IN THE SEARCH FOR A
TRULY MULTI-FAITH SPACE

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Multi-Faith Spaces (MFS) are a relatively new invention, and yet they quickly gained in significance. On one hand, they are a convenient solution for satisfying needs of people having diverse beliefs in the institutional context of places such as hospitals, schools, airports and the like, as well as, in standalone versions, of general population. On the other, as Andrew Crompton pointed out, they are politically significant, because the multifaith paradigm "is replacing Christianity as the face of public religion in Europe" (2013, p. 493), being successor to secularism.

Due to their ideological entanglement, however, they are often used as the means to promote either a more privatised version of religion, or a certain denominational preference. Two diverse kinds of design are used to achieve these means: negative in the case of the former, and positive for the latter. Both are not without problems, and both do not adequately serve their primary purpose of serving diverse groups of believers.

Realising the rising importance and the complexity of the MFS, this project wants to change the perspective from either functionalist or ideological, and focus on the believers and their needs instead. To do that it aims to investigate the basic needs and limitations of different faiths in order to propose a better design that would be tested on an actual example, and later used as the guidelines for future spaces.

II.   PROJECT BACKGROUND

Although some spaces were shared by different religions in the past, the phenomenon of the MFS is quite a recent invention. As Terry Biddington notes, the first explicitly all-inclusive "Andachtsraum" appeared at Vienna Airport only in 1988 (2013, pp. 316-17). Because of their recentness, they are still not well-defined. "The Multi-Faith Spaces" exhibition notes that even the naming is not congruent, ranging from "inter-faith chapels" to "retreat lounges" (Brand, Crompton & Hewson, 2012), which reflects the strive to appeal to as wide audience as possible (Crompton & Hewson, 2016, p. 83). They are spaces designated for a spiritual activity of different sorts, designed to be suitable for both the religious and the non-religious, without a bias towards any convictions. And while their appearance was an effect of both grassroots initiatives and voluntary decisions of facilities' management, they began to be promoted and recommended i.a. by government agencies in Europe (e.g. in the UK, see Collins and others, 2007, pp. 168-170 or in Spain, see Diez de Velasco, 2011).

There are no architectural guidelines for the way in which the MFS should be built and furnished. Nonetheless, the direction of the most seems quite congruent. Andrew Crompton (2013) notes that there are basically two types of MFS: negative, shared by a majority of such places in Europe and USA, and positive (p. 479). The most common type of the former is a "windowless white room with a few religious texts on a shelf and the paraphernalia of religion, when not actually in use, kept out of sight in boxes", all made from banal materials (p. 474). As Crompton argues, this is the architectural equivalent of an "ambient-noise" (p.

491). The latter is often termed the 'unity by inclusion', where the artefacts of different faiths are on display and the spaces are visibly occupied by different groups (p. 479). In some cases former Christian chapels are re-appropriated, yet in most cases they are built from scratch (The Economist, 2013).

There seems to be a discrepancy in the evaluation of the MFS. On one hand they are praised as the "new level of religious harmony" for their positive role in the facilitation of religious practice, the promotion of tolerance, and the balancing of religious and secular provisions (Crompton & Hewson, 2016, p. 77). On the other, they often evoke equally strong negative reactions, especially in reference to Islam. Some secularists accuse them of being "hidden mosques" that "creep into the public spaces, cloaked behind political correctness" (The Economist, 2013). Meanwhile, Marie Krarup, the Danish People's Party member of parliament wants to close a multi-faith retreat room at the Søndre Kampus of the University of Copenhagen in the name of Danishness and Christianity (Ravn & Schmidt-Mikkelsen, 2016). Finally, many Muslims reject the multi-faith facilities, requesting for a dedicated space and protesting in the streets (Taneja, 2010).

The problems seem to come from relying on what Adam Dinham (2012) calls the muddle of 'multi-faith paradigm'. Two contradictory understandings of religion hide under this name. On one hand, religions are treated as heroes of social cohesion that can bring different social groups together; on the other, as villains who radicalise individuals (p. 577). Thus multi-faith paradigm and the accompanying activities serve a dual purpose: to use different religions to bring tolerance and sense of togetherness, and to fight religion, introducing preference for more privatised faith (p. 588).

By the adherence to the negative design most MFS tilt the scale towards the latter. That is why Crompton and Hewson (2016) argue, that they "follow the modern preference for 'faith' rather than 'religion' and facilitate personal acts of worship", acting "as a benign form of social control, treating religion as a disorder to be tidied away" (pp. 80-81). However, this creates multiple problems. Aiming at everyone, it is home to no-one, creating a sense of impermanence (p. 82). Consequently, everyone is disadvantaged, but the most hindered are those who need objects, set activities and control over their surroundings in their religious practice, while those who can pray anywhere are clearly in favour (p. 85). As they sum it up, "[m]ulti-faith design is a provisional business, an act of casuistry rather than synthesis. Although it aims at equality of opportunity users can never truly be served equally" (p. 84).

Moreover, a truly negative design is hard to achieve. As Francisco Diez de Velasco (2014) notes, already a "neutral arrangement" gives a preference towards the unaffiliated and the non-believers (p. 4). And the all inclusive space needs an extreme amount of maintenance. Based on the case studies, Diez de Velasco tried to come up with some guidelines for the MFS. The rooms has to be spacious, soundproof and preferably circular, although a hexagonal design works too. A scrupulous timetable has to be maintained by an appointed inter-faith minister(s), as there should not be any simultaneous sharing between the groups. The rooms has to be kept spotlessly clean and the furniture easily removable for carpets to be rolled in their place. And nonetheless it is not enough amid increased religious activity, for example during coincidental festivities of two religious group (pp. 5-7).

In fact the MFS work the better, the more they make room for distinctiveness. This is well illustrated by the review of policies adapted by the UK universities. As Jonathan D. Smith (2016) points out, they present two different attitudes (p. 1). The best performing facilities, represented by most universities from the Russell Group, adapt the attitude termed by him "pragmatism + public religion". They implement the pragmatic recommendations made by researchers like Diez de Velasco, introduce separate rooms for Muslim prayers, and see religion as an important and positive addition to their campuses, maintaining the MFS as a space for the cultural exchange (p. 5). On the other side of the spectrum are those, that prefer a more privatised faith, rejecting religion as unnecessary and unwanted problem, and preferring minimal, bland design without any supervision (p. 8). These are the ones, that constantly gather negative media coverage due to the clashes between different faith groups and inadequacy to the needs of their users.

Dinham concludes, that "multi-faith practices risk constituting a parallel world running alongside 'real' faith communities, seeming to respond to policy hopes but unable to bring constituencies of faith with them. To this extent the multi-faith paradigm remains a construct of policy hopefulness" (2012, p. 586). Yet, as we

have seen above, this is the least of worries, as the MFS can constitute the opposite of what they aim for by generating conflicts and introducing inequality and discord. In these cases where former Christian chapels are converted, as Sophie Gilliat-Ray notes, they may even become a flashpoint of inter-institutional tension, especially between Christians, who are afraid about the disappearance of their tradition, and Muslims, who due to their daily prayers spend there the most time (2005, p. 300).

This project would like to try and reconcile the inclusiveness of negative spaces and the respect for distinctiveness of the positive ones. To do that, instead of proposing an "one-fits-all" solution, we want to argue that it is always necessary to start from the local religious communities, which should be involved in the preparation and design of such spaces. Both the interior and the ground rules should be a part of ongoing conversation to alleviate any potential tensions that the MFS might introduce. In this project we want to test if this attitude is workable.

III.   AIMS AND METHODS OF THE PROJECT

This project aims to:
- → evaluate the interest in, and the necessity of, the MFS in the Malmö area;
- → understand the basic requirements and limitations of believers from different religious congregations when it comes to the design and organisation of the MFS;
- → prepare guidelines for the design of the MFS that would accurately satisfy the needs of different believers;
- → enact these guidelines onto an actual MFS, and update the guidelines based on the results.

To do that we plan to:
- → consult with religious leaders on their perspectives towards the MFS;
- → collect the data by conducting surveys and focus groups with representatives of religious congregations in Skåne;
- → prepare an informational website on the project that could be of later promotional use;
- → build an actual space and open it to the public.

IV.   SCHEDULE

Conceptual Phase:
1. Finding Cooperating Institutions
2. Conducting research with the participation of religious congregations
3. Analysing surveys and focus groups results
4. Searching for space and funding
5. Preparing guidelines and designing the space

Empirical Phase:
1. Preparing the space
2. Marketing the space
3. Day to day maintenance and feedback collection

V.   INNOVATION

As we pointed out in the introduction, the phenomenon of the MFS is still understudied. To our best knowledge only one major research project focused exclusively on it, "Multi-Faith Spaces: Symptoms and Agents of Religious and Social Change" led jointly by the Universities of Manchester and Liverpool. This project investigated the currently existing Multi-Faith Spaces and on that base formed design recommendations. Our project changes the focus towards potential users of such spaces. Due to that it may offer the following innovative results:

- ➔ analysis of the situation, knowledge and interest in the MFS in the Nordic region, i.e. Malmö area;

- ➔ collection of data on basic requirements and limitations towards the MFS of different religious groups;

- ➔ introduction of the new MFS in Malmö in the place where there is the biggest need for it;

- ➔ preparation of guidelines for the future MFS in the Nordic region and possibly elsewhere.

VI. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

The project will be led by Ryszard Bobrowicz, a student at the University of Copenhagen with background in law and religious studies, and Moa Karlsson, Lund University student with background in philosophy, history of ideas, and religious studies.

Further research team and volunteers will comprise of the members of the existing network of Religious Roots of Europe students and alumni, who come from five major Scandinavian Universities: Aarhus, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Lund and Oslo.

VII. CONTACT INFORMATION

We would be happy to answer any questions at: contact@multifaithspace.eu

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