

## Reuse a Sacred Space (Éveux, 9 Jan 26)

couvent Sainte-Marie de la Tourette (Eveux), Jan 09, 2026

Deadline: Dec 14, 2025

Benjamin CHAVARDES

5th International Study Day 'The spaces of the Sacred'.

The spaces of the Sacred offers a space for reflection and debate for anyone who understands sacred spaces as laboratories for architectural, urban and landscape research. This definition includes places of worship, funerary and memorial spaces, as well as the urban spaces and landscapes that surround them. Defining sacred spaces as a laboratory means considering both their design and their potential transformation.

The ambition is to study contexts as well as project experiences, theories as well as practices, legacies, and mutations as well as orientations and prospects. In a few words, to build knowledge and culture, to learn, experiment, and develop operational tools to understand the present and enrich contemporary practices. As a complement to the historical and social studies developed around these issues, this study day places the architectural, urban, and landscape project at the heart of its concerns.

The spaces of the Sacred provides an opportunity to share ongoing or completed research projects and to bring together researchers working on these issues. The event is open to students, doctoral candidates, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and anyone interested in developing interdisciplinary exchanges across institutions and borders.

### Call for papers

For this fifth edition, the study day will focus on the adaptive reuse of sacred spaces.

For several decades, numerous studies have documented the decline in religious practice and the transformations of sacred spaces. In Quebec, the work of Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset (*Quel avenir pour les églises?*, 2006) opened the way for reflection on the heritage and social implications of church closures. In Belgium, KU Leuven has carried out several research projects, including RE[CHARGING THE]CHURCH. A research-by-design approach to the adaptive reuse of religious heritage in Flanders (2017–2022). In Italy, research teams in Turin, Bologna, and Rome have conducted in-depth investigations into the contemporary reuse of churches. In France, the international conference organized at ENSAL in 2016 (*L'avenir des églises*) marked an important milestone, positioning French research within an international network. Local initiatives have further confirmed the relevance and timeliness of the topic.

These studies have provided a broad overview of the situation: the extent of closures, and the associated heritage, social, economic, and touristic challenges, as well as the diversity of national contexts. However, one gap remains: research on the architectural, urban, and landscape design

dimensions of adaptive reuse projects is still marginal. Most publications have focused on documentation, inventories, and heritage or sociological analyses, while project-based approaches—design processes, methodological tools, and architectural experiments—have received much less attention.

Yet sacred spaces offer a particularly fertile ground for research through design. Their transformation raises specific questions: how can one design within a place imbued with strong symbolic and memorial value? How can continuity and rupture, heritage and innovation, sacredness and contemporary use be reconciled? How can new architectural and urban devices be imagined—ones capable of challenging our spatial practices and cultural frameworks?

By placing architectural and urban design at the center of reflection, this study day seeks to shift the focus: from observation to action, from analysis to experimentation. It invites us to consider the adaptive reuse of sacred spaces as a design laboratory, where new methods, forms, and tools are invented—enriching both contemporary architectural thinking and practice.

## Proposed Areas of Reflection

### 1. Design Practices and Methodologies

The adaptive reuse of a sacred site calls for specific design approaches: how can architectural and urban design become a true tool for research and analysis? This axis invites discussions on the particular methodologies developed for working within spaces marked by sacredness and memory, the use of digital tools—such as photogrammetry, BIM modeling, or augmented reality—as well as participatory approaches that involve residents, users, and institutions in the making of the project.

### 2. Reimagining Interior Spaces

Transforming a sacred space always involves a reworking of its interior: spatial, symbolic, and functional reconfigurations; hybrid uses that blend sacredness, culture, housing, or public services; and dialogues between material heritage and architectural innovation. Contributions may examine these transformations and their impact on how spaces are perceived, experienced, and appropriated.

### 3. Exterior Spaces and Landscapes

Adaptive reuse extends beyond buildings themselves: it also concerns forecourts, cemeteries, gardens, and memorial sites, all of which often possess strong symbolic and urban value. This axis seeks to explore the interactions between interior and exterior spaces, the relationship between architecture and landscape, and the issues of urban regeneration and territorial integration raised by the transformation of sacred ensembles.

### 4. Architectural Experimentation and Case Studies

Concrete experiences provide valuable material for reflection: completed or speculative projects, international comparisons (Quebec, the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom, etc.), or explorations conducted within schools of architecture. The aim is to highlight innovative approaches and to question the conceptual choices, technical devices, and design methods implemented.

### 5. Contemporary Issues and Future Perspectives

Finally, the adaptive reuse of sacred spaces raises ecological, social, and political questions: sustainability and reversibility of interventions, citizen participation and governance, and the potential

of sacred spaces as drivers of architectural and urban innovation. These contributions will help situate ongoing transformations within a broader reflection on the future of territories and architectural practice.

#### Submission procedures

The official language of the study day is French, but proposals and presentations may also be given in English. Notification of the selection results will be sent by email in December 2025. Researchers wishing to contribute to this event are invited to submit their proposal – including a title, an abstract (approximately 200 words), and a short biography to [sacres@lyon.archi.fr](mailto:sacres@lyon.archi.fr) by December 14, 2025. The study day will take place in person only, at the Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette (Éveux), on Friday, January 9, 2026.

#### Scientific direction

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#### Scientific committee

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#### Information

Venue: Sainte-Marie de la Tourette Convent (Eveux)

Dates: 9 January 2025

Languages accepted: French and English

#### Organised by

Chaire SACRES

#### Contacts

[sacres@lyon.archi.fr](mailto:sacres@lyon.archi.fr)

#### Partners

École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Lyon  
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