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WHICH WAY TO CHOOSE IN THE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF SACRED BUILDINGS

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Abstract

Some objects of sacred architecture which bear witness to our heritage are disused, some are no longer used for their primary purpose and some have been desacralized. Disused objects deteriorate rapidly. It is therefore important to find a way of repurposing them into facilities that would not degrade the historic values or the encoded intangible values testifying to the societies' religiosity. The optimum solution is to restore the original function to the desacralized buildings. This has proved possible in many cases. However, if this cannot be done, it is important to make an appropriate choice for the object's new use. Cultural functions that do not interfere with the character of the architecture are much better than the industrial, residential, hotel or catering ones.

Keywords: sacred architecture, church, monastery, function

Streszczenie

Część zasobów architektury sakralnej będących świadectwem naszego dziedzictwa traci możliwość dalszego użytkowania w ramach funkcji, dla której zostały wzniesione – niektóre z nich są nieużytkowane, część została zdesakralizowana. Nieużytkowane obiekty szybko ulegają zniszczeniu. Istotna jest droga do zmian użytkowania obiektów sakralnych, tak aby nowe funkcje nie degradowały zarówno wartości historycznych, jak i zakodowanych wartości niematerialnych stanowiących świadectwo religijności społeczeństw. Optymalnie jest, gdy zdesakralizowane budynki powracają do swej pierwotnej funkcji. W wielu przypadkach tak się stało. Jeśli jednak nie jest to możliwe, ważny staje się odpowiedni dobór nowego sposobu użytkowania. Funkcje kulturalne nie ingerujące w charakter architektury są o wiele bardziej korzystne niż przemysłowe, mieszkaniowe, hotelowe czy gastronomiczne.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura sakralna, kościół, klasztor, funkcja

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Historical sacred architecture is a significant asset to our heritage. The objects are usually the most valuable examples of the style of the epoch when they were built, as well as in terms of their technical condition. They have been subject to conversions to suit changing functions and needs. They have also undergone refurbishment and conservation with the use of modern technologies and materials in order to ensure that their technical condition is appropriate.

Some of these valuable resources with centuries-old tradition that bear witness to the architectural heritage can no longer serve the purpose for which they were erected. These are objects of high value and subject to conservation protection. However, some of them are disused, others have been desacralized and repurposed. Referring to the conference theses, and thus considering the problems of this particular kind of architecture in the context of the Vitruvian treatise, it can be stated that despite its “durability” and unquestionable “beauty” it has ceased to be “useful” for the function for which it was created.

Since many of the buildings perform different functions, some are disused and abandoned, they can quickly fall into disrepair¹. Obviously, their makers and users who had taken great pains to maintain their ‘durability’ and ‘beauty’ failed to realize that churches, whose task is to prepare us for eternal life, would not last for eternity and would be desacralized.

In Poland, the scale of the problem is small, and even a few years ago the church recovered former sacred objects and church property that had been taken over by the state under various circumstances. However, elsewhere in Europe, these problems are noticeable. Yet, they are not a specific feature of modern times as they date back to antiquity. Adaptive reuse of such objects becomes an important issue as it seems that an object in use is less likely to deteriorate than an abandoned and disused one. Although decisions about conversion of sacred objects and their new functions are made in the course of administrative proceedings, the architect still has an important role to play as he determines the final form of the object’s adaptive reuse.

The question then arises as to which way to choose in adaptive reuse of sacred buildings. What matters is not only to preserve and protect the historic substance but to identify the functions that will not be in conflict with the intangible values of the objects representing our cultural heritage as the values are permanently encoded in the object thus bearing witness to the religiosity of societies.

The author has researched the problem of the adaptive reuse of sacred objects with regard to Roman Catholic churches and monasteries in Poland and selected European countries. The paper presents some examples of repurposed desacralized buildings in some European countries and restoration of desacralized objects to their sacred function in Poland.

In Catholic Italy, several thousand sacred buildings have changed their owners and their original function. The objects have been repurposed into cultural, industrial and catering facilities. They house universities, libraries, concert halls, artists’ studios, garages, restaurants and other secular spaces.

The history of the Jesuit college and the church of Santa Lucia in Bologna are interesting². The church itself was erected in 1208, while the adjacent complex of the Jesuit college buildings was established in the first half of the 17th century with the help of some prominent architects such as Giuseppe Antonio Torri (1655 – ok.1713), or his pupil Giovanni

¹ A. Białkiewicz, *O zmianach użytkowania obiektów sakralnych. Adaptive reuse of sacred buildings*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2016.

² *Ibidem*, p. 34–38.

Battista Piacentini³. In the 16th century the church became property of the Jesuits. When Pope Clement XIV suppressed the Jesuit Order in 1773, the complex was transferred to the Barnabite order. In 1874, the buildings were taken over by the state and turned into an army barracks. A few years later, they also housed two schools: a secondary school and a Technical Institute. The buildings were seriously damaged in successive wars and in a fire in the 1960s. Modernization works started in 1975–1977. As a result of an agreement with the University of Bologna, the City Council assigned some funds for comprehensive reconstruction of the former Jesuit college and its adaptation to the needs of the University. The work began in 1983. In 1996–1998, the church of Santa Lucia was also repurposed into university facilities and now houses the university assembly hall.

More than twenty years on, it is clear that the repurposing of the former Jesuit college and the church of Santa Lucia was successful as, in a way, it restored the original historic character to the objects making their architecture contribute to the city's cultural heritage.

One of the oldest Dominican monasteries in Italy is the monastery at Piazza San Romano in the city of Lucca. The church of San Romano erected by the Dominican Order in the second half of the 13th century was consecrated in 1281. The monastery buildings were rebuilt in the Baroque style at the beginning of the second half of the 18th century. At the beginning of the 21st century, following thorough renovation, the church building was converted into a concert hall (Auditorium San Romano)⁴.

A similar fate befell another church in the same city. The church of Suffrage (Chiesa del Suffragio) that was consecrated in 1646, abandoned in 1980 and repurposed into a concert hall of the music school in 2002. The above examples of conversion of sacred buildings into cultural and educational facilities seem to be the right administrative choices. The more so that the adaptive architectural solutions did not harm the form of the buildings or their interiors.

However, some cases of the repurposing of sacred buildings remain controversial. One of them is the conversion of the church of Our Lady of the Snows in Como. The church was consecrated in 1959 but seven years later it was desacralized and turned into a car service station. In this case, the new purpose, which was approved in the course of administrative proceedings, not only affected the layout of the interior but also transformed the façade of the building. The architect did not have much freedom as regards the arrangement of the space as he could not avoid putting inside the basic technical equipment indispensable for a car service to work. However, the appliances do not correspond with the character of the interior of the former church. The façade had to be provided with an entry appropriate for the new function but alien to the architecture of the building. It can be said that the repurposing project made both the interior and the form of the building lose their former value.

Many former churches in Italy have been converted into restaurants such as La Chiesina in Viareggio in the suburbs of Lucca. It used to be the chapel of the Redeemer and All Saints. It was desacralized in 1977 and turned into a restaurant. It can be seen that the new function resulted in the inevitable changes in the interior and the exterior of the building which are not beneficial to the former sacred object.

³ V. Musumeci, *Collegio del Beato Luigi*, Adanti Solazzi & C., Bologna 1991.

⁴ <https://longoio.wordpress.com/2013/03/10/beethovens-choral-symphony-at-san-romano/>



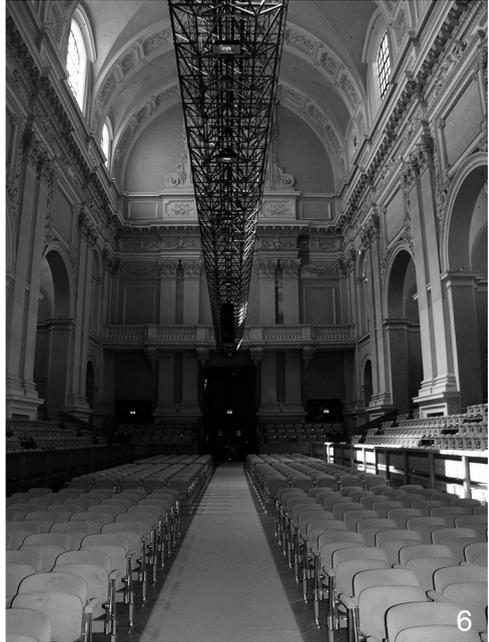
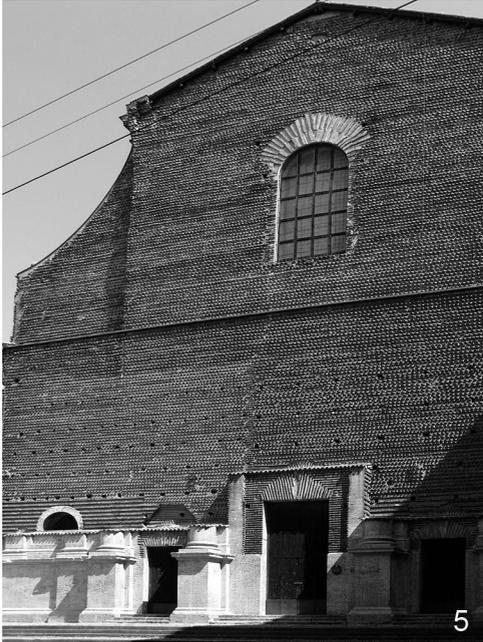
In France, as a result of the revolution, profound political and social changes and the overthrow of the monarchy occurred. Before the revolution, France was an absolute monarchy, one of the most powerful countries in the world, and, with twenty-five million inhabitants, one of the most populous countries in Europe. Before the revolution, the clergy of the Roman Catholic church numbered about one hundred and twenty thousand people, half of whom were monks and nuns. At that time, 10% of arable land belonged to the church, mainly in the northern parts of the country. Income from real estate was primarily received by high church dignitaries. For this reason, the lower clergy expressed their dissatisfaction, and even pro-reformist attitudes could be observed in some cases. Undoubtedly, one of the consequences of the revolution were changes in the functions of sacred buildings. Many churches were devastated and completely destroyed. A large number of monastic orders were dissolved so numerous monastic houses and monasteries were abandoned. Most buildings fell into disrepair. Some monasteries were turned into prisons or dedicated to other uses. Very few churches were restored to their sacred function. One of them is the Basilica of Saint Denis in Saint-Denis which was devastated in 1793 but since 1806 has been used again as a Christian church.

However, a significant number of sacred objects in France were repurposed. The new functions of the desacralized buildings in France are similar to those served by such objects in other European countries. French cities and communes which take action in order to preserve local cultural heritage through adaptive reuse and renovation of abandoned historical monuments are promoted. Apart from subsidies, they are awarded a special prize: “Les prix des Rubans du Patrimoine”. The monastery La Chartreuse in Villeneuve-les-Avignon is an example of adaptive reuse of a sacred object following the French revolution. In 1791 the Carthusian order, which dates back to the 11th century, was dissolved. The property of the monastery, which was the richest one in France in the middle of the 17th century⁵ was nationalized and put up for sale. In 1834, owing to years of efforts of Prosper Mérimée – a French historian, archaeologist and writer – the buildings were turned into a mausoleum. At the beginning of the 20th century, the monastery complex was in the hands of nearly three hundred private owners. The state then started buying back former monastery buildings from their owners and restoring the complex to its glory. The action was initiated by the architect Jules Formigé. Since 1973, the former monastery building has been home to the National Playwriting Centre⁶ as well as other cultural institutions, a museum documenting the Carthusians’ history, theatres, and conference halls with backstage facilities. While making the monastic premises serve such different purposes, the historic spatial layout was restored together with stone details and frescoes. The repurposing has not depreciated the

⁵ P. Méry, *Abbays, Prioués et Couvents*, Édition du Crapoud, La Roche-sur-Yon 2013.

⁶ J.-P. Piniès, *La Chartreuse de Villeneuve. Métamorphoses d’un monument*, Édition Jeanne Laffitte, Marseille, 2010.

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- Ill. 1., 2. Former chapel *Redentore e di Tutti Santi*, now the restaurant *La Chiesina*. Former church San Romano, Lucca, now concert hall *Auditorium San Romano*. Photo by author
- Ill. 3., 4. Former church *Suffragio*, Lucca, now auditorium of *Istituto Musicale Luigi Boccherini (Auditorium Chiesa del Suffragio)*. Photo by author



value of the objects' architecture and the restored buildings bear testimony to the history of the Carthusian order.

The diocese church of Saint Pons in Villeneuve-les-Avignon was desacralized for similar reasons. It was built in the 13th century and served the parishioners until 1792. Since 1793 it has been state property and has served many purposes. Initially it was a warehouse, then a private flat, later a garage and a coal yard. In 1985 it housed a public assistance centre but after a few years the building's condition deteriorated rapidly – the overgrown roof started leaking, the rafter framing was damaged, the walls were in disrepair. It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that the authorities realized that the object had a great historical value despite its deplorable condition. The decision was taken to have it restored and to place a media library inside. The entire roof was replaced, the walls were refurbished and the stone details were renovated. Since 2010 the building has been in use. The repurposing required a part of the nave and chapels to be divided by a ceiling into two levels. The central part of the nave retained its original size. Despite the changes, the building that had not been used as a sacred object for over two hundred years was restored. At present it is in perfect shape both with regard to technical condition and aesthetic value thus combining historic heritage and modernity. It serves as a cultural facility and hopefully will continue to do so, testifying to the region's heritage.

In Poland, there are also few cases of adaptive reuse of sacred buildings – churches and Christian monasteries of the Roman – Christian rite but this is a marginal phenomenon. Instead, the church reclaims its former property and restores the desacralized objects to their sacred use.

A good case in point is the Mochowo monastery. The monastic compound was built at the end of the 14th century for the Order of St. Paul⁷. In 1428, the Hussites burnt down the monastery and killed the monks. A hundred and fifty years later, a new monastery was built there and rebuilt in 1668. In 1813, the Prussian government suppressed the monastic house in Mochowo and took over its property forcing the monks to leave. After 1817, the tax collector Hann bought the monastery with the adjacent buildings. He turned the monastery into an inn while the church became a warehouse. When he died, the property was bought by two men from the nearby city of Głogówek who intended to have the church refurbished. In 1844, they sold the church and the monastery to Count Oppersdorf who had the church renovated and gave it back to the diocese letting the monastery be used by the Congregation of the Sisters of Misericorde of St. Charles Borromeo. In the same year, a parish was established in Mochowo. The sisters set up a hospital in the monastery and engaged in educational and charitable activities. In 1972, the Pauline Fathers took over the Mochowo parish and renovation works started in the church. In 2001, the Paulines bought back the monastery from the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo. The building was in a poor state. Previous to the repurchase,

⁷ A. Białkiewicz, *op.cit.*, p. 110–123.

Ill. 5., 6. Former church *Santa Lucia*, Bologna, now assembly hall of *Università degli Studi di Bologna (Aula Magna dell'Università di Bologna)*. Photo by author

Ill. 7. Former monastery *La Chartreuse*, Villeneuve-les-Avignon, now French National Centre for dramatic Writing CNES (*Centre National des Ecritures du Spectacle*). Photo by author



the building had not been used as a Pauline monastic house for nearly two hundred years, so there had been many conversions and alterations. It became necessary to rebuild most of the vaults, remove all the floors and all interior and exterior plastering, except for the refectory. After detailed studies, conservation project guidelines were determined and the renovation work started. Restoring historic value to the object⁸ was combined with reinstating its original function of a monastic house although in a slightly modified form. On the whole, although the Pauline Fathers' monastic compound in Mochowo has gone through hard times during the six hundred years of its existence, it has regained its original function and is again used by the Pauline community, thus testifying to the Order's cultural and spiritual heritage. Another monastic compound of the Order of St. Paul which has a similar history is in Włodawa⁹. The Pauline monks settled there in 1698, owing to Ludwik Konstancy Pocij, the founder and proprietor of the land in Włodawa¹⁰. In 1718, the monastery was built to a design of Józef Piola. The construction of the church designed by Józef Piola started in 1722 but around 1740 his project was dropped and the work was completed in July 1741 to a design of Paweł Fontana in collaboration with Paweł Burchandaj. The church was consecrated in 1786. For nearly eighty years following the construction, the monastery building was in excellent technical condition but it proved too big for the needs of the monastery as the number of monks decreased. Another problem was lack of money for the maintenance and the necessary current repairs. As a result, a decision was made in 1799 to let out a part of the building to secular people. It was hoped that the rent would cover the cost of renovation. Following appropriate conversions, the monastery building housed an inn, the Magistrates' Court disputes department and a salt depot. Twenty years later, the space to let was increased. The refectory was turned into a grain depot while other rooms were converted into flats for civil servants and a chapel for the Orthodox Church Brotherhood. However, the rental did not bring the expected profits. On the contrary, it resulted in financial losses and considerable deterioration of the building due to the numerous conversions and extensions. The tenants not only failed to pay rent, which was very low anyway, but also demanded that their flats should be refurbished. Further damage was done during the war of 1812 and between 1830 and 1831 when the army set up a military hospital on the premises. When the January uprising failed, the monastery was dissolved. Until 1993, a small part of the monastery in Włodawa was occupied by the diocese priests while the remaining space was used by the municipal offices and institutions. In 1993 Pauline Fathers got back the church and in 1999 they repossessed the church. Both buildings, and the monastery in particular, were in poor technical condition. Following architectural and conservation studies, a project was developed so renovation and conservation work could begin. In the course of the works the original layout of the

⁸ A. Białkiewicz, *Detal odtworzony*, Czasopismo Techniczne, 5-A/1/2012, z. 15, Kraków 2012.

⁹ A. Białkiewicz, *op.cit.*, p. 178–2016.

¹⁰ D. Cichor ZP, *Dzieje kościoła i klasztoru paulinów we Włodawie (1698–1864)*, [in:] *Studia Claromontana*, 13, Wydawnictwo oo. Paulinów, Jasna Góra 1993, p. 365–447.

Ill. 8. Theatre room. *La Chartreuse* w Villeneuve-les-Avignon, Now french National Centre for Dramatic Writing CNES. Photo by author

Ill. 9., 10. Former parish church of St Pontius (*Église Saint-Pons*) in Villeneuve-les-Avignon, now a multimedia library (Médiathèque Saint-Pons). Photo by author



monastery was restored and after nearly 300 years had passed, the basic parts of the monastery building resumed their original functions. They were slightly changed to comply with the binding building law. The church was also thoroughly renovated. Both buildings are now used by the Order which they were originally intended for.

It can be said that the optimum way to choose in adaptive reuse of sacred buildings is to make the desacralized objects resume their original function. This has happened in many cases, especially in Poland. The disused or desacralized object deteriorates rapidly. Therefore it should be used even if this involves repurposing so that it can be preserved for future generations. However, the repurposing should not be determined solely by economic considerations¹¹. Desacralized historic monuments are our material heritage as much as our intangible heritage just like contemporary sacred objects which are not monuments¹². It does matter how they are repurposed. Their repurposing into an appropriate kind of cultural facility does not interfere with the character of their architecture and is much more beneficial than turning them into industrial, housing or catering facilities. This seems an optimum path to follow in adaptive reuse of sacred objects. As history has proved on many occasions, we cannot be sure whether the desacralized objects will not resume their original function in the future.

Knowledge and experience of adaptive reuse of sacred objects prove that the proper choice is not always made when the future user offers the owner a substantial amount of money and promises reconstruction of the object as the prospective repurposing can be detrimental to the object's historical value and the encoded intangible values. A rational approach to adaptive reuse of sacred objects involves making sure that the appropriate choice of the new function takes priority over economic considerations.

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¹¹ H. Nadrowski, *Sztuki sakralnej szanse i zagrożenia*, Teologia i Człowiek, Półrocznik Wydziału Teologicznego UMK, 6 (2005), p. 126.

¹² E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich, A. Kadłuczka, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Przeszłość dla przyszłości*, pr. zbiorowa pod red. A. Kadłuczki, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, vol. 1, Kraków 2015, p. 5.

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- Ill. 11., 12. The Mochów monastery, repaired roof. The Mochów monastery under repair, west elevation. Photo by author
 - Ill. 13. Church in Włodawa before renovation, facade. Photo by Rafał Ćwiczek, Antis.
 - Ill. 14. Monastery in Włodawa, interior underrepair. Photo by author.

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