

# Between Church and Mosque

## Transformation of an (Inter)religious Site in Hamburg

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### Timeline of the Transformation

From the Capernaum Church to the Al-Nour Mosque in Hamburg Horn

1961 Construction of the Capernaum Church

#### Church community shrinks over the years

2002 The building is deconsecrated and sold

2005 An investor buys the building

#### Several years of vacancy

2012 The Islamic Centre Al-Nour buys the building

2013 Conversion to a mosque begins

#### Transformation

today Building is actively used as a mosque

### Research Question

What has and what has not changed throughout the transformation of the building?

How have communities reacted to this?

### Hypothesis

The building is an interreligious site situated between the two religious communities.

### Arguments

1. Interreligiosity in the narrative of the agents: **mutual acceptance of perspectives**
2. Interreligiosity of the site: **in-between state of the building**

### Theoretical Framework and Methodology

**Heritage** as a tangible object of historical or cultural value passed on or inherited by a community (Harrison 2010: 10), which is comprised of four facets (Björkdahl et al. 2017: 6-10):

**S**ite is the material representation of a heritage.

**A**gents produce through narratives the meaning of the heritage as such.

**N**

**E**vents are socially and morally meaning-making performative practices.

**Data collection** concerning the heritage was conducted by fieldwork, interviews, literature and archival research.

#### "Christianity was respected during the conversion"

Former pastor of Capernaum Church, Susanne Juhl, says that during the conversion, it became apparent that **much of the church was restored respectfully** and at great expense.

### 1. Argument

Because of its architectural importance, the Hamburg Heritage Protection Office considers the building still as a church and protects it as such. This classification creates tension due to its present use as a mosque. Nevertheless, the former Christian community and the new Muslim community embrace both the building's past as a church and its present use as a mosque.

#### "We do not want to take away the church"

The chairman of the mosque, Daniel Abdin, states that the community will preserve the building according to the motto "outside church, inside mosque." They do not want to "take away" the church, but rather sustain its character.

### 2. Argument

During the conversion, some original elements of the building have been removed, others have remained unchanged or have been adjusted. New elements have also been added. Therefore, in terms of the appearance of the building, **it is difficult to understand the transformation in two separate states**.



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#### Before Conversion



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### Window Wall

"[Without the window wall] the whole building would lose its character".

For Abdin, the window wall was a central element of the church and a part of the building's character that needed to be preserved.



### Mihrāb

In addition to its directional function, the prayer niche also has a ceremonial and ritual function, making it an important hallmark of the mosque (Andrew 1999: 187).

### Balcony

Since the Islamic prayer direction from Hamburg is to the southeast, the former gallery was in the way. It has been **adjusted to match the direction of prayer**. The intarsia, which used to decorate the balustrade of the gallery, was donated to another church. Quranic calligraphy now adorns the balcony.



#### After Conversion



### Conclusion

The building has undergone profound changes. Against the background of its conversion, such changes are expected. Nevertheless, it also becomes apparent that **(1) perspectives of shared heritage** are possible. From these perspectives, the building can be considered **(2) a representation of both a mosque and a church**, even though in current practice, it is exclusively used as a mosque. These perspectives enable the building to be **(3) a place of dialogue and encounter**.