

## Call for Workshop Papers

# ***New Uses, Old Places: The Transformations of Religious Buildings in Contemporary Europe***

September 27th-30th, 2023

Vienna Scientific Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Vienna, Austria)

### Workshop Theme

*New Uses, Old Places* is an international workshop that aims to discuss and advance the understanding of a broad range of topics concerning the change, reuse and adaptation of religious buildings in contemporary Europe from social science perspectives.

The *New Uses, Old Places* Workshop aims to:

- Share, explore and develop methodologies and theories that can be used to analyze phenomena pertaining to the social and spatial transformation of religious architecture and heritage.
- Facilitate conversations across disciplines, research projects and countries, while trying to establish some degree of comparability.
- Lead to collaboration on a future application for international research funding.

### Call for Papers

In contemporary European life, religion is viewed and experienced in many different ways. In some regions it remains a key aspect of society and an important resource engaged in debates about the future and the past, while in others it appears as a forgotten dimension and an issue barely present in public life. Yet, religious architecture is still highly visible almost everywhere. Cathedrals and churches, monasteries and convents, as well as other non-Christian religious places are as much a part of the European landscape as government, cultural and commercial buildings.

While persisting in their symbolic materiality across Europe, numerous religious buildings in recent decades have undergone a deep redefinition, sometimes a complete transformation in function and meaning due to a combination of factors. One of them is the limited liturgical use that many churches find today in response to dwindling religious membership, declining participation rates and loosening ties to religious and spiritual services. High maintenance and renovation costs, declining levels of volunteering, charitable giving and public financial support are other intervening variables. As a result of these changes, complex entanglements of social, cultural, political and economic forces have emerged. An example is when churches, although still functioning as places of worship, are used mainly as tourist attractions or heritage sites. In other cases, religious buildings that have lost their liturgical functions are still employed as places to express a sense of belonging and objects of community concern. At the same time, the transformation of former churches into mosques and other non-Christian worship sites, as well as their conversion to purely commercial and residential uses, create the potential for

conflict and tensions amongst church members and the larger society in general. The conversion of existing buildings from secular to religious use and the creation of modern facilities that allow different religions to share the same space for their ritual and worship practices are other cases in point.

What marks these and other shifts in use and meaning is not so much the mere transfer of the ownership or management of an edifice between various religious and secular actors, but rather the reciprocal social and power relationships that the involved actors, whether religious or not, exert on one another. This leads to compromises, negotiations and conflicts. The redefinition of a religious building's use is in this sense understood not as a neutral practice but as a powerful process through which various social actors contest, collaborate and/or reimagine the relationship between the religious and the secular.

Does all this constitute a new phenomenon or a continuation, in different modes and conditions, of long-standing trends? What forms did these transformations take in the past, and what can we expect in the future? What macro-social processes lay at the basis of those changes, and what are their broader social and political consequences? What are the roles for buildings still socially recognized as religious in a secularized public space?

We welcome papers that discuss research guided by either qualitative or quantitative approaches on how religious buildings are adapted, adopted or converted to a variety of different uses across Europe – and beyond, if needed for comparative purposes. As it is not the first time in history that religious buildings have been subjected to modifications, we also welcome historical analyses.

The following is an open list of presentation topics:

- Mix of religious and secular uses
- Innovative changes in worship-related use
- Complete replacement of the religious use with a secular one
- Transfer of ownership and its consequences
- Preservation of religious buildings as heritage
- Multi- or shared-religious sites
- Legal regulations affecting the reuse of former religious buildings
- Social memory and religious architecture
- The affective force of religious buildings
- Ethnographic approaches to religious materiality repurposed to serve new functions
- Immersive technologies for remote access to religious sites

### **Keynotes**

We are delighted to announce two keynote speakers, Isabelle Jonveaux (Katholische-Privat Universität Linz and PPH Augustinum Graz) and Yuri Kazepov (Professor of International Urban Sociology at the University of Vienna), who will share their research and insights on some of the workshop's themes.

## Workshop Format and Output

The workshop will start in the afternoon of Wednesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, and finish in the evening of Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The workshop will alternate keynote presentations, paper presentations and discussions, with site visits to religious buildings located in Vienna. The participants will present their papers in short talks of about 20 minutes, which will provide plenty of time for discussion and networking throughout the workshop.

The organizers plan to publish a special issue in a top international journal, or alternatively an edited volume to be published in English by a major academic publisher based on the selection of papers presented at the workshop.

## Practical Information

Deadline for abstracts - The deadline for abstracts (max. 300 words) is **Friday, March 3rd, 2023, midnight**. Please, send your abstracts to the workshop organizers: Agnieszka Halemba (a.halemba@uw.edu.pl), Carlo Nardella (carlo.nardella@unimi.it), and Barbora Spalová (b.spalova@gmail.com). Applicants will be notified of acceptance or rejection by Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

Venue - The conference will take place at the Vienna Scientific Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences located at Boerhaavegasse 25 (1030 Wien). A great location for academic dialogue in beautiful surroundings, it can be conveniently reached in 10 minutes by underground from the Vienna Central Railway Station.

Costs - The costs of accommodation and meals will be covered for all the participants. Financial support will also be available to have travel expenses reimbursed for some applicants who indicate need. Interested applicants are required to submit a travel planner estimating travel expenses along with their abstract.

## Sponsors and Organizers

The workshop is funded by the [International Society for the Sociology of Religion](#) in collaboration with the Polish Academy of Sciences, University of Milan and Charles University in Prague. The *New Uses, Old Places* Workshop was developed out of a collaboration of three social scientists who in 2020 began sharing their interests in exploring the social role and impact of the material and symbolic re-adaptation of historical religious buildings. The present workshop is the winner of the 2022 ISSR International Workshop Grant awarded to innovative workshop proposals in the sociology of religion.

**Agnieszka Halemba** (social anthropologist) is professor in the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Poland. She also teaches at the University of Potsdam, Germany.

**Carlo Nardella** (sociologist) is tenured assistant professor of Sociology in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Milan, Italy.

**Barbora Spalová** (social anthropologist) is researcher and teacher at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic.