

Decision-Making Based on Dialogue: Preservation of Danish Churches under the Consultancy of the National Museum

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ABSTRACT

Danish churches are not protected monuments and a democratically-elected church council is responsible for the protection of church buildings, the furniture and decorations. Decisions about any intervention are based on the opinions of consultants, for which the National Museum provides experts in archaeology, art history, cultural history and conservation. The decision-making process is an interaction between the users, the authorities and their consultants. This process most often leads to agreements, and sometimes to compromises, but can also end without agreement and irreversible loss of values. The diocese and the councils have a great deal of freedom to make decisions on their own. However, they also have confidence in the system. This attitude, combined with a tradition of consensus in decision-making processes, benefits cultural heritage. Case studies will illustrate the aspects mentioned above.

Introduction

In 1806, a medieval crucifix in the Cathedral of Roskilde was put on sale for firewood. Fortunately, a precious reliquary (a gold enamel cross) fell from the head of Christ. This became the direct reason for the establishment of the National Museum in 1807. One of the purposes was to establish an antiquarian authority in order to protect the churches' cultural heritage.

In 1536, the Danish Church passed from Catholicism to Protestantism and the King became the nominal head of the church authority. The Church of today is an established organization with its own formal, economical and legal structure.¹ The formal head of the Danish National Church is the Minister of Ecclesial Affairs. About 1 800 of the 2 500 parish churches are medieval (Figure 1) and most of them were built in the twelfth century. They are not included in the national heritage building conservation programme, as protection of churches is part of the national church legislation. Each parish is an independent entity with an everyday 'board of trustees' in the form of a church council democratically elected for a four-year period, which, according to the law, is responsible for the preservation of its cultural heritage "to ensure that a reduction of the cultural values does not take place" (Kirkeministeriet, 2001, p. 68). All repair work and any change in the church building or any item of furniture more than 100 years old must be approved by the local diocesan authority. The diocese comes to its decisions after conferring with its consultants – i.e. in the final analysis, the Ministry of Ecclesial Affairs - and these include experts from the National Museum (Kjær *et al.*, 1998, p. 169). None of the consultants has the authority to do more than make recommendations for or against a proposal. The finances are provided by taxes paid by members of the church; approximately 80 percent of the population.

The church councils consist of laymen without any professional insight and, in some cases proposals, and decisions have to be confirmed by the church authorities. The decision-making process emanates from the church council, which represents the parish church, it then