Conservation of monasteries by adaptive reuse: diversified program as a source of inspiration in past and future?
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K. Lens
University of Hasselt, Hasselt, Belgium

ABSTRACT: Adaptive reuse has proven to be an important strategy in conserving historical buildings. Nevertheless, reprogramming underused religious heritage sites in Western Europe is a sensitive subject because of its sacred aspects, history and connection to the surroundings. They represent strong intangible qualities. What can we learn from this original hybrid structures for adaptive reuse focusing on four monasteries and their diversified programs that made them self-sufficient?

White Sisters and Herkenrode (Belgium) are still operating through a diversified program taking into account the memory of the buildings. Whereas Pousada de Santa Maria du Bouro (Portugal) and Ecole de Musique (France) were installed with a singular, homogeneous contemporary program rather independent from its historic value. We will argue – partly by referring to the historic St Gallen model – that a heterogenous programming which respects the genus loci favors the protection of historical, cultural, social values and even sacred aspects of monastic sites.

1 INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL HYBRID PROGRAMS OF MONASTIC SITES

Adaptive reuse has proven to be an important strategy in conserving historical places (Brooker & Stone, 2004; Scott, 2008; Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2013) but the question for adaptation and reuse becomes more delicate when it touches upon to religious heritage buildings, such as churches and monasteries (Dubois et al., 2003; Vlaamse Overheid, 2009; Coomans et al., 2012). This paper concentrates itself to the rehabilitation of the latter (Belmans et al., 2008; Wijnekus, 2009).

Rehabilitation of monasteries has happened throughout history (Lawrence, 2004; Krüger & Toman, 2008). Repeatedly abbots and abbesses modified their monasteries for religious, organizational and other reasons, including a change of architectural styles. As a result of these adaptations, various monastic buildings were subject of internal reorganisations, usually as part of restructuring the site with respect to the spiritual mission.

As a general characteristic, in different times and constellations, monastery walls surrounded a group of buildings such as church or chapel, refectory, kitchen, cells with a oratorium or prayer area, infirmary, guest house, library, scriptorium, service buildings, alms house, etc. Different accents appear because of location, kind of order or congregation and age. But, usually, these functions, or a selection, are present in many monasteries in one way or another and in

various constellations. One could therefore argue that monasteries operate with a hybrid program, governed by the one goal: serving the Lord through prayer and daily work. The manuscript plan of Saint Gallen of c. 830 can still be considered as the prototype plan in that respect (Pevsner, 1977; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The centre of the site was the spiritual heart with the church and monastic residence. But this was surrounded by a variety of buildings for supportive activities, such as guest rooms, stables for horses and cows, pharmacy, botanical gardens, vegetable gardens etc. Cistercian monasteries are typical examples of how economic activities inside the monastery was part of larger scheme to make its inhabitants self sustained. And how, indeed, a diversified programming, is part of the general history of monasteries. We would like to argue that this original multi-layered organisation of monasteries should be an important inspiration for adaptive reuse of such buildings.

2 DEFINING METHODOLOGY

We will analyse 4 case studies of different monasteries that were the subject of rehabilitation (Fig. 1). We first present criteria for choosing these specific cases and look then at their uses in history and in present time and refer to the original functions and organization of Saint Gallen (Fig. 2). Eventually we want to compare the diversified– versus singular program-approach (Fig. 3).

2.1 *Joseph II*

First of all it is important that the rehabilitation of the monasteries started from a similar constructional or structural situation. The selected monasteries lost their original religious inhabitants at the end of the 18th or at the beginning of the 19th century because of the big political changes, as part of the charter that Joseph II promoted to close down a large number of monasteries that had no immediate 'social' function. All four premises were sold as State property in a public auction. All four sites survived in one way or another over the last 200 years, until they became the subject of a rehabilitation project in recent years.
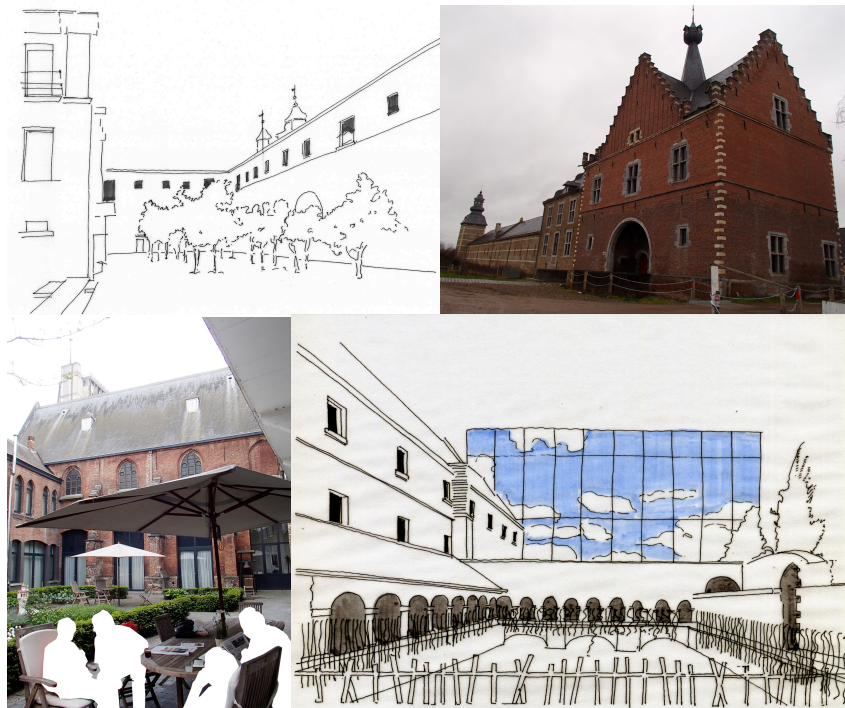

Figure 1: Pictures and sketches 4 case studies: Santa Maria do Bouro – Herkenrode - Witzusters– Penitents

2.2 *Hybrid and non hybrid in the present time*

Both monastic sites in Amares and Louviers got one main use from the first moment of rehabilitation and they were adapted in one track while Herkenrode and the Witzusters in Belgium are still projects in progress. In both latter cases, a multi-disciplinary team considers the building work and the hybrid programs step by step.

2.3 *Cistercians versus Penitents – City versus the Country*

The third reason to analyse these cases are the similarities and conflicts between the kind of orders and convents because of sub-typology, monastic rule, context, gender, … etc. (Coomans, 2013). Both the monasteries of male Santa Maria Do Bouro and female Herkenrode were Cistercians abbeys in rural areas while the respective male and female monastic sites in Louviers and Antwerp were at the start Penitents bases in medieval city centres.

Until today Cistercian monasteries are governed by the adapted monastic rules of Saint-Benedict by Saint-Bernard of Clairvaux (Bauer, 1995; Koehler & Miele, 1998; Lootens et al., 2012). They reside in their premises in seclusion of the world, in communion with each other and God, in prayer and daily work. Writing about Herkenrode Marc Laenen and Herman van Meer (Laenen &van Meer, 2012) described how the functional logic in structures and purity, the simplicity and austerity in the use of materials and finishing techniques, the evasion of all decoration that could divert attention while praying, are Cistercian guiding principles to allow the monks and nuns to focus. Like Saint Gallen most of them were or still are organized around the characteristic cloister with a central courtyard.

At the start Penitents didn't care that much about their monasteries and material possessions because they did penance following the rule of Saint-Francis. Instead of searching the seclusion of the countryside, they aspired to bring the word of God and contemplation to the heart of the cities. At first, their premises were only a required necessity but after a while their monastic sites grew in size, including infirmaries, workshops, schools, … adapted to the local surroundings, history and community. The development of their sites also shows the organic process of the urban fabric, of which they were very much an active part.

2.4 *Presence of religious community: intangible aspect*

A final criterion for inclusion was the presence of a religious community in two sites. And to examine if this has an influence on the material and intangible aspects in the rehabilitation process. In Portugal and France no order, congregation or lay community is present. But the monastic site in Hasselt is since 1972 partly occupied by the chapter of regular female canons of the Holy Sepulcher and in Antwerp, the former medieval monastery is since 1986 used by the lay Community of Sant Egidio.

3 ANALYSIS OF USES AT MONASTIC SITES

3.1 *Monastery of Santa Maria at Bouro*

It is situated in the north of Portugal in a small village called Amares in the neighbourhood of the city of Braga in the Minho Region with a natural park and vineyards (Farias, 2012). The first king of Portugal donated land to Benedictine friars to thank them for their assistance in the war of the Christian Reconquest. First a small chapel was raised which attracted pilgrims and the monastery was built surrounding it. After a short period of decay in the 16th century, a period of major reconstruction and enlargement started during the 17th and 18th century. The recently renovated monastery dates mostly from this period, combining traditional Cistercian austerity with mannerist and baroque styles. The organization of the centre was similar to the drawing of Saint Gallen.

Since 1939 Portugal tries to promote its historical, patrimonial, cultural and landscape resources with the launching of exclusive, high standard small-scaled hotels by rehabilitating his-

torical monuments such as monasteries, castles, palaces, … Renowned architects took care of the design of these so called pousadas. They are still owned by the Portuguese government, but since 2003 they are ran by the private company Grupo Pestana Pousadas.

In 1989 the monastery of Santa Maria was also converted into a pousada. Architect Eduardo Souto de Moura (Poveda, 2005) decided not to restore or renovate the existing building but to work with the existing ruins making use of the natural stone available to construct a new building. The flat roofs and windows were detailed in such way that they are almost invisible to accentuate the ruin. No old rooms or old uses were restored. There is no link between the old and new functions in the monastery except for the church and cemetery but they are in no way part of the hotel. The arcades of the cloister were freestanding so it became an open-air courtyard. Old granite walls served as an envelope for the new spatial structures. The hotel facilities were pragmatically filled in the pre-existing spaces or new constructions. The new building can be seen as an inhabited ruin instead of the rehabilitation of a monastery. However, as with the other case studies, there is a careful reading of the building's history, and the architecture is of minimalist expression in order to humbly respect and enhance the values of the ancient monastery.

3.2 Herkenrode

Between 1171 and 1194 the abbey was created in Kuringen nearby Hasselt (B) as the burial place of the counts of Loon (Laenen & van Meer, 2012; Team van Meer, 2010). After a short time being inhabited by monks, nuns took over in the early thirteenth century. The site became the first female Cistercian abbey in the Low Countries with its typical spiritual and architectural accents. But every self-respecting abbess did some modifications to the abbey to underwrite new spiritual, economical, political and certainly also esthetical stimuli. These changes and the destruction after the sale as confiscated goods, defined the present view of the site.

In 1972 the chapter of regular female canons of the Holy Sepulcher bought the East part of the site with the abbess residence, infirmary, nunnery cells and a 19th century English landscape park. These sisters decided, with the support of a multi-disciplinary advisory team to include the other remaining parts of the abbey in the development process. Responsible architects of Team van Meer wanted to integrate this new monastery in a more general rehabilitation framework for the total site to reach for the original Cistercian holistic vision of a coherent, architectural whole.

The team tried to restore the original succession of functions with the new program. The most accessible uses are located in the first buildings you meet when entering the site while the private ones like the cloister created behind the new church are at the back. In the mean time the Flemish government purchased the ca. 105 hectares remaining territory including the historic farmstead. Four users were tied to this project: the Heritage Flanders Foundation to restore the buildings; the Flemish department 'Nature and Forestery' to take care of the landscape at the site; the private organization 'VZW Herkenrode' to start up and increase touristic exploitation on behalf of the municipality of Hasselt; and the 'Centre for Herkenrode Studies' to do scientific research to the abbey.

In 2001 a new team including architect Van Meer, developed a master plan. Like in the former case in Portugal, new architectural interventions are modest but of high quality and in service of the original monastic buildings. The economical, educational part found its place in the farmstead in the west: shop, museum, reception room, congress centre, meetings and symposia, etc. The logistical part is organised in the North side and surroundings: support functions, repair landscape culture, herbal garden, etc. While the spiritual and residential areas are situated in the East: the monastery of Holy Sepulcher with meditation centre.

3.3 Monastery of Pentitents at Louviers

After being housed in unhealthy and inappropriate circumstances the monks built their new monastery between 1646 and 1659 in the French city of Louviers (Bequet, 1962) . It became the only one in Europe with a cloister located on a stream, L'Epervier. The church was situated in the West and two monastic wings were located alongside the central building. Almost 140 years the monks took care of the education of young children and provided health service to the sick, until they were expelled.

After the French Revolution the monastery became a prison until 1934. In 1990 the music school of Louviers found its place in the old, partially amputated, buildings but the students and teachers never felt at home because of the claustrophobic atmosphere.

The new program for the convent of the Penitents was quite heavy and demanded substantial interventions and contemporary extensions on top of the old walls, which became almost more important than the existent monastery. The architects of Opus 5 (Borne, 2012; Opus 5, 2012) needed every available space to make place for 24 classrooms, a score library and two big orchestra rooms. The most prominent part of the project is the big orchestra hall, now replacing the missing parts of the South wing in front to the water next to the cloister and focused on the city. During daytime the simple rectangular glass box reflects the landscape, the sky, other natural elements and the architectural remains of the old monastery. While in the evening the new glass box is transparent and shows the hart of the creative music academy. The other extensions are also made in contrasting materials to the original building.

3.4 *Witzusters or White Sisters*

In 1312 the woman monastery was founded by a lay brother connected to the sisters of penance Saint-Magdalena in Keulen (Prims, 1927; Antwerps Sint-Vincentius Genootschap, 1931). It was located in a house in the 'Cammerstrate' or Brewer Street near the Antwerp cathedral, in one of the oldest part of the city centre. The sisters lived according the rule of Saint-August instead of Saint-Francis and wore white clothes what defined their name 'the White Sisters'. Their mission was to save fallen women (in many cases prostitutes) and to make devout, 'God-fearing' women out of them.

The monastery survived the Reformation and Contra-reformation, iconoclasm, inquisition, the Siege of Antwerp, and grew steadily in buying adjacent properties and adaptations on site. The White Sisters became famous by poor and riche people through relief work and charity. A plan of 1700 shows a monastery organised around two gardens. They clearly occupied a considerable site in the city centre on which the chapel held a central position, in addition to other premises where the poor and sick were welcomed and helped. The uses are not strictly separated and are located were there is enough room: e.g. spiritual chapter hall and practical workshop are next to each other. There was also a brewery that is not communicated on the plan.

After the definite closure the Catholic Charity Society of Vincent de Paul bought the property in 1856 and turned it into their Antwerp headquarters named L' Espoir. The new owner divided the church into two levels. At the bottom there was a playground for the boy students of the Sunday school or evening school, the first floor was preserved as a neo-gothic chapel. Other school buildings were added. At 8th October 1914 an incendiary bomb destroyed the chapel and some secondary buildings. All were rebuilt in 1921 in the same configuration, as they exist today.

During the 20th century the school was closed and the buildings got underused. In 1986 the Christian Lay community of Sant Egidio started to use some spaces for care of homeless, a real home for elderly people, a soup kitchen, classes to learn Dutch to immigrants, youth working, etc. The community adapted the monastery every time comfort questions appeared. A team of Sant Egidio members and the architect Jo Crepain made the necessary decisions. Interventions in function of use or program were very modest, almost invisible or do not attract attention. They enhanced the existing neo-gothic character and new elements were realised in a modest contemporary language around the existing cloisters. The working budget was low so the team and architect needed to be creative and conservative at the same time. In 2013 the Society of Vincent de Paul bequeathed the entire site on the condition that Sant Egidio continues to use the premises for prayer and charity purposes, thus respecting the original programme of the building.

4 COMPARISON NON-HYBRID AND HYBRID APPROACH

This chapter analyses the influence and consequences of non-hybrid and hybrid rehabilitation process by comparing 'non-hybrid' Santa Maria and Pentitents with 'hybrid' Herkenrode and Witzusters.
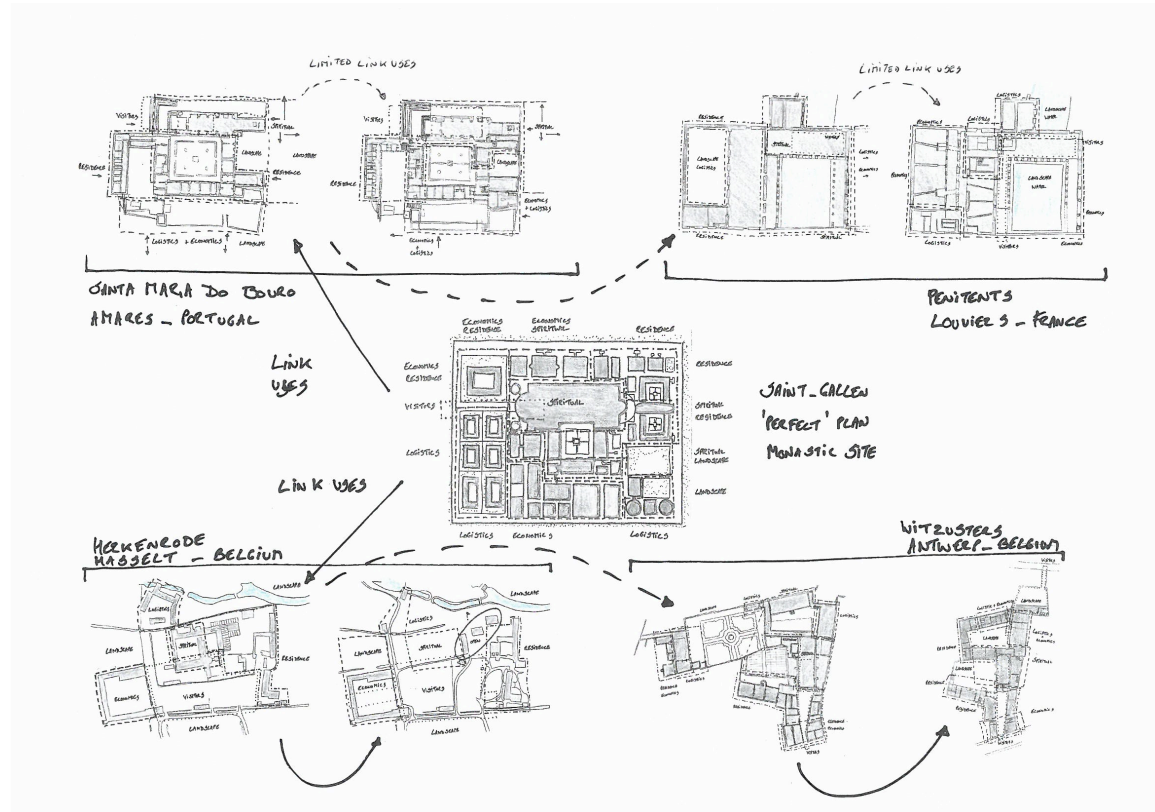

Figure 2: Comparison four selected monasteries and Saint Gallen.

4.1 *Chose of functions*

One could say that In Bouro and Louviers the program seemed more important than the original meaning of the site, where in Hasselt and Herkenrode, the genus loci of the building steered the rehabilitation process. The municipality of Louviers, for example wanted to create a new, functional, attractive musical school for 450 students, representing the town's cultural policy. One of the important goals was to bring the archaeological heritage into attention and rehabilitate this exceptional site in the heart of the city, erasing its more recent past as a prison. There was a large investment to install one singular program with virtually no relationship to its historic shell. The subtle quality of the Souto de Moura is much more humble and intelligent project with respect to the host building. But one could question, on a more conceptual level, the meaning of a 5star hotel in monasteries originally destined for worship and charity. The fact that Souto de Moura's pousada literary turns its back – there is blind wall – to the Renaissance church, could also be read in that same respect.

The rehabilitation process of both Belgian monasteries, on the other hand, started very much from in the internal narratives of the sites. The process grew gradually over a period of two decades, starting with a small part of the building, without knowing all the functions from the outset.

4.2 *Money versus time*

When the Sant Egidio Community met new needs in their various services, they looked for new solutions. This may be considered as fragmented and impromptu, but it turned to be rewarding in the long run. The lack of means triggered a kind of spatial creativity, always with great respect to its central mission: a safe haven for the people in need, mirrored with the historic program. It took them about 20 years to shape the building and its interiors into a configuration that seemed appropriate. The same is true for Herkenrode. The sisters took their time to create a new monastery and spiritual meditation centre in the rehabilitated abbess residence. Initially there was no direct public funding while the Flemish government sought partners to develop the rest of the site. There is now a long-term master plan with flexible implementations, always in relationship to the surroundings.

The monasteries of Santa Maria and the Penitents were developed in one track in a relative short space of time with direct sponsoring of the government and municipality. Santa Maria do Bouro is beautifully renovated but it averts itself from the village centre. Church and cemetery are publicly used but they are no part of the project. The monastery is little accessible for a limited part of the population, but it is still financed by the Portuguese government. At the same time the remains of the Penitents cloister above the river 'L'Epervier' and the surrounding landscape have been highlighted and interpreted in the rehabilitation project but in a very literal mode. The connection to the context is even a mirror, because of the intimate program of the music school that requires isolation and concentration. The program of the music school was very heavy from the outset and its architectural language radical to make everything just fit. If more time was taken during preparation, maybe a more diverse program would have been developed with more attention towards the existing site, its history, its surroundings, its context and with less necessary adaptations. Notwithstanding, a music school is a public function that is appropriate in a former more private monastery.

4.3 *Architectural translation*

All four cases were the result of a close cooperation between a motivated client and a renowned architect office. The designs of the proposed monasteries are all of high level. Though only the two non-hybrid projects are publicised in several architectural magazines or at design websites or even won architecture prizes. The hybrid rehabilitations give priority the conservation of the existing buildings because of tactical, financial but also social and spiritual reasons. Their program was adapted to the monastic site and not the other way around. Their architectural language is a balance between contemporary and vernacular.
On the contrary architect Souto de Moura needed to reinforce the attraction of the old monastery towards high comfort- and experience-seeking customers. He rejected the pure and simple consolidation of the ruin for the sake of contemplation, opting instead for the input of new materials, uses, forms and functions entre les choses, as Le Corbusier said. To him the ruins were more important than the 'Convent'. The Music School of Louviers is designed by the architects of Opus 5 to attract attention. This happened very conscious to make a clean cut with the past and to highlight the new chosen way of cultural vision of the municipality. In both non-hybrid projects the monastery was an occasional exclusive setting.

4.4 *Importance intangible*

Yet, architecture theorist Graham Brooker (Brooker, 2009) accentuates not to ignore the past because of the opportunities in infected architecture towards rehabilitation of historical sites. Also, Ellen Klingenberg highlights the non-permissive cultural memory of interior spaces (Klingenberg, 2012). The past, just because it is sometimes difficult, is a strong help to find strong realistic programs. The non-hybrid cases do not seize this opportunity.
In spite of the domination of the new parts, the ancient elements in the historical construction of the Penitents monastery are still governing but without referring to the intangible heritage of the site as a monastery and a prison. Souto de Moura saw himself as the builder of a Pousada with the stones from a monastery. They were the elements that were laid bare and ready for manipulation, just as the building was throughout its history. Both projects wanted to be picturesque,

but they try to conserve it by chance with old stones, not by intention or use. While the protection of the genius loci is precise the objective of the other two cases. The hybrid rehabilitations wanted to continue the site history while searching for social relevance and a new significance of the existing values of the site for us today. They also desired to intensify the relation between material architectural and natural character of the site and its immaterial dimension because of spiritual, social and practical reasons.

4.5 (Religious) community

Bart Verschaffel refers in his text 'Sacred Places are Made of Time' to an interesting connotation of hybrid towards a modern way of thinking about space (Coomans et al., 2012). He says that modern space strives to be 'neutral', but that it is evident that the modern world is not homogeneously 'modern' but hybrid, and involves an intense daily negotiation with the imposing presence of the remains of the world of the past. When rehabilitating historical buildings and more specific monasteries it is better to profit from this hybrid aspect then to ignore it.

The monastic sites Herkenrode and Witzusters approach their development in a hybrid way both literally and figuratively. They try to see their past as part of the context you have to work with to find a future and as an opportunity on different levels to find a fitting new program. Taking into account the intangible religious and social aspects of the site, it became the compass of the rehabilitation process. The contemporary religious communities play a crucial role in articulating the genius loci of the site by respecting the historical and social dimensions of the site. The new functions find a balance with the old ones so a natural new chapter in an existing story begins.
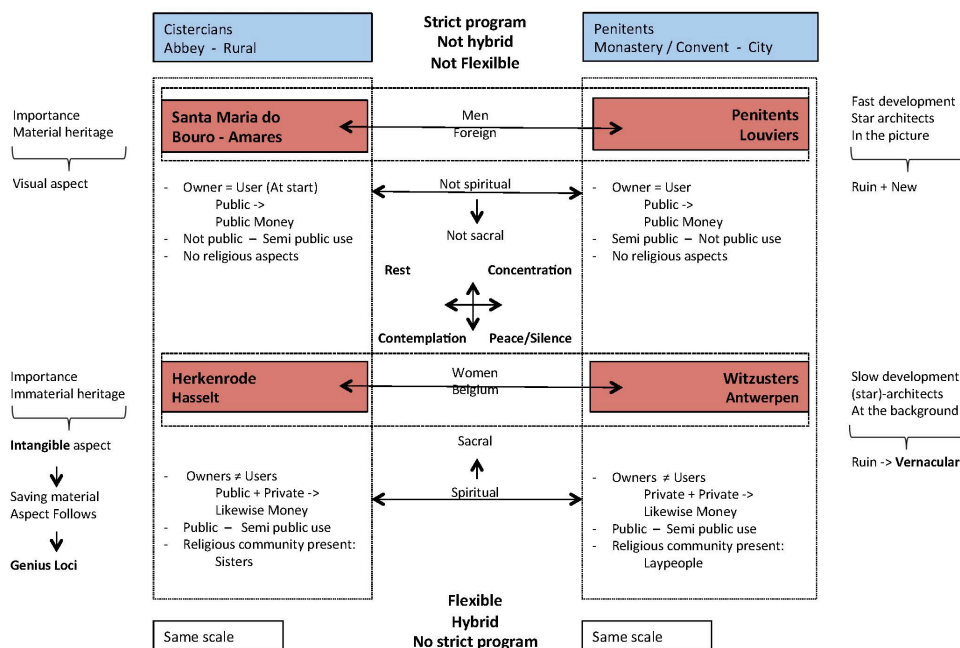

Figure 3: Comparison of non-hybrid and hybrid approach.

5 CONCLUSION – DISCUSSION

A larger time frame for rehabilitation is an opportunity: time makes it possible to leave space for place making, to search for the confirmation or creation of the genius loci. At the start hybrid projects can fill in one core aspect at the site that is the subject of adaptive reuse, so this cases automatically need time to develop. It is striking to see that the two hybrid projects are more related to their context and society in general. They are more publicly accessible than the two non-hybrid, rehabilitated monastic sites in spite of the more limited direct dependence on public money during the development.
The differences between sub-typologies of monasteries seem to be less important towards rehabilitation of a site as a whole and connected to its context. Decisive is whether a hybrid way of looking towards the present intangible aspects in combination with the use of the material heritage is used or not. Spectacular architecture is possible but seems to be unnecessary to attract people when there is a balance between the search to new uses and the original organization of functions. In this respect there is also a balance between vernacular and contemporary architecture.

We believe that there is close relationship between a hybrid or diverse program and the respect for the narratives of the site – which we have called genus loci – if one wants to successfully rehabilitate monastic sites.

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