# Roundtable VIII: Changing Religious Built Heritage

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# Roundtable VIII: Changing Religious Built Heritage

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**Date: 27 November 2019, 11.00**

**Moderators: Nicholas Clarke, Alexander de Ridder (TU Delft, The Netherlands)**

**Catalysts:**
Miktha Alkadi (TU Delft, The Netherlands)
Dr. Maria Jesus Gonzalez Diaz (Madrid, Spain)
Dr. Liza Kam (University of Göttingen, Germany)

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious buildings form a distinct and unique heritage category.

Religious built heritage by its very nature contains high levels of community values.

As communities change, the values associated with the built fabric of their places of worship also change. The generally slow evolution of religious practice, ritual, and symbolism linked to a broad community of worshippers, means that historically, religious buildings have been more resilient in the face of change than many other building typologies. However, this resilience has recently been challenged by the unprecedentedly rapid transformation of society, especially in Europe, leading to a dilemma as to the continued use and conservation of these often significant buildings.

Religious buildings also present high aesthetic and spatial qualities that transcend their immediate communities of practice. These may be appreciated by larger communities for whom these often visually dominant buildings serve as landmarks, defining urban or rural identity. As these buildings age, they bear witness to the passage of time and become important and relatively constant markers in the historic narrative. Even when the religious practice for which they were built has long disappeared, their sacred nature still inspires reflection and contemplation.

The 'Changing Religious Built Heritage' title reflects the constant evolution of our religious built heritages. The roundtable aimed to explore the challenges of societal appropriation through changing use and changing religious practice, and the (architectural, technical, and economic) challenges of developing viable interventions to sustainably maintain valorized religious heritage.

To this end, catalysts were presented withset quotations to explore in roundtable format after the presentation of their case study contributions:

1  What is the difference between various European countries today regarding vacancy alteration of religious buildings?
2  Should all religious buildings be formally protected? Which criteria should be applied for listing a religious building?
3  What are the common significant issues for the adaptive reuse of vacant religious buildings?
4  In the Netherlands, the problem of vacant churches is in the suburbs, not in the historical centers. What are the specific constraints concerning the redevelopment of these churches?

## CONTRIBUTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The contributions focused on built heritage associated with different religions (Shinto, Christianity, and Judaism), different geographic contexts (from Spain to Taiwan) and different scales (from landmark buildings to building details).

Dr Gonzalez Diaz presented the challenges faced in the conservation of religious buildings in Spain, which includes no fewer than 68 Cathedrals (18 of which are listed as World Heritage), in relation to the social, environmental, economic, and cultural dimensions of sustainability, specifically related to the increasing pressure of tourism, which can hamper the use of the buildings for their original purpose.

Dr Kam's analysis of the Shinto shrines built in Taiwan during Japanese colonization between 1895 and1945 showed how these shrines, often acknowledged as representing the former colonizers, today serve the public in various forms and often for various religious groupings. Dr Kam questioned the often-held assumption that eradicating colonial constructions equals decolonization, asking in turn if subsuming these through adaptive reuse is not the ultimate expression of power.

The potential of technologies in additive manufacturing development—specifically 3D scanning and printing—was the focus of the contribution of Mr. Alkadi. His case-study research presentation showed that the application of additive manufacturing in the preservation of architectural heritage offers new opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and interpretations of future heritage practice, by involving a wider set of stakeholders in a broader context

The roundtable discussion highlighted the following points:

— Change in religious buildings lags behind the evolution of society. However this historically gradual process is now speeding up because of growing secularization among other things.
— The historical, spiritual, and aesthetic meanings and values change over time, including through daily appropriation. However, these meanings can be molded strategically and built form is often subjugated to their modulation or eradication, which can be utilized (subversively) as a political tool.
— Change can happen through use or changes in our attribution of meaning. As such, the question is whether such change affects the perception of the authenticity of this built heritage.
— –  Transformation can happen in the material and physical appearance of the building, but also in its character and identity. Tangible and intangible values have an important role in the transformation of religious buildings.

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— Maintenance and operation costs raise questions about the economic viability of this heritage when facing the dilemma of reuse or destruction, but the ownership of religious buildings—private, public, or institutional—affects the possibilities for maintenance and transformation.
— Functional, social, historical, and artistic values can be identified in religious built heritage in both religious and non-religious communities. This is why it is essential to put the vacancy of churches and other religious buildings on the public agenda.
— Maintenance and operational costs raise questions about the economic viability of this heritage when facing the dilemma of reuse or destruction.
— Tourism can be a danger as much an opportunity for religious buildings.
— New additive technologies, such as 3D printing and laser scanning, can make a great contribution to collection of data and replication of attributes to safeguard this heritage, but these methods raise questions about the relationship between material and craft authenticity and meaning.
— A question raised: is economics value the new faith?

## CONCLUSIONS

The Changing Religious Built Heritage roundtable concluded that the expression "religious buildings" may not define the essence of this built heritage in contemporary society, since its value and recognition for society goes beyond this label. Our tools and techniques for understanding, recording, and intervening in religious buildings are also constantly evolving, providing new perspectives on conservation. Because of the potential wide scope of values associated with this important built legacy, a clear case-specific hierarchy of values is an essential ingredient for prioritizing decisions about changing religious built heritage.

Mechanisms should be established to ensure democratic participation in negotiation and decision-making processes related to religious built heritage. Listing has a key role to play in ensuring the maintenance of values. However, listing is generally a static tool. A dynamic assessment of values based on contemporary communities of practice, use, and association (right-holders, stakeholders, and interested and affected parties) is key for maintenance of values in Changing Religious Built Heritage.