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The series draws on the best research papers from various IEREK and other international conferences to promote the creation and development of viable solutions for a **sustainable future and a positive societal** transformation with the help of integrated and innovative science-based approaches. Including interdisciplinary contributions, it presents innovative approaches and highlights how they can best support both economic and sustainable development, through better use of data, more effective institutions, and global, local and individual action, for the welfare of all societies.

The series particularly features conceptual and empirical contributions from various interrelated fields of science, technology and innovation, with an emphasis on digital transformation, that focus on providing practical solutions to **ensure food, water and energy security to achieve the SDGs**. It also presents new case studies offering concrete examples of how to resolve sustainable urbanization and environmental issues in different regions of the world.

The series is intended for professionals in research and teaching, consultancies and industry, and government and international organizations. Published in collaboration with IEREK, the Springer ASTI series will acquaint readers with essential new studies in STI for sustainable development.

ASTI series has now been accepted for Scopus (September 2020). All content published in this series will start appearing on the Scopus site in early 2021.

Olimpia Niglio
Editor

Culture of The Sacred Space

 Springer

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University of Pavia
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ISSN 2522-8714 ISSN 2522-8722 (electronic)
Advances in Science, Technology & Innovation
IEREK Interdisciplinary Series for Sustainable Development
ISBN 978-3-031-69633-6 ISBN 978-3-031-69634-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69634-3>

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The Editors warmly thank all the Reviewers who have contributed their authority to the double-blind review process, to ensure the quality of this publication.

Preface

Utopia and *Sacred Space* are two topics that have accompanied the academic journey that began in 2019 at the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli with the project titled “Utopian and Sacred Architecture Studies (USAS)” then continued in 2022 at the University of East London and again in 2023 at the University of Pisa.

Although the two topics are both very articulated, they clearly express the social, political, and religious complexity in which we live daily and on which it is correct to question ourselves. Both themes do not always find answers or direct comparisons with reality as they are the expression of ideal thoughts and abstract models.

The term “utopia” already appears in classical antiquity not only in the literary field but also in many writings of a utopian-religious nature such as in the writings of Zeno (V century BC), a pupil of the philosopher Parmenides. Zeno is considered the inventor of dialectics, that is, of the method which consists in demonstrating the absurd or impossible consequences that derive from a thought, to eventually prove its opposite truth. In the history of Western culture, with reference to art and architecture, utopia finds important connections with architecture. An example is the dialogue of the philosopher Plato in the work “The Republic” where he deals with the theme of the ideal city, then reworked in the Renaissance and in many contemporary projects.

The concept of “utopia” is linked to that of the “sacred space” understood as a project for the recovery of a lost harmony resulting from a primordial anthropological experience and which focuses on the value of welcome, hospitality, and therefore reconnection with the transcendent.

However, the “sacred space” is identified with the historical-cultural function of the community to which it refers and therefore becomes a place of memory. Thus, “sacred space”, like “utopia”, represents an attempt to overcome the disenchantment of reality to recover the sense of a more harmonious existence.

In fact, the sacralization of certain spaces constitutes the first act of high culture and human civilization, which relate to the primordial manifestations of artistic and literary creation, and of a thought about the cosmos. These first expressions of human culture reveal a fundamental question that establishes the exercise of memory linked to the utopian possibility of imagining a more perfect and happier future.

By carefully analyzing these two topics, the researchers who contributed to this volume have elaborated different perspectives and interpretations on the “utopia” concept of “sacred space”. These have formulated new cultural paradigms that allow the reader to question the culture of the sacred and how the enhancement of one’s own culture is fundamental to understanding the creative and transforming sense of the founding and transforming dynamics of our history and of everything that surrounds us. Only when we can question the meaning of the sacred will the sublime function of culture be realized.

Pavia, Italy

Olimpia Niglio

Acknowledgments

The editor is deeply grateful to several professors, colleagues, friends, and others for participating with interesting papers in this research project. First of all, I wish to express our deepest gratitude to Professor Maria Luisa Germanà who proposed to me for editing this book. I also wish to extend my gratitude to Mgr. Paolo Giulietti, Archbishop of Lucca, and Don Marcello Brunini, director of the Diocesan Historical Archive of Lucca, because their suggestions and writings are being important references for me. My gratitude also to Maria De Giorgi, Xaverian missionary of the interreligious center Shinmeizan in Japan, and Father Andrea Dall'Asta SJ, Jesuit, director of the San Fedele Museum in Milan. At the end a special thanks to all my colleagues around the world for the reviews of every chapter because their comments and suggestions were important for the success of this book.

I wish to extend all my gratitude and appreciation to the authors of this book; important scholars from many countries in the world who have dedicated time and commitment during the period of this international project.

Deep in my heart, I sincerely wish to acknowledge the presence and the constant support of our parents and without their encouragement and patience, this book could not have seen the light of day.

Lucca (Italy)
December 2023

Olimpia Niglio

Introduction

The significance of sacred space is rooted in anthropology, which objectively studies the diversity of communities in time and space and from different perspectives. In recent decades, research on sacred places has greatly emphasized multidisciplinary studies and thus the dialogue between social sciences, design, and comparative history of religions. This approach has helped to contextualize the different meanings and role of the “sacred” both theoretically and practically in the socio-cultural but also in the economic sphere, and all these different connotations also help us to understand its conceptual complexity.

Research into sacred spaces, when analyzed about to the cultural diversities that characterize individual countries around the world, can cover many places in communities, such as temples, shrines, churches, holy cities, pilgrimage routes, natural landscapes, national monuments, domestic spaces, burial grounds, and even places of commerce.

The concept of the sacred, especially in contemporary society, is not enclosed within the boundaries drawn by different religious institutions. Cultural pluralism has grown, society has secularized, and religious traditions have often lost authority over their sacred references and symbols, but this should not frighten.

There is no doubt that it is precisely the great religious traditions that still constitute a fundamental reference today, but the sacredness of a place is closely linked to the value that the individual or a group of people attribute to a given space. The concept of the “sacred” refers to values and ideals that are part of the cultural and social identity of a community and thus refer to significant life events. For example, think of the sacred value of a place where martyrs or episodes that have strongly marked the history of a nation have been celebrated. Thus, the concept of the sacred is connected to the history of communities and for this reason reworks an anthropological content. At the same time, the concept of the “sacred” is an expression of the complexity and cultural pluralism in which contemporary society lives and where other sacred symbols connected to economic value also manifest themselves.

This plurality of interpretations is all phenomena of a certain complexity, where the sacred and sacred space are variously interpreted from both a phenomenological and a functionalist point of view.

Contemporary researchers confronted with the vast literature on the concept of “sacred space” have identified two certainly interesting interpretative trajectories: on the one hand, the concept of the sacred as a social practice of an emotional nature, and on the other, the sacred as a category of the human spirit, inexplicable but describable. Both research trajectories are rooted in the anthropological approach and find that a church, a sanctuary, a temple, and a national monument are all sacred spaces as long as they are separated from the profane. Indeed, the separateness between sacred and profane space is always a determining factor in the interpretation of this meaning.

A look at the comparative history of religions shows how a shrine, a church, a temple, a garden, or a pilgrimage path are sacred places insofar as they are associated with significant presences, experiences, or events that have affirmed the value, then recognized by the community. But even a house, a forest, or a natural landscape are not devoid of sacredness insofar as they are the architects of dialogue between man and the divine.

Meanwhile, human culture is born precisely from a process of distinction between the sacred and the profane. If we analyze art, science, and knowledge, they are all human activities that develop from the awareness that the humanization of nature embraces the ideal of transfiguration, of overcoming the strictly human condition to assume the divine. This process of overcoming elevates the human being to a horizon of meaning that helps him to analyze everything around him with greater objectivity. Thus, the sacralization of certain spaces constitutes the first act of high culture and human civilization capable of activating that fundamental quest that goes beyond the physical and therefore formal dimension of reality.

Meanwhile, the symbolic importance of sacred space and its connection to the identity of the community to which it belongs, helps us to understand how the control of these places can be a source of “cultural capital” and power that can be the object of contention, of desecration of the sacred and thus can come to constitute a serious threat, as well as a serious moral offense, to the cultural and social identity of the space recognized as sacred. However, as reality also testifies, when this limitation of the sacred is rigidly imposed then it can also trigger conflict.

All these reflections were elaborated in the reorganization of the contributions of two important international conferences under the eponymous title “Utopian and Sacred Architecture Studies (USAS)” which were held respectively at the University of East London in 2022 and at the University of Pisa in 2023. The volume’s table of contents has been organized into two parts; the first section brings together the contributions from the 2022 conference, while the second part brings together the contributions from 2023. In both sections, the sequence of chapters follows the general reflection elaborated here, and thanks to the authors, coming from different geographical, educational, and cultural contexts, it was possible to focus on the plurality of the concept of “sacred space” and therefore introduce new interpretative perspectives.

This book is also intended to be an initial guide to analyzing the meaning and sense of the “sacred” through a multidisciplinary approach where the true centrality of the sacred is no longer the built place but the community; indeed, cultural sharing and the different identities of people define the sacredness of space and foster the humanization of our everyday life and our common house.

December 2023

Prof. Olimpia Niglio
University of Pavia

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