

Research plan

Reinterpreting Dominican Heritage

Implementing architectural considerations of the Dominican order in zero-waste adaptive reuse of Dominican Heritage in Rotterdam today

Graduation studio
Heritage & Architecture
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1 Introduction

The Dominican monastic order belongs to the mendicant orders of the Catholic church. The order, also known as the 'Order of Preachers', is originally French and was founded by Dominicus Guzmán in Toulouse in 1215. European cities were proliferating then, while the Catholic Church was losing ground and had a dormant presence in French society. It was with sorrow that St. Dominic looked upon the rampant heresy and the inability and unwillingness of the church to turn the tide (Pepler, 1945). Therefore, his mission was to bring absolute truth to the people and "to show that to be a Catholic was to be truly modern, truly ascetic, truly free" (Pepler, 1945, p. 83).

In the thirteenth century, this Catholic order increased and spread across many European cities, eventually gaining a foothold in Rotterdam in 1444 (Seesink, 2019). The Dominicans' current residence in Rotterdam is the Dominicus convent. This church complex in the city centre was built in 1960 and designed by Kraaijvanger. The building is one of the representatives of the post-war reconstruction period. The parish church, part of the monastery, faces a declining number of parishioners.

Consequently, in the summer of 2021, Dominicans Netherlands (2021) stated that the church council formally announced the intention to decide on the sale and withdrawal from worship. This decision has pressured the monastery's viability and future use as a sacred space. Nevertheless, the building still forms the outgrowth of the Dominican life within.

In his article *Dominican Form and Architecture: Tensions* Dominican friar Irenaeus Dunlevy addresses this notion that the Dominican monastery shares a reciprocal relationship with the Dominican form of life. He compares the convent with the habit of the friar. He writes (2016, p. 25): "Just as the habit serves as an external sign of the interior reality of the friar's consecration to God, so too does the priory serve as a sign communicating the reality of a consecrated life". In other words, the religious paradigm and practices of the Dominican order are embedded in the architecture itself. Similarly, the monastery enables and stimulates the Dominican life within.

This research aims to understand the Dominican form of life, to identify specific Dominican architectural considerations, to recognise these architectural concepts in the Dominicus church and convent in Rotterdam, and to eventually reuse these architectural principles in a new narrative for the future redesign of the church complex. In order to gain a broader understanding of the architectural considerations of the Dominican convent, two other Dominican architectural contemporaries are also being researched. These concern Sainte-Marie de la Tourette, designed by Le Corbusier and the Dominican Motherhouse, designed by Louis Kahn.

2 Problem statement: Setting the scene

1. Society: Secularisation and vacancy

The secularisation trend continues unabated, and churches are thus increasingly confronted with the choice to stop or continue. Increasingly, churches are vacant, being demolished, or repurposed. This development is specifically evident in the case of the Dominicus church complex in Rotterdam, where the church will no longer be able to function as a church in the coming years. Therefore, the future of the Dominican friars in the Dominicus convent is uncertain. With the closure of the parish church, they will likely leave the convent.

2. Secularisation and the loss of the Dominican tradition

One might argue that losing certain traditions due to secularisation is not a problem. After all, society has always been subject to change. There is some truth to that; however, tradition often inspires new ideas. That is particularly important in architectural practices, especially when age-old traditions are involved, as with the Dominican congregation. The Dominican order may offer concepts or arguments relevant to contemporary architectural issues.

3. Field of architecture: lacking notion of sacred space in contemporary architecture

In the book *The Architecture of Sacred Space*, writers Pier Vittorio Aureli, Maria Shéhérazade Giudici, and Hamed Khosravi (2016) address that the topic of sacred space is often overlooked and not seen as relevant in contemporary architecture. This collection of essays points out the profound significance of sacred space in a postmodern societal context, especially in the Western world, which is increasingly materialistic.

3 Objective

This research is a sincere attempt to determine the current value and future of Dominican architectural heritage in Rotterdam. More specifically, this search is characterised by the uncertain future of the Dominican church complex. It is not so much because of the small number of Dominican friars - this community has recently been renewed - but because the church community is becoming too small.

The main objective is to research how the Dominican tradition can serve as inspiration for the building complex in Rotterdam and to find out whether the Dominican friars can remain residents in the monastery, not by merely looking at the Dominican tradition and the desires and obstacles offered by the friars, nor by looking at the building itself, but by understanding the intersection of these two. Architectural considerations form that intersection, shaped by spiritual tradition and expressed through sacred architecture.

This relationship between architecture and the form of life is reciprocal, as Dominican friar Dunlevy argues (2016, p. 25). The aim is to understand this reciprocity in the case of the Dominicus church complex in Rotterdam. Of course, this requires understanding the Dominican way of life and the architectonic concepts in the convent. Two additional Dominican case studies, Sainte-Marie de la Tourette and the Motherhouse Convent, might contribute to that understanding.

Finally, it is essential to understand the value of these architectonic considerations in the current social context of Rotterdam.

Research question:

How can the architectural considerations of the Dominican monastic order embedded in the Dominicus church complex in Rotterdam serve as architectural inspiration for the redesign?

Sub-questions:

- How can the Dominican form of life in the Netherlands be characterised?
- What are the relevant architectural considerations in the Dominican congregation?
- How are these considerations embedded in the Dominicus church complex, Sainte-Marie de La Tourette and the Dominican Motherhouse?
- How do these architectural considerations relate to the current societal context of the Dominicus church complex?

4 Frame of reference

This architectural research proves that architecture always involves interdisciplinary disciplines. In this case, theology, sociology, history, and art are involved in no particular order (see Figure 1). The domains of theology and sociology are predominantly present.

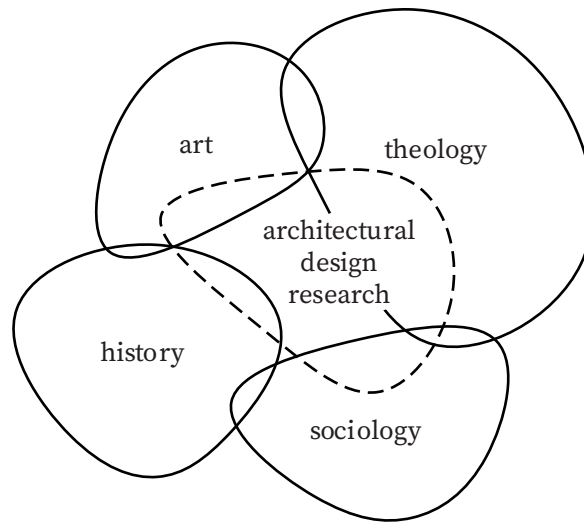


Figure 1. Schematic overview of this architectural design research and the scientific disciplines involved (own figure).

This research includes different periods, such as the 800-year Dominican tradition, the 1960s as the period of the case studies, and the present time, which involves Dominican life today and the redesign assignment. Furthermore, the case studies were designed around the time of the Second Vatican Council, whose mission was "to bring the church up to date". Also, (some of) the case studies were heavily influenced by the period preceding the actual design: the Sacred Art Movement, in which the French Dominican friars Marie-Alain Couturier and Pie-Raymond Régamey played an important role. As editors of the influential magazine *L'Art Sacré*, they contributed to reintroducing modern art in church buildings.

Marie-Alain Couturier maintained close contact with artists such as Henri Matisse, Jacques Lipchitz, and architect Le Corbusier. Also, in the case of the Dominicus church complex in Rotterdam, Dominican art critics made their influence felt. Art- and architectural historian Ida Jager writes (2015, p. 260) that the architects, Kraaijvanger, "owe much to the French Dominican Order of Friars, which left its mark on church architecture in the second half of the 20th century".

5 Methodology

The main objective is to turn the Dominicus church complex into a meaningful program and design. How to do so?

- How can the Dominican form of life in the Netherlands be characterised?
 - Study the Dominican form of life in the Netherlands through literature such as *The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brothers of the Order Of Preachers* (Dominicanen Nederland, 2018) to understand Dominican life's daily rhythm and meaning.
 - Interview current Dominican friars in Rotterdam about their values, customs, traditions and daily practices.
- What are the relevant architectural considerations in the Dominican congregation?
 - Identify fundamental principles in the Dominican congregation based on the previously mentioned interviews, *The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brothers of the Order Of Preachers* (2018), which also involves *The Rule of Saint Augustine*.
 - Study literature about Dominican friar Marie-Alain Couturier and the Sacred Art Movement at the beginning of the former century, which partly affected Kraaijvanger's vision of the Dominicus church complex.
 - Study literature from Dominican friars with expertise related to the field of architecture.
- How are these considerations embedded in the Dominicus church complex, Sainte-Marie de La Tourette and the Dominican Motherhouse?
 - Plan analysis: Use the three case studies as a lens to discover architectural considerations. This section is primarily about the relationship between the building and the form of life. Inevitably, one comes across the architects' design choices, as they are an integral part of the architectural concepts, yet these are not the most important for this research.
 - Documental analysis of the Dominican convent in the Rotterdam City Archive or *Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven* in Sint Agatha.
 - Use this analysis to synthesise recurring architectural principles.
 - Study the relationship between the architect, client, and users regarding the three Dominican case studies.
- How do these architectural considerations relate to the current societal context of the Dominicus church complex?
 - Analysis of municipal (vision) documents.
 - Interview Dominican friars in Rotterdam who understand this context well.

The flow of this research is schematically illustrated in Figure 2. While the main research question is specific, some sub-questions might not be so. Two other case studies are introduced to gain a broader and deeper understanding of Dominican architectural principles. These case studies might also reveal other considerations in the Dominicus convent that otherwise would have been overlooked.

Although this research has a linear approach, sub-question three might also provide input to sub-question two and vice versa. Thus, the case studies can be used to verify the found considerations in sub-question two and to determine whether these genuinely emerge in the architecture. If not, the relevance of these principles or the principles themselves might be questioned and adjusted.

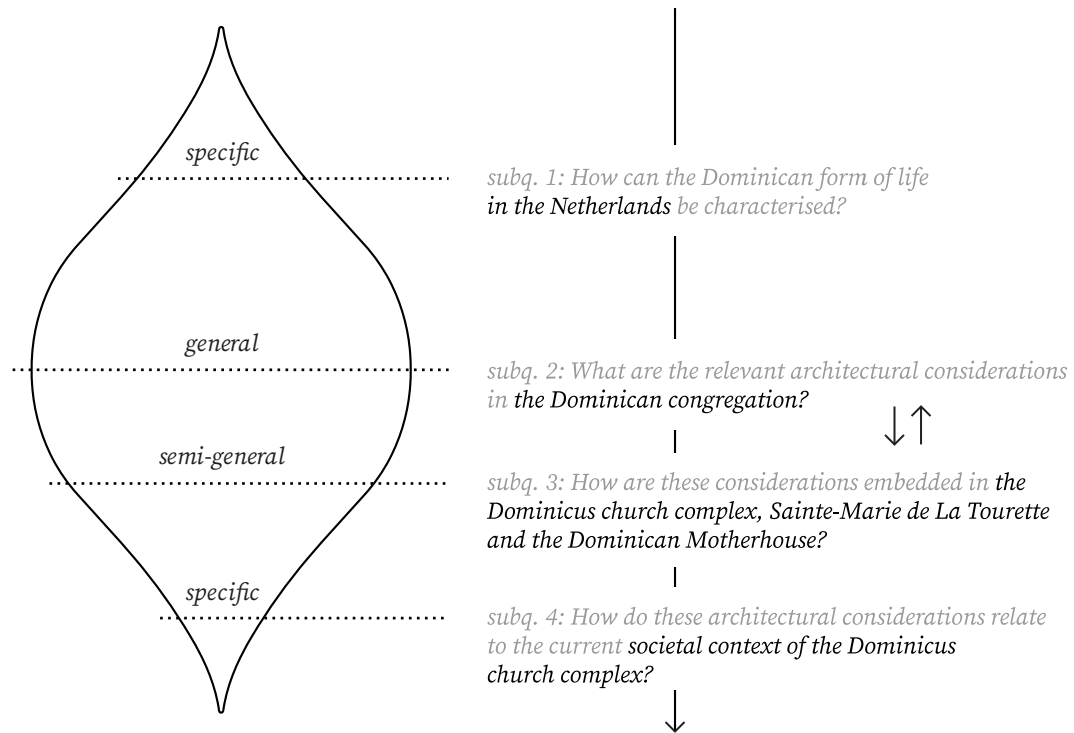


Figure 2. The structure of research questions and the degree of specificity (own figure).

6 Relevance and Ethical Dilemma

Relevance

1. To contribute to knowledge about the Dominican order: their form of life in relation to the church complex in Rotterdam and vice versa.
2. Explore the possibilities of mixed-use programmes in religious heritage.
3. To contribute to the debate on how to define and value religious heritage and how to position oneself as an architect or architecture student towards the user and current building.
4. Research into a design method which attempts to use a layered design methodology in which contemporary interventions incorporate the ideas of the original user.

Dilemmas

This approach, in which the original user offers a narrative for the redesign and is possibly one of the future users of the building, is applicable in specific cases. Consequently, this research has a particular value. Besides, only some religious buildings have a rich tradition regarding their users or architectural significance.

List of literature

- How can the Dominican form of life in the Netherlands be characterised?
 - Dominicanen Nederland. (2018). *Constituties en Verordeningen van de Broeders van de Orde der Predikers*. Dominicanen Nederland.
 - Monteiro, M. (2008). *Gods predikers : Dominicanen in Nederland (1795-2000)*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren.
- What are the relevant architectural considerations in the Dominican congregation?
 - Aureli, P. V., Giudici, M. S., & Khosravi, H. (2016). *Rituals and walls : the architecture of sacred space*. London: Architectural Association.
 - Dunlevy, I. (2016). Dominican Form and Architecture: Tensions. *Dominicana Journal*, 59(2), 25–37.
- How are these considerations embedded in the Dominicus church complex, Sainte-Marie de La Tourette and the Dominican Motherhouse?

Dominicus church complex

- Jager, I. (2015). *Kraaijvanger* (G. ten Cate & P. Warnaar, Eds). Rotterdam: Nai010.

The Dominican Motherhouse by Louis Kahn

- Merrill, M. (2010). *Louis Kahn : drawing to find out : The Dominican Motherhouse and the patient search for architecture*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.
- Merrill, M. (2010). *Louis Kahn : on the thoughtful making of spaces : The Dominican Motherhouse and a modern culture of space*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.

Sainte-Marie de La Tourette by le Corbusier

- Biot, F., Perrot, F., & Salmon, J. (1985). *Le Corbusier et l'architecture sacrée : Sainte-Marie-de-la-Tourette-Eveux*. Lyon: La Manufacture.
- McNamara, D. (1999). Almost Religious Couturier, Le Corbusier and the Monastery of La Tourette. *Sacred Architecture*, 2(1).
- Potie, P. (2001). *Le Corbusier : le Couvent Sainte Marie de la Tourette*. Basel: Birkhäuser.
- How do these architectural considerations relate to the current societal context of the Dominicus church complex?
 - Gemeente Rotterdam. (2021). *Een groene en vitale binnenstad voor iedereen. Uitwerking Omgevingsvisie: gebied binnenstad*. Rotterdam. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.rotterdam.nl/wonen-leven/binnenstad/Koersdocument-Binnenstad.pdf>

About interview techniques

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- Seesink, P. (2019). Dominicanen in Rotterdam - een geschiedenis. Retrieved October 30, 2022, from <https://dominicanen.nl/2019/01/dominicanen-in-rotterdam-een-geschiedenis/>