

SACRED SPACES IN PROFANE BUILDINGS

A project by: Matilde Cassani
Book editor: Demian Bern EXP. Edition
www.matildecassani.com
www.sacredspacesinprofanebuildings.com

The quality and form of the sacred space in contemporary Western cities have completely changed so as regulatory requirements related to the need to move from a mono-religious city to a pluralist one. The research “Sacred Spaces in Profane Buildings” attempts to describe the nascence of religious architecture and communities, becoming manifest in the contemporary urban context. It is a transversal investigation of architectures, policies and the multitude of individual acts through which each religion inhabits and transforms the contemporary city. In this context, most contemporary Western cities, reveal a partial image of their religious landscape. From the urban point of view, they either provide an illusion of secularity (by identifying sacred spaces as “community centers”) with regard to new religious constructions or present existing religious buildings prominently as historical artifacts. New religious manifestations through architectural or urban interventions are contested and building permission is only easily obtained in the spaces of uncharted periphery. Yet, religious spaces exist in the very center of each community. The architectural improvisations that respond to the increased demand of sacred space constitute the subject of these pages.





1. April 8, Baisakhi Feast, Novellara, Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Vaisakhi, also known as Baisakhi, Vaishakhi, or Vasakhi is a festival celebrated across the northern Indian subcontinent, especially in the Punjab region by the Sikh community. More recently, this festival is also celebrated around the world by the Sikh diaspora. The festival commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa. The festival bears a great significance for the Sikhs due of the fact that on the Vaisakhi Day in the year 1699, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh laid down the foundation of the Panth Khalsa, that is the Order of the Pure Ones. This day is also observed as the Thanksgiving day by the farmers whereby the farmers pay their tribute, thanking God for the abundant harvest and also praying for the future prosperity. Novellara, a small village, is home for a lot of recent immigrants in Italy, who are increasingly doing agricultural work on farms, especially in the dairy farms that produce milk for Parmesan cheese and accommodates many different religious groups and places to worship. Owned by an association of Indian Sikhs the Gurdwara in Novellara, opened in 2000, is the first in Italy. The Sikhs in the Italian territory are a well-established and rapidly expanding community. The temple has played a fundamental importance in characterizing the Indian migration to the North of the country. As a demonstration, every year, the village plays host to a huge Sikh harvest festival, the Vaisakhi feast. Sikhs from all over Central Europe congregate in Novellara for this event. The festivity involves the all city from the main square to the local stadium, to the local periphery, were the new huge Gurdwara is standing, in the middle of the industrial area of the town.

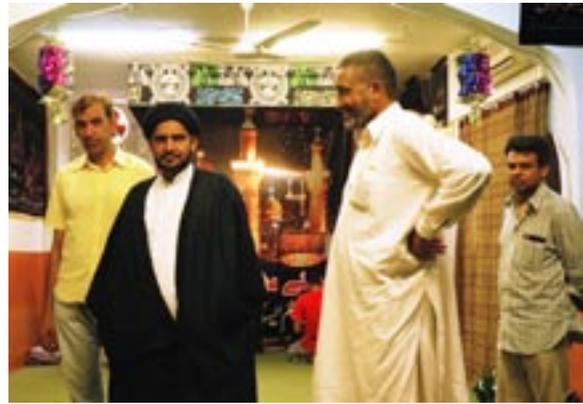
Imagine the city as a continuous system of inner spaces: a succession of places where people eat, sleep, work, park their car, practice sport or pray. Imagine too, the passing of time and the natural mutations of type: factories become houses, houses become offices, offices become shops, stations become art galleries, garages and empty buildings become places of worship for immigrants, and so on.

In the past, in Europe, the Christian majority always absorbed, harmonized and sometimes erased differences, leaving the continent with a homogeneous cultural image. More recently, migrations from other countries (former colonies, ex-Soviet republics, countries afflicted by war or poverty) have profoundly changed that uniform cultural pattern. This has raised the necessity to tackle religious pluralism from both a social and urban perspective. In today's built spaces, cultural differences are expressed in unprecedented ways. Until a few years ago, it was thought that the link between public and religious places would gradually disappear as societies gave way to secularity. In reality, things have gone differently. The demand for religious spaces has not dwindled, it has simply altered. The city's surfaces do not yet show it, but if we look inside buildings we can notice the change.

In the absence of precise legislation, the sacred becomes space through a microcosm of evolving informal actions. From a legislative viewpoint, in many countries the border is not clear: the construction of holy buildings depends on the economic strengths of a community, on the availability of urban voids, and on partly political deals. Without fixed procedures, each particular situation is managed ad hoc. Maintaining the identity of an immigrant community in a new country necessarily involved that community's place of worship, which becomes a safe and protected site, the faithful container of its traditions. Every religion's system of beliefs and practices results in complex urban structures linked to the sacred and to ceremonies: squares, streets and cemeteries. The new communities that have settled in Europe have not yet left evident signs of their religious presence, as once happened with a minaret or a bell tower. On the contrary, a shed, a cellar or a rented flat can often become the new focus of holiness for large groups of people. An interior is an immediate answer to the necessity for religious absorption and does not require recognition from the whole local community or the authorities. In this logic, the sacred building is built in a private space, while preparing to become public in the future. Sacred architecture thus constitutes a form of interior design, its ritual instruments and decorations being mass-produced objects, rendered holy for the occasion.

A MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPACE
AS STRATEGY TO
PRAY, GATHER,
TEACH AND
PREACH IN THE
SAME PLACE





1. Mezquita al Qaim, Carrer St. Pere Mijà, 21lb, Barcelona, Spain.



1.

2.

1. **Gurdwara Gurdarsahn Sahib Ji**, Carrer Hospital, 97 bxs, Barcelona, Spain.
 2. **Las Cocheras de Sants**, Carrer Sants, 79, Barcelona, Spain. Commemoration of the 59th anniversary of Sant Baba Prem Singh's death.



1.



2.

1. Mezquita Madni, Carrer Paloma, 9 loc, Barcelona, Spain.
 2. Moschea, Via da Capua, Novellara, Reggio Emilia, Italy.



1.



2.



3.



4.



1. Gurdwara Singh Sabha, Via Lorenzo Bandini, 7, Zona Industriale Nord, Novellara, Reggio Emilia, Italy.
2. Sri Muthu Vinajegar Sita, Garage Italia, Palermo, Italy.
3. El faro Apostolico de Brooklyn, Mercy Avenue, New York.
4. Moschea di Palermo, Former Church of San Paolino dei Giardinieri, Via San Celso, Palermo, Italy