

Spatial experience of a religious building in a non-religious public context

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Abstract

In Denmark a large part of society and culture consists of religion, religion can be practised in different ways, shapes or forms, some of which can impact society positively. This study will research religious buildings and tries to find how aspects of religion can help conceiving a public building and to answer the question: How can the way the inner space of religious buildings is experienced, influence the design of a public building?" To come to answer: the sub questions: "How does spatial perception influence human behaviour?", "How is religion practised in different buildings in different parts of the world?" And "What design principles of religious buildings can be used to create an urban condenser in Haraldsgade Kvarteret?" To answer these questions literature research will be done, and different religious buildings will be analysed. Concluding by answering the questions and giving guidelines or a framework that helps making choices during the design process.

Keywords: Inclusivity | Religion | Altruism | Architecture | Religious Buildings | Spatial perception | Benovalence | Exchange of beliefs

Introduction

Religion can be beneficial to society, in other forms than just faith for an individual, all types of religion are based on principles they can differ for each religion but there are similarities. Some of those principles rely on altruism or another form of doing 'good', beliefs differ all over the world, in the way they are practised and used in society, religion can also be political. A religion can either be performative or prescriptive. Either follow the guidelines or try to follow a principle of living. Both can lead to general 'good'. How does the architecture of a religious building affect an individual or group of individuals in a way that helps this phenomenon? A recent study about contemporary mostly Christian religious architecture found that there is a big educational value in the physicality of a religious building this is mostly about self reflection and spiritual growth.

"In Denmark, 72% of the population are registered members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. But less than a fifth of Danes see themselves as "very religious."", (Denmark.dk,2024). In Haraldsgade Kvareret there is another narrative, the only apparent traces of religion are Islamic. The mosque in this neighbourhood looks, at least from the outside, sober, and would apart from some minor details, blend perfectly into the surrounding square box like buildings of the car dealerships and storage buildings. There are already traces of altruism visible in the Haraldsgade Kvareret, there is a space for recycling waste, part of this area is a space where you can leave anything you don't use anymore but

can be used by others, others can take anything for free. These types of behaviour must be encouraged.

According to research conducted by open society foundations most Islamic Danes in Nørrebro feel like they belong there. However, a significant smaller number of Islamic Danes in Nørrebro feel like they are Danish even if they are by law. Furthermore, in this research is found that Islamic Danes, or immigrants are left behind on multiple fronts and attention must be paid accordingly.

Around the building site there are multiple religious buildings from different faiths. These different communities have some differentiating needs. However, there are also a lot of activities and programmatic features that align between these different buildings. These could be joined into one bigger building, supporting all different backgrounds and atheists. When these different groups of people are joined together in an openminded and collaborative way these groups can start to feel more part of the neighbourhood and improving inclusivity.

Problem statement

When researching the building site and taking interviews with residents it became very apparent that there is a general fear of rising costs and gentrification. When asked what would you add to this area, they all replied another meeting space. For other options they all hesitated, but came up with shops, restaurants, cafes and other amenities. They hesitated because they were afraid of new additions would cause that everything would get too expensive for the current residents and themselves.

With help of the research results the following question must be able to be answered: How might we design a public building improving the living conditions and amenities for all different religions and residents to improve inclusivity and taking fear of gentrification and rise of costs in the neighborhood away?

Answering this question makes sure that the addition of the to be designed public building adds to the public domain and therefore is relevant. The target group of all different religious and social backgrounds is a group that can be applied to other locations too. This means that this project could work as a prototype for including religion and residents who could oppose each other when misunderstood. As apparent in different conflicts all over the world. Talking, discussing and accepting as a starting point for exchanging of beliefs would be the goal that is aimed for.

How can the way the inner space of religious buildings is perceived, influence the design of a public building?

Perceiving religious buildings

The way a space is experienced, can be seen as a set of scenes such as a movie. The way Jean Luc Godard lets architecture tell a narrative in the movie *Le Mépris*: a doomed marriage, a couple split up by the walls of their own apartment (Godard, 1963). Pallasmaa tries to find the connection of architecture and cinema in: *The architecture of Image*. This connection works both ways, architecture has a narrative that is constantly being told (Pallasmaa, 2001). Havik finds that in literature writers can read places and spaces and tell the essence of a space to the reader (Havik, 2012). Can the experience of a religious space teach

us on how to approach designing public spaces? Space can be approached as perceived conceived and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991).

The way a religious building is experienced is not only influenced by the absolute space or what happens in it, but a balance of both, the lived space (Kulik et al., 2022). The way a person moves throughout a building, in this case a religious building can be viewed as a collection of scenes, these scenes together tell the story of the building, and therefore inform us about the perception of a religious space and building.

How does spatial perception influence human behaviour?

How is religion practised in different buildings in different parts of the world?

What design principles of religious buildings can be used to create an urban condenser in Haraldsgade Kvarteret?

What physical aspects of a religious building influence the sense of community and what activities take place that are non-religious but assist in creating a community that can help other buildings to improve their publicness?

Methods

To start the research literature research will be done to find what already has been written about the topic. To get more into depth information by doing case studies, and cataloguing findings of the religious buildings in Haraldsgade Kvarteret and other religious buildings outside of the site part of these case studies will be mapping the string of scenes throughout the buildings to inform on perception and the relation to behavior, these results can be compared to get a more complete image. The research about spatial perception influencing behaviour will inform on additional comparisons while doing the case studies.

The result of the research can create key design components that can be used to inform on physical and programmatical design choices that must be made during the design phase of a project. In the end it will act as a design guide throughout the entire process.

Literature

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