

Symbolic Morphologies: Built Form and Religion in Sylhet City, Bangladesh

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Abstract : Religious activities that have evolved the sacred into a dynamic cultural phenomenon in the public realm of Sylhet, Bangladesh, and the spatiality of sacred sites and everyday practices in certain built forms have framed these phenomena. Religious rituals in Sylhet gave birth to unique practices of their own and have a vast impact even on contemporary spatial practices, while most Western researchers are not hopeful about the future of religion. However, despite extensive research on urban morphology and religion separately, there is limited literature on the relationship between these two topics to capture religious perceptions and experiences in urban spaces. This research will try to fill the existing gap and explain sacred within the range of Western sociological and philosophical tools implemented in third-world contexts, which was never highlighted before. This perspective of research puts forth the argument that urban morphology influences sacred experiences and how consecrated entities and religious activities shape the city's structure in return. The methodology of the research will map key morphological and religious variables. This mapping might include festival trajectories, street life observations, pedestrian densities, religious activities, public and private interface types with religious commodification, and the identification of blurred boundaries between sacred and profane on smaller to broader urban scales. To relate the derived cartography, illustrative (not representative) interviews about religious signs and symbols will be conducted and compared accordingly. The possible findings might reintroduce the diversity of religious practices in urban places and develop a decent concept of how sacred and urban morphology are mutually reinforcing the city, which has remained a vital nutrient for the survival of its inhabitants. Such infrequent conceptualizations of urban morphology and its relationship to symbolic sacralization are truly 'outside' to those that exist in the West.

Keywords : sylhet, religion, urban morphology, symbolic exchange, Baudrillard

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