Abstract Title

Valuation of mediaeval churches, towards an integration of experts and laypersons views

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Conference Topic(s)

☐ 1 - Regulations and historic buildings: legal boundaries
☒ 2 - Preliminary assessment: identifying the boundaries
☐ 3 - Sustainable interventions: between tradition and innovation
☐ 4 - Governance, management and participation: from design to day-to-day use
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Abstract

Sustaining historical buildings does not always align with the ambition to promote sustainability in the built environment. In this paper we explore the dynamics and strategies that spring from this basic tension, by investigating the differences and similarities between expert’s valuation and peoples’ valuation of historical buildings, as well as their views on energy efficiency. Our paper highlights mediaeval churches in Groningen, which represent an important European heritage. We cooperate closely with the SOGK, a regional organization that is taking up the challenge of maintaining these churches in a region that is depopulating, secularizing and, to all that, suffering from earthquakes.

Our approach draws theoretically on three sources. Firstly, we include the ‘heritage as a vector’-approach, which positions heritage in relation to developments in society and carefully pays attention to how actors give meaning to heritage. Secondly, we draw on Actor-Network Theory, where an
artifact—such as a historical building—is viewed as a heterogeneous network. Thirdly, with valuation studies we investigate the different values that are attached to historical buildings by various stakeholders.

For this paper we carried out four case studies on mediaeval churches. We trace the network of involved actors, including heritage agencies, architects-historians and local stakeholders. Our empirical data consists of qualitative interviews, site-visits, archival research, restoration guidelines and technical information, such as energy use. All interviews were transcribed and Atlas.ti is used for qualitative analysis.

We reconstruct how tensions between heritage and sustainability values are reconciled in concrete practices surrounding the care for historical buildings. Furthermore, we reflect on the importance of these churches in art historical terms and contrast these findings with the values of local stakeholders. We conclude that for a more balanced approach, peoples’ valuations of historical buildings should be further integrated in heritage studies.