ST21

EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

THE FUTURE FOR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

in less than 1000 words...

Safeguarding Religious Heritage

Religious heritage represents a significant share of Europe's cultural heritage, be it tangible or intangible. **This rich heritage is a cornerstone of Europe's history and identity** and a meeting place for communities since ancient times. European religious heritage is highly diverse - largely Christian, divided into several denominations - with Jewish, Muslim and other faiths, each with their distinct characteristics that in turn varies with different geographical settings. The typologies of religious heritage are equally broad, encompassing built heritage, artefacts and intangible elements such as pilgrimage routes and festivities.

Religious heritage today faces unprecedented challenges due to changes in patterns of worship, attitudes towards religion and reductions in government spending. **Europe has more than 500,000 churches, chapels, synagogues, mosques, cathedrals, monasteries and convents.** How do we ensure their preservation? How can the sites best be managed? How can we keep them as centrepieces for the community? These challenges are not just the concern of individual managers but are the joint responsibility of all the various stakeholders, including public authorities, private organisations and civil society. it is only through a collaborative effort that creative and innovative solutions can surface and be implemented successfully. The safeguard of religious heritage must have a multidisciplinary approach.

FRH's Open Letter

Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) was established in 2011 as the only **independent, non-faith, non-for-profit European network working to safeguard religious heritage.** The network has more than 150 members in 24 countries and promotes collaborative projects and the exchange of best practices throughout Europe.

As one of its contributions to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, FRH, with the help of its members and other stakeholders, prepared an '**open letter to the EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**', which, underlines religious heritage's enormous potential to create further social value through community outreach and activities and further economic value through religious tourism.

It **proposes sector guidelines** and suggests a methodology for moving towards a European policy in favour of religious heritage based around the **four EYCH 2018 pillars**:

✓ **1. Engagement**: Religious heritage belongs to everybody and not just to worshippers.

✓ **2. Sustainability**: Interest is difficult to maintain in underused buildings. If use for worship is insufficient, other functions should be sought through tourism, community use, social outreach, alternative or extended use.

✓ **3. Protection**: Closure is to be avoided wherever possible. Buildings, which were often built by communities, should be preserved and kept open for public benefit.

✓ **4. Innovation**: particularly in adapting management to the needs of the 21st century, is key to the future.

Bernabe della Mattia
Swiss village

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Religious Heritage and Strategy 21

The Council of Europe's European Cultural Heritage Strategy (Strategy 21) and the sector guidelines proposed in FRH's open letter have many points in common. **They both seek to address challenges facing heritage management through a participatory and holistic approach**, encouraging citizen engagement and good practices including sustainability. As heritage obtains increasing recognition in the agendas of regional and international organisations, those in charge of governance can seek to incorporate valuable guidelines in order to adjust improvable policies. By considering the various strategies outlined in Strategy 21, along with sector guidelines proposed by FRH, relevant stakeholders have **dual input and a wide range of tools to assist them in their everyday management challenges**. In that regard, having heritage management strategies and guidelines from a European institution and from a European thematic network, interested organisations, authorities and individuals can build upon diverse perspectives, enriching the ever-evolving dialogue and debate on religious heritage management.

Social Component

✓ Find complementary compatible uses for buildings that are insufficiently used (Pillar 2 - Strategy 21: S1, S2, S8, S9, S10)

✓ Establish local volunteer support groups for site management -federate volunteer efforts (Pillar 1,2,3,4 Strategy 21: S1, S4, S5, S6, S8)

✓ Public use of sites as their primary function-develop a culture of greater public use (Pillar 1,2 Strategy 21: S1-S5)

✓ Conduct inclusive stakeholder consultations before closure/abandonment of sites (Pillar 1,3 Strategy 21: S1, S5, S8, S10)

Territorial and Economic Development

✓ Encourage extended use of abandoned buildings in order to retain public space (Pillar 4 Strategy 21: D2, D5, D11)

✓ Promote religious heritage via local tourism offices, including less well-known sites (Pillar 2 Strategy 21: D2, D7, D10)

✓ Adopt a best practice approach to the management of religious heritage tourism (Pillar 4 Strategy 21: D1-D11)

✓ Seek financial sustainability through online tax efficient donations and commercial use of buildings where appropriate (Pillar 2,3,4 Strategy 21: D1, D11)

✓ Establish inventories and security methodologies in avoiding loss or theft (Pillar 3 Strategy 21: D8)

Knowledge and Education

✓ Catalogue and creatively promote both tangible and intangible content, history, art and architecture (Pillar 3 Strategy 21: K3, K5)

✓ Encourage religious heritage teaching in public education for children and young people – including art, history, symbology, etc. (Pillar 1 Strategy 21: K1, K2)

✓ Promote sector-wide studies and knowledge-sharing on best practices with detailed technical briefs and templates to encourage replication (Pillar 1,2,3,4 Strategy 21: K6, K9, K10)

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