

Empowering Design Practices – Learning from the Past

Katerina Alexiou, Vera Hale, Ruchit Purohit and Theodore Zamenopoulos

The Open University

The register of listed buildings for England contains roughly 15,000 Listed Places of Worship, many of which are registered at Grade I. These buildings require a significant amount of time, effort and resources to be maintained, but the dedicated volunteers who look after them often do not have the support they need (Burdens or Blessings report, Historic England). Governmental and advisory bodies and funders for the management and protection of heritage recognise the need to look beyond repairs and restoration and consider the long-term use of these places, the engagement of the wider community in the design process and the co-production of uses and solutions that will keep historic places of worship at the centre of community life.

Empowering Design Practices, is an AHRC funded project that aims to co-develop and co-evaluate a spectrum of support mechanisms and processes to help those that look after historic places of worship to engage more actively with their communities in order to envisage new futures and deliver projects that connect with wider societal needs, while respecting the spiritual mission of these places. The project focuses on the tensions derived from different values and perceptions associated with design/architecture, community, faith and heritage.

In this presentation we discuss insights from three retrospective studies of places who have undertaken such projects: St. Luke's in Oxford, the Buddhist Centre in Sheffield and St. Martin's in Nottingham. In particular, we discuss similarities and differences in terms of key drivers, assets and principles surrounding community engagement.