

2018   
EUROPEAN YEAR  
OF CULTURAL  
HERITAGE  
#EuropeForCulture

 **La Sauvegarde**  
DE L'ART FRANÇAIS

 **FRH**  
Future for Religious Heritage

# Religious heritage Europe's Legacy for the Future

FRH 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference with La Sauvegarde de l'Art Français  
**PARIS/FRANCE 11-12-13 OCTOBER 2018**

Cultural, community, economic and environmental importance of Europe's religious heritage | Challenges confronting it | Role of NGOs in conservation, management, re-use and access | Examples of good practice throughout Europe | Measures for European institutions, national governments and political leaders



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**Engaging people, promoting sustainability,  
fostering protection and stimulating innovation.**

**Conference conclusions will be disseminated  
widely.**

# Religious heritage

## Europe's Legacy for the Future

Europe's religious heritage – the 500,000 buildings themselves, churches, chapels, synagogues, mosques, cathedrals, monasteries, convents: their contents, furnishings, monuments, sculptures, paintings, frescos, silver, vestments, libraries: the architects, artists & musicians they have inspired over the centuries: their record of national, local and individual history dating back well over 1,000 years – are unique to Europe's cultural identity.

**Examples are everywhere; living demonstrations, open to all, of the remarkable variety of regions, of peoples and of cultures that make up Europe.**

This exceptional patrimony is facing unprecedented threats due to changing patterns of society, worship and population.

Much is being done to adapt to a world that is increasingly secular, pluri-religious, and global.

But, despite extensive popular support, many religious buildings and their contents suffer from neglect, abandonment or destruction.

A real debate on the future of Europe's religious heritage - the lasting legacy of EYCH 2018.

## Engagement

**The key challenge: attracting a wider public.**

Subjects for debate:

### How to organise support?

Eglises Ouvertes federates 350 churches in Belgium, Luxembourg and Northern France and provides training in keeping churches open, welcoming and informative to visitors. Simple marketing techniques increased annual visitor numbers to 153 faith sites in a depressed region in North of England from 25,000 to 95,000 over four years.

### How to encourage social outreach?

Church buildings in the suburbs or city centres provide valuable but often underutilised social resource. McKinsey / NCT show 1.6 million individuals use faith buildings in the UK for non-worship work with immigrants, unemployed, young, sick and elderly.

### How to involve schools?

Understanding this heritage is key to its transmission to future generations. Churches hold much of Europe's art, but this is often little known and in a poor state of repair. A pilot 'Le Plus Grand Musée' has been developed by La Sauvegarde to involve schools in the identification, repair and promotion of selected work of art.

### How to federate volunteer effort?

All over Europe, local NGOs are being set up by determined, unpaid individuals, not always worshippers, for whom their own religious building represents an important repository of local or family history and a centre of community value. Training and funding to professionalise these associations is urgently required.





## Sustainability

### The Case for Religious Heritage

Religious heritage is of enormous:

**Cultural Value** – through its predominant share of Europe's patrimony.

**Social Value** – through its potential to provide community activity and social glue.

**Economic Value** – through visitor spending.

**Environmental Value** – through its ubiquitous presence in Europe's cities and countryside.

**These values were traditionally taken for granted.**

**Methodology is now needed to build a convincing, quantitative 'Case for Religious Heritage'.**

### Extending Use

Throughout Europe religious buildings are used for concerts, exhibitions and social outreach. In UK and Netherlands where money is tightest, some churches keep the space in the choir sacred. The rest is used for shops, cafés, post-offices, doctor's consulting rooms, garden museums.... or sold for housing or offices. Public space is lost if the whole building is closed or sold.

Subjects for debate:

**Should buildings be comfortable?**

60% of British churches now have WCs.

**Should people sleep in churches?**

The CCT proposes 'Champing' in selected churches.

In mediaeval times St Sernin in Toulouse reserved the South transept for pilgrims.

### Tourism

**Religious tourism is growing. Particularly pilgrimages and larger monuments - five out of ten of Europe's most visited sites are religious.**

Subjects for debate:

**How to resolve the 'economics' of religious tourism?**

With few exceptions, visitors do not pay. There is no economic incentive to promote visits.

The Religiana 'virtuous circle' business model.

**How to adapt to 'excessive' tourism at major sites?**

Comparison of business strategies of Notre Dame (13 million visitors with free entry) and Westminster Abbey (2 million fee-paying visitors).

**How to encourage pan-European pilgrimages?**

Marketing of Via Francigena, Caminos de Compostelle, 17 religious UNESCO world heritage sites along these routes.

## Protection

**Religious heritage, with its multiplicity of stakeholders, is vulnerable to:**

- **Benign neglect**
- **Insufficient maintenance**
- **Vandalism**
- **Theft or loss of artefacts**
- **Inappropriate adaptation**
- **Unmerited closure and sale**

Subjects for debate:

**How to ensure maintenance?**

Repair bills are reduced with regular maintenance, periodic surveys, repair scheduling, supplier certification, group purchasing....

**How to protect contents?**

French churches have lost 40% of their contents since André Malraux's inventories.

Local knowledge of content is best defence against inadvertent loss.

Good inventories are essential to recover stolen goods, but provide a thief's shopping list.

Insurance claims are lower in buildings that are open.

Portuguese dioceses name 'safe churches' to hold silver between services.

**Should unused churches be closed?**

2/3 of Dutch churches are expected to close within 10 years.

Cardinal Wim Eijk of Utrecht aims to reduce the 300 churches in his diocese to 20.

FRH recommends extensive consultation with all stakeholders before closure and, wherever possible, places of worship being kept open for future public benefit.

**How to preserve monasteries and convents?**

Nearly all 150 monasteries and convents in the Netherlands will be closed within 10 years.

The 900-year-old Parkabdij (Park Abbey), Leuven, Belgium has been transformed into public space, museum, music centre, research for organic farming, retaining its fine church and historic accommodation for its monks.

**What should be done with works of art when churches and monasteries are closed?**

The Catherijneconvent Museum in Utrecht has already acquired 100,000 objects, but only some 2,000 are on display.

# Innovation

Interesting examples of innovation are to be found throughout Europe. Most are not widely known nor introduced with the energy they merit due to insufficient resources and huge scale of the sector.

Innovation in management is key. Stakeholders do not always possess the new skills required.

The Internet contains an ever-increasing wealth of information. What is lacking is a 'Tripadvisor' that allows users to see at a glance the character of a particular edifice, its contents, opening times and comments from other visitors.

This would publicise events in religious buildings, help pilgrims develop itineraries, allow local NGOs to maintain virtual databases of members, provide a payment portal for donations and help managers to raise crowd funding.

Religiana, developed by FRH is a pilot for such a site. By charging a small fee on donations, Religiana could develop the virtuous circle necessary for its further promotion.

Subjects for debate:

#### Are individual development plans useful?

The CRCK has business plans for over 1,000 Flemish churches.

Partners for Sacred Places provide expert professional advice in the USA.

#### Does privatisation improve management?

The Church of Sweden was denationalised in 2000.

#### Are distinct management structures for underused buildings useful?

The CCT owns 347 redundant Anglican churches. The Stichting Oude Groninger Kerken owns 80 churches and two synagogues in Northern Netherlands.

#### How to benefit from enhanced volunteer support?

Can churches learn from the National Trust in the UK, which now has 2.4 million members, 25 million recorded visits and income of €700 million.

#### How to manage pilgrimage destinations?

Professor Alessandro Scafi, Warburg Institute interviewed visitors to St Benedict's cave, south of Rome, and concludes that sacred spaces cannot be managed as ordinary tourism sites.

#### How to conserve buildings no longer representative of local populations?

Hungary's remaining synagogues serve an almost non-existent Jewish community. (Pre-war Budapest was 25% Jewish). Romania has 14,574 Orthodox churches but the growing Catholic population only 378.



## Future for Religious Heritage

Founded in 2011, promotes the protection and use of religious buildings throughout Europe

- Brussels based, non-faith NGO, independent of churches and governments.
- A forum for all concerned by the future of Europe's religious heritage to exchange ideas and to develop and fund cross-border projects.
- Supported by the EU Creative Europe programme. EYCH2018 stakeholder.

## La Sauvegarde de l'Art Français

Founded in 1921, France's leading benefactor of churches

- Unique expertise via network of correspondents, advisory committees, links with the administration.
- Le plus grand Musée de France with the Sciences Po business school, searches out and restores artefacts in country churches.
- Distributes over €1,300,000 each year to help restore buildings and their contents.
- A foundation, independent of both churches and government.

## European Union

Historically has placed little weight on culture, but

- In 2015, European Parliament approved a paper stating:  
*Religious heritage is one of the pillars of European culture and identity. It is the largest 'museum' in Europe and covers every corner of the continent.*
- 'Reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage' is now one of the three pillars of EU's foreign policy.
- In 2017, the EU designated 2018 as the 'European Year of Cultural Heritage'.