

D E S I G N I N G W I T H R U I N S

An exploration of how an architectural intervention can be made while preserving ruins

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10 | 11 | 23

T I T L E P A G E

Title Designing with Ruins
Subtitle An exploration of how an architectural intervention
can be made while preserving ruins.

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Course Name Research Plan
Course Number AR3A010

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Studio Number AR3MET105
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Date November 10th, 2023

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This research proposal is written for the graduation studio 'A Matter of Scale' from the Methods of Analysis and Imagination Chair of the Master Architecture at the Technical University of Delft. The project revolves around the urban context of Tallinn, specifically the coastal zone will be examined as a potential surrounding for new architectural interventions. Tallinn has a broad coastal zone, with various urban settings, starting with the Pirita harbour in the far east. In this neighbourhood stands the Pirita Convent, a Medieval monastery, that borders the Pirita River.

The Pirita Convent was founded by three merchants from the Rule of St. Bridget. The monastery was active from 1407 until 1575 and consisted of three parts: the monk's (or brothers') quarter in the south, the nuns' (or sisters') quarter in the north, and a church reaching from west to east and connecting both sides. The convent was built in the Gothic architectural style, with the use of limestone, a traditional building material in Estonia at that time. The church has an area of 1.360 square meters with a front façade reaching up to 35 meters high, making it a historical landmark. The quarters of the brothers and sisters were designed based on the courtyard principle, having an opening in the middle, surrounded by an arcade hallway, and connected rooms on the outside. After an invasion in 1575, the monastery was brutally destroyed. Eventually, it turned into a ruin, since the building has never been rebuilt (Raam & Tamm, 2006).

Although the Pirita Convent was greatly destroyed and from both quarters only the outlines are left, most facades of the church are preserved and still standing, including the soaring triangular western gable of the convent, which everybody living in Estonia recognizes. Rather than being viewed as hostile and dangerous, the convent's massive walls and dimensions are something to be proud of. One of the reasons for this favourable image is its association with nuns (or sisters), who help to dispel the unpleasant historical memory of the medieval church and monastery in Estonia. Not only do nuns remove Pirita from that legacy, but they also distance it from the typical masculine domain of "greater history," which concentrates on battles and wars, and make it appear more innocent. Besides, its picturesque setting near the river bend and on the edge of the present-day garden suburb, made up for a rose to popularity as a day trip and bathing spot in the 1910s (Kaljundi, 2007).

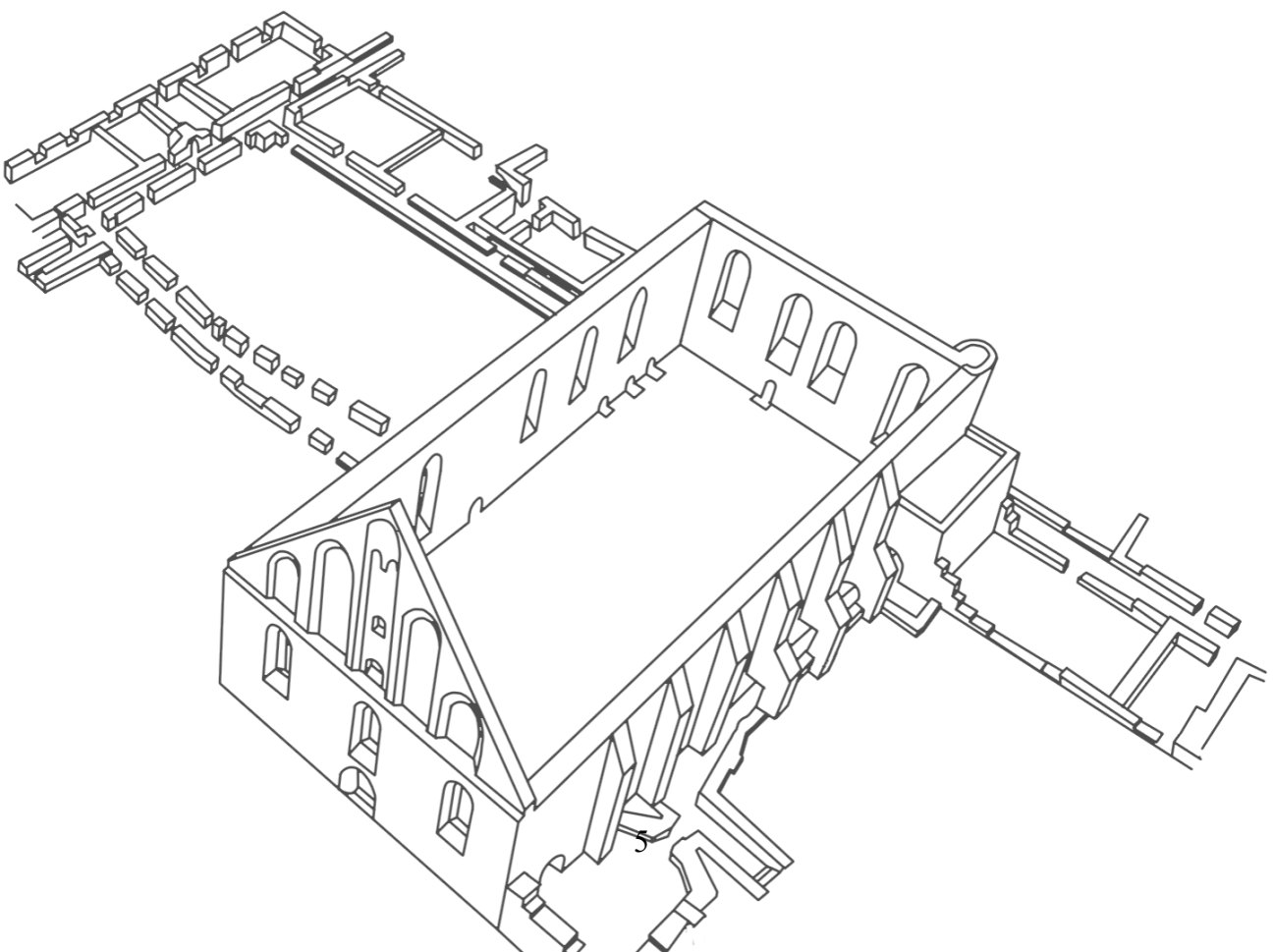
Nowadays, people can visit the ruins of the Pirita Convent. Some tourists can be found here, walking around, imagining what life would be like by reading the signs. Occasionally, and mostly in the summertime, the church is used as an event venue, creating a magical musical experience. Because of its open construction, they use a temporary construction on top of the church and set up tents around the place for wardrobes and toilets in order to be able to use it for events during the winter months. Besides, a new convent was built on the same building plot as the ruins, to the north of the previous monastery.

Talking with Estonian students from the Eesti Kunstiakadeemia (EKA) and inhabitants, like Bart Cosijn, it gets clear that the Estonians are proud of their event venue in the Piritä Convent. They love the events that are being hosted there, and the connection between music and nature. Inhabitants of Tallinn are afraid that, if anything permanent is being built on that site, it will damage the ruins. Although it is a sensitive place to create a new building, it is thought that developing an architectural structure that stands apart from the ruins to prevent any damage and that aims to enable year-round use of the event venue, considering Estonia's climate, can have great added value for the area. Additionally, by integrating a music school that is open to everyone, the building can serve as an inclusive community centre. This new centre will provide a place to foster connections through shared cultural experiences, preserve Estonia's rich musical history, and promote their pride, while also improving the local economy. Since it is such a delicate location to build at, careful and detailed research on designing with ruins will be necessary, in order to find a perfect balance between the ruins and the contemporary addition and to guarantee the preservation of the historical elements.

The research question is as follows: *"How can an intervention revitalize and repurpose a historical ruin to a public function while enhancing its architectural elements and ensuring its preservation?"*

Sub questions:

- What architectural elements characterize a Gothic-style church from the Medieval era?
- How can a ruin be repurposed without damaging the existing structure?
- What design requirements should be considered when designing a public building?



W H E R E

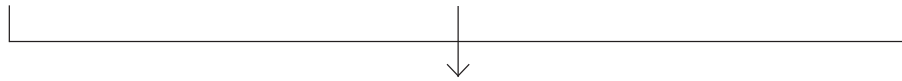
The project site is the Pirita Convent, a former monastery from the Medieval era in the far east of Tallinn, bordering the Pirita River and close to the harbor. While currently in ruins, it is occasionally used as an event venue, mostly during the summer months, since it requires temporary structures in winter for use.

W H A T

The idea is to develop an architectural structure that is standing apart from the ruins to prevent any damage and aims to enable year-round use of the event venue, considering Estonia's climate, and additionally integrate a music school that is open to everyone, serving as an inclusive community hub.

W H Y

The Pirita area is missing a place where individuals can connect through cultural experiences. By enhancing the event venue and incorporating a music school, this location can transform into a vital community center, preserving Estonia's rich musical history, and promoting local pride, while improving the economy.



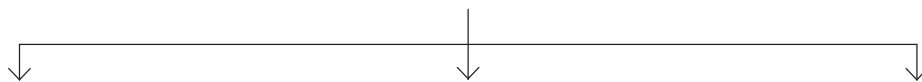
H O W

Since the ruins of the Pirita Convent is such a sensitive location to build at, careful and detailed research on designing with ruins will be necessary, in order to find a perfect balance between the ruins and the contemporary addition and to guarantee the preservation of the historical elements.



R E S E A R C H Q U E S T I O N

"How can an intervention revitalize and repurpose a historical ruin to a public function while enhancing its architectural elements and ensuring its preservation?"



S U B 1

"What architectural elements characterize a Gothic-style church from the Medieval times?"

S U B 2

"How can a ruin be repurposed without damaging the existing structure?"

S U B 3

"What design requirements should be considered when designing a public building?"

L I T E R A T U R E R E V I E W

ruin

/ˈruːɪn/

the remains of a building, typically an old one that has suffered much damage or disintegration.

plural noun: ruins

"the ruins of the castle" (Oxford Languages, z.d.)

The 19th-century French writer Stendhal made an interesting observation about the Colosseum, suggesting that it was more beautiful in its ruined state than during its prime. This insight reflects the unique aesthetics of ruins, as they are evidence of their former glory while acquiring a new kind of beauty and meaning through decay. They are sentimental objects, indicating absence and a lack of wholeness, which aesthetics have always been associated with decline and disappearance (Böhme, 1989). Operating without limits and without regard to time. Even when historical artifacts that have been kept as permanent ruins have outlived their original use, people are nevertheless drawn to them. They arouse nostalgia for an earlier time when the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities had not yet faded (Wilczek, 2021). Ruins bring us back to the past, and the way they lead us there will affect our perceptions of and opinions regarding the past (Cooper, 2016).

A complete description of the aesthetic experience, specifically related to the appreciation of ruins, highlights the need for an interaction between natural and cultural processes. A place's history is essentially a sense of how things were for the individuals whose lives were connected to it, people who may have worked, prayed, loved, struggled, and engaged in other activities there over many centuries. Gaining an understanding of people's experiences in the past demands using both empathy and imagination (Cooper, 2016). According to Woodward, "a ruin" is "a dialogue between an incomplete reality and the spectator's imagination"; it is also a dialogue between what is in front of the spectator and how they perceive the lives, emotions, desires, and losses of people in the past (Woodward, 2002). Ruins serve as silent expressions of history, capturing a moment between the past and an already present future. They are not only remainders of the past but also objects that request interpretation (Böhme, 1989). Devastated by time or disaster, ruins symbolize a fusion of artificial structures and natural elements, forming an intriguing emotional quality. The dynamic interaction of human involvement, environmental forces, and history is embodied in ruins (Zucker, 1961).

"Preservation is not wholly the archaeologist's job: it involves an understanding of the ruin as a ruin ... A ruin is more than a collection of debris. It is a place with its own individuality, charged with its own emotion and atmosphere and drama, of grandeur, of nobility, or of charm. These qualities must be preserved as carefully as the broken stones which are their physical embodiment." (Woodward, 2002)

Professionals who work with heritage, such as archaeologists and anthropologists, who adhere to these kinds of values, usually acknowledge that in certain situations, they may be substituted, and that the preservation of ruins may take priority over other considerations. Although archaeological preservation is valuable, the interests of today's local individuals might be of greater significance. Thus, merely because a place is "valuable," is not a reason to immediately conclude that it should be preserved. There cannot be a general assumption that ruins should be preserved, it depends on the type of place or object and the factors that make it valuable. Ruins must be the kind of objects whose worth is derived from aspects that strongly support preservation (Cooper, 2016). Cultural and literary scholar Böhme states that ruins only become meaningful in societies that repurpose them, redefining their significance beyond their original purpose. Ruins exist in a balance between form and matter, leaving the future open (Böhme, 1989). It is necessary to provide contemporary uses for protecting the historical heritage and transfer this attitude and new life to these buildings in order to carry them to future generations (Mine, 2013). To adapt the ruin to contemporary conditions and usage requirements, changes in the material and spatial structures are necessary. The distinctiveness of its documentary content, which serves as the ruin's carrier, should dictate the guiding principles for handling ruins. Thorough observations are necessary for the preservation of architectural heritage. Selecting a workable program that is tailored to the particulars of the ruin, without restricting its exposure, and with the least amount of interference necessary is crucial (Molski, 2020).

Philosopher Ginsberg agrees with the idea that contemporary architectural buildings and permanent ruins should merge to create a new, complete whole, stressing three primary concepts in his approach to contemporary intervention within monuments. First and foremost, maintaining the integrity of ruins by keeping their formal ambiance and social significance. Secondly, involving them in modern life and integrating them into developing culture as opposed to leaving them in a state of isolation. Thirdly, respecting their essential characteristics, such as shape (Ginsberg, 2004). Modern ruin preservation principles emphasize intangible elements and facilitate interpretation, going beyond the physical aspect (Accardi, 2008).

Nowadays, the question arises of whether history was driven by an impulse to create the Earth as a ruin and a universal archive of memory. This implies that ruins may be essential to historical tracking and memory preservation (Böhme, 1989). Historian Stanford emphasizes the significance of considering both the (natural) environment surrounding the ruin and the structure itself. The objective of this technique is to restore ruins as sources of information that enhance the comprehension of the historical and cultural significance of people (Stanford, 2000). Therefore, it is important to shed light on the vital importance, both material and spatial, of the monastic Orders in the development of the urban fabric of a city. The monastic building must be considered not only as an integral part and of development of an urban environment, but also as an element of construction and management of the territory (Martins, Cano, & Adell, 2019).

M E T H O D O L O G Y

This study aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the complexities of designing with ruins, with the main goal being to develop a better understanding of how to create designs that respect the historical significance of architectural remains while also blending in seamlessly with their surrounding environment. A thorough literature review will be conducted in order to provide a solid foundation of knowledge for this research. This quantitative method for the research involves using suitable keywords on Google Scholar, studying relevant books, and carefully analyzing references that the researcher or the course instructors have specifically selected.

However, acknowledging the necessity for a more detailed research, qualitative methods will be included into this research framework. The Pirita Convent and a few Gothic churches from the Medieval era were visited in Tallinn for the graduating studio, during which various remarkable architectural elements were noticed. This study went beyond a superficial examination of the building's structural components and included an investigation of the physical responses that visitors experienced as well as the feelings that these ruins or churches generated. Besides these buildings, The Netherlands has additional similar churches from the same era and architectural style that could be used for this same observational method. These findings are essentially subjective, but nevertheless offer an interesting, experiential frame of reference that complements the more quantitative conclusions gained from the desk research.

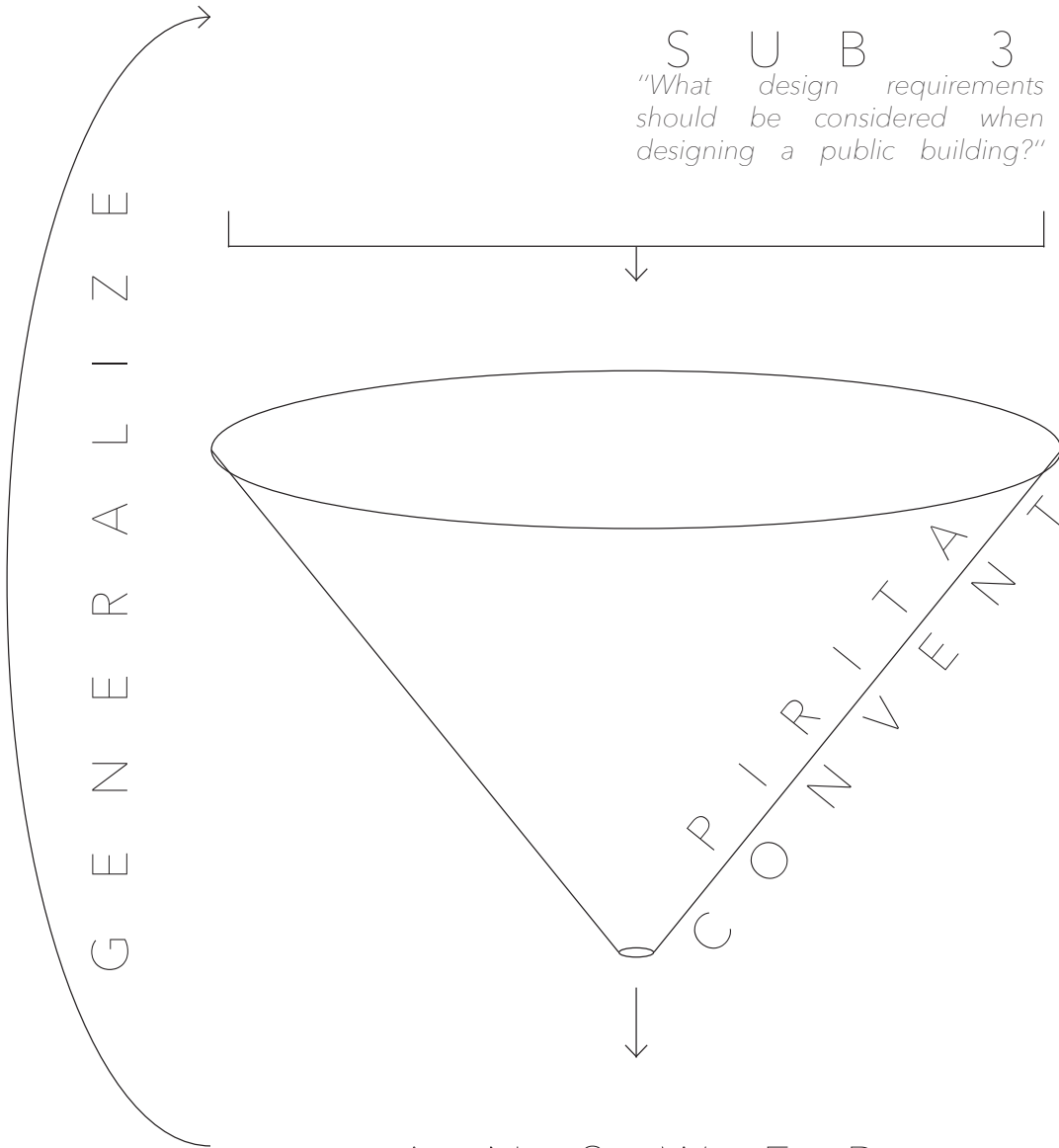
In addition, the research aims to expand its focus by exploring the possibility of interviewing professionals who have work in the same field as the topic, such as architects and historians. When these interviews take place, it will be a contribution for a significant and relevant qualitative layer to the research, including perspectives from individuals who are actively involved in both the theoretical and practical aspects of designing with ruins.

The research will use the case study method to address the research topics, with a primary focus on the Pirita Convent in Tallinn, which will be the location for the graduation project. These ruins, along with the surroundings, will serve as an illustrative 'funnel' for examining the complexities of the research questions. The particular knowledge gained from this case study will then be expanded on and applied in a more generalized approach, making it useful for advising and enhancing a wider range of design projects. In essence, the goal of this research is to provide useful information that can be applied to a variety of architectural projects while also making a theoretical contribution to the field of designing with ruins.

S U B 1
"What architectural elements characterize a Gothic-style church from the Medieval times?"

S U B 2
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S U B 3
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A N S W E R
Specific answer to the research question for the repurposing of the ruins from the Pirita Convent into an event venue and music school

R E L E V A N C E

The aim of this research on designing with ruins is to make significant contributions to the adaptive restoration and preservation of architecture, with a particular focus on the Pirita Convent in Tallinn. For architects, urban planners, and preservationists who must find a balance between intervention, revitalization, and preservation while transforming historic ruins into useful public functions, it offers valuable advice.

By bridging the gap between the Pirita Convent's historical value and the contemporary adaption, the research aims to provide an illustration for comparable projects. It also discusses revitalization options that enhance the ruin's essential architectural elements, going beyond the public space's functional purpose. By taking an innovative approach, the intervention is guaranteed to be more than just functional and to enhance the site's overall architectural and cultural significance.

Through balancing adaptation against the necessity of preserving historic ruins, the research also adds to the conversation on preservation ethics. This has a broader impact for the further development of environmentally friendly approaches in adaptive reuse and architectural preservation. The study intends to provide theoretical insights and practical advice that might inform similar projects in the future, assuring the culturally appropriate and sustainable transformation of historical ruins into active public areas.

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