subdivisions are not suitable in a building of such proportions as a church, they are often carried out in order to gain offices that can more easily be let out (Binney & Burman, 1977). The same authors also point issues with the acoustics:

Even where such conversions are relatively sensitive in architectural terms, the noise of people at work destroys the sense of peace and repose that was formerly one of the church’s main attractions (p. 121)

But, according to the Center for Architecture and Town Planning Tilburg (CAST 1996), some users, such as lawyers, architects and graphic designers, seek out the unique experience

of being in a church and having the space, exclusivity and perhaps the prestige, they are quite willing to put up with all the inconveniences and discomforts that comes with such a venue.

Rural churches may be useful as storage areas, such as for antiques or farming equipment; the advantage being that the church is saved from demolition and kept secure, even if it is not accessible to the general public (Powell & De La Hey, 1987); furthermore the spatial features of the church are not changed (Dubois, 2002). Urban or semi-urban churches can be used for light industrial purposes as their large, well ventilated and flexible spaces could provide a good working environment (Binney & Burman, 1977). Latham (2000) notes that adaptive reuse of buildings to shops has not been so successful; Binney & Burman (1977, p. 196) warn against unsympathetic changes such as in various cases where they noticed that *“the façade has been barbarously mutilated by the insertion of showroom windows”*

While in Britain there have been various successful conversions of crypts into bars and the like (Binney & Burman, 1977), reuse as a hospitality venue occurs in the Netherlands (Ekhart 1993), but less commonly as the more conservative Protestant denominations are be adverse to having alcohol and let alone gambling inside ‘their’ church.

7. Attitudes towards reuse

The various re-use options discussed in the previous section are, of course, only the tangible manifestations of prior decisions to reuse a church in the first place. Given the fact that churches are heritage buildings, and thus imbued with a range of values that have been projected onto them by owners and the public at large, it is not surprising that researchers and heritage professionals have been required to take into account the various community attitudes towards reuse. These shall be reviewed in the following section.

7.1 Denominations

Van der Harst (2000, p.10) notes that church authorities continue to feel responsible for a church building even after it has become redundant and is adaptively reused, because:

“Something of their ‘spirit’ can be found in these buildings. Inspired people have helped create these buildings, and have used, experienced, enriched and carefully maintained them.” (English translation)

The attitudes of the various denominations toward adaptive reuse all revolve around the question of what is considered ‘suitable’. According to the CIO-K (1999), the religious meaning of the church building and the approach towards suitable reuse varies between the denominations. Steensma (1985) notes that although from a theological perspective there are no limits to the types of reuse of Protestant churches as their churches are not consecrated, what is considered suitable is still dependant on the attitudes of the local church authorities and the congregation, as well as on the nature of the building. Within the Dutch Reformed denomination, some feel the redundant building should only be allowed to have suitable reuses that will add an extra dimension towards the church; others have a more functionalistic approach and feel that it does not make any difference what use the building will have after it becomes redundant. The Orthodox Calvinists on the other hand tend to favour demolition

over profane uses (CIO-K, 1999). Estimates indicate that one in five Orthodox Calvinist churches will be demolished (Kraaijeveld & Globert 2004) leading to a very skewed future representation of church architecture. It should be noted that within the Protestant Church there is no centralised approach by the church hierarchy; rather it is up to the local church authorities to make decisions on reuse.

As such, there are many different opinions about reuse. Some examples found in the literature demonstrate that Protestant Church authorities have indicated that they prefer their churches not to be reused commercially (Debets, 2000) or as a casino or cinema (Debets, 1986). Some prefer the church to be demolished rather than reused for non-religious purposes (CIO-K, 1999) while others want their church to be really *used*, which excludes functions such as storage (Bouma, 2003).

Within the Catholic Church the power of decision on reuse falls with each diocese (Van der Marel-Veerman, 2005). The Catholic denomination takes a different approach to the Protestants due to the fact that Catholics consecrate the building; they generally prefer that once a church is no longer used for religious service it should be demolished rather than reused (CIO-K, 1999). Pantus (1993, p. 13) remarks that:

“this attitude looks more like a tactic of scorched earth rather than like the warm involvement in the conservation of our cultural values, something one would expect from a church association.”

The dramatic decline in church attendance among the Roman Catholic congregations (figure 2) raises the spectre that most of the projected 300 churches that will be made redundant (Kraaijeveld & Globert 2005), will be demolished.

Rooijakker (2003) notes that where demolition is not an option, such as due to heritage listing of the building, a diocese will allow adaptive reuse on the condition that it does not affect the dignity of the building. After disapproval from within the church community over churches reused as entertainment venues, such as in Den Bosch (Rooijakker, 2003), Catholic Church authorities have tightened their policies to ensure that this will not happen again. Changes to the policies include the requirement to know what reuse a church will have after redundancy and the removal of all church furnishings:

“In short, where reuse occurs, all traces of the original function of the church needs to be removed as much as possible to avoid painful situations” (Rooijakker, 2003, English translation)

There are various cases where Catholic Church authorities have disallowed adaptive reuse. They include housing and shops (Ekhart, 1993) and especially mosques (Ibeling, 2002; Pantus, 1993), a supermarket (Arons, 2002), and other religious reuse in general (Debets, 1994). But not all Catholic Church authorities are opposed to adaptive reuse. Kregting (2005) notes that some prefer it over demolition and lists reuse for residential purposes, bed & breakfasts or studios as suitable options.

7.2 Local and church community

A church is a community building (Van der Harst, 2000) and it is not surprising that most community protest occurs over commercial reuse,

particularly residential reuse. The privatization of a church excludes the public from access and thus undermines the emotional attachments formed by the congregation to the place where they have been experienced such major personal events as baptisms, weddings and funerals (Arons, 2002). This aspect is under researched in the literature, even though it is not a new issue. In the 1970s Binney & Burman (1977, p. 198) noted that:

“Local people may find it offensive that the parish church should become the exclusive property of an individual, to which they no longer have rights of access. Others find it an assault upon the sanctity of the church and the churchyard where burials have recently taken place.”

Though Ten Cate (2002) notes that there is ever increasing awareness of the value of cemeteries in general, the plight of cemeteries after adaptive reuse of churches has in fact not gained much attention within the literature.

IN addition, moral values intercede especially with regard to residential reuse. Deelstra & Stehouwer (1987), for example, note that the former church community may rather see the building demolished than entertain the idea of unmarried couples living together in the (former) church. Other reuses potentially controversial to the church community include clubs (Rooijakker, 2003) and hospitality venues (¶¶) and especially reuse by the Muslim faith (Ibeling, 2002; Pantus, 1993).

Where the community feels strongly connected to a church, Ambachtsheer & De Booij (1979) note that it would be appropriate that the community becomes involved in finding an acceptable community use, one that may even be funded by the community. In fact, research has shown that three quarters of the Dutch population feels that after redundancy, at least one church should be saved in every town and village, and that this building should continue to be used as a community meeting space (Bouma, 2003). That the community is concerned with the fate of its churches can be demonstrated when one looks at community action and organisation aimed at saving and finding a reuse for a church threatened with demolition. Examples are the Bavo church in Haarlem (Van der Harst, 2000) or the Majella church in Amsterdam (Debets, 1994). Sometimes the community becomes immediately involved in the discussion with local government and church authorities about the future of a church after it becomes redundant, as was the case with the Sion church in Groningen (Ekhart, 1993).

Rooijakker (2003) points out that the approach of some denominations to make the church unrecognisable as a church after redundancy and reuse completely ignores the importance of the building to the local (church) community. Ambachtsheer & De Booij (1979) however point out that prior to the 19th century there was no link between function and meaning of the (protestant) church building. Only since then there has been a tendency to associate the church community with the church building. If the congregation were once more willing to accept that function and meaning are not the same then it will offer greater flexibility for adaptive reuse as a new function will not affect the meaning of the church to the community.

7.3 Architects

The decision to adaptively reuse a building depends on many factors, including architectural considerations. In fact Debets (1985) argues

that architects, engineers and building contractors should play an important role in the process of deliberations about the reuse if a responsible decision is to be made. There are various theoretical ideas about the best way to approach adaptive reuse of a church. One that has a lot of support amongst architects is that function should follow shape. According to the Center for Architecture and Town Planning Tilburg (CAST 1996), this means a thorough analysis of the construction and condition of the building; then a short list of possible uses followed by a market analysis to see if there are needs for any of those uses. Koster (1989) explains that an inventory of the character of the building (such as history, locale) should be drawn up in an effort to find the most fitting use.

Secondly, it is argued that changes should be kept to a minimum to maintain the integrity of the building or that changes are reversible so that the building can be re-used again in the future. Debets (1986) for instance notes that the church should remain recognisable as a church from inside and outside and Latham (2000, p. 86) urges that extensions should only be '*a last resort*'. Thirdly, many architects agree that the spatial features of the church are important and where possible, one should aim to create large and interesting spaces in order to make the reuse a success (Koster, 1989; Latham, 2000). Where a church already has some smaller spaces, such as is frequently the case among the multifunctional 20th century churches (Smaal, 1979) these spaces could be used. In the discussion about whether the changes to the building should be in traditional or contemporary style, the latter option currently seems to have most support (Van 't Hof, 1999). In other words, the past of the building should not limit the reuse and one should be able to add a modern layer (Koster, 1989). One way to do this is to create a real and a sensed division between the new and the old elements, and whilst the elements should fit in with the building, the materials and texture should stand out (Debets, 1981 & 2000). The architect should not just consider the building but ideally should also take into account the variety in civic, political, social and artistic directions as well as the nature of the building and its surroundings (Deelstra & Stehouwer, 1987). But in the end, there is generally quite a realistic approach to adaptive reuse: assuming the building will only be saved if it becomes useful, one is aware that it must be financially feasible in its new use. This generally means drastic changes to the building (Koster, 1989).

7.4 Government

Though much has been written about how the government can contribute to adaptive reuse through legislation, funding, protection and policies, which is outside the scope of this review, less is available about the government attitude towards reuse. Generally, a local council is interested in creating a community that is renewable but where the historic features are preserved, meaning that the building should be adaptable to the demands of a different function, but the appearance should be retained. In most cases means retaining an unchanged façade and limited or reversible changes inside (Debets, 1981).

Rooijakker (2003) note that local governments generally object to the demolition of churches proposed by church authorities as they do not want to lose a building with high

streetscape and townscape values and then having to deal with filling a large void. Stevens (1986) points out that local governments need to be flexible about adaptive reuse if they wish to maintain the health and vitality of towns. The same author also points out that a lack of understanding, vision and funding from local government has frequently resulted in a great amount of demolition or misuse of heritage buildings. There should be greater cooperation between government and church owners regarding finding financially viable ways to reuse churches, so that the new owner will not need to rely on government funding (CAST, 1996), something which frequently happens (Pollmann, 1995).

8. Conclusion

This literature review has looked at the wide range of opinions on and attitudes towards reuse of Christian churches in the Netherlands. It has found that as a result of a high rate of secularisation the Netherlands has a subsequent high level of church redundancy. There is a generally pragmatic attitude towards these redundant churches as high population density and housing shortage, combined with the economic spirit of the Dutch mean a building does not remain unused for long. Where the building is reused, practical economic considerations tend to have a higher priority than other considerations, though this does not mean all reused churches are financially viable. There are however many people within society who feel an emotional attachment towards the building, or towards what they feel it stands for. Conflicts occur where people demand that these opinions also be taken into consideration when it comes to adaptive reuse of the church.

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