



## Policy Paper – European Sustainable Religious Heritage

### Abstract

The policy recommendations were compiled based on the **FRH 2023 Biennial Conference “European Sustainable Religious Heritage”** held in Lund, Sweden on 20-21 April 2023.

FRH wants to provide recommendations to EU institutions and support for stakeholders, heritage professionals and communities. Sustainability is an important paradigm of the United Nations. In March 2021, ICOMOS published its policy guidance for heritage and sustainable development and underlined that it is fundamental to address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030). FRH emphasizes and promotes the dimension of sustainability of culture by including religious heritage in the discussion.

Comprehensive planning and inclusive stakeholder engagement is needed to respond to threats deriving from climate change, armed conflicts, discrimination of minorities, decay, and inappropriate uses of religious heritage buildings.

Religious Heritage has an enormous potential in facing these challenges:

- Religious heritage reflects European values and supports Europe’s diversity through its heritage. It contributes to society. It educates on the values of democracy. It should be value oriented.
- Religious heritage means working together, beyond disciplines.
- There is a direct link between religious heritage and well-being.
- Religious Heritage is a starting point for sustainable urban development and urban recovery. It leads to rethinking spaces, (in line with the New European Bauhaus.

**Policy recommendations based on the 4 key themes of the conference: Economic sustainability, Ecological sustainability, Social sustainability, Cultural/Spiritual sustainability**

## **A) Economic sustainability**

“Economic challenges regarding maintenance, restoration and use of religious heritage sites should be addressed by focusing on education and community engagement. Ensuring the continuity of traditional craft skills required for these tasks is paramount, as is the transmission of knowledge, and access to cultural heritage activities and sites.”

- Educational strategies are important to connect people to Religious Heritage and to hand this responsibility over from generation to generation. Sharing knowledge from generation to generation means ensuring a sustainable knowledge transfer, constant education, and learning.
- Involvement of diverse educational organizations (higher education, adult education etc.) and diverse target groups, involve younger generation.
- Educating children on heritage awareness in schools by using interactive tools, capacity-building initiatives and volunteer opportunities for young professionals, researchers, and enthusiasts.
- Ensuring younger generations’ participation in decision-making for cultural heritage management and safeguarding.
- Religious heritage can be promoted as shared spaces, as meeting spaces, to connect people.
- Religious heritage means inclusivity and respect with a view to minorities in Europe.

## B) Ecological sustainability

“All cultural heritage actions should incorporate international standards and norms regarding environmental sustainability. Additionally, efforts should be made to transition to a more sustainable cultural tourism framework, encouraging sustainable transportation, universal accessibility and avoiding over-tourism of cultural heritage sites.”

- Best practices of sustainable management and environmentally friendly maintenance of Religious Heritage.
- Rely on existing papers and cartas from ICCROM, ICOMOS, UNESCO.
- Integrate cultural heritage into environmental sustainability policy. We need monitoring and emergency risk management, to anticipate and be prepared for critical challenges and risk management.
- Renovations and interventions must be carried out with the involvement of the local community.
- Preventing over-tourism is necessary to ensure the preservation of sites, as well as negative spillover effects including a tourism-focused management of areas around prominent religious heritage sites.
- Encourage people to walk and use public transport.
- Avoid paper leaflets etc., use QR-Codes and apps.
- Facilitate accessibility, be barrier-free.

## C) Social Sustainability

“A wide range of stakeholders should be involved in any identification, planning, and implementation of solutions to safeguard religious heritage. A top-down and bottom-up approach needs to be complemented with participation of diverse organisations, individuals, and policymakers, to include varied perspectives, creative solutions and to raise awareness in multiple forums at all levels.”

Stakeholders enable initiatives and support with guidance and advice. Municipalities and local communities can work together with NGOs and people with experience who want to engage. State entities and ministries, EU bodies etc. are important for financial resources. Promote therefore recommendations by ICOMOS, UNESCO etc.

- Networks and international organisations, for instance, FRH, ICOMOS, UNESCO
- Municipalities
- Local communities
- Heritage communities such as monuments preservationists, architects, educators etc.
- Local businesses such as stone masons, restorers, architects, landscapers
- Religious communities (local and national levels)
- Public institutions, states
- EU through funding

## 4) Cultural and Spiritual Sustainability

“All actions should be based on the respect for diversity, fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue, ensuring that all participating organizations and individuals are included, and their views are given relevance.”

- Social sustainability promotes resilience
- Present diversity and common values
- Show, promote and implement utmost sensibility with adaptive reuse
- Promote and implement culture-conscious decisions
- Integrate spirituality
- Prevent over-simplifications in promotion and tourism, marketing, education etc
- Foster religious diplomacy / interreligious dialogue
- Importance of the term “togetherness”
- Communities involved during the whole process: build up responsibility, participation, and transparent decision-making. Therefore, create milestones where the community is involved
- Make people aware of their heritage
- Involve diverse communities and particular communities (rely for instance on the FARO convention)
- Social Inclusivity as a concept under shared knowledge and community involvement
- Minority heritage is sometimes overlooked
- A real future of religious heritage needs respect and open-minded people, based on European values and human rights. The sustainable future of intangible religious heritage is intertwined with tangible heritage. Songs, art, music, and narratives are all part of Religious Heritage.