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Synagogues and Churches: The Transformation of the Religious Cityscape in Germany since 1990

Kim de Wildt

Abstract

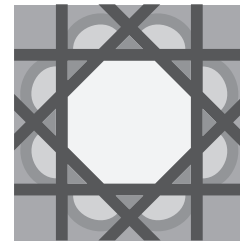
Since the reunification of Germany its religious topography has undergone some drastic transformations. Whereas synagogues and mosques are being built, and in a few cases churches as well, the latter are in the process of reuse and demolition. In this contribution some of these current architectural transformations will be analyzed as phenomena that characterize the religious makeup of contemporary German society.

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Synagogues and Churches: The Transformation of the Religious Cityscape in Germany since 1990

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Since the reunification of Germany, the religious topography of Germany has undergone some drastic transformations. Whereas synagogues and mosques are being built, and in few cases some churches too, the latter, specifically those built in the postwar era, are in an increasing process of reuse and demolition.

Since the last decades, the topic of church reuse, already a well-known phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, has become an increasing factor of societal, scholarly and media attention in Germany as well. This interest is not without controversy as the heated debates often accompanying these transformations show. The same applies to the building of so-called “representative” mosques. Less controversy, but a lot of attention as well, is paid to the spectacular new synagogues in some of Germany’s major cities.

In this contribution some of these current architectural transformations will be analyzed as phenomena that characterize the religious makeup of contemporary German society.¹ This paper will discuss 1.) the background situation that has led to some of the current architectural expressions of societal transformations with regard to religion; 2.) diverse forms of architectural transformation a.) by means of a quantitative overview of synagogue transformations in Germany, and b.) by means of one case study concerning a 150 year old church in the Ruhr area, and 3.) conclusions with regard to these current transformations of religious architecture in Germany.

The main research questions that will be addressed here are: Which kind of transformations in the religious architectural landscape have taken place since the reunification of Germany? How should we understand these transformations? And: How do social change and changes in the built environment interrelate and how do people give meaning to these changes?

The answer to the first question is reached by documenting available data concerning these transformations in a quantitative database. The first outcomes of this documentation are presented here with regard to synagogues. These outcomes show which kind of synagogue transformations can be discerned in Germany since 1990. The other questions are of a qualitative nature and will be exemplified by the abovementioned case study.

¹ These phenomena are addressed in the DFG funded research project “Sakralität im Wandel” (SaWa)= “Transformations of Sacredness: Religious Architecture in Urban Space in 21st Century Germany”, which is a collaborative project conducted at the Ruhr University Bochum and TU Dortmund University. I herewith thank my fellow project members Beate Löffler and Martin Radermacher for their helpful comments on this article. I also thank Robert Plum for his constructive comments.

The Transformation Process: Background Situation

Synagogues

Religious buildings can be attributed a multitude of meanings that are not restricted to their religious function or to the religious intention with which they were built. Newly built synagogues, for instance, do not exclusively function as places of prayer for Jewish people. Besides their historical existence as multifunctional spaces for worship, study and community gatherings,² contemporary synagogues are commonly ascribed political and societal meanings that refer to the Shoah and have a memorial function, especially in Germany.³ The laying of the foundation stone often takes place at the date of the “Reichskristallnacht”, also known as “Pogromnacht”, the night of the 9th to the 10th of November 1938, in which more than 1,400 synagogues were destroyed in Germany.⁴ As our research confirms, in many cases, new synagogues have been built at or near historical sites where once the former synagogue was situated.⁵

Since 1988 an influx of Jewish people from the former Soviet Union into Germany took place because of several factors such as easier possibilities to migrate in the slipstream of perestroika and glasnost, fear of anti-semitism and civil war, and lacking economic prospects. Germany, besides Israel and the United States of America, was one of the main immigration destinations and even developed into the first destination former Soviet Jews migrated to. Germany wanted to own up to its historical responsibility and sought out to actively support existing Jewish life in Germany.⁶ More than 200,000 Jewish people and their non-Jewish family members migrated to Germany between 1989 and 2005.⁷ Many Jewish migrants however, did not have a strong connection to the Jewish religion, which can partly be attributed to the dismissive attitude towards religion by the communist doctrine.⁸ In view of the gradual re-establishment of Jewish life in Germany, newly built synagogues play an important role for the Jewish community, since they also function as places for social and cultural gatherings.⁹ The American Jewish Year Book of 1996 designates the increase of new synagogues in Germany even as a “synagogue boom” and relates it to the influx of the Soviet immigrants and the “desire for more permanence”.¹⁰

Churches

During the “Kirchenbau-boom” between the 1950s and the 1970s in former West-Germany, a decline in churchgoing was already noticeable. With regard to the current situation of church transformations, mostly arguments such as a decline in churchgoing and a decline in church finances are employed for the fact that church buildings are being taken out of liturgical use, and are subsequently being reused or demolished.¹¹ The societal opposition, which often arises when a church threatens to be demolished or reused, often entails, but also surpasses, the churchgoing segment of the population.¹² Interestingly, a lot of resistance stems

² Alexandra Klei, *Jüdisches Bauen in Nachkriegsdeutschland*, Berlin 2017, p. 43; 4 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Buildings Fraught with Meaning: An Introduction to a Special Issue on Synagogue Architecture in Context*, in: *Jewish History* (25/1), 2011, pp. 1-11, here: p. 1.

³ Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Between Memory and Normalcy: Synagogue Architecture in Postwar Germany*, in: Jay Howard Geller and Leslie Morris (eds.), *Three-Way Street: Jews, Germans, and the Transnational*, Ann Arbor 2016, pp. 277-301, here: p. 290; Ulrich Knufinke, *Zur Geschichte der Synagogen in Deutschland*, in: Stiftung Baukultur Rheinland-Pfalz (ed.), *Gebauter Aufbruch: Neue Synagogen in Deutschland*, Regensburg 2010, pp. 19-52, here: p. 42; Oskar Verkaaik, *The Art of Imperfection: Contemporary Synagogues in Germany and the Netherlands*, in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (20/3), 2014, pp. 486-504, here: p. 487. Interestingly, Alexandra Klei holds a different opinion and regards modern synagogue architecture as a general architectural characteristic of reconstruction architecture after World War II. She furthermore seems to imply that there exists a need to see some kind of statement in the architecture on behalf of the Jewish community or the (Jewish) architect regarding the way in which history is being dealt with; Klei, *ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

⁴ Klei, *ibid.*, p. 57; Verkaaik, *ibid.*, p. 492; Sandra Andrea O'Connell, *Concrete Memory. New Synagogues in Germany: Dresden, Munich, Ulm*, in: Lisa Godson and Kathleen James-Chakraborty (eds.), *Modern Religious Architecture in Germany, Ireland and Beyond: Influence, Process and After-life since 1945*, New York 2018, pp. 155-176, here: pp. 155-156.

⁵ See also Verkaaik, *ibid.*, p. 492.

⁶ Sonja Haug and Michael Wolf, *Jüdische Zuwanderer in Deutschland*, in: Frank Swiaczny and Sonja Haug (eds.), *Neue Zuwanderergruppen in Deutschland*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 65-82, here: p. 65-67.

⁷ Sergio DellaPergola, *World Jewish Population*, 2017, in: Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Book 2017*, Cham 2018, pp. 297-377, here: p. 339.

⁸ Haug and Wolf, *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰ Deidre Berger and Murray Gordon, *Federal Republic of Germany*, in: David

from non-churchgoers who appreciate these buildings for non-religious reasons; such as architectural or art historical reasons or for their role as landmarks within a familiar neighborhood.¹³ The Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research showed in their 2009 study on church reuse that three main categories of appreciation for church buildings by the German population can be discerned, namely religiously motivated affinity, church visits as a positive (contrast) experience, and historical interest.¹⁴ The study shows that this first dimension, affinity, is not always religious affinity towards the building, but often a secular form of affinity, related to atmosphere.¹⁵ Another important dimension which is highlighted by this research, is the function that church buildings fulfil as Christian landmarks. Notwithstanding this last dimension, the same study shows that 51% of the German population is also of the opinion that bigger mosques should be built, and 68% is also in favor of building new synagogues.

Mosques

Although mosques will not be explicitly dealt with in this article it is necessary to shortly address them in order to gain a better understanding of the context of the overall transformation process. The building of new representative mosques brings a new dimension of meaning-giving to the fore: the claim for societal and urban visibility and the right to express this visibility by architectural means.¹⁶

German mosques often have multiple functions. Besides being spaces for religious worship, cultural and social activities are also often employed there.¹⁷ The societal debates and controversies that often accompany the (intention of) newly built mosques, seem to indicate that more is at stake than just the construction of a new place of worship.¹⁸ Muslim “guest workers” who mainly migrated from Turkey since the 1960s made use of so-called “backyard mosques” (“Hinterhofmoscheen”) for their religious worship.¹⁹ After it became clear that the guests were not “guests” anymore, but were here to stay, the need for so-called “representative mosques” arose.²⁰ Although the Allensbach study shows that a majority of the German population is in favor of the building of new mosques, in contrast to the abovementioned situation of the churches and synagogues, some parts of society feel that the “Christian West” is under threat by a “foreign culture” when new mosques are being built.²¹

Forms of Transformation

One of the main objectives of the research project “Transformations of Sacredness: Religious Architecture in Urban Space in 21st Century Germany” (SaWa) at the University of Bochum is to map the transformations synagogues, churches and mosques since 1990 underwent in a comprehensive database. Our aim is to provide the first comparative overview of the transformative architectural representation and urban positioning of contemporary religious architecture in a religiously plural society.²²

Singer and Ruth R. Seldin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Book 1996*, New York 1996, pp. 278-299, here: p. 292.

¹¹ Kim de Wildt and Robert J.J.M. Plum, *Kirchenumnutzung*, in: Michael Klöcker and Udo Tworuschka (eds.), *Handbuch der Religionen. Kirchen und andere Glaubensgemeinschaften in Deutschland und im deutschsprachigen Raum*, Vol. 2. 60. Ergänzungslieferung. Hohenwarsleben 2019, pp. 1-30, here: pp. 4-5.

¹² Kim de Wildt and Albert Gerhards, *Traditionen und Transformationen*, in: *kunst und kirche* (3), 2014, pp. 24-27, here: p. 25.

¹³ De Wildt and Plum, *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *Reaktion der Bevölkerung auf die Umwidmung von Sakralbauten*, Allensbach 2009, pp. 15-29, accessed 11 June 2019, https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/fileadmin/studien/7442_Sakralbauten.pdf.

¹⁵ See for a thorough examination on atmosphere and space: Martin Radermacher, „Atmosphäre“: Zum Potenzial eines Konzepts für die Religionswissenschaft. Ein Forschungsüberblick, in: *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* (26/1), 2018, pp. 142-194.

¹⁶ Sabine Kraft, *Islamische Sakralarchitektur in Deutschland*, Münster 2002, p. 58; Rauf Ceylan, *Islam und Urbanität: Moscheen als multifunktionale Zentren in der Stadtgesellschaft*, in: Alexander Häusler (ed.), *Rechtspopulismus als „Bürgerbewegung“: Kampagnen gegen Islam und Moscheebau und kommunale Gegenstrategien*, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 183-197, here: pp. 190-193.

¹⁷ Ceylan, *ibid.*, pp. 183-197.

¹⁸ An ever growing amount of literature on mosque conflicts, testifies of the relevance of this discourse. Interestingly enough, the topic of mosque conflicts seems to be mainly discussed in the German-speaking academic discourse. In Switzerland the debates concerning mosques are more focused on the minaret. Some examples: Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Kampf um die Deutlichkeit. Religionstheologische Überlegungen im Rückblick auf den Schweizer Minarettstreit*, in: *Öffentliches Ärgernis? Moscheebaukonflikte in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz*, Zürich 2015, pp. 161-181; Birte Nienaber and Alexandra Reich, *Moscheebauten und Minarettstreit in Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland am Beispiel der Selimiye-Moschee in Völklingen*, in:

Synagogue Transformations in Germany

For pragmatic reasons we started out to map the synagogue transformations, since these are the most manageable by numbers. Our first findings show that approximately 133 synagogues and Jewish prayer halls are in use as such in Germany today. There have been 61 synagogue transformations since 1990. These transformations entail 24 newly built synagogues, thereof 12 situated at or near the location of a synagogue which was destructed during the “Pogromnacht”. 23 buildings have been converted into synagogues. Seven of these reused structures are former companies, one is a former school building, ten are converted churches or chapels, and two are former residential buildings. This number obviously does not add up to 23, but the former use of some of these buildings is unclear to this point. A form of transformation we did not anticipate at the outset of our research was the category of translocation. Two synagogues have been translocated to a new place and taken into renewed use as a synagogue.²³ One synagogue has been demolished in 2004 in Osterholz-Scharmbeck in favor of a commercial building.²⁴ Six synagogues which were not in use as synagogues anymore have been reconsecrated.²⁵

A last category is that of remodeled synagogues. This category consists of those synagogues which have undergone a substantial remodeling. We are still in the process of determining which forms of remodeling can be designated as substantial. So far we identified two cases of remodeled synagogues by the architect Alfred Jacoby (*1950), who is renown for designing the most German synagogues since World War II, such as those in Darmstadt (1988), Heidelberg (1994), Aachen (1995), Kassel (2000), Chemnitz (2002), and Speyer (2010).²⁶ Jacoby also remodeled two synagogues that were originally designed by the architect Hermann Zvi Guttmann (1917-1977). In 1997 Jacoby remodeled the synagogue in Offenbach am Main (Hesse), built in 1956, and from 2008 till 2010 he remodeled and expanded the synagogue in Osnabrück (Lower Saxony), built in the years 1967-1969.

The mapping of the transformations of synagogues, including a preliminary selection of churches and mosques, has led to a preliminary overview of transformation categories thus far (table 1). In the further course of the project more categories may arise.

Transformation categories	Synagogues	Churches	Mosques
New built	X	X	X
Planned	X	X	X
Remodeled	X	X	X
Reused	X	X	X
Demolished	X	X	X
Translocated	X	-	-
Reconsecrated	X	-	-
Vacant	-	X	-
Substitute chapel	-	X	-

Birte Nienaber and Ursula Roos (eds.), Internationalisierung der Gesellschaft und die Auswirkungen auf die Raumentwicklung: Beispiele aus Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz und dem Saarland, Hannover 2015, pp. 43-53; Jörg Hüttermann, Das Minarett: Zur politischen Kultur des Konflikts um islamische Symbole, Weinheim/München 2006; Jörg Hüttermann, Moscheekonflikte im Figurationsprozess der Einwanderungsgesellschaft: Eine soziologische Analyse, in: Marianne Krüger-Potratz and Werner Schiffauer (eds.), Migrationsreport 2010: Fakten - Analysen - Perspektiven, Frankfurt am Main 2011, pp. 39-82; Petra Kuppinger, Mosques and Minarets: Conflict, Participation, and Visibility in German Cities, in: Anthropological Quarterly (87/3), 2014, pp. 793-818; Thomas Schmitt, Moscheen in Deutschland: Konflikte um ihre Errichtung und Nutzung, Flensburg 2003; Uwe Gerrens, Der Islam sucht seinen Platz: Der Moscheebaukonflikt in Köln, in: Klaus Spenlen (ed.), Gehört der Islam zu Deutschland? Fakten und Analysen zu einem Meinungsstreit, Düsseldorf 2013, pp. 335-368; Christoph Hohage, Moschee-Konflikte: Wie überzeugungsbasierte Koalitionen lokale Integrationspolitik bestimmen, Wiesbaden 2013; Stefano Allievi, Conflicts over Mosques in Europe: Policy Issues and Trends, London 2009.

¹⁹ Ceylan, *ibid.*, pp. 186-188.

²⁰ Ossama Hegazy, Towards a German Mosque: Rethinking the Mosque's Meaning in Germany by Applying Socio-Semiotics, in: Erkan Toguslu (ed.), Everyday Life Practices of Muslims in Europe, Leuven 2015, pp. 193-214, here: pp. 200-205.

²¹ Thomas Schmitt, Moschee-Konflikte und deutsche Gesellschaft, in: Dirk Halm and Hendrik Meyer (eds.), Islam und die deutsche Gesellschaft, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 145-166, here: p. 155.

²² Kim de Wildt, Martin Radermacher, Volkhard Krech, Beate Löffler and

Table 1
Transformation categories that were established for the research project “Sakralität im Wandel” (SaWa)= “Transformations of Sacredness: Religious Architecture in Urban Space in 21st Century Germany” at the Ruhr University Bochum and TU Dortmund University. © The author/collaborators of SaWa

Church Transformation: The Case of St. John Baptist in Altenessen

To gain a deeper understanding of transformation processes, the stakeholders involved, their interactions, the meanings that are attributed to religious architecture, and the dominant discourses that play a role in such processes, I studied one specific case in detail. This is the case of the Roman-Catholic church St. John Baptist that has been recently sold and currently threatens to be demolished (fig. 1, 2). This church, which is located in the district Altenessen of the Ruhr town Essen, is still in liturgical use. It has drawn substantial media attention and notoriety on a local scale.

Besides analyzing the media output concerning this transformation process, I attended one parish meeting and conducted two interviews: One interview with two opponents and one interview with a proponent of the sale and demolition of this church building.²⁷ My objectives were the following: to identify the proponents and opponents of sale and demolition of the church, to describe the interactions between the stakeholders, to gain more insight in the background situation that led to this transformation process, to gain insight in the arguments of both parties involved, and to analyze power discourses, such as forms of resistance.

Wolfgang Sonne, Transformations of "Sacredness in Stone". Religious Architecture in Urban Space in 21st Century Germany - New Perspectives in the Study of Religious Architecture, in: Religions (10/602), (2019).

²³ The former synagogue in Wohra (Hesse) which has been translocated in 1995 to Giessen (Hesse), and the former synagogue in Bodenfelde (Lower Saxony) which has been translocated in 2008 to Göttingen (Lower Saxony).

²⁴ Katrin Kessler and Ulrich Knufinke, Eine Synagoge wird abgerissen. On the destruction of the synagogue in Osterholz Scharmbeck, Germany, in: bet tfila.org/info. Informationen der Bet Tfila Forschungsstelle für jüdische Architektur in Europa 1, Braunschweig 2005, p. 7. Furthermore, the preceding synagogue in Kassel which has been demolished in the 1990s has been constructed in the 1960s has been demolished in the 1990s in favor of the new synagogue designed by Alfred Jacoby: Klei, *ibid.*, p. 59, fn. 90.

Fig. 1 and 2
St. John Baptist, Altenessen.
© The author



1



2

Background Situation

The case of the Roman-Catholic church St. John Baptist, a neo-gothic church²⁸ which has been consecrated in 1862, came to my attention when I, during an internet search on church demolition in March of 2019, stumbled upon the website of the association “Rettet St. Johann” (“Rescue St. John”).²⁹

This case was particularly interesting, since the transformation process was still in full swing and the outcome uncertain. This provided me with the unique opportunity to gain more insight in the way in which such a process takes place. I saw on the website of the association that a meeting between the diverse stakeholders, consisting of community members, members of the diocese and the church council, was planned to take place in only two days. I enquired with my contact person, one of the initiators of the association, and he told me, since this was a public meeting, open to attend for everyone who was interested, that I was welcome to observe the event. Before I will address this observation, I will first give a chronological overview of the situation.

On the basis of an analysis of media output (newspapers, blogs, Instagram posts, and a brochure³⁰), I was able to reconstruct the process that started in 2017 and is developing up-to-date. In 2017 the parish proposed a plan³¹ for the future of their parish, also named St. John Baptist, which consists of four church buildings. In this plan, all of the churches were assessed on assignment of the diocese by the architecture firm Schröder Architekten in Essen. The maintenance costs of all four churches were estimated. The assessment of St. John showed that after the renovation in 2006 the overall condition was considered very good.

Given the economic situation of the diocese, it would only be possible to maintain one church building in 2030 and this church, the parish wished, should be St. John for several reasons; such as having the most seats, the centrality of the location, the parking facilities, a usable foyer and other rooms, the ability to use the churchyard for festivities, and the visibility in the center of the district.³² The document issued by the parish council reads: “The parish church St. John Baptist should be creatively optimized by all members of the community together. Sacred or artistic artifacts from the other churches can be incorporated there. Collectively, a new parish church should arise. (...) Our main objective is to prevent the ‘painful’ loss of church buildings through this proposal with realistic opportunities.”³³ The bishop ratified this proposal on May 24, 2018.³⁴

Shortly thereafter, and this is the turning point of the story, the local hospital operator Contilia GmbH proposed the diocese to buy and demolish the church in order to build a new hospital at the location of the church. The diocese and church council were in favor of selling St. John. A new church within this new hospital should substitute St. John. This construction within the hospital was presented as a full-fledged church for the

²⁵ Two reconsecrated synagogues are situated in Berlin (one was reconsecrated in 1990 and one in 2014), one in Mainz-Weisenau (Rhineland-Palatinate) (reconsecration: 1996), one in Michelstadt (Hamburg) (reconsecration: 2005), one in Leipzig (Sachsony) (reconsecrated: 1993), and one in Mühlhausen (Thuringia) (reconsecration: 1998).

²⁶ Alfred Jacoby, Synagoge und Gemeindezentrum 1995, in: Stiftung Baukultur Rheinland-Pfalz (ed.), Gebauter Aufbruch: Neue Synagogen in Deutschland, Regensburg 2010, pp. 63-66 (Aachen); Alfred Jacoby, Synagoge und Gemeindezentrum 2002, in: *ibid.*, pp. 85-87 (Chemnitz); Alfred Jacoby, Neue Synagoge Bremer Strasse 2000, in: *ibid.*, pp. 106-109 (Kassel); Alfred Jacoby, Synagoge und Gemeindezentrum 2010, in: *ibid.*, pp. 137-139 (Speyer); Ulrich Knufinke, Zur Geschichte der Synagogen in Deutschland, in: *ibid.*, pp. 42-43 (Darmstadt 1988); Berger and Gordon, *ibid.*, p. 292 (Heidelberg 1994); on Alfred Jacoby, see also: Ulrich Knufinke, *ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁷ Proponents and opponents of sale and demolition are hereafter referred to as “opponents” and “proponents”.

²⁸ St. John Baptist was financed by a member of the church council, Johannes Lindemann, and the construction plan was made by the municipal architect Carl Wilhelm Theodor Freyse (1815-1881). The foundation stone was laid on the 15th of August 1860. The building was extended in the years 1872, and again in 1892-1901. During World War II it was severely damaged. Between 1947-1949 the church was rebuilt by the Essener architect Heinrich Böll: Michael Maas and Wladislaus Przybilla, 125 Jahre St. Johann Essen-Altenessen, Essen 1987, pp. 8, 12, 20, 29, 32; Andreas Koerner, Baumeister Freyse, in: Borbecker Beiträge: Mitgliederbrief des Kultur-Historischen Vereins e.V. (1), 1994, pp. 3-8, here: p. 3; Heinz Dohmen and Eckhard Sons, Kirchen, Kapellen, Synagogen in Essen, Essen 1998, pp. 201-202. Most of the church windows are designed by the artist Margarethe Keith and were constructed between 1990 and 1992: Forschungsstelle Glasmalerei des 20. Jahrhunderts e.V.: <http://www.glasmalerei-ev.net/pages/b1032/b1032.shtml>; <http://www.margarethe-keith.de/Ausstellungen/ausstellungen.html>, accessed: 14 June 2019; Dohmen and Sons, *ibid.*, p. 202. In 2006 the church has been renovated: Katholische Pfarrgemeinde St. Johann Baptist, (eds.), Pfarreientwicklungs-



3

Fig. 3

St. John Baptist, Altenessen, banner at the churchyard, "Rescue the church, stop the sale". © The author



4

Fig. 4

St. John Baptist, Altenessen, banner "St. John must stay! Parents, children, grandchildren pray here... Rescue St. John!" © The author

parish members and not just as a hospital chapel. In 2019 the initiative "Rettet St. John" started and later on became an association („Rettet St. Johann – Verein der Freunde und Förderer der katholischen Kirche St. Johann Baptist e.V.“). The members of this association took action against the proposed sale and demolition of the church by means of demonstrations, legal efforts, and social media presence (fig. 3, 4).³⁵

Observation of the Parish Meeting

I attended the open meeting of the parish council and the representatives of the diocese on the proposed sale of St. John on May 16, 2019. In the circle of proponents there were two lawyers of the diocese, one of them presented numbers during a slideshow within which the outcomes of two rounds of negotiations with Contillia, the hospital operator, were shown.

prozess in St. Johann Baptist, Essen-Altenessen 2017-2030, December 2017, pp. 25-26.

²⁹ <https://www.rettet-st-johann.de>, accessed: 14 June 2019.

³⁰ Bistum Essen and Contillia GmbH (eds.), Zukunft im Essener Norden: Informationen zum Krankenhaus-Projekt in Altenessen, March 2019, brochure.

³¹ Katholische Pfarrgemeinde St. Johann Baptist, *ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Because of the small size of the projection screen and also because of the speed with which it was presented it was impossible to see the numbers clearly and get an accurate idea of the actual outcome of the negotiations. During the meeting, the opponents framed the church building as valuable. This value was defined in terms of economic value: “You give a lot of money away. It is worth more!“, but also in terms of emotional value: “Particularly in St. John there are many young people, young families; I feel at home there.“ Interestingly enough, the opponents did not present arguments concerning the architectural or art historical significance of the church.

The proponents framed St. John as already sold: they did not discuss the current church building at all, but they underscored the benefits of the proposed new church inside the new hospital as a substitute for St. John: “You will get a brand-new, modern church.” This new “church” is described in the brochure as:

(...) a church for the community, as well as a sacristy, an office and rooms for shared use by groups, committees and for events. The church will be smaller as the previous place of worship St. John Baptist, but significantly bigger as usual hospital chapels. The church will explicitly be at the exposal for not only patients, staff members and visitors of the clinic, but for the community of the faithful as well. Therefore they will get their own entrance, (...) just near the entrance of the new clinic.³⁴

Overall, two opposing and distrusting fronts shaped the meeting. The opponents expressed their opinion in sentences like: “Why is it so hard to utter a word of comfort?”, and „There is a breach of trust. These cracks will never heal!“ The discourse was very emotional. This was also the case with regard to the proponents who complained: „I never experienced such severe accusations!“, and “That you treat our volunteers in this manner!” The proponents also seemed to use psychological pressure: “How will this district manage without a hospital?”, although the opponents explicitly stated that they were not against the building of a new hospital but merely against the demolition of St. John. The opponents brought forth alternative building plots to which a proponent responded in the following manner: “The evaluation has shown that alternatives are impossible to realize.” One person asked who was actually responsible for this evaluation that showed the impossibility of the alternatives. During the meeting, this question remained unanswered.

Interviews

To gain more insight in the arguments of both the proponents and the opponents, I conducted interviews with representatives of both sides. I conducted the first interview with a married couple who opposed the sale of the church on May 20, 2019 in a parish room in St. John. Both are members of the association “Rescue St. John”. I will refer to them as “M”

³⁴ The Bishop writes in this letter: „Together with the responsible departments in the Episcopal Ordinariate I can confirm a solid concept.“

³⁵ E.g. Instagram: #rettetunserekirche #stjohannbleibt #kirche #altenessen #christeninessen #rettetstjohann #klinikessennord #contilia #whatwould-jesusdo #save_st_johann #church #catholic #bistumessen #kirchein-deutschland #community #catholicism #jesus #judas #help #treason, https://www.instagram.com/rettet_st_johann/p/BqUTdo4BaK9, accessed: 27 June 2019. Because of the wealth of information provided on the website of the association and the limited space here, I will restrict my focus on some preliminary findings on the basis of my observation during the parish meeting.

³⁶ Bistum Essen and Contilia GmbH (eds.), *ibid.*, brochure, p. 2.

(male) and “F” (female). A second interview with a church official who favored selling the church took place on July 2, 2019 in a church office at the center of Essen city. I will refer to him as “C” (church official). I will refer to myself as “K”.³⁷

In the following part I will highlight some themes I discerned in both interviews to illustrate the arguments employed pro and contra sale and demolition, the way in which the conflict is perceived by both sides, and the meanings that are attributed to this church building.

Interview 1: Opponents

In the afternoon I met the couple at the church yard and they first showed me the liturgical space, the foyer, the library, some of the offices within the church and gave me the opportunity to take photos, before we sat down in one of the group rooms for the interview.

F said that she has known the church for all of her life and that her own mother was already an active church member there. She has been baptized in St. John, the couple has been married there, their children did their first Holy Communion there, and the couple have always been active church volunteers. M added that their children made friends there because of an active community life, and that their neighbors are church members as well.

Their opposition is not an opposition against a new hospital, they stated:

M: (...) we always said, the initiative and nowadays the association, we are not against the hospital. (...) the hospital that is here now, is extremely old and is in need of an overhaul, and the Essen hospital landscape must certainly be rearranged. But our criticism always went in the direction: Why is it necessary that the church has to move? And here we have proposed alternatives so that the church can be preserved (...).

The couple related their opposition to the proposed sale and demolition of the church to several factors: such as the *centrality of the church*, and, interestingly enough, the building of a *new big mosque* in the proximity of the church, thus relating it to *religious identity*:

M: (...) well, a very, very big mosque, bee-line 500 meters, has been erected here.

F: This should not be misunderstood: I really don't have a problem with people of a different faith. I work along migrants and I work along Muslims, that is not the problem, but nevertheless, ... one feels somewhat driven into a corner.

The fact that the church building is one out of three distinctive *landmarks* in the district, besides the protestant church which has been listed as a

³⁷ I conducted both interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. I made notes during the interviews and recorded them with a digital voice recorder. All interviews were conducted in German and all translations into English are mine. In order to enhance the readability of the interviews I omitted hesitation markers and smoothed out the language. I want to thank project assistant Dunja Sharbat Dar for transcribing both interviews.

monument and the Karl colliery, is also a reason for the opponents' efforts to preserve it. They furthermore highlighted that the church stands in close proximity to the protestant church building, thus relating it once again to *religious identity*. M explained that the district finds itself in a social-cultural transformation process, and that it has been portrayed in the media as a district with many problems:

M: And that would perhaps express itself negatively at the whole cultural context here in this district, when one erases such a big feature.

Another aspect addressed is the way in which the *communication* with the church officials is perceived as top-down, as well as the way in which secular institutions deal with this situation; distant and disinterested, according to the couple. This dimension is characterized by *distrust*:

F: In addition, there is also the way in which this whole problem with the proposed sale has been communicated to the community. The church council has, actually everything had already been decided, before anyone of the parish, of the common people (...) had heard of it. (...) The paperwork lay so-to-say ready in the desk drawer of the diocese. (...) this is entirely my very personal opinion: The bishop lets us do the work. We should, the believers should think for themselves and feel supported, he does not have to decide himself which church will be doomed. (...) And if it doesn't suit him, then he opens the drawer and says: 'Here, that is the solution that I would like to have.' I have been pretty angry from the onset towards this whole thing. (...) M: Everything is communicated downwards by the diocese with the words of the bishop to the church council: 'The bishop expects that consent to the sale will be decided in the church council.'

F: We only know that from hearsay.

M: We only know that from hearsay, but this always resonates, and we also know that the diocese of Essen has to get rid of 160 or 170 churches because the financial situation is so dire in the diocese of Essen, that you cannot preserve all of these churches. And, in my opinion, this came in so handy for the bishop, that the hospital has made this request now and also said: 'we'll build a new church for you in the hospital', that he was glad to get rid of a church in this manner, regardless of what the church looks like. He would have sold his cathedral, I believe. (M laughs). (...)

M: Politics and administration are in no way helping the situation or try to restore some peace upfront – no, they're letting things all come to extremes here, and they're not trying to intervene anywhere (...)

M: And they do not want to interfere in the inner affairs of the Church (...)

F: And they (the church officials, KdW) always say that everything has been verified (...) ‘Of course that has been checked’. (...) Then lay it out open on the table. I do not believe it.

This *distrust* came explicitly to the fore with regard to the way in which the diocese, according to the opponents, employed canon law:

M: I have recently learned that there is this canon law and ...

F: That, the church law blew me away.

M: That’s what I did not even realize before to this extent, that the church has its own law and is not subjected to normal civil justice.

F: Which impact this has. I mean, as a lay person, when do you have to deal with this? You might have heard something about it in religious education at some point, but that did not really interest you. And that really blew me away, that such a bishop can say that, or even judge for himself whether he did something wrong or not.

But also within the church community there are *two opposing fronts*. The couple explained that the current parish of St. John used to consist of four parishes which have been fused into one, although in the hearts and minds of the respective church communities they are still separate. Within this new community there are also people in favor of the sale and demolition and F expressed their views as she experienced them:

F: ‘We’re going to have a great church and whether or not we will go here or go there – and imagine now what will be the case in 20 years. Then the church will be much, much too big.’ – It is likely that it will be, if I am also completely honest, but at some point, if you’re in there, you’ll become, too, a person who sticks rigidly to their principles (‘Prinzipienreiter’).

Questions I asked about how they feel about the future prospect of using the new church and their *feelings* in relation to the current church were answered as follows:

F: (...) I think a hospital is a hospital and I think it’s good if there’s a nice chapel in there, where you can go as a patient or go with your family, but for a Sunday service, or for a baptism, when my grandchild is baptized, to have to go to a hospital to go to church. I mean, there will be a separate entrance to this church space, (...) I find this really difficult. Although I can also imagine that this room can certainly be designed beautifully, I do not want to ...

M: Question that?

F: Question that. I am a bit torn, how I would handle it when it (the sale contract, KdW) is really signed. If I would say: ‘Up yours. Do your parish council without me, since you seem to do

whatever you want anyway.’ Or if I still want to be involved in some way or the other. I’m still a bit ambivalent because, yes, probably because I am from a too Catholic family. (laughs)

K: Yes. And this may be a bit mean, but if you imagine that this building will be demolished?

M: Yes, there’s a lot of lifeblood related to it, even to me there’s a lot of lifeblood, if the building would really ...

F: Well, I know one thing: I will not attend the last service that will be celebrated there.

M: Me neither, no.

Interview 2: Proponent

C, a church official, explained that his relation to this church building is rather distant since he did not grow up there, is not at home there and only occasionally conducts church services there. He explained the chronological background situation from his perspective to me in detail and addressed the fact that it is important to have a hospital in this district:

C: (...) it’s not just that this one hospital suddenly said: ‘We want to build a bigger hospital.’ But this is an important infrastructural project in the north of Essen, that there is a hospital for the people there – I believe, 100,000 to 120,000 people who would, without these hospitals, have no in-patient medical care. And the Contilia, as a hospital operator who belongs to the Catholic family, is willing to build this hospital there.

C is sympathetic to the *feelings and emotions* of the people who resist the sale and demolition of the church, people who are active church members. Especially since this new situation came up shortly after the positive response of the diocese to the plans to preserve St. John, and also because he has understanding for those people who grew up with this church and are at home there:

C: (...) it is incredibly hard to part with such a building and even to imagine that a church building is given up. And that rejection, as well as, yes anger and sadness and pain are expressed, I can understand that really well.

C employs *theological arguments* to justify the church institutional stance:

C: But here we have the situation that a church is given up, so that something new can arise; both a new church and a hospital. And I have, well, we have always tried to make clear, that a hospital is also a place of the church; of lived caritas because caring for the sick is a deeply Christian concern, Christian ministry. And this hospital is not just any hospital, it’s a hospital built by a hospital operator who belongs to the Christian

Catholic family. And within this hospital there will be a church, a parish church for the parish of St. John. Of course, this will be completely different than the current church, but I have also regarded this as an opportunity, up to this day, that there can arise a modern church which is also future-oriented. Which is also, for the people of this and future generations, an attractive church building. And helps us to celebrate the liturgy and live faith as it is fitting in our time.

Later on during the interview C came back to this point and he elaborated:

C: (...) for the celebration of the liturgy according to the second Vatican council, this church has never been built for that purpose. This church is not so well suited for this purpose as a church that could be built nowadays. And therein lies for me an opportunity. (...) So, with the aid of a theologian and a liturgical scholar or a liturgically informed person, this new church should be designed and then also be built.

The *communication* with the opponents proved difficult for the proponents and was characterized by strong *negative feelings* and *conflict*. C speaks about a parish meeting he experienced as traumatic:

C: (...) and the parish assembly started with a shrill whistle-concert. So that the people who came to stand up for the church and protect the church abused the church in such a manner that was inconceivable to me. ... one must always remember, that it is a place of worship, a holy place where we meet, a sacred place – and people have treated this place as a football field or any arbitrary room. (...) And the people who tried to mediate have been booed and shouted at and howled down, have been badly abused. I experienced the initiative (the initiative “Rescue St. John”, KdW) so ..., that there was hardly any willingness to talk. The initiative has always signaled willingness to talk, but has always demanded conditions under which they were willing to talk with me or with the church council and the representatives of the diocese. And if the conditions were not met, there was no conversation (...) It was clear that this (a public discussion, KdW) was no longer possible in the church because people have shown that they cannot and do not want to behave in the church, and that the church is not a suitable place for such a parish meeting.

During the interview C readdressed the difficulty in the *communication process* and related this to a *theological stance*, that in his opinion, should take into account a more global view instead of a local view. It is implied that the opponents are not conscious enough of this church-wide perspective and hang on too much to the past:

C: I said that right from the start, that the process, from the start, has been very unfortunate. (...) in such processes I expect better communication. That just went wrong, and what makes me really very pensive in the whole argument and depresses me is that the view on the bigger picture is just very, very difficult to convey. (...) But something else has also been difficult to get across, namely, the overall situation of the Church in which we find ourselves, and also the prospect we are moving towards. (...) I can understand that people are hanging on to their space, to their church building, and also to their church community, and at the same time we are experiencing that this way of thinking – and not only this way of thinking, but also this form of community life – is increasingly in dissolution. We experience in many places, how the church develops in a new way. And new initiatives start and people look for new forms of faith and community life. And there, in this situation in Altenessen – and I experience that in many other places in the diocese as well – people hold on to the past and want to bring as much as possible from the past into the present (...) But that's not just a problem in Altenessen, that's really a church-wide problem that we are experiencing on all levels, that when the future gets uncertain many will yearn for what was in the past in the hope that that offers security (...).

With regard to the future C thought it would be difficult to reestablish a sense of normalcy and appease the *conflicting parties*:

C: And that's why I think it's important, also in the near future, to take steps towards each other, and at the same time I see that this is very difficult because we have this situation now, that actually two groups stand opposite each other. And the opponents from the initiative St. John (...) they will continue to fight for their cause. And there are different aims and that's going to be hard, to bring that together.

C addressed the proposed alternatives of the initiative and stated that they have been tested on viability:

C: (...) the initiative always claims that there are alternatives that would make it possible for the church to be preserved and still be able to build a hospital. (...) But these are no alternatives. These alternatives have been tested and it does not work."

K: Who has tested them?

D: (...) the Contilia – they have to check that because the Contilia will be the builder. And then there was another assessment and these things were checked; it's about a plot that the initiative once suggested, an old industrial wasteland nearby where the hospital should be built, but that's not yet developed. And there are quite different things planned here at that site, that is a building plot which is not available.

I discerned three main themes throughout the interviews. In the next table the different positions of opponents and proponents in relation to the church transformation are contrasted (table 2). The three main themes I discerned are placed in opposition in order to highlight how the conflicting arguments, forms of communication, and feelings and emotions are employed and perceived.

Themes		Opponents	Proponent
Arguments pro and contra sale and demolition	Value: Personal attachment	Strong emotional connection to the church building	Distant connection to the church building
	Value: Urban position	Appreciation of the centrality and landmark function in the district	Suitability of the infrastructure (or location) for a new hospital
	Value: Religion	Religious identification with/through architectural manifestation of Catholic faith, also vis-a-vis other denominations nearby: Islam (mosque), Protestantism (old church)	Hospital as an expression of catholic identity (caritas). The new church would be more suitable for celebrating the liturgy after Vat II. A church building is a sacred, holy space
Communication		Distrust; perceived as top down, hierarchical	Perceived as abusive; Opponents perceived as hardly willing to engage in a dialogue, as clinging to the past
Feelings and emotions		Angry. "Lifeblood": strong emotional attachment to the church building	Understanding towards opponents. Traumatic. Feeling abused and treated badly

Table 2
Main themes of the conducted interviews. © The author

Aftermath

At the end of May 2019, between the two interviews, the purchase contract between the church council and Contilia had been signed. Nevertheless, the opposition continued. A blog posted on May 29 on the "Rescue St. John" website called for a strike: "Call for a strike: All volunteers are resting in June! It's enough – you should not treat your voters in this manner! What are shepherds without sheep? Out of work, bread and destitute!"

A blog posted on June 7 reflected on the strike, and addressed the boycott of the annual parish celebration, which is normally the highlight of the year for the parish:

But the last year has brought forth deep cleavages, anger, despair and bitterness in the parish. No one could and can imagine celebrating a carefree parish feast in these circumstances. So while many were very sad that the strike included the parish

feast, everyone knew that had to be. Many parishioners found it hard to renounce their beloved volunteer work or church attendance, but it was a valuable experience to once again reiterate what we all will soon be missing. But what the sale-deciders have approvingly accepted.

In this blog, statements of some of the people on strike, on how they actually experienced this strike, have been published. Here I will show one of the statements that is exemplary for most of the responses on the blog:

I have been lied to. I and my trust have been abused. (...) My church has been given away, we parishioners have been betrayed and even held for stupid. (...) Pastorally, I was left completely on my own during this time. And by whom? Ironically, by the same institution with her commandments that preach the observance of these basic values every Sunday from the altars and which I have supported with all my volunteer work, and also financially (...). What the worldly decision makers and anyone who has let themselves be instrumentalized by them – can, thank god, never take away from me is my belief in God.

The story took yet another interesting turn when the broadcasting agency Radio Essen on November 4, 2019 and the association itself reported that the association recovered a 150-year-old document; the deed of donation, in the archive of the diocese. This deed stipulates that the founder of the church, Johannes Lindemann, must have his eternal resting place there. Lindemann stipulated this as a condition for his donation of the church plot and the church building itself to the Catholic community of Altenessen. The association wants to use these facts as arguments to undo the sale of St. John and states that they will take further legal action on this basis.³⁸

Analysis: Analyzing the Case of St. John as a “Dividing Practice”

Power struggles are constitutive of this transformation process and the essay “The Subject and Power”³⁹ by the French philosopher Michel Foucault is my main inspiration for the analysis of the (conflicted) case of St. John. Foucault studied the objectivizing of the subject in what he names “dividing practices”. This is a division either within the subject or a division between the subject and others. In the case of St. John it is striking that the proposed sale and demolition of the church seems somewhat of a schoolbook example of a “dividing practice”: A struggle, and the resistance against power, which causes a division between two groups who employ diverse actions, and actions upon actions, such as strikes, legal efforts, publishing a brochure, organizing meetings and debates, etc. for the benefit of either the sale of this church building, or its preservation.⁴⁰

Foucault proposes to make the forms of resistance against power the starting point for an analysis of power struggles. The opposition against power

³⁸ Kampf um Kirche St. Johann Baptist in Essen geht weiter: <https://www.radioessen.de/artikel/kampf-um-kirche-st-johann-baptist-in-essen-geht-weiter-390131.html>, 4 November 2019, accessed 6 November 2019; <https://www.rettet-st-johann.de>, accessed 2 December 2019.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power, in: Critical Inquiry (8/4), Chicago 1982, pp. 777-795.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *ibid.*, pp. 777-778.

is more than an anti-authority struggle, according to Foucault. In total, Foucault suggests six focal points on how to characterize these struggles. The first three are 1. “transversal”: not limited to one country, 2. they focus on the effects of power, and 3. they are “immediate”: people critique those forms of power that are closest to them and they do not expect a solution to the problem in the immediate future.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 780.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 781.

Immediacy

In the case of St. John, the opposition is so intense, since the sale and demolition of the church building affects the opponents immediately. Not only a specific landmark within their familiar neighborhood would disappear, but also a place which is an expression of their history, and of their religious, in this case Roman-Catholic, identity. Their individuality as well as their community is immediately affected by the decision to sell and demolish St. John. The opponents do not seem naive about the possibility of “winning” this conflict, neither in the immediate, nor in the distant future. They wish not to submit, not even after the purchase contract has been signed. Their resistance has to some extent become a matter of principle: It is the expression of their need to let their individual voices be heard and not to surrender without a fight. They communicate their individual and communal efforts in a lot of ways that modern digital culture provides us with: a blog, Facebook, Instagram, etc.

Individuality and Community

The following three points (points 4 to 6) of Foucault’s characterization of political struggles are more specific:

4. They are struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. (...) ⁴²

In this case the opponents have a different perspective on the matter than the proponents and are able to fight by all means possible for their cause. Both sides state that they regret the rift in the community, but their opposing views, fueled by their different perspectives on the matter, reinforces their right to have different takes on the case. The institutional church ties the identity of the individual believer to a certain Roman-Catholic stance which prescribes, for instance, a certain demeanor in a church building. Here I refer to the critique the church official had on the way certain people behaved during the church assembly in St. John. The differing theological views of the church official and the opponents may also be understood against the background of individuality and identity.

Knowledge

Foucault continues with:

5. They are an opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people. (...) ⁴³

Before this conflict, the opponents I interviewed were not aware that such a thing as canon law even exists. In the way they perceive it, church law is a kind of private law which a bishop can use to his own advantage. Leaving aside what canon law actually is, and how it functions, the opponents lacked knowledge and competence in this matter in order to effectively counteract against it. Another aspect in this regard is the way in which evaluations of alternatives proposed by the opponents were mystified. During the parish meeting as well as during my interview with the church official it remained unclear who tested the alternatives, how they were tested and why they were deemed inviable, since no names were mentioned and no reports were shown.

Who are we?

Foucault concludes:

6. Finally, all these present struggles revolve around the question: Who are we? They are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition which determines who one is. To sum up, the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much “such or such” an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power. ⁴⁴

In the Altenessener situation, the question “who are we?” may be answered thus: ‘We’ in this case are two opposing fronts with opposing aims, who argue on different levels, and whereby one group is invested more emotionally. Noteworthy and also illustrative is the fact that the church official stated that the opponents did not behave appropriately in a space he considered sacred. This conception of sacredness seems to be an abstract conception of sacredness, which is probably linked to the act of church consecration, ⁴⁵ and not so much to this specific building, since the church official proposes the sale and demolition of this building. The opponents, in his opinion not behaving in the respectful manner one should in such a sacred place, behave as such out of love for this space. The contrast in arguments and feelings could not be bigger.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 781.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 781.

⁴⁵ De Wildt and Plum, *ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

Foucault discerns three kinds of struggles: either against domination (e.g. religious domination), against exploitation, or “against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission).”⁴⁶ Foucault exemplifies this with the historical phenomenon of the Reformation, which he considers as a subjectivity crisis that revolts against religious and moral power, and the need of people to take directly part in “spiritual life, in the work of salvation, in the truth which lies in the Book – all that was a struggle for a new subjectivity.”⁴⁷ The time of the Reformation, a long gone by era, almost seemed to resurface in Altenessen. The opponents were not willing to subordinate themselves to the institutional church. Although the Roman-Catholic church is hierarchical in nature, opposition to the religious domination within this institution, as once was the case during the Reformation, and calls for a more egalitarian structure within the Roman-Catholic church are nothing new. The reforms of Vatican II, such as liturgical renewals and more recognition for the role of the laity, are for a lot of active church members not enough anymore and even “common” churchgoers express their individual need to fight against what they perceive as hierarchical oppression.⁴⁸

The Exercise of Power

In the second part of his essay Foucault examines the questions: By what means is power exercised? and: What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?⁴⁹ Exercising power “consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome”⁵⁰ and in “government”: directing people in their way of conduct, thus implying the freedom of those people to act and not to submit.⁵¹ Foucault states that the best way to analyze power relations is by analyzing institutions.⁵² A last aspect which Foucault addresses is that of strategy. He discerns three elements here: 1.) the designation of the means to an end, 2.) the way in which one seeks to gain the upper hand, and 3.) the way in which the opponent is deprived of his means to combat and tempted to give up the struggle.⁵³

In the case of St. John, it is made clear by the officials of the diocese what the playing rules are: e.g. how one should behave in a sacred space or that this space, as a consequence of inappropriate behavior, will not be available for debates anymore. Those in power obviously control this space. The proponent in the interview criticized the unwillingness of the opponents to communicate, later correcting himself by stating that they were willing to communicate, be it on their own terms: The opponents have a certain amount of freedom to act and express their wish not to submit to power by several kinds of power resisting actions. Nevertheless, this case seems to be a classic power struggle which is characterized by the fact that s/he who sets and implements the rules has the upper hand. The difficulty in the whole communication process between both parties is

⁴⁶ Foucault, *ibid.*, p. 781.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 782.

⁴⁸ One of the latest initiatives being Maria 2.0, an initiative which originated in the city of Münster and protests against sexual abuse in the Church and the exclusion of women to positions that matter in the Church.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 785-786.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 789.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 790.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 790.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 793-795.

enhanced by a lack of information, e.g. knowledge of church law, unclear assessment of the alternatives, etc. In this sense the opponents have a difficult situation combating against the proponents who are more knowledgeable or informed in certain matters. Furthermore, they fight against an institution which has its own lawyers and a whole apparatus at their disposal. Although the opponents have organized themselves in an association, they still are working on a voluntary basis for their cause and do not have a complete institution with accompanying infrastructure at hand. Interestingly enough, both sides regret the rift in the parish community and oppose it, although the communication between both parties only has evolved into a bigger rift.

Conclusions: A Continuing Need for Sacred Spaces

On the basis of the research thus far, some tentative conclusions will be drawn here. Concerning synagogues, it can indeed be concluded that since the 1990s, due to factors such as the migration of Jewish people to Germany, the architectural landscape of Germany is in a transformation process: Not only have new synagogues been built and other buildings been transformed into synagogues, thereby making Jewish life visually present, but this visual presence is often expressed by forms that are architecturally spectacular and seem to testify to a renewed Jewish assertiveness. This presence seems to be increasingly characterized by a sense of belonging, or in the words of the architect Salomon Korn: He who builds a house wants to stay.⁵⁴ The number of chapels and churches which have been converted into synagogues is relatively substantial. Most institutional churches prohibit, on the basis of their respective canon law, the use of their church buildings by most other religious communities, such as Muslim communities, whereas the conversion of churches into synagogues is usually supported. Noteworthy is that besides the main transformation categories such as new and reused buildings, also categories such as the categories of translocation and reconsecration are introduced as analytical categories in our investigation that do more justice to the complexity and plurality of the contemporary religious architectural landscape in Germany.

Despite a decline in churchgoing, people seem to be extremely emotionally invested with regard to their church buildings. When it comes to closure, reuse or demolition of churches, or the building of new representative mosques, this emotionality comes, be it often in the form of conflicts, explicitly to the fore.⁵⁵ The case of St. John in Altenessen is no exception and shows that, for the stakeholders involved, more is at stake than the need for a place of worship or the art historical or architectural appreciation of a century-old structure. The emotional attachment to a church building can take on such an intense form that a community is divided to its core and people feel they have no other option than to leave the very institution they were fighting for.

⁵⁴ Salomon Korn, *Wer ein Haus baut, will bleiben*. Ansprache anlässlich der Eröffnung des Jüdischen Gemeindezentrums in Frankfurt am Main am 14. September 1986, in: Salomon Korn, *Geteilte Erinnerung. Beiträge zur "deutsch-jüdischen" Gegenwart*, Berlin 1999, pp. 71-77.

⁵⁵ Oskar Verkaaik, *Het gewone en iconische van religieuze architectuur*, in: Oskar Verkaaik (ed.), *Gods huis in de steigers. Religieuze gebouwen in ontwikkeling*, Amsterdam 2017, pp. 7-24, here: pp. 13-15.

To sum up: Besides meeting religious, cultural, and social needs, religious buildings also respond to emotional needs, whether these needs are religiously inspired or not. Furthermore, the symbolic presence of religious buildings play a role in the way in which a society identifies itself: as a Christian society, a multireligious society, a society of individuals that wish to be recognized and heard, etc. The transformation of sacred space is not without dispute: e.g. societal conflicts concerning the presence of religious buildings, such as debates on church demolition and church reuse, the height of minarets and the like testify to the way in which (national and/or local) identity is negotiated, expressed and even disputed and how this affects people. These discussed transformations show that more is at stake here than the mere right to practice a religion: the debate on how people and societies wish to identify and express themselves lies at the core of such processes.

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