

**International Conference on Religious Tourism:
*Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities***

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Session 1: Understanding religious tourism - motivations and trends

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Bio:

Yonca Kösebay Erkan is Associate Professor at Kadir Has University of Istanbul. She received her Ph.D from Istanbul Technical University and S.MArchS degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and M.Arch from Yıldız Technical University. Since 2010, she has been actively taking part in UNESCO World Heritage meetings. Currently, she is the director of the UNESCO Chair on Management and Promotion of World Heritage Sites: New Media and Community Involvement at Kadir Has University. She is a member of ICOMOS Working Group on Places of Religion and Ritual (PRERICO).

Abstract:

The working group on Places of Religion and Ritual (PRERICO) presented its preliminary mission statement in November 2014, to the ICOMOS Scientific Council and it anticipated that it will be approved as an International Scientific Committee in October 2015.

PRERICO aims at the understanding, protection, conservation and management of places which are valued as heritage predominantly for their present and where pertinent past roles in religious, ritual, sacred and spiritual contexts. The objectives include identification, research and documentation, protection and promotion of places of religion, worship and ritual as platforms of learning and reflection, as well as valuable resources for dialogue and

community participation. Tangible features including intangible associations related to these places are deemed highly important, especially in terms of religious tourism. Innovative approaches are essential for offering a personal learning experience at the site facilitating contemplation and indulging in spirituality. This requires holistic management strategies under which rights of hosts and visitors are mutually safeguarded, allowing community involvement in management. In response to challenges of mass tourism at religious sites, advanced solutions towards creating a “slow visitor flow”, “augmented learning experiences“, present opportunities. However it is a fact that protection of places of religion and ritual is at great risk as a consequence of the value attached to it by communities.

In this line, PRERICO shall pursue fostering awareness-raising, appreciation, interpretation - also in view of encouraging mutual respect and understanding - and capacity-building activities concerning places of religion, worship and ritual.