

The relationship between spirituality, architecture and landscape: the case of Walden & Thoreau and Sidhartha & Hesse

Margarida Pedroso de Lima

Faculty of Psychology, University of Coimbra, Portugal

mplima@fpce.uc.pt <https://woc.uc.pt/fpce/person/ppgeral.do?idpessoa=47>

Nuno Martins

Superior Artistic School of Oporto (ESAP), Portugal

anunomartins@sapo.pt www.projecto9.org

Introduction

Quality of Life (QoL) has been conceptualized in different ways and, recently, accepted as a subjective and multidimensional concept (Bonomi, Patrick, Bushnell & Martin, 2000). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QoL as “individuals” perception of their position in life in the context of culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHOQOL GROUP, 1995, p. 1405) and considers that it is structured in six dimensions, which are: physical, psychological, level of independence, social relationships, environment and religious/spiritual values (WHO, 1999).

Recent utilization of spirituality and religious beliefs concepts in the definition of health by WHO reflect the influence these concepts produce in the perception of peoples’ QoL. Studies have shown that religious experience is an important factor in QoL perception, and it is intimately related to health, social and psychological aspects (Epperly, 2000 cit in Panzini et al, 2007; Shreve-Neiger & Edelstein, 2004; Koenig, 2004). The active participation in religious practices and spiritual development are directly related to the perception of quality of a good life and inversely connected to psychological symptoms, as depression (Koenig, 2004). It also represents an important coping tool to deal with other aspects of life, (Ramos, 2001). Therefore the interest in this relation is not restricted to the medical/clinical professionals but also organizational/ environmental researchers.

The conceptualization of spirituality in the scientific community tends to converge and have many points in common. For Guillory (2000 cit in Mai & Denardin, 2005), spirituality is a state of consciousness that influences the pattern of behavior that people take through life, while religion represents a practical side of spirituality. Religious practices express spiritual values by means of rituals and worship, prayer, meditation and others and take place in certain sacred buildings or environments (Mai & Denardin, 2005; Shreve-Neiger & Edelstein, 2004). Koenig (2004) defines spirituality as a personal resource to assign meaning to issues of life, with sacred or transcendence, which may or may not lead to the practice of religious rituals.

To the extent that personal values are directly influenced by spirituality, it is no longer an

issue restricted to the context of religions. Individual values determine the placement of people in life. It is therefore important to consider that spirituality affects significantly the design and training of these values (Mai & Denardin, 2005), insofar as it is a concept closely related to “individual experience, and is generally linked to private events and transcendence” (George et al, 2000; Hill et al, 2000; Piedmont, 1999 cit in Shreve-Neiger & Edelstein, 2004, 380). And, therefore is closely related to our experience with space and place.

Our personal values and religious beliefs are important factors in how we perceive our own existence and environment. These beliefs consist in an attempt to make the world more understandable (Carone, Jr & Barone, 2001), mitigating the effects of the hardships and problems that people face. According to these authors, religious beliefs act as aids to thinking, as providing “prior notice” of how to act when a specific situation happens. Thus spirituality is intrinsically linked to space and environment that enhances our feeling of belonging and the assignment to our lives.

Methods and study cases

Taking as research framework the dialectic architecture-body-mind this communication outlines some hypothesis on the relationship between internal space-external space. As study cases authors selected two world masterpieces of poetic prose. The first one is an autobiographic text, the second, a fiction. The first allows to approach the perception of the reality of outside spaces (a house, a wood, a lake) seen from the inside space (the self). The second allows to focus a fully experience of the outside (a house, a forest, a river, a city) overlaid by the mindfulness activity. One book is *Walden; or, life in the woods*, by H.D.Thoreau, the other one is *Siddhartha*, by H.Hesse.

In *Walden*, the writer describes on his diary a particular way of living: auto sufficient, completely isolated in the woods, occupying a self-made small house, near a lake. In *Walden*, we look at the concepts of domestic&public space and their links to spirituality, self belonging and happiness. By dissociating characteristics of the place from the demands of functionality (usually dictated by common sense) Thoreau redefines the frontiers between public and private space, as well as between architectural program (demands of space and its requirements) and typological elements of architecture (the ideas behind building forms historically connect to specific functions). Moreover, the spatial expansion manifested in Thoreau’s daily chronicles subverts classic concepts of scale and proportion, linking the notion of spatial dimension to the vibration and breathing of the space. This seems to be a mind movement commanded by perception that eludes the very Euclidian Geometric postulates.

In *Siddhartha*, the main character dwells different scenarios: a few houses, paths, forests, a city, a river. Despite the richness of literary devices, from an architecture&landscape point of view, it is noteworthy the scarcity of physical elements descriptions: just a few images bring us a sense of place related to the drama setting. Looking deeply to the narrative it becomes clear that the spiritual density of *Siddhartha*-character, emphasized by the flow of the writing, hides the exact place where the action really occurs. And the action does not occur in the outside spaces where *Siddhartha* moves through, but rather

in his own internal space. All lifelong Siddhartha's experiences converge to a unique space, a complex one, a flexible space that contracts and expands, which is the space of the mindfulness where Siddhartha definitely inhabits. Missing the stage of inhabiting home before inhabiting the world (Bachelard,1961) in this case, before inhabiting the world Siddhartha inhabits inside himself.

Conclusions

The revisitation of Walden&Thoureau and Sidhartha&Hesse suggests a revision of the relation spirituality&architecture&landscape. The fusion between Nature and states of mind, or between landscapes and mindscapes underlines the inevitability of a poetic dimension of the inhabiting. The dialectic internal spaces&external spaces points out the spiritual dimension of the well being as a critical matter to the QoL.

Key words: *quality of life, well being, spirituality, spiritual architecture, landscapes, mindscapes*

References

- Bachelard, G. (1957). *La poétique de l'espace*, Presses universitaires,Paris; (1958, First edition in English), *The Poetics of Space - The classic Look How we Experience Intimate Spaces*, Beacon Press, Boston; (1978) *A poética do Espaço*, in *Os pensadores - Ganton Bachelard, Vida e Obra*, Editora Abril, S.Paulo
- Bonomi, A. E., Patrick, D. L., Bushnell, D. M. & Martin, M. (2000). *Validation of the United States' version of the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL) instrument. Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 53, 1-12.
- Carone, Jr, D. A. & Barone, D. F. (2001). *A social cognitive perspective on religious beliefs: their functions and impact on coping and psychotherapy*. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 21, 989-1003.
- Hess, H. (1998), *Sidhartha - um poema indiano*, Casa das Letras, Lisboa; *Sidhartha* (1922, First edition in german; 1951, First edition in english, New Direction, USA)
- Koenig, H. G. (2004). *Religion, Spirituality, and Medicine: Research Findings and Implications for Clinical Practice. The Southern Medical Journal*, 97 (12), 1194-1200.
- Mai, C. F. M. & Denardin, E. S. (2005). *Espiritualidade nas empresas: uma nova maneira de desenvolver líderes de sucesso*. *Ciências Sociais Aplicadas*, 1, 19-43.
- Panzini, R. G.; Rocha, N. S.; Bandeira, D. R. & Fleck, M. P. A. (2007). *Qualidade de vida e espiritualidade*. *Revista de Psiquiatria Clínica*, 34, 105-115.
- Ramos, M. (2001). *Desafiar o desafio: Prevenção do stresse no trabalho*. Lisboa: Editora RH.
- Shreve-Neiger, A. K. & Edelstein, B. A. (2004). *Religion and anxiety: A critical review of the*

- literature*. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 24, 379-397.
- Thoreau, H.D. (1999). *Walden, ou a vida nos bosques*, Antígona, Lisboa; (1854, First Edition)
Walden; Or, Life in the Woods, Ticknor and Fields, Boston
- WHOQOL SRPB Group. (2006). *A cross-cultural study of spirituality, religion, and personal beliefs as components of quality of life*. *Social Science & Medicine*, 62, 1486-1497.
- World Health Organization. (1999). *WHOQOL – Annotated Bibliography*. Geneva, Switzerland: Department of Mental Health, World Health Organization.