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Photo, front cover: Magnus Rönn
Photo is describing a Lumen Prototype from an exhibition 2024 at Louisiana in Denmark called *The Living Structures*. The exhibition is the first in a new series 'Architecture Connecting', spotlighting the evolution of architecture in an era of climate crisis and the social, cultural and political challenges this reality poses.

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PURPOSE-BUILT, GRAND, OR CENTRAL MOSQUE? A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION OF MOSQUE TYPOLOGY IN SCANDINAVIA

HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN, TOVE ROSENDAL, AND MARIA LÖFDAHL

Abstract

Mosques in Scandinavia are a highly diverse phenomenon, which has led to the emergence of a rich vocabulary within the field of academic research. This article examines the conceptualization of mosques in the diaspora, with a particular focus on purpose-built mosques, and argues for a rethinking of this frequently used term. We suggest replacing the term with a more nuanced typology that goes beyond mere physical structures to include aspects such as the size, status, and mutual positioning of large Scandinavian mosques, and consequently propose a terminology that includes "grand", "central", and "Friday mosques" as well as "multipurpose cultural centres" as key categories. To link the abstract typology to the empirical, we apply the terminology to a number of Scandinavian mosques and discuss how to deal with cases where the typology differs from the mosques' own designations.

Keywords:
purpose-built mosques, grand mosques, central mosques, Friday mosques, multipurpose cultural centres, Scandinavia, typology of mosques

1. Introduction

Over the past fifty years, hundreds of mosques have been built in Scandinavian cities as a result of Muslim immigration.[1] Most of them operate in existing buildings, ranging from the temporary use of basements, backyard flats, and disused shops in residential areas to purchased and renovated factory buildings, warehouses, and workshops in industrial areas. In recent years, there has also been an increase in what are often referred to as purpose-built mosques, that is, buildings specifically designed and constructed to serve as places of worship for Muslims. According to the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, twenty-three mosques in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were classified as purpose-built in 2020 (Müssig et al., 2022, pp. 200, 503, 639), and a few more have been established since then.[2]

The mosques in Scandinavia vary in locations and architectural style. Those established in existing buildings are often located interstitially, in the gaps of the post-industrial city, or appear relatively anonymous from the outside, due to having little or no signage or Islamic symbols, and have thus become synonymous with invisibility and "precarious territoriality" (Dejean, 2010, pp. 309–310). The purpose-built mosques, on the other hand, tend to be centrally located in large cities and, because of their size and use of Islamic symbols, act as visual landmarks in the urban environment.

Mosques in Scandinavia are thus a very diverse phenomenon in terms of form, function, and location, and have therefore given rise to a rich vocabulary in the research literature, with terms such as prayer rooms, basement mosques, backyard or storefront mosques, pop-up mosques, converted mosques, purpose-built mosques, intentionally-built or intentionally-constructed mosques, fully-fledge or "real mosques", grand mosques, mega mosques, and Islamic centres, amongst others. And although this terminology may seem relatively transparent, given the descriptive nature of the terms, ambiguities in meaning often arise: Is an Islamic centre (always) the same as a mosque? Is a mosque whose building was originally a garage for buses, but which now appears completely renovated with a minaret and a dome, a converted mosque or a purpose-built one? And do purpose-built mosques necessarily have to have minarets, domes, or other Islamic features, or can they be anonymous buildings with no Islamic features on the outside?

The diverse and sometimes unclear use of terms is likely a consequence of the fact that mosques are (still) a relatively new phenomenon in the Scandinavian context. Additionally, the vocabulary employed tends to reflect a predominantly Western perspective, focussing on the physical structure of the mosque and not, for example, on their social or religious implications (for further discussion of this, see also Kühle & Larsen, 2019, pp. 58–63). The fact that the terms have evolved over decades as mosques have gradually become more permanent and visible in public space –

1 In Denmark, there are about 170 mosques (Kühle & Larsen, 2019, p. 6. See also p. 61 ff for a discussion of the difficulties in determining the number of mosques). In Norway, the number is estimated at 150 (Hafnor Bøe, 2022, p. 483), but there does not seem to be reliable data for Sweden (Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2022, p. 611).

2 The first purpose-built mosques were established as early as in 1967 (Denmark) and 1975 (Sweden), but they were both quite small and belonged to the Ahmadiya movement, a sect that originates from Pakistan and is not recognized by traditional Islam. See Kühle & Larsen (2017), p. 76–77; Larsson (2010a), p. 364; and Larsson (2010b), p. 376.

from early, temporary sites, to converted buildings, to purpose-built mosques – also means that they may be seen as an expression of the times in which they were created, rather than as an appropriate and up-to-date conceptualization of mosques in Scandinavia today.

In this article, we examine the conceptualization of mosques in the research literature, with a particular focus on purpose-built mosques in Scandinavia, and argue for a rethinking of this frequently used term. Our interest in exploring this concept arose in the context of a study on the territorialization of mosques in the three Scandinavian capitals of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm, where we looked more closely at purpose-built mosques, but quickly ran into difficulties in defining what this term actually means. For many reasons, purpose-built mosques are central to Muslim placemaking in Scandinavia, and as the number of such mosques is expected to increase in the coming decades (Nielsen, 2024; Worre Sørensen, 2024), it is important to reflect on how these types of institutions can be suitably conceptualized.

In what follows, we first provide an overview of how mosques in the diaspora have been categorized in the research literature to date. We then, in section 3, focus on purpose-built mosques and point out terminological issues that have arisen in recent years. In section 4, we discuss alternative concepts and apply them to empirical data, and in section 5 we argue for a more consistent and up-to-date terminology for large mosques in the Scandinavian diaspora.

Before presenting an overview of mosque typologies, a short note on the concepts and methodology used in this study: To address the research question, we focus on the research literature that deals with mosque typologies in the diaspora. The term “diaspora” is used to refer to mosques situated in regions where Islam is a minority religion. However, as there is great variation among mosques across the diaspora, depending, among other things, on their geographical location, we focus on the Islamic diaspora in Europe, with a particular emphasis on the northern European context. We are aware that the definition and application of the term “diaspora” has undergone significant expansion over recent decades, as highlighted by Brubaker (2006). In this study, we adhere to the definition of diaspora based on three core elements that are widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora: dispersion in space (Muslim immigration to Scandinavia); orientation to a (religious) homeland; and boundary-maintenance (between Muslim and non-Muslim nation-states) (Brubaker, 2006, pp. 5–7; Crang, 2010; Jonker, 1996).

The aim of this study is to establish a foundation for a reflexive use of concepts associated with large mosques within the Scandinavian diaspora, thereby facilitating a coherent theorization of mosque typology. To connect the abstract typology with the empirical, we use examples

from the twenty-three purpose-built mosques in Scandinavia listed in the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe. We visited eight of these mosques located in the three capitals, talked to representatives, and took photographs, from the out- and inside, of texts, signs, and symbols as well as architectural features.

2. Mosque Typologies in the Diaspora

As with all research, the choice and definition of concepts depends on the research question being addressed, and it is therefore not surprising that we find a wide range of different concepts and categories for diaspora mosques in the research literature.

A mosque, in its simplest definition, is a place for performing prayers (Asfour, 2016, p. 80). In Arabic Islamic terminology, there are three basic types of what in Scandinavia is called a mosque: Musalla, a place of prayer or prayer room, refers to a place solely for performing prayers, especially in locations where a formal mosque is not available. Prayers are often performed individually or in small groups, without the presence of an imam. Masjid, a place of prostrating or bowing in prayer, is the Arabic term for a mosque that serves as a central point for prayers, religious activities, and other social gatherings. And masjid jaamic refers to a central or congregational mosque in a city. Jaamic means to gather or bring together, indicating that a masjid jaamic – or what in Arabic is usually just called jaamic – is typically a large mosque that serves as a central place where people meet for religious and social purposes, such as daily prayers, Friday prayers, religious holidays, and various community events. A jaamic is generally larger and more centrally located than smaller neighbourhood mosques or masjids.

Research on diaspora mosques also works with different categories of mosques. A common way to categorize them is to distinguish between "house mosques", where homes are converted into religious spaces, often with only the most basic functions of religious activity; "converted mosques", where non-residential buildings such as former warehouses, shops, or churches have been transformed into mosques that can accommodate religious activities and be adapted to the religious and social needs of the congregation at a low cost; and "purpose-built mosques", that is, new mosques built from the ground up, which are often established when converted mosques are no longer large enough to accommodate all those who wish to participate in religious activities such as Friday prayers (Saleem, 2013, p. 188; 2018, pp. 11–15). This categorization, long used in the British research literature (see, for instance, Gale & Naylor, 2002; Nasser, 2003, among many others), has found its way to Scandinavian research and is frequently used to describe Scandinavian mosques, for example, in Arly Jacobsen et al. (2019), Fridolfsson & Elander (2012), Hafnor Bøe (2022), Jensen & Petersen (2022), and Larsson

& Sorgenfrei (2022), the main difference being, however, that "house mosques" have been replaced by a more diverse vocabulary, such as, for instance, cellar mosques, backyard mosques, storefront mosques, and pop-up mosques, as opposed to permanent mosques (see, for example, Fridolfsson & Elander, 2012; Larsson, 2014; Mack, 2015; Petersen, 2019, amongst others).

In the 1970s and 1980s, diaspora mosques were often categorized according to the ethnic background of their congregants, thus focussing on whether the mosques typically served Arabs, Bosnians, Pakistanis, Turks, and so on (Karlsson & Svanberg, 1995; Maréchal, 2003; Nasser, 2003; Simonsen, 1990). And although several studies have argued for the de-ethnification of the Muslim diaspora and thus of mosques (Tibi, 2010 among others), ethnicity is still used as a category in present-day research as it offers insights into many different aspects of mosque organization and activities (Kühle & Larsen, 2019, pp. 201–255). However, in such instances, it is typically rephrased as "ethnic mosque communities" or "the ethnicity perspective" on mosques, and is employed as a supplementary category alongside other features of diaspora mosques.

A number of studies categorize mosques in the diaspora according to their geographical location: Kuhle & Larsen, for instance, employ the categorization of "metropolitan mosques", "urban mosques", and "small town mosques",[3] on the basis that the environment in which a mosque is established and operates influences the conditions and activities it can undertake (Kühle & Larsen, 2019, pp. 265 ff). Others posit that the location of mosques in urban areas is a reciprocal relationship, as mosques also exert an influence on the social and functional aspects of urban neighbourhoods (Blind & Dahlberg, 2020; El Boujjoufi et al., 2021). In contrast, Jones (2010) directs attention to rural mosques and the use of subterranean spaces. He challenges the tendency to focus on a homogenized and dominant Muslim minority in urban spaces, where "studies (of mosques) are generalized from the urban locale to that of the state", completely overlooking the fact that rural and semirural settings offer different experiences for Muslims (Jones, 2010, p. 754).

3 Kühle & Larsen use the Danish terms "Storbymoskeer", "bymoskeer", and "småbymoskeer" respectively.

The architectural style of diaspora mosques is also employed as a means of categorization, distinguishing for example between "contemporary mosques", "traditional mosques", and "timeless mosques" (Verkaaik, 2012, p. 163) or between "nostalgia mosques", which bring Islamic architecture to urban space, and more modern "polder mosques", which harmonize with north-European architecture (Maussen 2009, cited in Hewidy & Schmidt-Thomé, 2022, p. 152). This line of research is primarily concerned with purpose-built mosques, and it is often argued that their stylistic expression is markedly ambivalent due to a combination of "the usual 'Islamic' architectural imagery" and the use of local forms and materials (Nasser, 2003, p. 16). Gale & Naylor (2002, p. 398) have designated

this phenomenon "stylistic domestication", which signifies an aesthetic form that is not reducible to any particular tradition. However, a particularly intriguing phenomenon in this context is the architectural mimicry observed, for instance, among Turkish diaspora mosques in Europe, which imitate elements of classic sixteenth-century Ottoman mosques. Rather than attempting to construct an exact replica of a specific, grand mosque, the objective seems to be either to evoke a sense of nostalgia and memories of Ottoman grandeur or to emphasize Turkey's geopolitical significance to the West and to other Islamic countries through a synthesis of Turkish/Ottoman architectural styles and Islamic influences (Batuman, 2016). Avcioglu (2020), on the other hand, has identified four key architectural and chronological phases of diaspora mosques that place stylistic domestication and architectural mimicry in a more historically based typology: 1) "Orientalist mosques" (before World War II), designed to showcase tolerance as a cornerstone of imperial power, with their architectural styles directly influenced by Islamic art, as illustrated by the Grand Mosque of Paris and the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, UK (Avcioglu, 2020, pp. 282–286); 2) "nationalist mosques" (World War II to 1970–80), where decolonization and secularism lead architects to reform traditional Islamic architecture and promote modern functionalist principles, as illustrated by the Central London Mosque and the Cultural Centre of Rome (ibid., pp. 286–291); 3) "diasporic mosques" (1970–80 to today), designed to assert agency for Muslim immigrants, which prompted architects to turn to postmodernism, partially reviving traditional Islamic forms and symbols (ibid., pp. 291–297); and finally 4) "emancipated mosques", which aim to negate the oppressive rhetoric of previous eras and adhere to the discourse of multiculturalism and globalization, in which secularist and ecumenical desires converge with creativity, as illustrated by the Strasbourg mosque in France (ibid., pp. 297–303). The phenomena of stylistic domestication, architectural mimicry, and, not least, Avcioglu's focus on architectural practices of orientalism, nationalism, postmodernism, and globalization demonstrates the ways in which diaspora mosques, as a result of their architectural features, are (hyper-) politicized within the context of European geopolitics—or, as Verkaaik puts it, following Roose (2009): "Architectural forms and styles are actively chosen to make a political statement, and consequently, the parties involved in this process are seen as political actors" (Verkaaik, 2013, p. 11).

The events of 11 September 2001 and the cartoon crisis in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2006 prompted an increased focus on the internal power dynamics of diaspora mosques, as well as their political and religious affiliations with the Islamic world. The need to comprehend the distribution of authority and power within diaspora mosques was underscored in Kühle's comprehensive survey of Danish mosques from 2006, which delineated Sunni Muslim mosques into three categories based on Weber's typology of charismatic, bureaucratic, and traditional authority: Sheikh mosques, where religious authority is vested in

charismatic imams; organizational mosques, where religious authority is held by a national or transnational Islamic organization or institution; and lay mosques, in which religious authority is exercised by non-clerics, whose religious knowledge is based on Islamic traditions as it is handed-down in Quranic schools and other formal or informal educational contexts (see also Arly Jacobsen et al., 2019; Kühle, 2016, pp. 104–106; Kühle & Larsen, 2019, pp. 160–197). And while lay mosques are the most widespread type of mosque in Denmark, sheikh mosques are typically found among very large mosques (Kühle, 2006, pp. 168–170; 2016, p. 104). The categorization of diaspora mosques based on forms of authority is also evident in studies of Norwegian mosques, such as Døving (2014, pp. 218–222) and Linge (2009, pp. 28–34). As for the mosques' political and religious affiliations with the Islamic world, this strand of research focusses on possible transnational links to Middle Eastern states such as Morocco, Turkey, or Pakistan, where many migrants in Scandinavia come from (Bruce, 2018; Kühle, 2016, pp. 113–114; Maréchal, 2003, pp. 109–110; Sunier et al., 2016), or to Gulf countries that sponsor the building of new purpose-built mosques in the diaspora (Hewidy & Schmidt-Thomé, 2022; Kühle, 2020; Mack, 2015; 2019). This focus on mosques as politico-religious actors in a geopolitical context that is often tense, remains a relevant topic in recent Scandinavian research, as evidenced in the works of Gustafson & Ranstorp (2017), Hegghammer (2018), and Nilsson & Esholdt (2022), among others.

In recent years, research has begun to take an interest in diaspora mosques from a Muslim religious perspective. Ahmed (2019, pp. 140–145), for example, divides mosques into "fard mosques", which focus mainly on daily prayers, "fard kifaya mosques", which are preoccupied with congregational and communal activities, and "sunna mosques", which follow not only what is compulsory in Islam, but also what is recommended by linking back to the life of the prophet (the sunna) as exemplary behaviour for today's Muslims.

In summary, one noteworthy aspect of these studies on diaspora mosques is the significance of size. The majority of categorizations employ a specific terminology for large mosques, albeit from disparate perspectives, be it a masjid jaamic, purpose-built mosques, metropolitan mosques, sheikh or sunna mosques, or the use of architectural imitations of Ottoman or Arab grandeur. Such mosque typologies, when considered alongside the research literature's diverse terminology for large, visible mosques in diaspora contexts, shows a need for a transparent terminology that encompasses larger mosques in the diaspora as a distinct entity from other categories of mosques. And it is to this category that we will turn in the subsequent sections.

3. What is a purpose-built mosque?

"Purpose-built mosque" is a term that seems to be used only in the diaspora – at least we have never come across it in an Islamic or Middle Eastern context. This is probably because mosques have been a natural part of the landscape in the Middle East and Islamic countries for centuries, and "purpose-built" only emerges as a necessary category in relation to environments in which Muslims are (re-)establishing their presence.

The term appears to be used most frequently in the research literature on large mosques in Scandinavia and northern Europe, including derived concepts such as "intentionally-built" or "intentionally-constructed" mosques (Allievi, 2010a; 2010b; Arly Jacobsen et al., 2015; Neergaard et al., 2017; Simonsen et al., 2017; Verkaaik, 2020, among many others). In addition to size, the term typically implies the assumption that the mosques have identifiable Islamic architectural features such as domes, minarets, or Islamic ornamentation. However, the use of the term is unclear and problematic in several respects. Saleem's frequently used definition of purpose-built mosques as being constructed for the specific purpose of serving as a place of worship for Muslims has the consequence that small mosques without identifiable Islamic architectural features also fall under this term. This is exemplified by a number of Tatar mosques in Finland, Lithuania, and Poland[4] (Larsson, 2010b, p. 376; Racius, 2022, p. 396), which are frequently constructed from wood and feature a small minaret on the roof, rendering them visually similar to churches (see Krausen, 2023, p. 21–22, 26, 28–33). This also applies to some of the Scandinavian Ahmadiya mosques, such as the Nusrat Djahan mosque in Hvidovre, a suburb of Copenhagen, and, officially, Scandinavia's first mosque, having been built in 1967 (fig. 1). The Ahmadiya movement is not recognized by other Muslim denominations as Islamic (Arly Jacobsen et al., 2015), and some of their mosques are modest in size and lack outward Islamic markers that would indicate their function as a mosque from the exterior; it is only upon entering the prayer room that their Islamic affiliation becomes apparent. These examples demonstrate that the term "purpose-built mosque" cannot be readily equated with large, conspicuous mosques.

Another conceptual ambiguity surrounding the use of the term purpose-built mosque has emerged in recent years, as more Muslims in the diaspora attend Friday prayers. In response to the growing demand for mosques with greater capacity, some Muslim congregations in Scandinavia have taken steps to either expand existing facilities, for instance by adding an additional floor or purchasing a neighbouring property, or to acquire a larger existing property that is then refurbished and decorated in accordance with the principles that characterize purpose-built mosques. These buildings are thus not, in fact, "genuine" purpose-built mosques, but following extensive and often costly renovations, they are able to fulfil the same religious, social, and cultural functions. This

4 The Tatars first arrived in the Baltic region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, initially as soldiers and traders. They were subsequently granted a series of privileges and rights, including the ability to practice their religion freely and to construct mosques. See Larsson (2010b), p. 375–76; and Racius (2022), p. 393–94.

Figure 1
The Nusrat Djahan mosque in Hvidovre, Copenhagen. This Ahmadiya mosque, established in 1967, is Scandinavia's first mosque.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

is typically the case in centrally located neighbourhoods, where new construction is not a viable option, or in areas where the cost of land and construction of new buildings is so high that it far exceeds the cost of extensive renovations. This makes the transition between (large) converted mosques and purpose-built mosques more fluid, suggesting that the term "purpose-built" may be a transitional term that is necessary for a period of time to index "genuine" purpose-built mosques in the diaspora, but may be phased out as existing mosques evolve in a more organic manner.

Examples of the uncritical use of the term can be observed in the Swedish research literature, where the Stockholm mosque is frequently referred to as a purpose-built mosque (Larsson, 2010a, pp. 361–362; Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2022, p. 639, among others), though it is clearly stated on the mosque's official website and on a small sign outside the building that it was originally a converter station for the Stockholm power station, which has since been converted into a mosque.[5] Another example from the Danish research literature can be observed in the article "A mosque event: the opening of a purpose-built mosque in Copenhagen" by Simonsen, Neergaard, & Koefoed (2017). In this article, the authors consistently define the Khayr el-Bariya mosque and the affiliated community centre in Copenhagen, collectively known as the Hamad Bin Khalifa Civilization Centre, as purpose-built, despite the authors being aware that the centre's buildings were actually "redeveloped from two existing industrial buildings, … [a] redevelopment [that] consisted in adding one and a half extra floors and making a combined staircase and terrace connecting the two" (Neergaard et al., 2017, p. 71). In their article titled "Purpose-built Mosques in Copenhagen: Visibility, Publicity and Cultural Dispute", the authors include Khayr el-Bariya, the Imam Ali Mosque in the neighbourhood of Nørrebro, which was constructed from scratch on the

5 Stockholms moske, om oss https://stockholmsmoske.se/om-oss/byggnadens-historia/ [all URLs here accessed in April 2025].

site of a demolished factory, and the Ahmadiya Mosque Nusrat Djahan in Hvidovre, and their use of "purpose-built mosque" thus encompasses a small mosque lacking outward Islamic markers, a converted mosque, and a "genuine" purpose-built one (Neergaard et al., 2017).

Other examples of the very broad use of the term "purpose-built mosques" can be found in the work of Jensen and Petersen. In their chapter on Denmark in the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, they state that the number of purpose-built mosques has grown from three in 2006 to eleven in 2020 (Jensen & Petersen, 2022, p. 200). A more detailed examination of the purpose-built mosques they refer to outside Copenhagen reveals that they encompass both converted buildings (for instance, in the town of Svendborg) and "genuine" purpose-built mosques in the form of large square structures that lack any overt Islamic markers other than a nameplate (as, for example, the mosque in the town of Randers). The rectangular shape of several of these "genuine" purpose-built mosques, which in their form and material resemble industrial warehouses and prefabricated buildings, combined with the lack or minimal marking of the buildings' Islamic affiliation, makes it challenging to identify them as mosques from the outside, but more importantly in this context, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between purpose-built mosques and converted mosques.

In other words, the term "purpose-built mosque" is used broadly and in an imprecise manner. It is employed as a generic term in the diaspora to describe both large mosques with identifiable architectural features and small mosques without such features, provided that these buildings are simply constructed with the purpose of serving Muslim worship. The term is also employed to describe both newly constructed mosques exhibiting unambiguous Islamic characteristics such as minarets and domes, and converted mosques that have undergone significant renovations and extensions, thereby incorporating external Islamic symbolism. The latter are becoming increasingly common as Muslim congregations expand their mosques to accommodate the growing number of visitors, while simultaneously seeking to enhance and expand the facilities and activities that the mosque is able to accommodate, such as ritual ablutions, kitchen facilities, and educational activities. Once such renovated mosques are completed, it can be challenging (and in many cases also inconsequential) to determine whether they were purpose-built or converted.

As a concept, "purpose-built mosque" is concerned with the form and function of mosque buildings, and the fact that the term is used in the diaspora, where Islam is a minority religion, lends support to the notion of the "outsider gaze". The ability to distinguish between purpose-built mosques and converted ones has undoubtedly been helpful in the context of the emergence and establishment of mosques in the Scandina-

vian diaspora, but as the two categories gradually merge, it becomes necessary to rethink this categorization and to seek more suitable terminology for large, visible mosques in the diaspora.

4. Alternative Concepts

If the term "purpose-built mosque" is deemed inadequate for large mosques in Scandinavia, what could then be the alternative? The following section presents a typology for large mosques in the Scandinavian diaspora that attempts to categorize these structures according to four existing concepts: grand mosques, central mosques, Friday mosques, and multipurpose cultural centres. In order to establish a connection between this abstract typology and the empirical, we apply the terminology to a number of examples among the twenty-three Scandinavian mosques listed in the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe as "purpose-built"*.

4.1 Grand Mosques: When Size and Status Matter

The term Grand Mosque (stormoske in Scandinavian languages) is used both in- and outside the Islamic world. In Arabic, the language of Islam par excellence, "grand" is typically a translation of the Arabic word for big or large, kabir, as seen, for example, in the name of the largest mosque in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Centre (Arabic: markaz jaamic al-sheikh zayid al-kabir; markaz meaning centre) in Abu Dhabi. It is one of the largest mosques in the world, with a maximum capacity of approximately 55,000 people.[6] The mosque takes its name from the late ruler of Abu Dhabi and first president of the UAE, making it the closest thing to a state mosque in the country. Kuwait also has a grand mosque, whose official name, "the Grand Mosque" (Arabic: al-masjid al-kabir), alternates with "the Grand State Mosque" (Arabic: masjid al-dawla al-kabir; dawla meaning nation or state), indicating the close relationship between the state and the Grand Mosque.[7] However, the term Grand Mosque is found not only in rich Arab Gulf states or in the names of national mosques in other Islamic countries (Sheline, 2019); it is also used, for example, in the names of large, important mosques in the diaspora, such as The Grand Mosque of Paris (Arabic: masjid Baris al-kabir).[8]

A specific mosque may be designated as a "Grand Mosque" in English or French, despite the absence of the term "kabir" from its Arabic name. The most important mosque in Islam, the Holy Mosque (Arabic.: al-masjid al-haram) in Mecca, to which Muslims make the hajj pilgrimage, is usually referred to in English-language research literature as "the Grand Mosque in Mecca" (see Alsaif & Starks, 2018; 2020, among others). The same is true of the Grand Mosque in Algiers, which is simply called jaamic al-jaza'ir (Algiers Mosque) in Arabic. Adding "grand" is thus a way of signalling to non-Arabic speakers that a particular mosque is significant in terms of both size and status.

6 https://www.szgmc.gov.ae/en/islamic-architecture/overview.

7 https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=3137546&language=en.

8 https://www.grandemosqueedeparis.fr/.

In the Nordic countries, there are four examples of the use of kabir/grand as part of or in connection with mosque names. The Stockholm mosque refers to itself as masjid Stockholm al-kabir in Arabic, but not in Swedish.[9] The Hamad Bin Khalifa Cultural Centre in Copenhagen presents itself on its Facebook page as "Danmarks første Stormoske og Islamiske kulturcentre" (Denmark's first Grand Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre), and the word "Stormoskeen" is also included in its web address, but is not part of its official name. In Finland, an initiative to build a new mosque in the capital of Helsinki was launched in 2014. The initiative was named "The Grand Mosque and the Multifunctional Oasis Centre" and was continuously referred to as the Grand Mosque Initiative. It was eventually rejected by the City of Helsinki in December 2017, in part because it was "seen as functionally and symbolically exaggerated and a source of fear", according to Hewidy & Schmidt-Thomé (2022, p. 161), who analysed the process behind the rejection of the mosque. One of their interviewees formulated the reason for the rejection as follows:

> *I'm not against mosques, but the idea of a big, grand mosque … the word grand has the feeling of a big negative word. [The mosque] is an idea to occupy the country from inside. Initiatives of building big mosques come from those countries of radicalised Islam interpretations.* (Hewidy & Schmidt-Thomé, 2022, p. 161)

The fourth grand mosque is in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, a city with no more than 3,000 Muslims.[10] The city has three mosques, which have been in conflict with each other for a long time (Shavit & Spengler 2018). This led one of the parties involved to rename its al-Rahman Mosque as "the Grand Mosque of Iceland" (Arabic: masjid Icelanda al-kabir) in an attempt to upscale its importance relative to the other two.[11] It is estimated that around 100 people attended Friday prayers at the Grand Mosque of Iceland in 2018 (ibid., pp. 341–342).

While kabir is often translated from Arabic into the names of mosques in English, French, and the Nordic countries in the diaspora, or added in the form of grand in these languages, even if the Arabic name of the mosque name does not contain kabir, the opposite is true for Turkish mosques in the Scandinavian diaspora. The term ulu (grand/great) Camii (mosque) in Turkish or "Grand Mosque" is equivalent to al-masjid al-kabir in Arabic, and there are two Turkish mosques in Scandinavia with this name, the Fittja Ulu Camii in Stockholm and the Brabrand Ulu Camii in Aarhus, Denmark. In both cases, ulu is dropped in the translation into Scandinavian languages, so that the grand mosque in Fittja is called the Fittja mosque in Swedish (fig. 2), while the Grand mosque in Brabrand is consistently presented in Danish as "Tyrkisk Kulturcentre, Aarhus – Brabrand Ulu Camii", that is as a cultural association in Danish and as a grand mosque in Turkish (fig. 3).

9 https://stockholmsmoske.se/ar/.

10 The U.S. Department of State: 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iceland https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iceland#:~:text=The%20Association%20of%20Muslims%20in,Muslims%2C%20primarily%20of%20immigrant%20origin.

11 https://www.facebook.com/grandmosque.iceland/.

Figure 2
The main entrance to the Fittja Ulu Camii in Stockholm.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Figure 3
The logo of the Brabrand Ulu Camii in Aarhus, Denmark

As grand or kabir/ulu indicate size, they are used rhetorically to upscale and downscale the size and thus the importance and status of diaspora mosques. For non-Muslims in the diaspora, adding grand to a mosque name, whether it is a part of the original name or not, signals that it is a large and important mosque at the state or regional level (Ahmed, 2019, p. 152) – and vice versa: not translating grand, even if it is a part of the original name, downscales the importance of the mosque in a majority

perspective, as is the case with the two Turkish mosques and the Stockholm mosque in Scandinavia. For Muslims, grand, kabir, and ulu also allow for the up- or downscaling of the meaning of a diaspora mosque, as can be seen in the example from Iceland.

4.2 Central Mosques and the Importance of Positionality

The term "central mosque" is used both in- and outside the Islamic world. While "grand mosque" is often used in Arabo-Islamic countries, the term "central mosque" appears to be more prevalent in South Asia. In Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, Farsi, and other languages that have been influenced by Islam, the terms markaz and markazi are typically used for "centre" and "central" in mosque names. The term "central mosque" is frequently used in the diaspora, and notably in the United Kingdom, where many major cities have a central mosque, for instance, the Birmingham Central Mosque,[12] Cambridge Central Mosque,[13] Glasgow Central Mosque,[14] London Central Mosque,[15] and numerous others. The term is also used in Germany, particularly in reference to Turkish mosques. Unlike Ulu Camii, these mosques are designated as Merkez Camii, as exemplified by the Cologne Central Mosque (German: Zentralmoschee Köln, Turkish: Köln Merkez-Camii).[16]

12 https://centralmosque.org.uk/.
13 https://cambridgecentralmosque.org/.
14 https://centralmosque.co.uk/.
15 https://www.iccuk.org/.
16 https://www.zentralmoschee-koeln.de/.

Unlike grand mosques, which that often aspire to national status, a central mosque is typically one that plays a pivotal role within a city or a large community. It may not necessarily be the largest mosque in the area, nor be as architecturally grand as a grand mosque, but it plays an important role in the local Muslim community by organizing daily prayers, educational programs, and community services. It often coordinates activities with smaller local mosques and may be strategically located in the heart of a community. Mosques that label themselves as "central" are often purpose-built or large, renovated converted mosques and by asserting their status as central, they consequently situate other mosques in a peripheral position with respect to their own central role (for this and other ways of positioning mosques in the urban landscape, see Nielsen et al., 2022). And according to Ahmed (2019), central mosques not only fulfil the functions typical of fard kifaya mosques, namely communal responsibilities, which are primarily the rites of passage and educational activities (Ahmed, 2019, p. 139). They frequently also aspire to become "sunna mosques", that is, a mosque that follows the optional, but encouraged example of the Prophet Muhammad, also called "the sunna" (ibid., p. 152).

Two of Oslo's purpose-built mosques use the term "central" in their name, thus illustrating how the term is used to position one mosque in relation to other mosques. The first Islamic organization and mosque in Norway was established in Oslo in 1974 by a group of Pakistani immigrants under the name Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC).[17] However, three years later, in

17 https://www.islamic.no/om-icc-2/.

1977, a group of Sufi-oriented, first-generation Pakistani immigrants split from the ICC and formed the Central Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat (Urdu: markazi jamaat ahl sunnat),[18] a name that translates to "the Central Congregational Mosque for those who follow the way of life of the prophet" (ahl-e meaning people, sunna corresponding to "the way of life of the prophet Muhammed") (see fig. 4).[19] Seven years later, in 1984, as a result of internal conflicts within this congregation, a faction split to form yet another Pakistani congregation, this time under the umbrella of the World Islamic Mission (WIM),[20] a diaspora organization of Barelvi Sunni Muslims based in the United Kingdom. This group was able to purchase a plot of land and construct the first purpose-built mosque in Norway. The mosque, named the First Central Jam-e-Mosque (Urdu: Bahli Markazi Jaami Masjid, Bahli meaning first, equivalent to First Central Congregational Mosque), was inaugurated in 1994. By prefixing bahli to "central", WIM strategically positioned its mosque as "more central" than the Central Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat (fig. 5).

18 https://cjas.no/index.php/ct-menu1-item4.

19 This illustrates Ahmed's claim that the use of "central" in the names of British diaspora mosques is one of the most evident indicators of mosques which aspire to become a sunna mosque (Ahmed, 2019, p. 152).

20 https://www.wim.no/om-oss/moskeen.

Figure 4a
Central Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunnat Norway in Oslo.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Figure 4b
Nameplate on the mosque facade.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Figure 5a
First Central Jam-e-Mosque in Oslo.
PHOTO: TOVE ROSENDAL

Figure 5b
Nameplate on the mosque facade.
PHOTO: TOVE ROSENDAL

4.3 Multipurpose Cultural Centres

While only a few mosques in Scandinavia use the term "central mosque" as part of their name, "centre" is widely used in all Scandinavian countries for both large and small mosques. The Islamic Centre in Malmø and the Islamic Cultural Centre in Oslo are examples of large purpose-built or converted and renovated mosques. But "centre" is also used by many smaller mosques – in Denmark alone, twenty-six of the country's 170 mosques have centre as part of their name rather than association, assembly, or organization, which are used by many other mosques (Kühle & Larsen, 2019, pp. 368–371). One should bear in mind that "central" and "centre" differ in meaning: "Central" is an adjective that describes something of primary importance or something located in the middle or most crucial position, as is the case with the term "central mosque", whereas "centre" as a noun refers to a physical place or a point of focus where activities, operations, or objects are concentrated. An "Islamic centre" is thus a place or focal point for a range of activities, be they religious, educational, or social, but says nothing about its location in relation to other mosques.

In her 2020 study, Avcioglu outlines the concept of Islamic centres in the diaspora, which she terms "multipurpose cultural centres". They emerged in the diaspora in the 1990s, are typically situated in peripheral locations outside the central areas of large cities, and make minimal use of Islamic architectural elements, either in modern or modest designs. In some cases, the buildings may evince a corporate aesthetic or resemble a shopping mall. However, this minimalist Islamic architectural style is frequently complemented by highly embellished interiors incorporating numerous Islamic motifs (Avcioglu, 2020, pp. 293–295). The term "multipurpose" denotes that, in addition to the mosque itself, these centres encompass a range of ancillary facilities, including meeting rooms, kitchens, sports facilities, exhibition halls, larger halls for various religious and social activities, and parking facilities. As Avcioglu notes, these centres serve as exemplars of how to "showcase the new generation of prosperous and well-integrated European Muslim citizens" (on the use of the term, see also Avcioglu, 2014, pp. 61–62; Avcioglu, 2020, p. 293; Zwilling, 2022, p. 245, among others).

There are numerous examples of multipurpose cultural centres in Scandinavia. The Islamic Cultural Centre Norway in Oslo and the Imam Malik Institute in Copenhagen (figs. 6a and 7, respectively) are mosques that are characterized by being part of a larger building that houses various religious and sociocultural activities, including education, women's associations, sports, and so forth. The Islamic architectural style is subtly evident within the design of these centres, yet still discernible, and the choice of names, which avoid the use of the word mosque and instead use terms such as "cultural" or "civilization centre" or even "institute" (to underscore a scholarly identity), illustrates the self-perception of these centres.

Figure 6a
Islamic Cultural Centre Norway in Oslo.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Figure 6b
Nameplate on the mosque facade.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Figure 7
Imam Malik Institute in Valby, Copenhagen.
PHOTO: HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

Ahmed (2019, p. 147) offers a scathing critique of the term "multipurpose cultural centre", asserting that it is "a claim that … is seldom explored in any depth. What does this multipurpose-ness look like? To what ends is it put? Why has it emerged? What does the 'mono-purpose' mosque look like?" In his view, the concept is not based on the mosques' own self-perception, but instead makes an inappropriate distinction between a sacred and secular dynamic that does not "provide a coherent and meaningful insight into the activities of mosques" (ibid., p. 140). We shall return to this critique in section 5.

4.4 Friday Mosques

The term "Friday mosque" is a cultural translation of the Arabic-Islamic term (masjid) jaamic, which basically denotes a large mosque that is used for Friday prayers (and, by extension, also organizes a range of educational and social functions). The Arabic word jaamic is derived from the basic letters J-M-', meaning to gather, and consequently, the term can be translated as congregational (or community) mosque. However, since the same basic letters are also present in the Arabic term for congregational prayer, salat al-jumca (salat meaning prayer and salat al-jumca community or congregational prayer), as well as for Friday, yawm al-jumca (yawm meaning day, yawm al-jumca the day of congregation), the translation of jaamic as the place where congregational prayer is held on Fridays – that is, a Friday mosque – is evident.

A Friday mosque is thus defined as a place where the weekly Friday prayer is held, as opposed to the smaller masjids (derived from the basic letters S-J-D, meaning "to prostrate", with the prefix ma- meaning "a place" of prostration), where Muslims can perform their daily prayers (Hillenbrand, [1994] 2000, pp. 42–44). The importance of Friday prayer in distinguishing between mosque types is partly due to the typological distinction in Islam between mosques that serve individual religious needs such as daily prayer (which can, but need not be performed communally in a masjid), the so-called fard mosques, and larger mosques that focus more on religious responsibilities for the Muslim community as a whole,

such as Friday prayer and religious educational activities, the so-called fard kifaya mosques (Ahmed, 2019, pp. 140–43; Kana'an, 2024, p. 215).

The concept of the Friday mosque encapsulates an Arabo-Islamic perspective underscoring the semantic linkage between action (salat al-jumca), time (yawm al-jumca), and place (jaamic), while at the same time also delineating a functional distinction between jaamic and masjid. While Islamic scriptures do not stipulate specific architectural or layout requirements for mosques, the necessity for a jaamic to accommodate a much larger congregation than smaller masjids as well as the need for the imam, as prayer leader and preacher, to be as widely visible as possible to the worshippers, influence the size and layout of a jaamic, such as, for example, the need for a vast prayer hall and the inclusion of an elevated pulpit, or minbar in Arabic (Hillenbrand, [1994] 2000, pp. 36, 46–48).

The term Friday mosque is not utilized in Scandinavian research literature, nor is it employed in the Scandinavian mosque names in Scandinavian languages, but it may be found in the names used in Arabic and Urdu, as evidenced by the two central mosques in Oslo mentioned above. In English-language research literature, Friday mosque is often employed in historical accounts of significant early Ottoman, Turkish, and Iranian mosques (Hillenbrand, [1994] 2000, pp. 100–06), but the concept seems to have emerged recently when it comes to contemporary mosques in the Islamic world as well as diaspora mosques (see, for instance, Avcioglu, 2020; Kana'an, 2024; Ugurlu & Yalman, 2020, among others).

The definition of a Friday mosque as a place that houses Friday prayers and, by extension, other sociocultural activities, means that grand and central mosques, as well as multipurpose cultural centres, can be regarded as falling under the term. Friday mosques, therefore, constitute a diverse category. However, if we exclude the three types of mosques, which are well-defined in their own right, Friday mosque becomes a useful general term for large mosques that are not grand or central or multipurpose cultural centres, that is, a "residual" category that includes the rest of what we would label big mosques.

5. Grand, Central, or Friday Mosques? Discussion and Conclusion

In lieu of the pervasive term "purpose-built mosque", which is frequently employed within the Scandinavian research literature to designate large mosques in the diaspora, we propose a more consistent, transparent, and up-to-date terminology that shifts the focus from the building perspective to the function and status of these large mosques. This entails the conceptualization of these structures as grand or central mosques,

multipurpose cultural centres or Friday mosques. These terms are all familiar from the research literature or from Islamic practice, but are often used interchangeably or poorly defined.

It is important to note, however, that the proposed typology should not be viewed as a definitive set of categories that can exhaustively describe any given mosque. Mosques in Europe are "neither monolithic nor static … [but] rather heterogeneous, dynamic, and contested", as stated by Es (2011, p. 1), and they may, consequently, belong to several categories within the proposed typology. The Hamad Bin Khalifa Civilization Centre in Copenhagen serves as an illustrative case in point. It exhibits numerous characteristics associated with the category of multipurpose cultural centres, such as its location, architectural style, sociocultural activities, and the use of the term "Civilization Centre" as a part of its name, but, at the same time, it states on its Facebook profile that it is Denmark's first grand mosque, even employing the term as part of its Facebook address. The typology thus provides a useful illustration of how the Hamad Bin Khalifa Civilization Centre functions as a multipurpose cultural centre, in line with a number of other mosques in the area, while simultaneously aspiring to become a national grand mosque, and in pursuit of this goal uses social media as part of its branding process (Nielsen, 2023, pp. 591–94).

The aim of the proposed typology is to establish a more precise and sophisticated conceptual framework for large mosques in Scandinavia with a view to facilitating research in this field. It should be noted, however, that in some cases the categories will differ from those used by the mosques themselves. Iceland's Grand Mosque in Reykjavik, which according to the typology should be categorized as a Friday mosque, is an illustrative example. This classification should not be interpreted as a disparagement of the mosque; rather, it is an illustration of how mosques occasionally seek to enhance or diminish their significance through name choices, thereby indicating their desired positioning within the local, regional, and national mosque landscape (Nielsen et al., 2022). Thus, in this sense, the typology also serves as a means to understand what is going on within the mosque landscape of the Scandinavian diaspora.

Ahmad's critique of the concept of multipurpose cultural centres and, by implication, other categories that fail to describe the self-conceptualization of mosques (2019, pp. 140, 147), is both relevant and timely and reflects an ongoing discussion in Scandinavia and elsewhere about how to approach Islam in a sound scientific manner (Aghdassi & Hughes, 2022; Gärtner & Winkel, 2021). We are fully aware that our non-Muslim Scandinavian materiality approach to mosques disregards the entire field of religious practices and, to a certain extent, Islamic traditions. Nevertheless, by approaching the mosques from a materiality and majority position, our aim is to contribute to the knowledge about Muslim

placemaking in the Scandinavian diaspora. And we are convinced that a shift in focus from the building perspective on mosques, as implied by the term "purpose-built mosques", to their size, status, and mutual positioning will contribute to a more coherent and meaningful understanding of large mosques in the Scandinavian diaspora. This is significant not only because precise language and clear categories and concepts are a virtue in research literature, but also because the terminology used affects how both Muslims and non-Muslims in the diaspora understand mosques. According to Verkaaik (2012, p. 174), mosque design in Europe is still in a pioneering phase, and just as the materiality of mosques in the diaspora influences how Muslims identify with them and subsequently shapes their Muslim identity in the diaspora, the distinction between grand and central mosques, multipurpose cultural centres and Friday mosques also has implications for the way the non-Muslim majority understands and relates to Islam in the diaspora.

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