

1st Interregional Event of Exchange of Experiences (IEEE) on-line: "Rural communities and Heritage. Successful cases and new initiatives. The Faro Convention Approach"

Online

28th January 2025

9:00-13:00 CET

Inscriptions & info:



<https://www.interregeurope.eu/relihe/news-and-events/events/1st-ieee-rural-communities-heritage>



This Exchange of experiences will explore how the principles outlined in the *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* can be applied to the revitalization of religious heritage in rural areas. We will delve into a series of good practices implemented by our partners, showcasing innovative approaches to reconnecting communities with their religious heritage.

The *Faro Convention* emphasizes the **social value of cultural heritage**, recognizing its role in fostering community identity, social cohesion, and well-being. This aligns perfectly with the presented good practices, which demonstrate how the repurposing and revitalization of religious buildings can:

- **Strengthen community bonds:** By creating spaces for social interaction, cultural activities, and community gatherings.
- **Promote social inclusion:** By ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all community members.
- **Foster sustainable development:** By integrating cultural heritage into local development strategies and promoting economic and social benefits.

Furthermore, the *Faro Convention* highlights the importance of **community participation** and **ownership** in cultural heritage management. This is evident in many of the presented projects, which involved active community engagement in decision-making, implementation, and ongoing management.

Agenda

9:00-9:10 Welcome and Introduction. *The Interreg Europe Project RELiHE (Religious Heritage in Rural Areas).* Chiara L. M. Occelli and Irene Ruiz Bazán. Politecnico di Torino.

9:10-9:30 The Faro Convention Approach A vision on Religious Heritage in Rural Areas Chiara L. M. Occelli and Irene Ruiz Bazá. Politecnico di Torino.

9:30 - Session 1: Reconnecting with the Community: Revitalizing Deconsecrated Buildings.

9:30-9:40 1.1 Latvia. **Cultural Premise “Mežotne Church”.** Dace Strautkalne. Zemgale Planning Region.

9:45-9:55 1.2 Latvia. **Jelgava Holy Trinity Church Tower.** Dace Strautkalne. Zemgale Planning Region.

10:00-10:10 1.3 Czech Republic. **Augustinian Monastery Borovany.** Veronika Koblizkova. Regional Development Agency of South Bohemia. RERA.

10:15-10:25 1.4 Germany. **Monastery of Waldsassen.** Verena Pfeffer. Upper Palatinate District.

10:30-10:40 1.5 Spain. **Quinto Mummy Museum.** Isabel Soria. Provincial Government of Zaragoza.

10:40-11:00 Questions and Answers

11:00-11:15
Coffee Break

11:15 - Session 2: Ideas that Transform Buildings: Participatory Processes for Conservation and Re-functionalization.

11:15-11:25 2.1 The Netherlands. **Church Village on the Move.** Suzan Flokstra-Beute. Province of Overijssel.

11:30-11:40 2.2 Poland. **Cafe Francesco – A Space for Meetings and Dialogue.** Agata Mazurek, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship and Jan Wólkowski. Nicolaus Copernicus University.

11:45-11:55 2.3 Czech Republic. **Church of St. Lawrence in Klení.** Veronika Koblizkova. Regional Development Agency of South Bohemia. RERA.

11:55-12:15 Questions and Answers

12:15 - Session 3: Sparking Change: Initiatives to Promote Transformation.

12:15-12:25 3.1 The Netherlands. **Churches Can Go to the Doctor – Free Church Consultation Hour: For All Your Questions, Tips, and Advice on Repurposing Your Church Building!** Mireille Dosker. Cultural Heritage Support Center in Overijssel.

12:30-12:40 3.2 Spain. **Grant Program for non-profit organizations for the promotion and revitalization of the cultural heritage of the province of Zaragoza** Isabel Soria. Provincial Government of Zaragoza.

12:40-12:50 Questions and Answers

12:50-13:00 Wrap-Up, Conclusions, and Overview of the Next IEEE 2nd. IEEE Online: “New Tendencies and Approaches in Shared Working Spaces, Temporary Locations, and Ephemeral Events”

Summary of the Good Practices

Latvia. **Cultural Premise “Mežotne Church”**. Dace Strautkalne. Zemgale Planning Region.



The Mežotne Church, originally built in 1582, underwent several reconstructions, including a new tower funded by Charlotte Lieven in the early 19th century. It was severely damaged during both World Wars and was used as a fertilizer warehouse from 1960 to 1990. In 2019, the tower was rebuilt with EU funding, and in 2021, it was fully restored. The church reopened as a cultural space on September 9, 2022, offering panoramic views from its restored tower.

“A miracle has been created here, created with great love, responsibility and determination. Everything is connected here – past, present, future and man.” (I. Lancmanis)

Latvia. **Jelgava Holy Trinity Church Tower**. Dace Strautkalne. Zemgale Planning Region.

The story of the St. Trinity Church tower in Jelgava began in 1567 when Duke Gotthard Kettler ordered the construction of a new church for the local German Lutheran congregation. Construction started in 1574, and the church was consecrated in 1615. The tower, originally built in 1688 by master builder Martin Knoch, was rebuilt in 1862 by Emil Strauss, reaching a height of 80.5 meters.



During World War II, Jelgava suffered extensive destruction, and the church was heavily damaged. In 1954, the church's altar and walls were removed, leaving only the bell tower, which was repurposed as a military facility. Restoration began in 2004, with the addition of a glass roof, reducing the tower's height to 50.17 meters while maintaining its original architectural form.

Thanks to European Union funding, the tower was revitalized and reopened on November 16, 2010. It now serves as a cultural and leisure destination, offering visitors opportunities to explore its history and enjoy the space.

Czech Republic. **Augustinian Monastery Borovany**. Veronika Koblizkova. Regional Development Agency of South Bohemia. RERA

The monastery was founded in 1455. It gradually declined in the 16th century and was abolished by Emperor Joseph II in 1785. The Schwarzenbergs bought the monastery estate from the Religious Fund in 1787 and converted it into a castle, which they owned until the first land reform

in 1920. In 1939, the municipality bought the castle to establish a town school. The school used the castle until 1997, when it moved to new premises. In 2005–2010, the castle underwent a general renovation and housed the town library, information centre, exhibition spaces, café and a sightseeing route that also passes through other buildings of the former monastery complex.



Germany. **Monastery of Waldsassen.** Verena Pfeffer. Upper Palatinate District.



During the Cold War, Waldsassen and its monastery faced significant challenges due to their location on the German-Czech border. After the Iron Curtain fell, Laetitia Fech became abbess in 1995 and initiated a major renovation of the abbey in 1997, securing funding from 10 grant providers and diversifying its uses to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Key developments included the establishment of the KuBZ cultural and meeting center in 1998, an environmental station in 2004, and the St. Joseph guesthouse with accommodations and a monastery shop in 2008. Over time, the monastery

and its basilica have become major tourist attractions, contributing to the branding of the Stiftland region as a prominent holiday destination, earning the European Heritage Label in 2024.

Projects have also included converting the former mill district into housing for vulnerable groups (2009–2019), with ongoing plans to transform the abbey library into a "Third Place" and prepare for roof renovations.

Spain. **Quinto Mummy Museum.** Isabel Soria. Provincial Government of Zaragoza.

The Quinto Mummy Museum was created to boost the local economy and address depopulation, utilizing a 15th-century Mudéjar church to display mummified remains found in the area. The museum offers guided tours covering the town's history, the church, and 18th–19th-century funeral rites, with research and preservation efforts showcased through videos and upcoming publications.



Visitors benefit from partnerships with local businesses offering discounts, while promotion is actively carried out through tourism fairs, media, and social networks. The museum is accessible, multilingual, and caters to various age groups, hosting ten weekly guided tours with additional group visits available by reservation.

The Netherlands. ***Church Village on the Move***. Suzan Flokstra-Beute. Province of Overijssel.



The competition *Church Village on the Move* in Overijssel aims to prevent church vacancies by supporting projects that repurpose churches as community meeting spaces. The initiative addresses the negative social impact of church closures, promoting social repurposing to enhance village liveability. Winning proposals, from Broekland, Deurningen, and Reutum, emphasized inclusive connections within their communities.

The campaign attracted significant media attention due to public concern over church closures. Participants pitched their ideas, received guidance, and are still being monitored. Key stakeholders included village residents and other provincial departments, with an expert jury composed of a deputy, a Protestant pastor, and a religious heritage specialist. Communication played a vital role in the campaign's success.

Poland. ***Cafe Francesco – A Space for Meetings and Dialogue***. Agata Mazurek, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship and Jan Wólkowski. Nicolaus Copernicus University

Cafe Francesco was founded by Father Leon Bartczak to meet the growing need for spaces that foster dialogue and social interaction beyond traditional religious settings. Located on Kalwaria Hill in Pakość, the initiative aimed to create a community space for youth, pilgrims, and locals, addressing the town's lack of such venues.

The project repurposed unused church spaces into a multifunctional venue, offering a café, library, music facilities, recreational areas, and a conference room. The café runs on donations and volunteer support, encouraging a sense of community ownership. Its goal is to promote inclusivity and mutual respect, providing a welcoming environment for all.

Key stakeholders include the local parish, residents, tourists, and volunteers. Beneficiaries include youth looking for a safe social space and tourists visiting the historical Kalwaria of Pakość.



Czech Republic. **Church of St. Lawrence in Klení.** Veronika Koblizkova. Regional Development Agency of South Bohemia. RERA.

The early Gothic Church of St. Lawrence in Benešov nad Černou, dating back to 1334, fell into disrepair and faced collapse by the late 20th century. In 1992, the local Association for the Preservation of the Church initiated its restoration, working with volunteers to secure funding, repair the roof, vaults, plaster, facade, and rebuild the stone wall.

The church, on loan from the Roman Catholic parish, is now open to the public, hosting concerts, meetings, and services, with proceeds supporting ongoing repairs. In 2019, it held its first mass in 50 years, symbolizing its revival as a community and cultural hub



The Netherlands. **Churches Can Go to the Doctor – Free Church Consultation Hour: For All Your Questions, Tips, and Advice on Repurposing Your Church Building!** Mireille Dosker. Cultural Heritage Support Center in Overijssel.



The Cultural Heritage Support Center in Overijssel, based at Het Oversticht, provides accessible guidance for church owners, volunteers, and residents planning projects. With experienced advisors, the center offers consultation on topics like sustainability, repurposing, multi-use adaptation, and restoration, addressing questions about permits, processes, and preserving the building's unique character.

Appointments include practical advice, tools, and, if needed, input from additional experts available on-site or on location. The center acts as a key

stakeholder, complementing its advisory role with financial support to help projects succeed.

Spain. *Grant Program for non-profit organizations for the promotion and revitalization of the cultural heritage of the province of Zaragoza.* Isabel Soria. Provincial Government of Zaragoza.

This program provides funding for initiatives by non-profit organizations such as associations, clubs, and others in the province of Zaragoza. These projects can focus on activities and operational actions, with expenses aimed at improving the knowledge, promotion, study, revitalization, recovery, restoration, preventive conservation, and enhancement of cultural, historical, and artistic heritage, both tangible and intangible. Each year, around 70 bottom-up initiatives are funded, many of them directly related to the revitalization of the province's religious heritage.

