

# CONSERVATION— ADAPTATION

KEEPING ALIVE THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE  
ADAPTIVE REUSE OF HERITAGE  
WITH SYMBOLIC VALUE

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This book presents presents the papers written by 39 participants following the 5th Workshop on Conservation, organised by the Conservation Network of the European Association for Architectural Education in Hasselt/Liège in 2015. All papers have been peer-reviewed. The Workshop was attended by 73 participants from the following countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, United Kingdom.

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## INTRODUCTION

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### Workshop theme

The theme of the 5th EAAE Workshop, Conservation/Adaptation, captures one of the most critical questions in addressing the legacy of inherited buildings and sites of cultural importance. Over time, protection of the architectural heritage has become recognised as a cultural imperative, supported by international conventions and deepening scholarship. The adaptation of such heritage for contemporary uses is one of the major issues in sustainable development of the built environment, and it has long been recognised that the continuing appropriate use of historic buildings is one of the best ways of ensuring their survival. In this context, the concept of ‘adaptive reuse’ has emerged.

Adaptive reuse can be described as ‘the process of wholeheartedly altering a building by which the function is the most obvious change, but other alterations may be made to the building itself, such as the circulation route, the orientation, the relationship between spaces; additions may be built and other areas may be demolished’<sup>1</sup>. In context, besides retaining the material values of buildings or sites, an important aspect of reuse is the preservation of immaterial significance. This is particularly important in the case of symbolic buildings or sites where the spirit of the place is important, such as those with social, political, commemorative or religious meaning, or those with a negative or ‘infected’ history. The workshop addressed some difficult questions: how to combine the reanimation of such a building or site with the transmission of its material and immaterial values? What are the limits and opportunities in the adaptive reuse of this type of ‘sensitive’ heritage? How is the *genius loci* – the spirit of place – to be preserved?

These issues in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings that embody special meanings were addressed under three headings:

#### *Social meaning*

Europe is experiencing fundamental socio-economic changes, a shift from an industrial society (product oriented) towards a knowledge-based society (service oriented). This has an important impact on built environments and landscapes. What is the future for the relicts of this industrial past that are strongly imbued with social meaning and collective memory, but that sometimes have limited architectural value?

#### *Religious/sacred meaning*

Religious buildings form a rich part of our European cultural heritage, with not only important historical and architectural value, but also an important symbolic value. Over recent decades, however, in different European countries this particular type of heritage has faced major challenges: in some countries, a marked decrease in religious practice combined with a general economic decline has caused the abandonment of many churches,

chapels, convents and monasteries. Together with presbyteries and other types of service buildings, they tend to be privatised. What future do these buildings have? How far can we go in reanimating these sites? Do the new functions need to incorporate the 'sacral atmosphere' of the building? Or can we approach these buildings as 'empty shells' and convert them into concert halls, libraries, hotels or supermarkets?

#### *Commemorative/political meaning*

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, some buildings or sites carry a particular political message, or the memory of an historic event - sometimes tragic, sometimes positive. Is it appropriate to reuse such buildings or sites? How far can we go to exploit them, and make the memory more accessible for the public (musealisation versus Disneyfication)? Can we afford to simply conserve them? How are we to prevent them from being ideologically misused?

Participants were invited to submit abstracts addressing one or several of these aspects, related to case studies of conservation and/or adaptive reuse of architectural heritage that embodies special meaning.

#### **Case study sites**

To steer discussion among participants, local case studies and reference projects were presented by the organising team and visited during the workshop.

##### *Industrial sites in Genk*

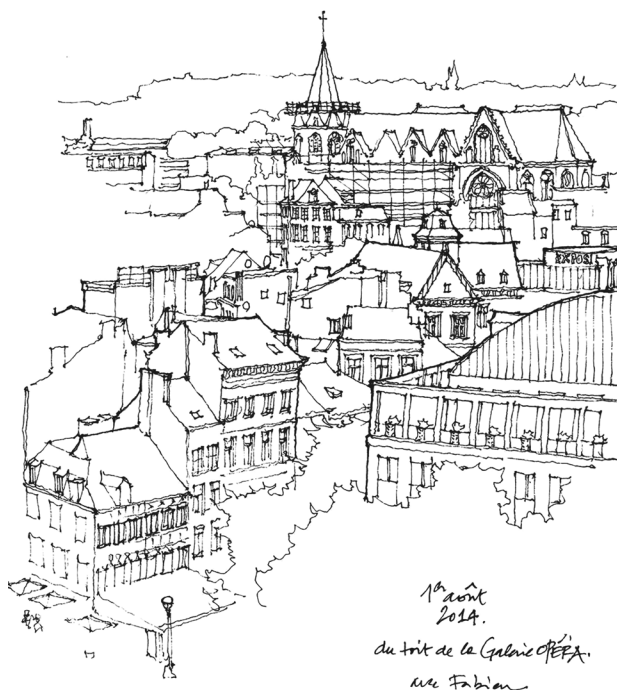
In the early 20th century the city of Genk rapidly became industrialised, mainly through the mining industry. After the closure of the mines in the 1980s the city was confronted with widespread unemployment, and also with the question of how to deal with the built relics of the mining industry, and with its surrounding landscape, also strongly shaped by this industry. New industries were attracted to Genk in order to create jobs and give a new dynamic to the city and in the last decade, several former mining sites were rehabilitated into commercial, social, cultural and educational facilities. However, the recent closure of the Ford automobile factory, the largest employer in the region, has created a new crisis for the city. Again the question has arisen as to how to deal with the desolate industrial site, which has limited architectural value but is nevertheless important for the collective memory of this city.

##### **C-Mine**

The workshop participants visited C-Mine, the former mine of Winterslag, which closed in 1986. In the late 1990s Genk started the redevelopment of this site into a creative hub, organised around four key aspects: education, creative economy, recreation and artistic creation. It now houses various functions, including a school of art and design, an incubator for young entrepreneurs, a cinema, a cultural centre, an art gallery and a museum. Various architects have worked on the different buildings at the site; some of these are adapted industrial buildings, while others are new constructions but respecting the original layout of the site. C-Mine, an enormous labyrinth of gray steel construction designed by the artist studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, was positioned on the central square. The labyrinthine structure creates unique views of the site and its different buildings.

Fig. 1. The interior of the Energy building at C-Mine, now a cultural centre (photo by L. Kealy).

Fig. 2. The Sainte-Croix Collegiate Church, Liège (drawing by G. Michel).



The most prominent and best preserved historical building is the Energy Building, transformed into a cultural centre by 51N4E (Fig. 1). A large steel volume marks the entrance at the front folding, transformed into a cultural centre by 51N4E. The turbine halls and machine rooms are preserved, along with much of their machinery and patina, and serve as foyer, exhibition space, event location, etc. At each side of the central turbine hall, a new construction with auditoria is added. Rooftop spaces serve as terraces in between the existing building and auditoria.

#### *The Sainte-Croix Collegiate Church (Liège)*

Liège Sainte-Croix Collegiate Church is listed as 'exceptional heritage' in the Walloon region due to its historical and architectural importance (Fig. 2).

It was founded in 978 or 979 by Notker, the first Prince Bishop of the Bishopric of Liège was whose ambition was to make of the Episcopal City one of the most renowned centres of the Holy Roman Empire. Sainte-Croix was one of seven collegiate churches built in the city between the 10th and the 11th centuries, its impressive octagonal tower aimed at establishing a symbolic bond between collegiate churches, thus defining the religious topography of the city. It is still an important urban landmark.

The present building, erected between the 13th and the 14th centuries on the foundations of the original church, is an example of the Gothic influence in the eastern part of the Holy Roman Empire and retains an exceptional architectural significance. Characterised by its two opposed apses, an eastern choir inspired by the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, and, uncommonly for the Mosan region, a three-aisle nave, the building is highly relevant to studies exploring the influence of the relics of the Passion (which were preserved in Sainte-Croix) on the design of a medieval church, as well as for its neo-Gothic external and internal features, both the result of important restorations conducted in the 19th century.

The fate of Sainte-Croix was, however, dramatically altered by the urban changes that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. Formerly situated at the edge of the historic centre of Liège on the eastern side of a natural promontory (the Publémont hill), Sainte-Croix was surrounded by the Sauvenière, a tributary of the Meuse river, and the Lègia stream, which flowed into the Meuse close to Saint Lambert Square. Both rivers were diverted and covered in the 19th century and are no longer visible today. Additionally, in the 1960s the urban area on the northern side of the church was torn down to make room for a speedway connecting the city centre with the highway. As a consequence, Sainte-Croix was deprived of a crucial portion of its built surroundings and its parish, and went through a slow process of abandonment and structural deterioration that eventually led to the church's closure and to its insertion in the World Monument Fund 2013–2015 'watch list' of endangered monuments. In recent years, campaigns for the preservation of the collegiate church of Sainte-Croix and for its restoration have been conducted by several associations. In February 2017, the Walloon regional government announced a €15 million, 10-year restoration project aimed at transforming the building into an ecumenical place of worship and cultural centre.

### *The Interallied Monument in Liège*

Characterised by a double identity as both a civilian and religious site, the Interallied Monument originated from two joined initiatives launched respectively by the International Federation of Veterans of the Allied countries to celebrate the bravery of the soldiers who fought in the First World War, and by the Catholic segments of Liège society, who wanted to build a monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the aftermath of the First World War. It was during a congress in Paris in 1923 that the International Federation of Veterans determined on the creation of a monument which was financed by public subscription from the Allied countries, aimed at honouring their soldiers. Two years later, in Rome, the Federation chose Liège as the monument's ideal location, as it was the first city to be impacted by the First World War. When the Federation discovered that a private association had also opened a subscription to create a pilgrimage church in Liège, the two plans were merged, and a competition for the construction of their joint project was launched. The Interallied Monument and the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes and the Sacred Heart of Jesus were thus two complementary parts of an international symbolic project recognising the key role of Liège in the First World War.

The architectural competition was won by Flemish architect Jos Smolderen. Composed of a memorial tower, an open-air esplanade and a pilgrimage church situated in the Liège suburb of Cointe, on a hill above the Guillemins Station, the complex's construction had



Fig. 3. The Interallied Monument and Church, Liège (photo by S.F. Musso).

a long gestation, mainly due to a lack of funding and the outbreak of the Second World War. It was therefore built in phases between 1923 and 1968 in a geometrical Art Deco style. It is adorned by a great number of sculpted monuments offered by former Allied countries (Fig. 3).

Although the monument's crypt and esplanade still regularly host commemorative ceremonies (for instance, the European commemoration of the First World War in 2014) and welcomes new monuments, the extensively deteriorated church, a listed monument since 2011, has been neglected by the parishioners and abandoned. Many possibilities for private reuse have been explored, but they have not yet led to any adequate solution.

Besides its obvious architectural, symbolic and artistic values, the site, built on a hill overlooking Calatrava's Guillemins Station with tremendous views over the city, remains a key element of the city landscape.

#### *The Military Fort of Loncin*

Built between 1888 and 1892 according to the plans of General Henri Alexis Brialmont, the military Fort of Loncin is one of twelve forts built in a ring around Liège as part of its fortified belt towards the end of the 19th century. The triangular fort, surrounded by a deep ditch and semi-submerged in the landscape, has a dual cultural relevance. It is an important element of built heritage. It is also a burial ground as a result of massive bombardment from the 12th to the 15th of August 1914. The fort had been built



Fig. 4. The destroyed Fort de Loncin: its wreckage is a sarcophagus and a site of commemoration (photo by D. Prina).

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Fig. 5. The former prison of Hasselt now houses the faculty of Law of Hasselt University (UHasselt), the octagon seen from a courtyard (photo by P. Vorlik).

to a particular design and using an experimental building technique of non-reinforced concrete rather than masonry. This played an unexpected role in its destruction and transformed the ruins of its powder magazine into a permanent sarcophagus protecting the corpses of the 350 soldiers who were killed by an explosion. The weakness of the structure made the ammunition storage – it contained twelve tons of explosive – vulnerable to the impact of large-calibre shells. The wreckage became first a war grave and then a remembrance site. Although the majority of the bodies could not be moved after the explosion, some remains were buried in a crypt placed at the western tip of the triangle forming the site. In the aftermath of the war, the sentiment of respect in Belgium for the fort's victims resulted in the erection on the site of a number of monuments honouring their memory. Besides its commemorative value, the natural location and the partially wrecked concrete structures confer on the site a broader and powerful landscape significance (Fig. 4).

The Military Fort of Loncin was listed in 2004 and its site now includes a museum. Although the Fort is especially popular for its symbolic role, the motivations for its listing also included its historical interest as a major element in the Belgian fortification of its time as well as its importance in the events of August 1914. Furthermore, the Fort of Loncin was listed for its scientific value (it still contains original weapons and equipment) and for its landscape importance as a privileged site for biodiversity development.



### *Former prison of Hasselt*

The Faculty of Law of Hasselt University (UHasselt) is located in a former prison, built in 1859 on the panopticon model and used as a prison until 2005 (Fig. 5). The buildings of the university were initially located at the outskirts of the city, but it wished to move closer to the city centre. The only available site in this rather small city was the former prison. UHasselt, which prides itself on being an open and approachable institution, did not at first want to preserve the existing building's characteristics, as these features seemed the exact opposite of the university's vision of a centre city campus. Hence the redesign was opened to an architectural competition, won by noAarchitecten. The architects' concept saw the prison as an enclave within the city. Thus, instead of being a symbol of confinement, the walls were to serve as a symbol of prestige attaching to the community of the students and staff of UHasselt.

The original prison wall was preserved in its entirety, and no changes were made to the front facade. The side entrance doors were replaced by fence gates to allow views of the green courtyards behind the wall. The basic structure of the interior and the characteristics of the typology were retained. The centre space of the panopticon served as the main entrance hall, which was made more monumental with the addition of a new staircase and terrazzo flooring. The former cells were kept, serving the new function of individual study cells for students. To fit the large programme within the existing building, the triangular courtyards between the different wings were partly filled with two auditoria and a

cafeteria. The original corridors running along the side of each wing were enlarged to give access to these new spaces. In the original prison building, daylight could barely enter the building interior, owing to the extremely small windows. Throughout the transformation, daylight was brought into the building through the roof, where old and new parts of the building were connected. A number of the green roofs were made accessible; the prison and the city may be viewed from there.

In addition to these buildings and sites, participants also visited three buildings in Maastricht which had religious uses in the past: the Minorite Monastery, now an archive; a 13th-century former Dominican church, which is now known as the Selexyz Dominicanen bookstore; and the 15th-century former Crutched Friars monastery and church, which has been converted into a 5-star and 60-room hotel (Kruisherhotel). These buildings were to prove a significant element of several papers.

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### Notes and references

- <sup>1</sup> Brooker, G., Stone, S., 2004. *Re-readings: Interior architecture and the design principles of remodelling existing buildings*. London.