

Construction of Sagrada Família

--Building the Architecture and Sacred Space in the Modern World

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Abstract: This research report examines the construction and evolution of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, focusing on the level of complexities of the global debates on the proceeding construction of the project. This study delves into the original vision of the second leading architect, Antoni Gaudí, and his political perspective within the church, then subsequent shifts into the transforming design philosophy after Gaudí's death, considering factors such as tourism and urban plans. Through a thorough analysis of architecture itself, this research investigates the ongoing debate over the cathedral's completion and the concept of sacred space, revealing the tension between the church's initial identity and the continuing of construction of novel sacred space. The study concludes that the cathedral has evolved into a symbol not only of the Catalan community but also of broader application such as religious tourism, continuing to drift away from Gaudí's insightful purpose, however, reshaping the sacred space benefits the society economically.

Keywords: Sacred space, Sagrada Família, Antoni Gaudí, cathedral, religious architecture

1. Introduction

Declared as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1984, the extraordinary cathedral Basílica de la Sagrada Família represents the perfect model of the Christian home for citizens to follow, in accordance with the Catholic religion. The significance of this cathedral is continuously suggested by the designer behind the great monument, Antoni Gaudí, a famous Catalan architect from Spain widely known for his exponent of Catalan Modernism [1]. Until now, which is 142 years since the foundation, the architecture is believed to be finished by 2026, the centenary of Gaudí's death, however the progress will be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic as some components of the structure may be completed by 2040 [2]. Significant monuments taking centuries to construct and having this new as a catalyst certainly give rise to concerns and doubts about the completion of the Sagrada Família. These concerns simultaneously brought the cathedral itself around 3.8 million visitors in 2022 [3], a trend that is experiencing a progressive increase.

Architecture, with its fundamental purpose to be fulfilling the needs of human activities, as for shelter from natural disasters or places to store foods. One practical problem derives from this concept would be the process of construction, or in short words: how fast can the architecture put in place? Building a house in the modern world is fairly rapid, considering from a historical perspective. Pharaohs from ancient Egypt would not consider the tomb for theirs took a long time to construct, or Qin Shi Huang would not think that taking over 2000 years to establish the Great Wall is essentially waste of time. With the aid of technology improvement, architectures no longer solve solely on functional problems. Spirituality, religious beliefs, aesthetics uses, recognition are instances for various purpose that could be denoted by architecture. These buildings dedicated to religious purposes, specifically, create a particular term called "sacred space," and the first task that needs to be taken is to clarify the meaning.

Sacred space refers a category of space, recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem, and the most common type of sacred space can be characterized as mystic-religious sites [4]. Religious sites, or sacred space, are based on construction of architecture. These continuous processes of building cathedrals, temples, mosques, etc., have been found in every era since the foundation of religious belief. This paper will focus on the case study of the construction of the famous Sagrada Familia cathedral. Along with the reconstruction of the stunning architecture, a sacred space is to be built as the same time underneath the affection of the tourism industry.

2. Building the Sagrada Familia

On 19 March 1882, the construction of the Sagrada Família began under the former architect Francisco de Paula del Villar, after Villar resigned, Gaudí replaced his role, transforming the project with his architectural style [5]. The former architect is characterized as a genius artist with provisionary techniques and unique designing style, turning the attention of the public to the significance of the aesthetic aspects of the cathedral. However, all the initial political and national resonances of Gaudi's work and the patriotic Gaudi seemed to be forgotten. By analyzing various reconstruction components of the Sagrada Familia, this section seeks to address the contradicting design philosophy, focusing on the changes in the root purpose of the architecture, and answer the inquiry of reasons for the continuation of the construction.

Gaudi's interest in Catalan Gothic can be trace back during his youth, where the knowledge of Catalan architecture is documented through a detailed plan for the restoration of the Monastery of Poblet when he was only seventeen. The architect's passion of Catalan building can also be evidence by the joining of "Associació Catalanista d'Excursion Científiques" later at the Architectural school in Barcelona [6]. Gaudi's intensive personality as a very religious and Catalan nationalist was expressed seventeen years later during his project of the Sagrada Familia, which act as the expression of "the cultural and political ambitions of Barcelona's Catholic haute bourgeoisie and, later, of those of the Catalan Catholic Church" [7]. Initially, the cathedral ought to reflect the status of the families who commissioned the architecture as well as their ideals that related to Catalan nationalism. In this context, Gaudi's cathedral became the perfect media for representing Catalan nationalism and Catalan Catholic Church's perspective. The "History of Catalonia" dedicated to "its monuments, its traditions, its artists and illustrious characters" published by Bori in 1898, ends with this drawing in which the mountain of Montserrat is represented, the focus of a resplendent light, as the culmination of Catalan architecture, which as it happen to be the Sagrada Família is vantage point for the city of Barcelona, as a mountain that can be climbed to contemplate the landscape [8], evincing the previous hypothesis of Gaudi's personality and his purpose behind the Sagrada Familia.

The tragic incidence occurred in 1926, when Gaudí set off on June 7, 1926, for confession, where minutes later he was run over by a tram. His assistant finally located him in the early hours of the morning, broken and semi-conscious in the hospital. Three days later the great architect died [5]. After several years of the architect's tragedy, a group of experts and UNESCO turned their attention to the technical concepts behind Gaudí's architecture, presenting a perfect, straight, rational, and technological piece of work that fundamentally differs from Gaudí's original purpose in constructing the church as a symbol of the Catalan community. Proceeding in the laborious reconstruction, the story comes to the early 21st century, when seven talented architects have sat on the chair of the head architect, the current Jordi Faulí i Oller, who is the current director architect of the project, trying to finalize the project under his hand [2]. Under his leadership, Etsuro Sotoo, the Japanese sculptor, continuing to add detail with his own style, where the sculpture planned by Gaudí were now more iconic and recognizably the work of Sotoo [5]. In the summer of 2014, Sotoo placed the first of four giant doors at the entrance to Gaudí's Nativity façade, which is described as "Predominantly green, the doors are covered in bronze ivy, pumpkin and lily flowers and a host of insects. They are joyous; as exotic as Klimt or a Japanese print; as exuberant as a pool of Monet's water lilies. They are delightfully whimsical, playing to the inquisitive child who spies a bug or butterfly" [5]. The Japanese artistic style immediately differentiate itself from Gaudí's "insistence on realism" [7]. It quickly reinforce the side of debate which considers the reconstruction of Sagrada Familia should be shut down. Interestingly, UNESCO only recognize the part of Sagrada Familia constructed under Gaudí's design, where the description of UNESCO world heritage solely wrote that "Gaudí's work on the Nativity façade and Crypt of La Sagrada Familia" [1], which further consolidates the inconsistent designing philosophy with the late architect. However, the debate on the works of the Sagrada Familia began after Gaudí's death and reaches to the peak in the late 20th century.

At the time of his death, less of a quarter of the cathedral was completed, and the architect was there, buried in the church's crypt. The architect had never completed the drawings for the project as a whole, moreover, a number of his documents were destroyed in the Spanish Civil War [7]. On one side of the debate, Gaudí was considered out of date, working in old-fashioned stone, influenced by the medieval, and spending too much on excessive religious and nationalist symbolism. English novelist, essayist, journalist George Orwell commented on the Sagrada Familia on a philistine in 1937 "a modern cathedral, and one of the most hideous buildings in the world. It has four crenellated spires exactly the shape of hock bottles. Unlike most of the churches in Barcelona it was not damaged during the revolution - it was spared because of its "artistic value", people said. I think the Anarchists showed bad taste in not blowing it up when they had the chance" [9], demonstrating the side of the discussion where public's shape critical view of Gaudí revealed.

Nevertheless, there was existing issue during the recreation of the cathedral. The urban plan of the church never came in peace, primary due to the conflict between the Spanish government the Catalan legislation. Spanish and Catalan urban legislation disclose a sense of uniqueness due to the autonomous communities locating in Catalan regions. An overview of the system can be concluded that the autonomous communities are responsible for "legal creation of the urban planning model and the territorial strategy in their respective spheres" [10], and the State is, on the other hand, responsible for establishing a broad framework. The conflicts between the State and Autonomous regulation came cross the concept of expropriation, the action of authority taking away properties from the owner. However, a practical example of expropriation is the Sagrada Familia, where "in 1976, the Ajuntament de Barcelona approved the PGM changing the qualification of the surrounding area to the church to a key as a public space; there were buildings already in there, and they couldn't executes an expropriation" [10]. Although, since the alternation, changes have suffered the idea of the surrounding areas, coming to cross the

regulations of both autonomous and the State, making things becoming complicated, the Spain government still reinforced the act of changing the surrounding area of church into public areas because they understood the importance of forming the completed sacred space and the tourism behind the completion, hence the continuation of construction would not stop.

In the perspective of the country's economy, the expanding of the church certainly justifies the benefits. The development of tourism is an outstanding reason for continuing reshaping the church, even though the designing philosophy have betrayed the past architect. Tourism in Spain can trace back to the post-civil war periods when Spain was in the urgency of recovering from the hiatus. The significance of an influx of visitors was under the efforts of the Spain government, where the Government's organization and expand under its National Tourism Plans released measures such as the relaxation of visa regulations and increase in the number of state inns and hotels [11]. This contributed to Spain's surplus on tourism to almost doubled over two years 1963 and 1964. The state has definitely seen the drastic profit brought by tourism. "Back in 1927, the advice to visitors was clear. Take the tram and avoid at all costs the coach drivers and chauffeurs who, posing as scholarly 'cicerones', 'know nothing of the truth of the grand construction'" [5]. The Sagrada Familia has shown a sign of evolving into a tourist attraction since the early 20th century, long before the approval of changing the surrounding area to the church to a public space. People's idea of this cathedral might change when it became Barcelona's second most popular tourist attraction in 2022, leading to people putting on the tag "tourist attraction" to this scared cathedral.

3. Reshaping the sacred space

"A cathedral is where a bishop literally has his seat (the throne known as a cathedral). It functions as the center of a diocese and is frequently used as a parish church as well. Cathedrals are the historic centerpieces of the cities where they are located" [12]. The Cathedral of Barcelona is the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia dedicated to Eulalia of Barcelona, carrying the sea of the archbishop of Barcelona [13]. Basilicas, different from Cathedrals, are significant church due to its historical or religious importance that does not need to be consecrated by a pope. Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XVI has consecrated Antoni Gaudi's unfinished church, the Sagrada Familia, as a basilica in the Spanish city of Barcelona. This section tries to discuss recreating or finalizing the sacred space of the unfinished church and the relative conflicts that arise in the modern era.

The Swiss-Italian architect Mario Botta defines a sacred building or sacred space as an expression of human work, where the first step of creating architecture begins is to put a stone on the ground, and this action in itself has a sacred meaning, because it transforms a condition that is not controlled by human activity into a living space formed by mankind. Botta further refers to these building that hold a sacred potential as physical memorial to the labor work of human [14]. However, the process of laying down stones on the ground no longer holds scariness as for the Sagrada Familia when the characteristic of "unfinished" becomes a key point for the government to gain tourists and to sell tickets. It could be said that the relations between tourism and religion are becoming increasingly close and the conceptual boundaries are becoming diffuse. The most visible connection between tourism and religion are the thousands of sacred buildings that are visited by millions of tourists. These sacred building are being transformed into cultural and historical value such as heritage, rather than to their original religious purpose [15]. These phenomenons suggest the impact of tourism on sacred space, especially in case of Sagrada Familia and the corresponding decline in scariness when transiting into a tourist attraction. The commodification of religion and religious building further lead to negative influence of both tourism and religious groups such as the large potential number of tourists taking away the sense of place of those

who came to worship, disturbing the efficacy of holy rituals and customs [16]. Still, the cathedral struggles to balance religious tourism and secular pilgrimage where “results are along the lines of the survey conducted by Poltronieri et al., which found that religious motivations do not reach 4%, while more than 40% indicate their interest in art and architecture” [17]. The huge difference in percentage indicates that there is some degree of decline in scariness when most visitors are not under the interest of worship. Therefore, the church is also rebuilding the sacred space while undergoing construction, further away from Gaudi’s original intention of glorifying God.

German Jesuit priest and theologian Karl Rahner once wrote about the definition of sacred space related to those followers, where “Man does not enter a temple, a fane which encloses the holy and cuts it off from a godless and secular world which remains outside. Rather in the free breadth of a divine world he erects a landmark, a sign of the fact that this entire world belongs to God, a sign precisely of the fact that God is adored, experienced and accepted everywhere as he who, through his ‘grace’, has himself set all things free to attain to himself, and a sign that this adoration of him takes place not in Jerusalem alone but everywhere in spirit and in truth.” In other words, Rahner focuses on the importance of liturgy, which God causes to be celebrated, leading to the landmarks of celebration to be sacred spaces. On the other hand, the previously mentioned Swiss-Italian architect Mario Botta defines a sacred building or sacred space as an expression of labor work, praising the manual labor [14]. For the construction of the Sagrada Familia in modern days, since the death of Gaudi, the architecture itself clearly is appropriate for the two categories of sacred space mentioned above. From 1983 to current days, components of the church of the following are expected to be finished: Perimeter walls, Columns and covers the naves (main body, transept and apse), Foundation and columns of the Gloria façade Cloister, and the towers [18]. Most of the events hold on every Sunday and holy days are located at the Nativity Façade, according to the church’s website, which is included in the plan of construction after 1983. Additionally, the shocking incidence of Pope Benedict XVI consecrated Gaudi’s unfinished church, the Sagrada Familia, as a basilica in the Spanish city of Barcelona sprinkling holy water on the altar before a congregation of more than 6,500 people in 2012 certainly brings the amount of scariness of the church to an upper level. Back to the starting point, underlining the identity of the architect, Gaudi is also a good strategy. Along with the church marketing, Gaudi is becoming a salient trademark, whose piety and worship to God are incessantly highlighted with the striking slogan ‘My client is not in a hurry’, in which way the attention from the tourist could be hopeful diverted from the architecture itself to the sacred career.

The contradicting idea is how the process of recreating the sacred space in the modern time especially for a pope to consecrate the church, while advertising the place as a tourist attraction, has opposite effects and purposes. On one side, the continuation of the construction through not following the past architect’s aspiration is already surely controversy enough to stop the reshaping, and on the other side laying more sacred space that is fundamental for tourism causes decline in scariness conflict with the initial motivation. Finally, the church conveys the religious identity of individuals but also cultural meaning that evoke collective memories of the church being an urban identity or even a visual element of the cityscape [19]. By carrying on the huge project, the church and local government are also reconstructing the public’s imaginations of the architecture and the sacred space behind it.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the legend of the Sagrada Familia is a multifaceted narrative intertwining element of complexity. From its inception under the visionary of Gaudi to its ongoing construction spanning over two centuries, the cathedral has evolved into a symbol not only of the Catalan community but also of

broader application such as religious tourism, continuing to drift away from Gaudí's insightful purpose. Building the architecture is unquestionably painless under modern technology, but the dilemma comes concerning whether we should finish the masterpiece or not, or is it a masterpiece after completion? Reshaping the sacred space is beneficial for society and the economy, but the debate will still be going on even after the day of finalization.

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