

# Developing a Comprehensive Conserving and Preserving Framework to Meet the Particularity of Religious Heritage and Sacred Places

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*Abstract— since the dawn of the history, human communities have been interested in building and constructing places for worshiping and practicing their rituals that are based on their beliefs. These spaces are known now as the religious heritage as declared by ICOMOS on its international day in the year 2008. This type of heritage has its own significant features that create a combination of particular issues facing it. The public and religious authorities' objections, besides the worshippers who visiting them and the sacrists of this heritage are the main issues that facing the conservation processes for them. This paper focusing on building a comprehensive framework in order to deal with those issues in a way that grantee the minimum number of obstacles.*

**Index Terms—religious heritage, conservation, preservation, comprehensive framework.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the concept of cultural heritage has been expanded to cover all the living heritage dimensions and the overall aspects of spiritual and physical relationship between human groupings and their environments [1]. According to [2], the physical culture can be defined as the immovable or movable structures, sites, objects or assembles of them besides the landscapes and natural features that have aesthetic, religious, architectural, historical paleontological, cultural or archeological significant. According to the same reference, the previously mentioned elements have a valuable historical and scientific information that are important for social and economic development, as well as forming a significant part of the cultural practices and identity of people. The International Council on Monuments and Sites "ICOMOS" was established in Warsaw in the year 1965. ICOMOS is an association that is specialized in the protection and conservation of the places of cultural heritage in the world, besides offering the advice on World Heritage Sites to UNESCO [3]. Currently, ICOMOS has more than 7500 members around the world, each qualified in the conservation field and a practicing architect, archivist, paleontologist, art historian, historian, heritage administrator, engineer, town planner, anthropologist, archaeologist or landscape architect, with some exceptions of course [4]. In the year of 1982, The International Day for Monuments and Sites was built by ICOMOS and later approved in 1983 by the 22nd UNESCO General Conference. The main purpose behind this day is to increase the public awareness toward the diversity of the

heritage around the world and the best ways to conserve and protect it besides focusing on its vulnerability [4]. Every year for a long time, this day was used to suggest a subject to be focused on from the several dimensions of cultural dimensions, where activities, events and conferences are held for that purpose [3]. In 2008, particularly on the 18th of April, ICOMOS was dedicated International Day for Monuments and Sites to the theme of "Religious heritage and sacred places" due to its significant role in leading the human societies toward building their places, making their spaces and carrying out their memorial archives [4]. Despite all that, the conservation and preservation approaches for religious heritage are facing some issues that are originated from the fact that most of the religious buildings or sites are treated as any other cultural heritage. This paper is focusing on the particularity of religious heritage and sacred places among the other cultural heritage when conserving and preserving them. All the specific features and considerations will be gone through in order to build a comprehensive framework when dealing with such heritage.

## II. RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Since the dawn of the history, the different societies with different religious beliefs have created a vast heritage related to their thoughts. Till now, these thoughts and related heritage are covering the majority of the human societies despite the massive developments in the secularist and atheistic thoughts [5]. In those societies, most of the skills and arts are based on the religious heritage. The religious building is defined as the building or apace used for worshiping or glorification of the Lord [6]. According to [5], the religious building has to accommodate the associated activities with the religious belief. It is influenced by the culture elements including; the social systems, beliefs and values [7].

### A. THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

According to [8], religious heritage has a significant role in summing all the sciences and arts of the current and past societies together in a one object or site. It represents the community aspects, where it reflects ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, knowledge, ideas, etc. [7]. Therefore, religious heritage is considered as one of the major representatives of people's faith and beliefs, where it accommodates the people expression through the different religious activities. The spiritual and inner belief influences the expression way people follow throughout worship and ritual, which also

influences the form and decoration of the sacred buildings. As long as this heritage is conserved, the original values of the religious thoughts will be preserved too [8].

### **B. CONSERVATION OF RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS**

The religious building or sacred site can be seen as both tangible and intangible element since these two concepts are interrelated [9]. Usually, such buildings are well-preserved due to the active and continuous use of them, which form an important fact in the approaches of the conservation process as mentioned by [10], who explained the importance of using the religious buildings as "Buildings decay when they are abandoned without a use and their spirit dies when they become frozen in time as near museum pieces".

## **III. FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES REGARDING CONSERVATION OF RELIGIOUS HERITAGE**

Nowadays, various approaches are used to conserve religious heritage including the "bottom-up" approach, which uses traditional ways for conservation and "community-by-community" [11]. According to [11], the specialized authorities faced several issues regarding preserving and conserving religious buildings, where the known approaches has failed. Most of those fails were caused by neglecting or lack of focus on the associated variables. The failure and success of any conserving approach depend on taking into considerations the main features of the targeted heritage. The following are the main issues facing the conserving and preserving of religious heritage:

### **1. Religious heritage is a "living heritage"**

Religious heritage buildings and sacred sites are considered as living heritage due to the continuous use of them. In other words, the social and cultural systems are still running in the space. According to [12], the living heritage can be defined as the tangible art works, objects and structures that have been made to support the worship forms of a religious faith within the associated devotional activities, celebrations and intangible rituals [9]. This continuous use of religious buildings for pilgrims and worshiping contributes on keeping the religious heritage on a better shape; however, wrong behavior can do the opposite.

### **2. Negative response toward changing the "holy remains"**

In religious societies, any change or action targeting any holy remains faces objections from these societies. Their deep belief that anything religious has to be maintained as it is leads them to organize such opposition campaigns. Any action may change the attached values and beliefs [13].

### **3. High respect to the living tradition**

Generally, conserving the religious heritage dimensions can create a considerable challenge for the community. In any religion, traditions are playing a significant role on shaping the common thoughts. Therefore, any building or

space including the religious heritage is governed by the prevailing living traditions of its area.

### **4. Type of visitors "worshippers and Pilgrims"**

Every cultural heritage has its own visitors led by many motivations. Religious heritage has its own particular visitors that are motivated by their religious belief "worshippers and Pilgrims". [14] explained this motivation as the inner call they have led by the love of God, besides the urgent need for orientation. Those special visitors have a special way to perform their rituals that cannot be affected by the conservation and preservation processes.

### **5. Control of the religious authorities**

Regarding their deep understanding of the religious values attached to religious heritage, religious authorities have a lack of understanding the reasons behind implementing processes aim to conserve this heritage. Therefore, several interventions and objections are made by them, which obstruct the overall processes.

## **IV. A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK TO CONSERVE AND PRESERVE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE**

Religious heritage, as a living heritage, has three main levels; the spiritual, social and artistic values. Each one of these values has to be handled probably in order to achieve the best conservation of this heritage. Based on the previously mentioned issues that are facing preserving and conserving of religious heritage, the following are the main steps that have to be followed in order to achieve a comprehensive conservation process with a minimum amount of obstacles.

### **1. Engage the local communities**

A dialogue has to be created with the local communities in order to avoid any probable objections. This step is necessary also to ensure that the traditions are respected since those traditions are best known by the individuals in the same community. This engagement can take several shapes from consulting the respected persons to participating in the conservation committee.

### **2. Engage the religious authorities into the conservation processes**

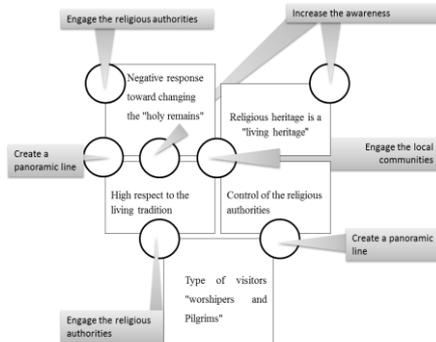
Based on the significant role the religious authorities have on effecting people's thoughts and ideas towards religious heritage, those authorities have to be engaged on the conservation processes. This engagement can be on taking approvals on any action made.

### **3. Increase the awareness**

Religious heritage is known to have the most frequent number of visitors, so awareness toward the importance of conserving such heritage is necessary. Besides, awareness toward the importance of heritage conservation can ease the process and increase the voluntary works.

#### 4. Create a panoramic line of the conserved heritage

Presenting a panoramic line for any religious heritage to be opened to the public contributes on showing both the public and the religious authorities the true mission of the conservation processes. The following chart shows the proposed framework for conserving an preserving religious heritage.



**Fig 1: a comprehensive framework to conserve and preserve religious heritage**

#### V. CONCLUSION

Religious heritage and sacred places have its own features that distinguish them from any other cultural heritage. Their holy nature and attached values are creating the following issues:

1. Religious heritage is a " living heritage"
2. Negative response toward changing the "holy remains"
3. High respect to the living tradition
4. Type of visitors "worshippers and Pilgrims"
5. Control of the religious authorities

However, there are some steps that can be followed to overcome them and build a comprehensive framework including:

1. Engage the local communities
2. Engage the religious authorities into the conservation Processes
3. Increase the awareness
4. Create a panoramic line of the conserved heritage

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