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Ritual void in the sacred architecture of Montenegro

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Abstract:

Sacral architecture has always aimed at the ritualization of space, which gained its spatial form by making the *void*. Common to all religions is the need to create a grandiose space with a "sacred void", which achieves mystification, sublimity, as a special experience of the religious space. Historical examples show that religion has demonstrated its power precisely through volumetrics that exceeded expected proportions. However, contemporary realizations of sacral architecture point to the need for a redefinition of the "sacred void". In this sense, the goal of this work is analysis the smaller scale of the sacral void, which is present in numerous examples of sacral architecture in the Balkans. In this paper, several relevant examples in the territory of Montenegro will be processed, whose idea of emptiness remains as a consequence of religious, cultural, but also contextual conditions, where the wall - the beginning, as a building element of emptiness, plays an important role.

Keywords: *ritual void, sacred architecture, religious space, poche, Montenegro.*

1. Introduction

At a time when the minimalist emptiness of many contemporary religious buildings is being criticized for its inability to create a sacred meaning, it is necessary to re-examine how the ritual-sacred emptiness is created, in relation to the architectural and spatial elements of different religions. The concept of the "holy void", which he considers necessary for the contemporary reflection on religion, is stated in his theories by the German theologian Paul Tillich. Speaking of Art and Architecture (1952), he suggested that "the most expressive form of art today in relation to religion may be the sacred void" (Tillich [1952] 1989, p. 40). In his theoretical analyzes of the sacred void, we often come across the views that the void is never neutral, but as such can evolve into a new experience that arises as a result of the fulfillment and presence of the sacred. In this paper, the sacral void will also be analyzed as a spatial volume that figures in the urban context, and as such affects its transformation and perception. Three dominant religions live in Montenegro: Orthodox, Islamic and Catholic, whose sacred architecture will be the focus of interest in this research, through the principle of creating a ritual void, and a volume within the city. In this sense, the leading goal of the work is to reexamine the concept of sacral void in traditional, but also contemporary examples of religious architecture in Montenegro, but also their role in the urban context. The hypothetical framework of the work in this sense is directed towards the assumption that the sacred void has a symbolic value, and creates a specific religious experience, but that it is not necessarily connected to the volume. Therefore, the research begins with the principle of building a ritual void, but also with its symbolic value, analyzing relevant examples. The research continues on the Montenegrin context, and the first examples of small-scale religious buildings, created as a result of a need within a specific context, with a special focus on the elements of the sacral void. In the continuation of the research, two phases have special importance in the development of religious architecture in Montenegro: the communist period of the city, when sacred architecture was marginalized, or almost completely restrained, and the second, post-socialist period of expansion of the construction of religious buildings. The social crisis caused by accumulated national, post-war intolerance is reflected through the need for religious marking of space, in the form of the construction of megalomaniacal religious buildings, and such an approach is exclusively based on volumetric overpowering. In this way, a completely new identity of the city is created - *the neo-sacred identity* of the city (Alihodžić Jašarović, 2020), whose basic concept is not in the sacred void, but on the contrary exclusively in the spatial dimension.

2. The symbolic value of the sacral void

Ritual - sacral void as a concept of architectural space, differs in relation to religion and typological characteristics of religious buildings. Sawant calls the sacral void implicit space, stating that it creates certain mystical connotations (Sawant, 2021). Indian and Buddhist architecture use voids to represent sacred space, which in fact symbolically represents the "inner space" of a person. Different approaches to creating a ritual void are reflected in, first of all, the formation of the dynamics of the interior space. Romanesque basilicas have a spatial dynamic that progresses towards the altar, while the culmination in height accompanied by light is concentrated at the altar space. The change in heights, but also the transition from one to another whole, changes the perception and experience, and in this sense, there is no integral impression of the sacred emptiness. In the orthodox spatial concepts of the sacred

space, spatial dynamics also dominates, which creates a specific experience of the space, which as such is divided according to hierarchy, function, but also ritual. This effect is additionally enhanced by architectural elements, details, ornamentation, but also painting, which provides a changing visual and spatial experience, which does not imply the concept of emptiness, as its primary symbolic potential. Contrary to this approach, the interior of the mosque does not contain dynamic spatial elements, but the space is arranged so that its emptiness creates a monolithic, compact and contemplative space, without differentiation. This perfectly static space, apart from the compact base, is additionally achieved by the visual effect and the synthesis of two large complementary forms, which are most often present in Islamic architecture: the hemisphere of the dome and the cube of the building itself. This will become the basic design principle based on examples of contemporary practice, and not only in Islamic sacred architecture.

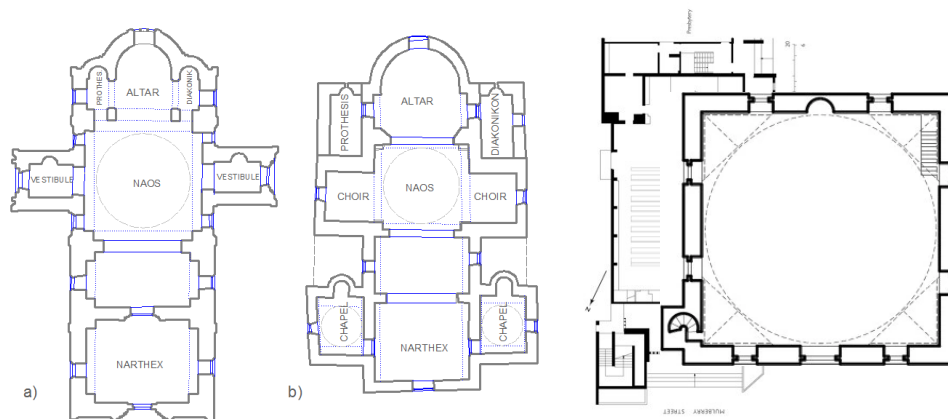


Figure 1. Characteristic functional schemes of sacred spaces

a. orthodox church

source : https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Architectural-program-of-the-two-churches-Studenica-a-Zica-b-The-elegancy-of-the_fig1_326251771

b. catholic church

source : <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/survey-of-london/2020/09/18/the-mulberry-gardens-and-the-german-roman-catholic-church-of-st-boniface-in-whitechapel/>

c. mosque

source : https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Single-dome-layout-nuclear-dome-layout-Orhan-Gazi-Mosque_fig5_259169917

In the following, an overview of the philosophical perceptions of sacred emptiness in the three mentioned religions will be presented. God in Islamic philosophy cannot be associated with a certain time, space or material because his presence is comprehensive and omnipresent (Kutty, 2019), which largely determines the architectural concepts of sacred Islamic architecture. In Islam, there is a thought about the invisible and the visible world, where the invisible world is the spiritual world, and the visible world is the material world, where the spatial and ritual void are connected with the need for the material not to dominate the life of believers. The center of the holiest place for Islam is an absolute void, protected and inaccessible, this void emphasizes the fact that the faith forbids any personification of divinity or any object of worship (El Katra, 2020). In Islamic philosophy, which manifests itself in art and architecture, regardless of the type of construction, from primitive mosques with gable roofs to Turkish mosques with domes, emptiness is considered a logical answer. In that space, it is imperative to ban the depiction of figures, because such images could become an idolatrous cult. The prohibition of images forms part of the liturgical framework of Islam, which becomes the basis of the sacred art of Islam. This may seem paradoxical, because the prohibition of images in this sense conflicts with the basic character of visual arts. In this sense, Islamic art and architecture are dedicated to exteriorization (Burckhardt, 1970), whereby the ritual void is at the service of complete contemplation, and the aestheticization of space is concentrated in shaping its exterior. On the topic of the significance of the sacred void for church architecture, contemporary studies highlight the theories of theologian Paul Tillich and Roman Catholic architect Rudolf Schwarz, who believe that it must be answered in a new way (Daelemans, 2022). Tillich believed that the spatial void, which is increasingly present in contemporary sacred architecture, reflects the atheistic state of the twentieth century, which produced the removal of paintings and sculptures from the church and resulted in emptiness. This spatial - "holy" void can become such a symbolic distance with God, but also a new platform for creating a mystical and contemplative space, which continues the previously

mentioned tradition of Judaism and Islam. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church, in its symbolic and spatial concept, does not establish a sacred void as a concept of space construction, which is reflected in the spatial concept, which as such hardly changes over time. In this sense, the orthodox church is the least transformed, because the minimization and purification of such an approach is atypical and uncharacteristic of established philosophical positions.

In order to better understand the concept of sacral void, it is important to look back at the original principles of space construction, starting from the fact that sacral architecture was created as a need of the locals for a religious space in which religious rituals were performed. We can conclude that sacral architecture did not originally possess all the characteristics and elements of the religious space that we know today, and it is clear that many elements that were subsequently introduced are not a matter of the canon but of the aestheticization of sacral architecture. It is believed that the first Christian churches were actually the houses of the first Christians, and one of the first Christian meeting places was the house of Saint Peter in Capernaum¹.

Sacral architecture on the territory of Montenegro and the Balkans was created as architecture of small dimensions, realized from available materials, while respecting the basic canons. Such architecture merged with the context, it represented a pure example of vernacular. However, one of the key elements that was missing in such an approach is precisely the power of sacred emptiness, which mystifies the space and makes it sublime and contemplative. Over time, small-scale local village churches were built, which were made of stone, usually with a gable roof, and less often with a domed space and side lighting, through a small window opening. When it comes to Islamic sacral architecture, we are also talking about buildings of smaller size, with usually a simple square base, a cubic form covered with gable or gable roofs. In this approach, in contrast to the small size and volume of the space, one can notice the presence of a ritual void, which is concentrated in a small space within a simple form, which at that time was free of superfluous architectural elements and decorations. Here it can be concluded that the ritual emptiness is not conditioned by the dimensions of the space, but that it becomes the result of spatial relations, spatial dynamics, light effects, which produce a specific ritual, mystical and contemplative proctor. In the period of the Ottoman rule, there was a transformation of the existing church buildings into the space of the mosque, which will be discussed in the following chapters, where the same ritual space gets a different reading. This implies the universality of the philosophical approach about the ritual void, which is independent of the change of religious scenography and other canons (example: church and mosque in Ulcinj, mosque in Meterizi).



Figure 2. The mosque in Meterizi existed until 1907, Photo: Samir Adrović

source : <https://ulcinj.travel/ulcinj-nekada/>

Figure 3. Beška Monastery, Lake Skadar

source : <https://agencijaagape.me/obilazak-manastira-na-skadarskom-jezeru/>

Figure 4. Church and mosque in Ulcinj, City Museum

source : <https://waytomonte.com/rs/p-3270-tower-balshicha>

2.1. A new - contemporary reading of sacral emptiness

Traditional spatial conceptions of ritual space are increasingly looking for repurposing and redefinition, in order to create contemporary architectural responses, which include canonical frameworks, but also the need for new architectural expressions that are in line with the times. This process of redefinition is closely related to the treatment of the ritual space, which tends towards a minimalist approach, and which is closely related to the previously analyzed philosophical positions on the perception of ritual emptiness. One of the successful examples is the reconstruction of the Church of Jesus in Cologne, which, after several attempts at reconstruction, today is characterized by simplicity and emptiness, a space that has been completely cleaned of traditional spatial concepts, benches and other furniture. Today, that space represents a complete physical as well as sacral void, which stands

out with two partitioned organs, and above all with the altar of Eduardo Chillida. This is presented as a sculptural but also sacral response to the canon but also the need for space to be defined precisely by emptiness.



Figure 5. The cross altar by Eduardo Chillida in the Jesuit church in Cologne

source : <https://www.diariovasco.com/culturas/wiesbaden-chillida-20181010001653-ntvo.html>

source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327561316_El_Movimiento_de_Renovacion_del_Arte_Religioso_portugues_195267_Contaminaciones_y_transferencias

Numerous contemporary authors try to find the symbolism of the ritual void, and include it in their theoretical and design solutions. Aldo Van Eyck presents a powerful scheme, called Otterlo circles, where the diagram visualizes his approach to designing architecture, emphasized by the strong reciprocity and relativity of space and function. On the right half of the drawing, there is a drawn ring containing an image of individuals forming a circle around the void, as he considers the void to be a basic spatial concept.

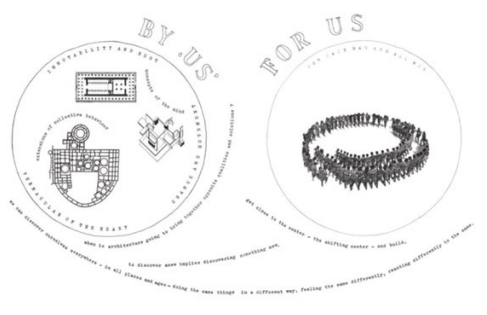


Figure 6. a. Otterlo Circles scheme, Aldo Van Eyck. source : https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Les-Cercles-dotterlo-1959-62_fig1_303718710

b. Playground, Aldo Van Eyck source : <https://archive.curbed.com/2016/2/26/11028076/aldo-van-eyck-playground-orphanage-dutch-design>

Analyzing the semiotics of emptiness in sacral architecture, we can recognize different approaches to its understanding and acceptance (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021) depending on which religion we are talking about. The architecture of Islam and Catholicism, as we stated earlier, are significantly different from orthodox architecture. The concept of emptiness is a kind of synonym for nothingness, and nothingness remains in opposition to the main message of Christianity. For this very reason, the Orthodox Church has changed its canons the least since its inception, unlike the Catholic Church. We are witnessing that the Catholic Church has a very flexible approach to the architectural interpretation of the canon, which often leads to a kind of elimination of decorative forms that were traditionally present in Catholic churches. The minimalist approach promoted by the contemporary sacral architecture of the Catholic Church emphasizes the spaciousness that is built with emptiness.

One exceptional example of sacral architecture based on the concept of building a sacral void, as the main architectural experience, is the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, designed by architect Peter Zumthor. The architect is building the chapel using an inverse design approach, which is precisely the most authentic segment of this project. He first builds the sacral void, subsequently packing it in an envelope. The inner void of the space was formed from a mold of 112 carefully placed spruce logs, then left to burn slowly for three weeks. After burning, the only residue

left in the void is the negative print of the logs, along with the smell of burning wood. A void built with concrete 12 meters high, which as such takes on a rigid and orthogonal exterior, whose inner sanctum is quite unexpectedly the opposite - an amorphous, curved, void. Although formed as a continuous space, it has exceptional dynamic properties concentrated on a small surface, and they are visible from the veiled entrance with a lower height, which culminates in the altar space, above which there is a strong void, which is additionally accentuated by zenithal lighting. A minimal number of scenographic elements, which essentially represent the canon, make the space liberated, and the ritual void, the leading element for experience and contemplation.



Figure 7. Construction of the sacral void, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, architect Peter Zumthora
source : <https://de-architects.com/Feldkapelle-fur-den-heiligen-Bruder-Klaus-03-Bruder-Klaus-Field>

Another example of sacral architecture, built on the principle of sacral void, is Ando's "sacred void" in Church of the Light (1999). Its proportions, both compact and undifferentiated, free of ornaments and details, focus on the ritual void, as a platform for creating an individual religious experience. Emptiness is additionally mystified by the cross, the universal symbol of Christianity, which in this case stands between the inner and the outer, and its body is empty, letting in natural light.

Alvaro Siza also applies a similar architectural response, simplification, subtraction and a minimalistic approach to the design of space that guarantees ritual emptiness, on the project Chapel in Croatia (2021). Freeing up space and bringing believers into a direct relationship with the ritual act, which is not hindered by side effects, produces a specific experience based on the principle of sacral emptiness, which, as in the previous examples, is not directly related to its spatial dimensions and volume.

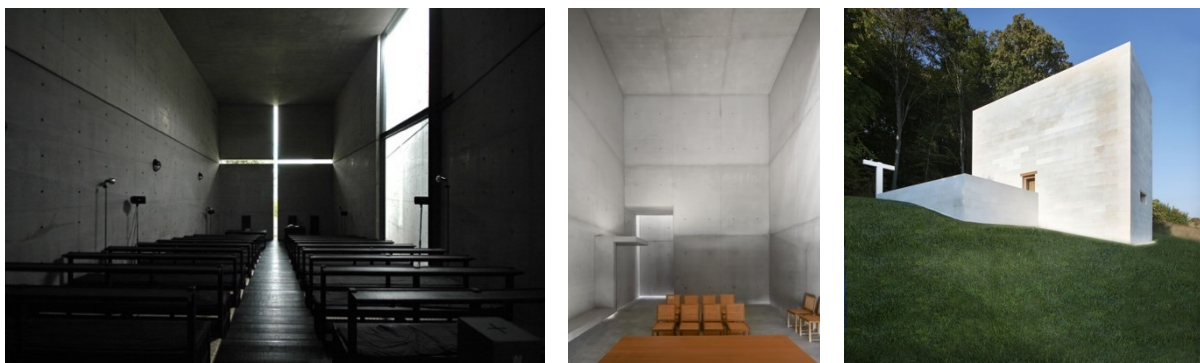


Figure 8. Church of the Light / Tadao Ando Architect & Associates

source : https://www.archdaily.com/101260/ad-classics-church-of-the-light-tadao-ando?ad_medium=gallery

Figure 9. and 10. Chapel in Miljana, Croatia, Alvaro Siza, 2021

source : <https://www.archdaily.com/975910/chapel-in-miljana-alvaro-siza-vieira>

The need to clean sacral architecture of ornaments and reduce it to a complete experience of ritual space, in which nothing distracts attention from the act of prayer itself, has become part of the architectural concept of the contemporary architecture of the Catholic church. On the Abbey of our Lady of Nový Dvůr project, John Pawson uses the sterility of the space and the envelope to build a void that creates the specifics of the ritual space (1999 – 2004), with an emphasis on light, simplicity of proportions and clarity of space. Such an approach, which is in opposition to

traditional perceptions of religious objects, is also visible through its appearance as an intervention that is interpolated into the former complex. In this sense, it is clear that new, contemporary architectural responses imply a re-examination of traditional perceptions, which aims to create a sacral void, as the ultimate range of experience.



Figure 11. Abbey of Our Lady of Nový Dvůr Bohemia, Czech Republic 1999 – 2004

source : <http://www.johnpawson.com/works/abbey-of-our-lady-of-novy-dvur/>

Such a minimalist, refined approach to the construction of the sacred void is very much integrated into the philosophical and symbolic value of Islamic architecture. It is represented as such by numerous authors, among whom Zlatko Ugljen stands out in this area with the imposing White Mosque (1980), whose emptiness and the volume of the interior space create a unique religious experience. The hemisphere of the original dome is placed on a cubic base, but this is interpreted as a square plan from which the planes of the pyramid rise, gradually melting into a continuous space. That light with the abstract whiteness of all interior surfaces whose overall impression is both aesthetic and sublime. The most important award came in 1983, when Zlatka Ugljena's work received the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture, and in 2007 it was recognized by the Society of Hungarian Architects, who rated the White Mosque in Visoko as one of the three best-designed sacred spaces in Europe.

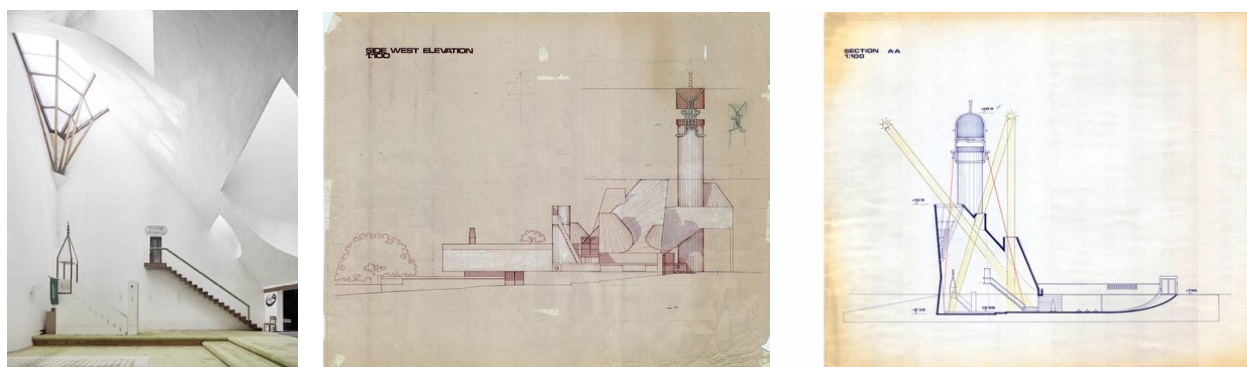


Figure 12. White mosque, 1969, Visoko, architect Zlatko Ugljen

source : <https://brooklynrail.org/2018/10/artseen/Toward-a-Concrete-Utopia-Architecture-in-Yugoslavia-1948-1980>

Previous analyzes pointed to problems in the approach to the interpretation of the ritual void in the Orthodox Church, which as such hardly deviate from traditional schemes. However, in recent years, there have been attempts to reinterpret the architecture of the Orthodox Church in a modern way, keeping all the necessary elements of the canon. In the following, examples from contemporary practice will be presented that try to bring the ritual void into focus. The winning solution, by the architect Saša Buđevac, was realized in 2004. It very quickly opened a debate about whether the boundaries of the materialization of the Orthodox sacred object were pushed too far with this idea. The idea of this architecture was completely different from almost all existing Orthodox temples, so instead of an introverted one, an extroverted concept was used. The transparent structure is made of steel construction and transparent material, which allows the monument and the chapel to be visually penetrated. The form is dominated by the motif of the cross, which can be seen in the base and sides, and is based on a modular element measuring 105x105x105 cm. The chapel is raised from the ground for the same height, so it gives the impression of floating, especially at night when it is illuminated. Here, the conception of the metaphysics of heaven went even further, so the dome completely gave way to a transparent cross motif (Stojanović, 2020).



Figure 13. Chapel, Saša Budjevac, 2004.

source : <https://www.gradnja.rs/ovo-su-najvisi-dometi-na-polju-pravoslavne-sakralne-arhitekture/>

Another successful example of the idea of simplifying the sacred space, the focus of which is the sacred void, is the project of the church by the author's team consisting of prof. Branislav Mitrović and Boris Podreka. At first glance, the church seems atypical for an Orthodox temple, but when its concept is shed further light, the architecture becomes very readable. The church was built on the edge of a large execution ground, where more than 80,000 Serbs and Jews were shot over a period of several years, which inspired the authors that the temple should not be given an established Orthodox form, but that the symbolism of Judaism should also be woven into it. Despite all these oddities, the church has kept its Orthodox signs, primarily through liturgical and canonical principles, which rest on the presence of a hidden altar and a dome, as a symbolic representation of heaven. The projected dome is in fact a blind dome and does not extend beyond the roof covering, thus the harmony of the architectural form remained intact (Stojanović, 2020). The space is lit by six vertically elongated windows that are positioned on the northern wall of the temple. The southern wall is covered by a symbolic "wailing wall", on the outside of which the names and number of victims will be inscribed, while the procession will lead the faithful between the two walls. A modernist styled tower with a belfry rises in the west.

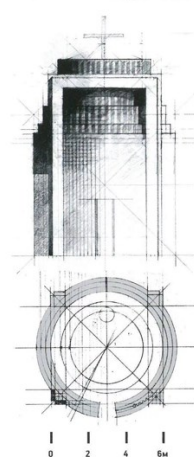


Figure 14. Branislav Mitrović i Boris Podreka, 2002. source : <https://www.gradnja.rs/ovo-su-najvisi-dometi-na-polju-pravoslavne-sakralne-arhitekture/>

Figure 15. Patriotic Chapel, Kraljevo; Spasoje Krunic. source : <https://www.gradnja.rs/ovo-su-najvisi-dometi-na-polju-pravoslavne-sakralne-arhitekture/>

Another good example of the contemporary interpretation of Orthodox religious architecture, mainly on the territory of Serbia, is the memorial chapel dedicated to the genocide of the Second World War that took place in Kraljevo in 1941. The author's team, prof. Spasoje Krunic and Miloš Đurasinović. As a representative of the generation of the second modernism, the architect Krunic models with simple, recognizable forms, but in his specific way he refines the structure with details and bold use of different building materials. However, the greatest contribution of this solution is in the creation of a compressed ritual experience in the form of a sacral void, reduced to a circular base, with a dominant graceful height, which emphasizes the grandeur of the ritual space. The lighting of the chapel was solved in an unusual way, so instead of a dome made of brick or concrete, there was a circular

glass opening on the ceiling. Here, the sky is represented both realistically and symbolically, which provided the interior space with mystical, zenithal lighting. (Stojanović, 2020).

Another of the newer and perhaps the most current examples of contemporary Islamic architecture in the region is the mosque in Ljubljana (BEVK Perović architects, 2020), which is part of the complex of the Islamic religious and cultural center, realized after a competition, and after decades of struggle by the Islamic community of Slovenia. Unconventional, responsible for the theme of the Islamic architecture of the Balkans, the architects set the leading concept in the form of strong ritual voids, located in a transparent cube, dominated by a cloth blue dome that symbolizes the firmament. The power of ritual emptiness is the leading architectural and spatial experience. The whiteness and transparency of the cubic mass additionally increase the power of its action. The light, but also the acoustics, enhance the effect of the ritual experience, where the monumentality of the cubic mass dominates the urban image of that zone of the city. The volume of the mosque creates new spatial and dynamic relationships in the image of the city, consciously marking the space.

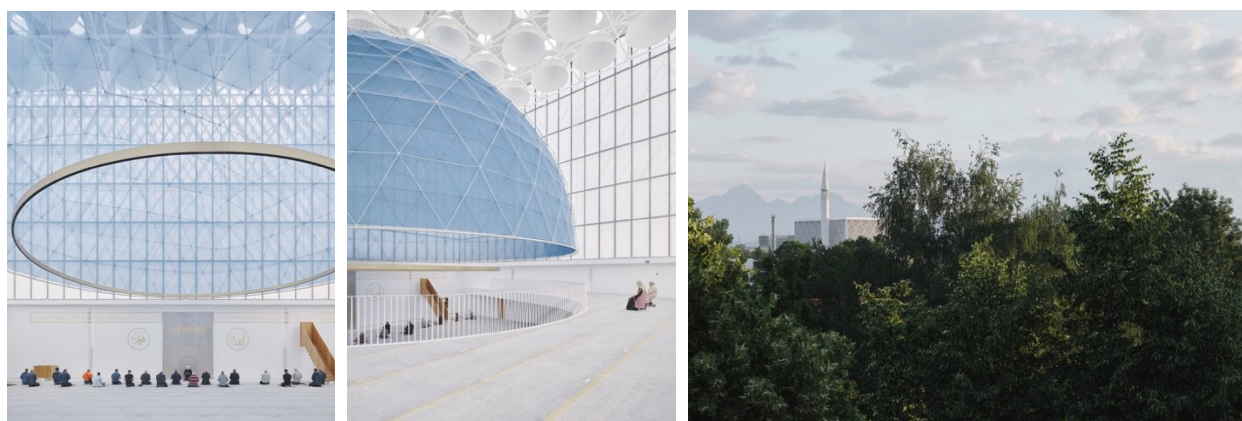


Figure 16. Islamic cultural center and mosque in Ljubljana, 2020. Bevk Perović architects
source : <https://www.archdaily.com/952019/islamic-religious-and-cultural-center-in-ljubljana-bevk-perovic-arhitekti>

2.3. Disappearing space – the power of sacral emptiness

In order to understand the power of the sacred space, it is important to look at examples that, even after the disappearance of the space for certain historical reasons, emit the ritual value of the space. If there are traces of the elements that build that space - walls, as a spatial frame, it will suggest its envelope, which is directly related to our previous experience. In this sense, the void remains a present element regardless of the missing envelope. On the territory of Montenegro, due to the turbulent history, there are a large number of examples of the remains of places of worship, which were demolished as a result of wars. Some of them have never been restored, but still, during religious holidays and rituals, they are activated. Also, after centuries of Ottoman rule in Montenegro, during the conquest of the territory, many places of worship - mosques - were transformed into churches. Thus, the same sacred space, changing the scenography, acquired a new meaning, while the same membrane and sacral void remained, building religious symbolism in the same way. On the other hand, when a Roman Catholic church is withdrawn from liturgical use, regardless of whether it is to be reused or, in a lesser number of cases, demolished, the church building is usually desacralized by a formal act of deconsecration or profanation (Wildt, 2020). This represents a specific aspect of "changing" the status of a sacred space into a profane or secular space.



Figure 17. the remains of one of the oldest mosques in the world, built around 600 or 700 CE.

source : (<http://www.johnpawson.com/works/abbey-of-our-lady-of-novy-dvurlery>)

Figure 18. Hajdar-pašina mosques u Radulići in Bihor

source : <http://www.johnpawson.com/works/abbey-of-our-lady-of-novy-dvurlery>

3. Sacral architecture in Montenegro - *architecture of emptiness or architecture of volume?*

In the 1960s and 1970s, Montenegro experienced the best years in the development of the city, whose dynamics of planning and growth of the city were conditioned and dictated by modernist principles, which rely on the leading postulates and methods established by the CIAM. However, since the communist state system was in force in those years, sacred architecture was not on the list of priorities, and what's more, its construction was often hindered. For this reason, communist - anti-religious principles influenced the stagnation in the construction of sacred architecture in that period. Nevertheless, several successful realizations of sacred architecture point to the fact that the building policies for imperatives had contemporary architectural concepts, which in that period could only be answered by the Catholic Church. The avant-garde period of city construction in this sense is also manifested in the field of sacred architecture. Modernist design principles influence the reduction and purification of the architectural expression in sacred architecture, but also the use of concrete as a material, which is a response to the brutalist trend that dominates the world architectural scene in that period. Orthodox and Islamic architecture, however, remain very conservative when it comes to deviations from conservative architectural expression, not succumbing to new trends. On the other hand, the Catholic Church radically introduces new design models into religious practice, using concrete that enabled the creation of completely new dimensions of space.

This can be seen on the example of the Catholic Church - Church of the Holy Heart of Jesus in Podgorica (1963-1969), author duo Zvonimir Vrkljan and Boris Krstulović. The mega-concrete, completely new and modern Catholic church was built in the Konik settlement, not far from the city center, and as such is the largest and strongest spatial structure in that part of the city. Introducing such a spatial dimension significantly changes the urban cross-section and image of the city, as well as the previously established spatial relations, which makes this building the leader and the main visual benchmark of that part of the city. The monumental concrete belfry becomes a vertical benchmark that can be seen from the entrance sequence to the city. It was built on the principle of creating a spectacular interior space characterized by spatial dynamics, a change in height from the entrance to the altar area, where a spatial and visual culmination occurs, but also a concentrated sacral void.

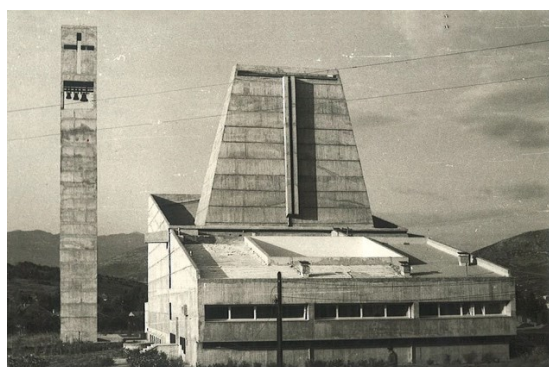


Figure 19. Catholic church in Podgorica, 1969. Zvonimir Vrkljan and Boris Krstulović

source : <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/207827>

Such a changing and dynamic spatial volume is characteristic of the architecture of the Catholic church, as in this case, it is symbolized to perfection and focused on the sacral void, as a unique experience that provides complete contemplation. A special experience of the space is created by the light that penetrates the space zenithally and culminates in the altar space. The strong concrete envelope forms an introverted space, the void of which creates an unusual spatial and sacred experience. The appearance and power of the work show the potential of architecture in social engagement and transformation in ways that are still relevant today, making it indispensable in current contemporary architectural aspirations.



Figure 20. Catholic church in Podgorica, 1969. Zvonimir Vrkljan and Boris Krstulović
source : [http://www.oris.hr/hr/casopis/clanak/\[265\]verfremdungseffekt,4162.html](http://www.oris.hr/hr/casopis/clanak/[265]verfremdungseffekt,4162.html)

Figure 21. Drawing, Ana Radovanović
source : author drawings floor plan, Ana Radovanović

Još jedan veoma značajan primjer sakralne arhitekture iz tog perioda, je katolička crkva sv. Ćirila I Metodija u Nikšiću (1976-1986), autora Slobodana Vukajlovića. Nesvakidšnji arhitektonski odgovor na kontekst, upravo je odraz građenja specifičnog unutrašnjeg prostora i ritualne praznine. Forma ipak predstavlja specifičan pristup kojim se izbjegava konvencionalan odgovor na kose krovove, uslovljene klimatom, a sa druge strane, ona gradi teatralan portal na čijem se vrhu nalazi krst. Beton, kao veoma prisutan material u graditeljstvu 70ih u Crnoj Gori, omogućava kreiranje ove opne, koja kao takva postaje jedan od značajnijih arhitektonskih repera u gradu. Prostor je u unutrašnjosti, suprotno dramatičnom omotaču, mnogo svedeniji, sa veoma intimnim sakralnim prostorom, koji je diferenciran u dvije zone.

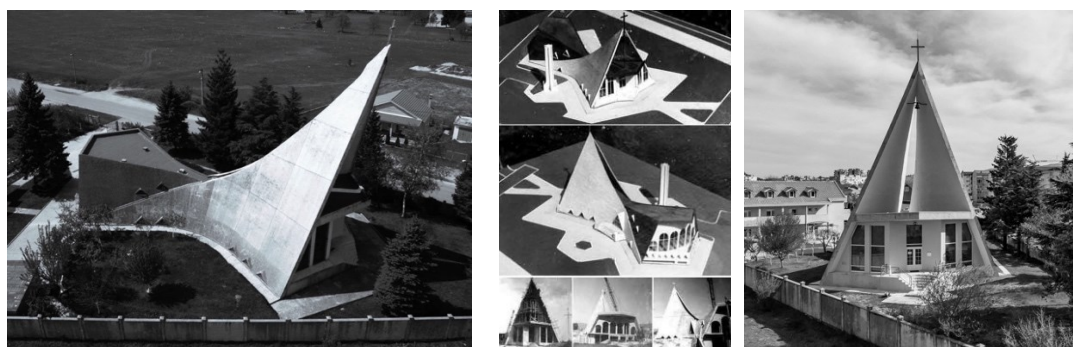


Figure 22. Catholic Church in Nikšić, Slobodan Vukajlović
source : <https://www.pobjeda.me/clanak/majstor-poetizirane-geometrije>
<https://www.skyscrapercity.com/threads/socialist-architecture.912336/page-67>

Another very significant example of sacral architecture from that period is the Catholic church of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Nikšić, Slobodan Vukajlović. The unusual architectural response to the context is

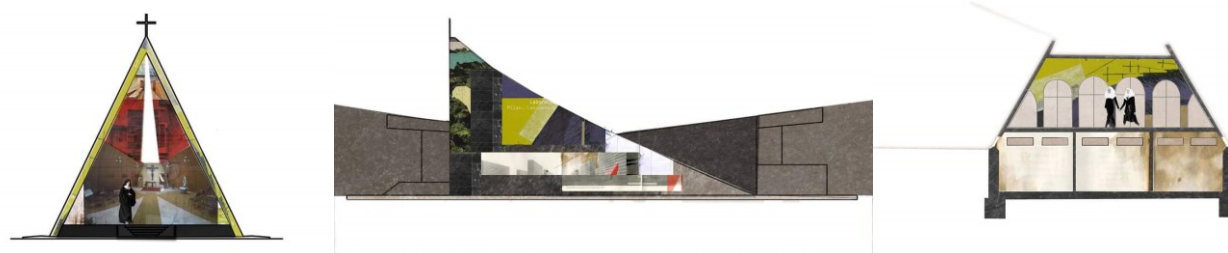


Figure 23. Catholic church in Nikšić, Slobodan Vukajlović (drawings Anđela Marković and Andrea Vujović)
It is clear that the communist authorities had a significant impact on the impermeability of the dominant religious features in the cities in this area, which gave primacy to modern architectural realizations, rejecting any form of

division, especially that arising from religious motivations. Contrary to the previous examples, Orthodox and Islamic architecture are much more conservative in the process of modernizing the architectural form, and this is one of the reasons why these buildings were not built in this period.

After breaking with the idea of a socialist city, Montenegrin cities in the post-war years are experiencing a crisis on several levels. It reflects on the city through different aspects, but in the context of this topic, it is interesting to see how social hypocrisy, accumulated conflicts, restrained religious ambitions escalate in the hyperproduction of religious buildings, which become the leading marker of the city. It is especially important to look at the dimensions of the newly created buildings, which influence the change of the spatial volumes of the city, while neglecting contemporary trends in the construction of sacred architecture. Thus, the Church of Christ's Resurrection in Podgorica (constructed from 1993-2013), designed by architect Predrag Ristić, is the largest building in the modernist part of the city. Even though it was built in the 21st century, it in no way tries to transform the traditional building principles, which are characteristic of Byzantine architecture. Thus, within the modernist part of the city, created mostly in the 60s and 70s of the last century, the leading rapper became a temple whose stylistic characteristics do not belong to the context, nor to the time in which it was created. In this solution, the minimalist approach in building the spatial void was not the theme, but on the contrary, grandiosity and luxury are imperative.



Figure 24. Hram Hristovog Vaskrsenja, Podgorica

source : <https://svetigora.com/osam-godina-od-osvecenja-podgorickog-sabornog-hram-hristovog-vaskrsenja/>
<https://mapio.net/pic/p-15384469/>

The way in which religious objects change the urban image of the city is best demonstrated by the example of three religious objects created in a similar period in the port city of Bar, in the south of Montenegro. Although the city of Bar, known as a multi-confessional and multinational environment of three dominant religions (Islam, Christianity and Catholicism), the social crisis is manifested by the expansion of the construction of religious buildings in just a few years: Islamic Cultural Center Bar with Selimija Mosque (2014) ; Church of Saint John Vladimir (2016); Catholic Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle (2017). All three buildings, with their sizes and positions within the city zones, dimensionally and visually dominate and surpass all existing built urban structures, creating a new transitional - neo-sacred identity. Such an approach is in conflict with the previous principles of the urban and architectural image of the city, which primarily has the function of a coastal, tourist port city. Oversized religious buildings in this way, with very questionable stylistic and architectural characteristics, communicate a completely new image and identity of the city, which puts the original concept of a coastal and port city in the background. In this way, architecture becomes a medium that demonstrates the state of society, cultural and developmental level. This approach points to the fact that sacred architecture in Montenegro does not aim to modernize the concept and design approach, whose focus is the analysis of the contemporary response to the context and the city, but on the contrary, promotes a pretentious approach that manifests the power of a certain religious community.



Figure 25.

a. Mosque Selimija, 2014

source : <https://bar.travel/listing/dzamija-selimija/>

b. Church st. Jovana Vladimira, 2016.

source : <https://tumagazin.rs/2020/07/27/saborni-hram-svetog-jovana-vladimira-u-baru-crna-gora/>

c. Catholic church Sv. Petra Apostola, 2017.

source : <https://www.gradnja.me/euromix-industrija/referenca/695/katolicka-crkva-bar>

The need to mark the space, with religious buildings, as an act of accumulated post-war and nationalist disagreements in these areas, can best be seen on the example of the prefab, tin church, which was erected in mountain Rumija. Marking the territory with religious symbols also represents the identification of an area, and in this sense, the "tin church" in Rumija, which for years has been the subject of political conflicts, was erected by a helicopter of the Army of the then State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2005, on a place where for hundreds of years believers of three confessions - Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic - once a year carry the cross of St. Vladimir, the patron saint of Bar, which translates this ritual into a single-national one. The dimensions of this tin church are determined by the maximum dimensions that the helicopter could transport in the steel structure, which is 3x2x4m. This church is still an unresolved - conflicting issue, because it was built illegally.

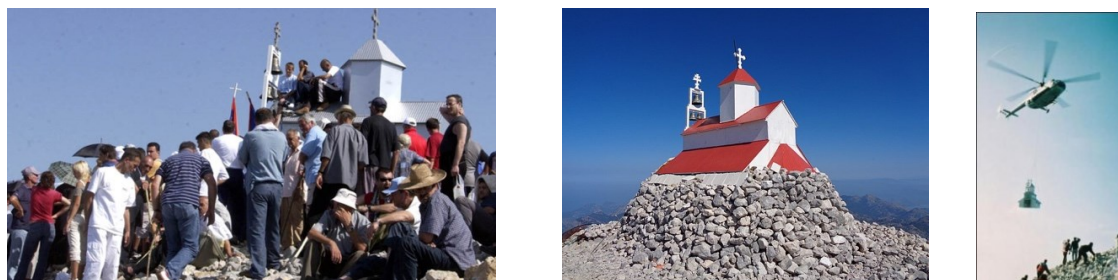


Figure 26. Bringing the church to Rumija by helicopter

source : <https://www.aktuelno.me/istaknuto/san-o-slobodi/attachment/leteca-crkva-na-rumiji/>

https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crkva_Svetog_Trojstva_na_Rumiji

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/limena-crkva-na-rumiji-kao-simbol-podjela-i-nemoci-drzave/27161560.html>

4. Material and Methods

This theoretical aspect is based on a combination of several theoretical and practical methods. Such a mixed method, based on a quantitative (objective indicator) and qualitative approach, was used to show the spatial and volumetric relationships that build the sacral void, on certain religious objects. In this sense, in addition to the analysis method, the case study method is used as a key, by means of which the objects for further analysis will be selected. The historical context will be analyzed using the generic method, which also includes the historical method, with a special focus on spatial relationships and volumes in religious buildings. In this sense, the original spatial concepts of religious buildings on the territory of Montenegro will be analyzed, as well as mutual similarities and differences in the interpretation of the sacred void. After that, the research process continues on examples of sacral architecture that has specific spatial relationships.

The focus of the research is on selected examples of sacred architecture in Montenegro, created as a response to the trend of modernist and brutalist architecture: the Catholic Church in Podgorica, by the author team Vrkljan – Krstulović (1969) and the Catholic Church in Nikšić, architect Vukajlović, and in which we recognize the need to purify established traditional postulates, and by creating a sacral void. Nevertheless, in the summary of the conclusions, this paper has a critical review of the contemporary trends of hyperproduction of sacred buildings in Montenegro,

but which do not aim at re-examining contemporary architectural responses, but at volumetric overriding in order to mark the space and create a new identity of the city.

5. Results and Discussion

Ritual emptiness as a sacred space gained importance over time, as the need arose for re-examination and transformation of traditional religious spaces in sacred architecture. Starting from small, modest religious - prayer spaces, through grandiose volumes, sacred emptiness often remained the leading trump card in the religious experience of space. The attitude about the sacred void is deeply rooted in the philosophy and symbolism of certain religions, which essentially creates different attitudes and determinations, which later manifest themselves in the architecture and treatment of the sacred space. The construction of the sacral void can first of all be recognized in the functional and dynamic organization of space, but also in proportional relations, but also dominantly in the relation of built and unbuilt space, fullness - emptiness, void - poche. These are the leading differences in the typological characteristics of religious buildings. Traditional religious forms in Montenegro were smaller in size, and as such, they were a response to the local context and methods of local construction, with available materials, with typical characteristics of religious architecture in the Balkans. Such possessed the strength of the sacred space, because they are still not focused on aestheticization and "enrichment" of the impression. Contrary to Orthodox and Islamic religious architecture, the Catholic church experienced its architectural culmination in the 70s, building two brutalist buildings, which set new standards in terms of spatial volume and dimensions. The volume of religious architecture has a strong impact on the volume of the city. The establishment of religious buildings as the main benchmarks of the city was particularly evident in the trend of overproduction of religious buildings in Montenegro in the last 20 years. In Montenegro, due to the social, post-war crisis, sacred architecture, contrary to world trends and aspirations to adapt sacred architecture to contemporary trends, is in fact only a volumetric competition and marking of space. Such production of objects of sacred architecture, in all three dominant religions, affects the change of the identity of the city, into a neo-sacred identity, recognized by the largest buildings in size and volume.

7. Conclusions

Ritual emptiness represents a spatial concept in sacral architecture, which as such does not necessarily depend on its dimension, but on the dynamic and spatial framework that is based on the symbolic and philosophical postulates of all religions. Sacral architecture needs a reexamination of the concept, which is essentially related to the modernization of architectural, traditional perceptions, and in this sense, the question of the sacred void necessarily arises, towards a possible answer. In the 1970s, in the context of the then modernist attitudes about the city, two successful examples of sacred architecture were created, namely both Catholic churches in Nikšić and Podgorica, which offered a modern answer to the topic of sacred architecture. However, in Montenegro, contemporary architectural practice in sacral architecture records opposite processes, whose conceptual attitudes are aimed at creating an architecture of volume and not an architecture of emptiness. In this sense, the focus is not on rethinking the transformation of sacred architecture, but on building strong volumes that overpower the context and mark the city. In this sense, contrary to reference examples from world practice, sacral architecture in Montenegro is used to demonstrate power through volume, where ritual void, contrary to size, is not established as a principle of space creation. Therefore, it can be concluded that sacral architecture in Montenegro is not in accordance with contemporary trends, but is very conservative. On the other hand, sacral architecture in Montenegro is contrary to basic religious principles, very socially conflicting. From a spatial and aesthetic point of view, it is very destructive to the modern city.

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