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REliHE

Transformation of Īle Church into an Acoustic Concert Hall

A Good Practice in the Adaptive Reuse of Abandoned Religious Heritage: From ruins to a vibrant cultural hub



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History and Rediscovery

- Built in the end of 17th century as a Lutheran church.
- Heavily damaged during both World Wars and forcibly liquidated by Soviet authorities in 1965.
- After 50 years of abandonment, in 2016 conductor Ints Teterovskis and the Youth Choir "BALSIS" rediscovered the ruins and organized a concert as part of the "Night of Churches".

Mission: To breathe new life into the sanctuary through acoustics and community synergy.



Description of the Reuse Practice

- **Dual Functionality:** Reborn as the "Īle Acoustic Concert Hall" while simultaneously maintaining its primary sacred function as a Lutheran church with church services, wedding ceremonies, funerals, etc..
- **Architectural Restoration Collaboration:** Masonry repairs, the installation of a new roof and installation of heated floors in collaboration with Zalenieki Technical School.
- **Interior Design Collaboration:** Created as a diploma project by 27 students from the Riga School of Arts and Media, reflecting early Classicism with Baroque and Rococo features.
- **Capacity:** Accommodates up to 200 people for cultural events.







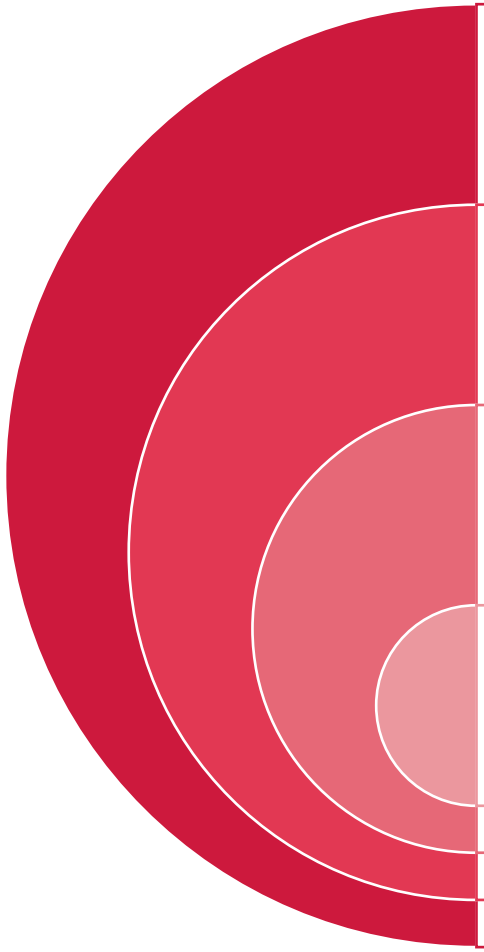








Key to Succes: a "Quadruple Helix" style collaboration



The Creative Sector: **Artists and Musicians**	• Provided the "Functional Soul" of the building, transforming a physical structure into a cultural brand that attracts visitors and justifies the investment.
Public Sector: **Dobele Municipality and State Culture Capital Foundation**	• Provided institutional legitimacy, planning support, and co-financing. Their role ensures the project aligns with regional development goals and secures long-term infrastructure stability.
The Non-Profit Sector: **Īle Church Restoration Fund**	• Acts as the project engine. Manage the day-to-day operations, lead fundraising efforts and coordinate volunteers.
Educational Institutions: **Riga School of Arts and Media, Zalenieki Technical school**	• Represents the "Learning" component. Students used the church as a living laboratory for their diploma projects, providing high-quality masonry and interior design work at a reduced cost while gaining real-world experience.

Resources and Investment

Financial Investment:

Nearly 300,000 EUR invested to date.

Public Support: 70,000 EUR support from Dobele Municipality and the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Private/Materials: 80,000 EUR in cash donations and 120,000 EUR worth of donated materials.

Human Capital: Extensive volunteer work and the "Īle Church Restoration Fund".

Evidence of Success

- Transformed an abandoned ruin into a high-profile regional cultural site that attracts visitors from across the country.
- The project ensured the survival of a architectural monument.
- Increased accessibility and attractiveness of Īle rural area.
- Regularly hosts high-quality musical performances and religious ceremonies.



Potential for Learning or Transfer

- A model for regions looking to move beyond passive conservation toward full-scale functional reuse.
- **Key Transferable Elements:**
  - Combining professional architects with vocational school students for interior restoration.
  - Cooperation between state, municipality, non-governmental organizations.
  - Prioritizing activities that ensure year-round usability.
  - Creation of a cultural hub to revitalize a rural territory rise its attractiveness.

Thank You!

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