

Call for Papers

Understanding urban religion

Heritage, public space and governance

International Workshop

Barcelona, 25-27 October 2018

While sociological research on religion in urban contexts has proliferated in recent years, the city has less frequently been taken explicitly as a relevant dimension in the study of religion. Historically, social scientists considered cities as the epitome of secularization, and predicted that processes of secularization would diminish the role of religion in urban life. However, dynamic and vibrant forms of urban religion have emerged in cities across the world in recent years (Becci, Burchardt and Casanova, 2013). Developments such as rising levels of transnational migration and the growth of new religious movements have contributed to the religious revitalization of contemporary cities.

The diversification of urban religious landscapes is documented by a variety of studies (Knott, Krech and Meyer, 2016; Lanz et al., 2016). All over the world, cities are witnessing a proliferation of non-traditional places of worship of several kinds (Martínez-Ariño et al., 2011; Stolz and Monnot, forthcoming). On the one hand, religious communities have begun to adapt to trends of urban change such as sub-urbanization and de-industrialization by establishing places of worship in shopping malls, former industrial warehouses, newly established industrial estates and other commercial zones. On the other hand, and especially in Europe, a rapidly increasing number of traditional church buildings are closed and repurposed as a consequence of dropping membership and resulting financial pressures. Churches are sometimes demolished, but more commonly they are put to new use: they are handed over to other faith communities, converted into lofts or other kinds of commercial property, or into public and civic facilities such as museums, libraries or art spaces. In many cities, the future and the management of religious heritage has been object of debate and controversy. In recent years, there has also been a proliferation of multi-faith and inter-faith places. These are either construed as unified places that remain architecturally neutral and open to believers and practitioners of all persuasions, or contain symbolic and architectural elements of different religious communities (often the so-called Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism).

At the same time, cities have turned into sites of religious innovation and have become stages for the performing of religious events and celebrations that are parts of urban consumer cultures and contribute to the construction of urban identities and city images. The density of religious actors in the city fosters processes of religious hybridization, transformation and cross-fertilization. This vibrant dynamism becomes a fertile ground for cooperation and exchange, but also for conflict. In this context, the governance of religious diversity gains new saliency at

the level of cities (Griera, 2012). Municipal authorities, including political as well as administrative actors, pay increasing attention to religious issues and a multiplicity of policy instruments are in place to govern them (Martínez-Ariño, 2017). In addition, urban religious affairs often become the object of public contestation, and generate media and civil society attention (Griera and Burchardt, 2016; Siemiatycki, 2005; Watson, 2005).

The aim of this workshop is **to explore the conditions, forms and consequences of the ways urban religion is revitalized, spatialized and governed in contemporary cities**. The general topic of the workshop is organized around three sub-themes: heritage, religious expressions in public space, and governance.

Workshop papers should address one or more of the following themes:

1. **Religious heritage.** The aim of this thematic focus is to discuss cultural, political and power dynamics associated with religious heritage, and explore its role in contemporary cities.
2. **Urban religious expressions.** This strand explores public religious expressions such as festivals, parades, public prayers and meditations and aims to understand processes of the eventization of urban religion as well as the challenges these presences pose to cities and their dwellers.
3. **Governance.** Contributions in this third thematic section will look at different articulations of state-religion regimes and political secularism at the urban level.

Abstracts of no more than **250-300 words** should be submitted to j.martinez.arino@rug.nl* by **15 June 2018**.

Organisers

Paul Bramadat (University of Victoria, Canada)
Marian Burchardt (University of Leipzig, Germany)
Mar Griera (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain)
Julia Martínez-Ariño (University of Groningen, Netherlands)

The workshop will be carried out with the support of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR), the Research Institute on Sociology of Religion (ISOR) at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, the Centre for Religion Conflict and Globalization (CRCG) at the University of Groningen and the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria.

*If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the conference organisers.