NEW PUBLIC USE FOR CHURCHES

Architectural strategies for the adaptive reuse of church buildings in Sweden

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An increasing amount of church buildings in Sweden are becoming redundant, just as in large parts of northern Europe. Many parishes in both urban and rural areas are struggling to maintain the vast amount of buildings. At the same time these churches are surrounded by very strong protective legislation making it practically impossible to adapt them for new uses. This might paradoxically enough ultimately become a threat to the building's survival as architectural heritage.

The need for a broader public debate on the subject is urgent, however there seems to be a lack of knowledge and awareness of the issue among the general public. We believe that architects need to take a position in this debate suggesting a mindful and sensitive development of the religious heritage through visionary proposals and solutions. The main problem is not that there are too many churches but rather too few ideas about what to do with them.

1.
Large church buildings in central parts of the city

2.
Post-war church buildings in suburban areas

3.
19th-century church buildings on the countryside

Three case studies

The purpose of this project is to find concrete architectural strategies for the adaptive reuse of redundant church buildings in Sweden, both religious and secular, to illustrate the potential rather than the problem with the churches in the future.

The project evolves around three scenarios with three specific church buildings that are becoming redundant, each typical in the narrative of the cultural, religious and demographical changes that has reshaped Swedish society during the last hundred years.

A case study is made for each church developing an architectural strategy for the transformation of the building. Focus will be on new public use open for the community surrounding each church:

- Continued religious use such as parish hall, café or concert hall as part of the church space
- Public use such as library, community center, school or public bath
- Commercial use such as market hall, gallery, theatre, concert hall

The aim is to create visual content through drawings, illustrations and physical models to serve as a basis for a public debate on the topic. The project is developed in dialogue with each parish as well as experts on conservation of built heritage. The project will result in an architecture exhibition in the spring of 2021.