

# Filling the Void? Religious Pluralisms and the City

Conference at Technische Universität Darmstadt  
28–30 January 2016  
Location: S 3|20 /18; Rundeturmstraße 10; 64283 Darmstadt

In light of the rise of religiously inspired violence and the increasing significance of charismatic Christian movements, the Islam and other spiritual traditions, the long-held conviction in Western social and cultural sciences that modern societies based on the nation state are at once secular societies, has certainly lost more than its empirical plausibility. The theoretical framework assuming that secularization goes, of necessity, hand in hand with both an institutional and a practical loss of relevance of religion, is under scrutiny. As a result the interplay of modernization and religion – and only that – is being released from the semantics of secularization. The most decisive social effect of modernization is thus not secularization but rather the pluralization of religion(s): the simultaneity of secular and religious stocks of knowledge *and* the coexistence of different religions.

This is where the city comes into play. It is in the city (and in *cities*) where a plurality of worldviews is articulated and contested, where power struggles over the legitimate view of the social world are being fought, and where new civilizational arrangements are made or unmade. Modern cities then seem to be the first and foremost address for sociological enquiries to analyze the organizational and institutional basis, and the particular modes of coexistence within a religiously plural society. Under conditions of maximal contact-intensity coupled with minimal obligations, cities are prime sites where ideological passions are cooled down to manageable proportions, and where detachment and the habitualization of indifference are typically regarded as measures for successful integration. So what does this particular socio-spatial arrangement mean in view of the increasing densification of heterogeneous religious faiths? Empirical evidence has taught us that it is a fragile arrangement ridden with prerequisites, which does not rule out conflicts and even outbreaks of violence. There is, after all, no proper reason to assume that ideological passions might not at any moment intensify beyond all tolerable limits.

The city itself as well as the temporal modalities and regulations established in these urban contexts, are the result of locally specific negotiation processes, of conflicts, coalitions and solidarities between different religious beliefs. These locally specific constellations can be captured and described empirically, and they will be a prime focus of the conference. The central theme will revolve around the interrelations of religion and the city linked to three controversially debated issues, which include:

- 1) Theorizing the relationship of the sociology of religion and urban sociology, more precisely: suggestions for a possible conceptualization of religion and the city between the poles of secularization and religious pluralism
- 2) The issue of institutional arrangements and the organization of religious pluralism in cities to manage conflict or facilitate compromise and appeasement to regularize the coexistence of different religious truths
- 3) Contributions investigating the relationship of religion and city in two directions: a) to explore the effects of religious pluralism on the city (and cities), more specifically on their symbolic orders; b) to shed light on the contributions the city and cities make to the formation of the coexistence and interaction of different religions.

## Conference programme

**Thursday, 28 January 2016**

18:00 – 20:00 h

*Keynotes*

**Peter L. Berger** (Boston University): The City as Vortex of Pluralism

**Nezar AlSayyad** (UC Berkeley): The Death and Life of the Fundamentalist City

20:00 h

Get-together

**Friday, 29 January 2016**

*Morning panel: Conceptualizing Religion and Urbanism*

*Time: 9:00 – 13 h / Chair: Jochen Schwenk*

**Philip Sheldrake** (Westcott House): The Spiritual City: Christian Concepts of the City & Contemporary Urban Challenges

**Chris Baker** (University of Chester): Postsecularity and a New Urban Politics? – Spaces, Practices and Imaginaries

**Marian Burchardt** (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity): Religion in Urban Space: Diversity and Governmentality after Identity

*Afternoon panel: Religious Pluralism: Conflicts and Negotiations in the City*

*Time: 14:00 – 18:00 h / Chair: Silke Steets*

**John Eade** (University of Roehampton): Constructing Islam in a Global City: Building High Profile Mosques in London and Multiple Identities

**Tulasi Srinivas** (Emerson College): Worlds of Wonder: The Megacity and Religious Pluralism

**Martijn Oosterbaan** (Utrecht University): Revisiting Religious Plurality and Conflict in Rio de Janeiro: Pentecostal Presence 20 Years after 'Kicking the Saint'

**Saturday, 30 January 2016**

*Morning panel: Changing Urban Imaginaries*

*Time: 10:00 – 14:00 h / Chair: Helmuth Berking*

**Tovi Fenster** (Tel Aviv University): Jerusalem's Imaginaries: Visual and Sound Conflict Representations in the 'Holy City'

**Werner Schiffauer** (Europa Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)): How Berlin Deals with Global Prayers: Global Prayers Migration Post-Migration. Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City

**Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum** (FU Berlin): The Sumerian 'Tempelstadt' – The Modern Making of an Ancient Urban Concept

*Panel Discussion*

*Time: 15:00 – 17:00 h*

Participation is free of admission. Please register until 15 January 2016 by sending an email to: [fillingthevoid@ifs.tu-darmstadt.de](mailto:fillingthevoid@ifs.tu-darmstadt.de)