



Conceptualising the role of cities in the governance of religious diversity in Europe

Current Sociology
2018, Vol. 66(5) 810–827
© The Author(s) 2017
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0011392117745942
journals.sagepub.com/home/csi



Julia Martínez-Ariño

University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Abstract

The sociological literature has devoted less attention to cities than to nation-states as contexts for the regulation of religion and religious diversity in Europe. Drawing on ideas from the literature on migration, urban studies, geography and the sociology of religion, as well as empirical material from fieldwork conducted in three medium-size cities in France, the author conceptualises the governance of religious diversity in cities as complex assemblages where (1) the political interests and claims of various unequally socially positioned actors over (2) a number of domains and objects of the public expression of religiosity are (3) subjected to a variety of municipal interventions, which are (4) shaped by the interplay of supranational legal frameworks, national legislation, policies, institutional arrangements and local contextual factors. The result of these regulation processes are particular (and often contested) normative definitions of ‘accepted’ or ‘legitimate’ public expressions of religiosity, subsequently enacted by a variety of local actors through both formal procedures and informal practices.

Keywords

Cities, Europe, governance, municipalities, religious diversity

Introduction

In August 2016, amidst vigorous debates over Islam and *laïcité* in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* and November attacks in Paris, a number of French municipalities passed decrees banning use of the so-called ‘*burkini*’ on public beaches. On 5 August 2016,¹ the

Corresponding author:

Julia Martínez-Ariño, Department of Comparative Study of Religion, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen, Oude Boteringestraat 38, Groningen 9712 GK, the Netherlands.
Email: j.martinez.arino@rug.nl

municipality of Villeneuve-Loubet prohibited bathing from 15 June until 15 September ‘to every person not wearing a proper outfit, respectful in accordance with good manners and the principle of *laïcité*’.² This case was followed by more than 25 French coastal cities, which also banned use of the full-covering bathing suit on their municipal beaches. Although the Conseil d’État, the highest administrative court in France, overturned the decision in the case of Villeneuve-Loubet on 26 August 2016, establishing a precedent for the other municipalities, the interest of the case lies in what it shows of the active role taken by municipal authorities in regulating public expressions of religiosity. This very specific example demonstrates the relevance of looking not only at the national but also the municipal level of regulation when studying the governance of religious diversity in Europe.

However, research on the regulation of religion has mainly focused on the national level in its attempts to explain differences across countries in how religion, especially Islam, is governed. In particular, the sociology of religion tends to explain cross-country differences in the accommodation of religious diversity by referring to the impact of national models of church–state relations (Soper and Fetzer, 2007). More recently, criticisms of this scholarship have suggested that national models are not adequate analytical tools because they present a number of limitations (Bader, 2007; Bowen, 2007). Therefore, there is a call for studies to be disaggregated to lower administrative levels.

Research on religion in the city has mostly treated cities as loci of the presence and public expression of religious diversity. Contrary to what has happened in migration research, cities and their regulatory capacity have attracted less attention in studies of the governance of religious diversity. Moreover, with few exceptions (De Galember, 2003), there is a lack of research on the interaction and sometimes the mismatch between the urban and national levels in regulating religion. This is all the more necessary now, since decentralisation has taken place in many European countries (Borraz and John, 2004), and multilevel and network governance is expanding in the policy field of religion (Martikainen, 2013).

In this article, I bring together ideas from migration research, urban studies, geography and the sociology of religion to argue that cities, as political spaces (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012), play a significant role in regulating religious diversity alongside the institutions of the central state. I draw on material from my own empirical research³ to propose a conceptualisation of cities’ regulation of religious diversity and its implications in terms of the resulting definitions of ‘accepted’ or ‘legitimate’ expressions of religiosity in urban spaces.

This approach does not imply that national frameworks are irrelevant or that only cities matter, which would amount to an incautious fetishisation of the city and the urban (Brenner, 2009) as the only relevant scale, thus creating the potential for misleading analyses. Analysis of the regulation of religion in cities therefore has to take into account the regional, national and supranational politico-administrative levels in which cities are embedded (Giorgi and Itçaina, 2016). More specifically, we need to examine the interactions, superposition and mismatches between regulations of religious diversity at different levels, as well as ‘interurban policy transfers’ (McCann, 2011: 107).

Through this conceptualisation, the article contributes to the literature on the governance of religious diversity by providing a more nuanced account of the processes and actors

involved beyond national legal regulations and institutional arrangements. It also speaks to the debate on national models and the potential mismatch between the national and urban political arenas. Finally, by way of its empirical material, which focuses on three French cities, the article provides insights into how state secularism takes shape in cities.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, I contrast the progress made by migration studies and the sociology of religion in studying the role of cities in regulating migration-led diversity and identify some shortcomings in the sociological literature. I then offer my own conceptualisation of the role of cities in the governance of religious diversity, which stems from the empirical material collected during my research in three French cities and ideas from different disciplines. Finally, I offer some conclusions on state secularism in France and on the regulatory capacities of cities regarding religious diversity in Europe.

The regulatory role of cities in the context of migration-led diversity

National models of citizenship and of state–church relations have been used extensively as explanatory factors in the study of the integration of immigrants (Brubaker, 1992) and the governance of religious diversity (Soper and Fetzer, 2007) respectively. However, in both strands of research, criticisms of the analytical limitations of national models have spread in recent years. The main drawbacks are their homogenising and normative character (Bertossi, 2012; Bowen, 2007), their inability to capture historical change and, as a result, the rather stabilising image they project (Bader, 2007), and their limitations at a point in time when the governance of migration and integration is being decentralised (Schmidtke, 2014). Therefore, there has been a call to disaggregate analyses in both research fields.

However, the two strands of literature have made unequal progress in this direction. In migration scholarship, criticisms have stimulated a proliferation of studies on the role of cities in policy-making regarding the integration of immigrants (Dekker et al., 2015; Penninx et al., 2004). This analytical turn has redirected attention to cities as the locus where immigrant incorporation takes place and where immigrants encounter state officials and agencies (De Graauw and Vermeulen, 2016).

In addition, this literature has looked recently at the differences between national and urban policies and their decoupling, pointing out the challenges of multilevel governance (Ambrosini and Boccagni, 2015; Scholten, 2015). A view that cities are more pragmatic and more accommodating (Poppelaars and Scholten, 2008) than national regulatory frameworks, which are described as ideological and more restrictive, predominates in this scholarship, corresponding with the classification of geographical scales within the world-economy approach in geography proposed by Taylor (1981). However, such an approach has been criticised by several authors, who question the notion that cities have an increasing role in immigrant integration policies (Gebhardt, 2016), or who criticise the sharp distinction between ideational and pragmatic politics (Schiller, 2015).

Progress in the literature on the governance of religious diversity at sub-state politico-administrative levels has remained more modest, particularly with regard to cities. Research on the accommodation of religious diversity in institutional contexts has

proliferated recently (Beckford and Gilliat, 2005; Martínez-Ariño et al., 2015; Michalowski, 2015), showing that such contexts and the practical schemas deployed by actors differ from rather homogenising national accounts (Bowen et al., 2014). Another approach to the governance of religious diversity that goes beyond national models is that which looks at the roles played by networks of actors (Martikainen, 2013). From this perspective, the regulation of religion increasingly takes place through rather loose governance structures, such as networks and projects, instead of through legal patterns of church–state relations exclusively. Although not focusing directly on cities, this perspective provides useful conceptual tools for the approach I propose in this article.

Cities are not absent from the study of religious diversity. However, research has mostly looked at them as sites of the presence and expression of religious diversity (Becci et al., 2013), and less as loci of its regulation. Studies of the spatial presence of religion have attracted a great deal of attention in both religious studies and the sociology of religion in recent years. Some authors have looked at the diversification of urban religious landscapes (Knott et al., 2016), while others have focused on the spatial strategies of religious groups (Becci et al., 2016), and yet others have analysed how urban spaces are imbued with sacrality (Sinha, 2016).

Geographical research has also devoted more attention to religion recently, with a focus on the geographical and architectural presence and distribution of religions in the city, whether in the official form of places of worship (Gale and Naylor, 2002) or in the contexts of so-called ‘unofficially sacred sites’ (Kong, 2010: 756). Cities have also been studied as sites of regulation (Chiodelli and Moroni, 2017), conflict and negotiation over the construction of minority places of worship, in particular mosques (Astor, 2012; Cesari, 2005; Kuppinger, 2014), and the expression of more or less visible religious practices in public spaces (Siemiatycki, 2005; Watson, 2005).

However, cities have less frequently been explicitly considered in the sociological literature as spaces for the regulation of religion and religious diversity in Europe. Although the field is expanding, and there is increasing work being done (De Galembert, 2006b; Frégosi and Willaime, 2001; Griera, 2012), a broader approach is still missing. Authors have focused mostly on rather specific issues (e.g. the building of mosques), on a particular religious group (e.g. Islam), or on a concrete territory (i.e. one city).

Urban planning and the construction of mosques and cemeteries for religious minorities have attracted a great deal of attention (Maussen, 2007; Van den Breemer and Maussen, 2012; Zwilling, 2015). Burchardt et al. (2015) and Griera and Burchardt (2016) have studied municipal *burka* prohibitions in Spanish municipalities. In recent years, a number of authors have also looked at the proliferation of local interfaith activities and platforms as a means to regulate religious diversity (Dick and Nagel, 2017; Duemmler and Nagel, 2013; Griera and Forteza, 2011; Lamine, 2005, 2015).

The urban governance of Islam is receiving increasing attention, and studies have shown that it is used as a political resource (Fournier, 2009). De Galembert (2006a) sees the institutionalisation of relations with local Islamic figures as a way of instrumentalising Islam as a government tool and of creating public authorities as bodies for the regulation of religion. In their accounts of the cases of Brussels and Créteil respectively, Torrekens (2012) and Fourot (2015) similarly show that public consultation is used as a policy tool for the municipal regulation of Islam beyond the explicit objectives of the

concrete consultation process. As such, the use of public consultation has implications not only for the democratisation of urban policy-making around mosque building but also for the instrumentalisation of certain processes for political purposes, such as gaining political legitimacy to achieve policy implementation, or the representation of a particular definition of Islam.

All these very rich analyses contribute to an understanding of cities as relevant contexts for the regulation of religious diversity. Nevertheless, a comprehensive conceptualisation of cities from the point of view of their involvement in the governance of religious diversity is still lacking. In the following subsections, I formulate a proposal for considering the regulatory role of cities based on my own empirical research and some of the works mentioned above.

Conceptualising the role of cities in the governance of religious diversity

European states are witnessing a number of challenges around religious diversity issues. Most of these tensions, contestations and conflicts become apparent at the level of cities as the localisation of national and global religious controversies (Giorgi and Itçaina, 2016; Griera, 2012). Simultaneously, as a result of processes of European integration and decentralisation of the state, regions and cities are gaining autonomy and the ability to make their own political decisions. In this sense, cities should no longer be seen as simply implementing national policies, but rather as policy entrepreneurs (Schmidtke, 2014). In the case of religious issues, cities also represent the first stage of regulation (Frégosi and Willaime, 2001), and innovative responses to religious diversity can be found there.

Drawing on notions of cities as political sites (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012), I conceptualise the urban governance of religious diversity as complex assemblages where (1) the political interests and claims of various unequally socially positioned actors over (2) a number of domains and objects of the public expression of religiosity are (3) subjected to a variety of municipal interventions, which are (4) shaped by the interplay of supranational legal frameworks, national legislation, policies, institutional arrangements and local contextual factors. The result of these processes of regulation are particular (and often contested) normative definitions of 'accepted' or 'legitimate' public expressions of religiosity, subsequently enacted by various local actors through both formal procedures and informal practices.

This understanding, which involves a number of urban actors that negotiate and regulate the public expression of religion, stems from the governance literature, which refers to a widening of the range of actors involved in policy-making (Klijn, 2008). This perspective allows a more dynamic and flexible approach, focusing not only on state actors and top-down regulations (Duemmler and Nagel, 2013) but also on the negotiations that happen among governance networks. Martikainen (2013) argues that network governance is an alternative way of monitoring religious diversity that is gaining relevance in increasingly diverse societies. From this perspective, the study of the governance of religious diversity moves beyond an exclusive focus on national laws, policies and discourses to incorporate the analysis of policy devices, discursive struggles, administrative practices and inertia, micro-negotiations among actors, and tacit agreements based on

trust and cooperation. It also allows the influence of specific local contextual factors on the resulting regimes that govern religion in cities to be disentangled from supra-municipal regulations.

However, in order to avoid falling into the ‘methodological trap of localism’ (Brenner, 2009: 122), with its suggestion that only the local matters, I do not overlook the broader legal and normative frames that constrain cities’ room for manoeuvre. Urban studies provide insightful ideas to unpack the relationship between the urban and higher levels of intervention. ‘Cities are always embedded in wider systems of social and political relationships at many different scales’ (Scott and Storper, 2015: 10), and thus they cannot be isolated from their institutional and political environment. In this sense, the level of institutionalisation of the municipal governance of religious diversity as a policy field may vary significantly across cities and countries, depending on national regulations. The competences and resources allocated to municipal governments and the capacities of religious groups and other urban actors (i.e. secularist groups) to make claims around religion can also vary significantly according to national legal and political regulations and the degree of decentralisation of each state.

In what follows, I develop my formulation of the governance of religious diversity in cities, which arose from the field research I conducted in three medium-size cities in France (Rennes, Bordeaux and Toulouse) between November 2015 and January 2017. In total, I interviewed 45 urban actors: seven politicians, seven members of the city administration, 21 representatives of local religious organisations, three members of secularist/humanist groups, two members of other civil-society associations, two local journalists and three academics. I also conducted participant observation in the meetings of a consultative body set up by the mayor of Rennes in 2015 to discuss issues dealing with religion in the city.

The governance of religious diversity in three French cities

Rennes, Bordeaux and Toulouse, like many other cities in Europe, have experienced the increasing religious diversification of their population, linked mostly to the arrival of immigrants from a wide range of countries, especially since the mid-twentieth century. This has resulted in claims related to the exercise of the right to religious freedom in a number of domains.

The quest for decent places of worship has been the most vocal and visible claim made by religious groups at the city level, and it is also the one that has generated the greatest public opposition, especially in the case of mosques. In Rennes, claims for places of worship made by Muslim communities at the end of the 1970s converged with the interventionist character of the city administration, resulting in an active policy of constructing so-called ‘cultural’ centres funded and, to a certain extent, controlled by the city. The municipal government, and in particular the charismatic mayor of the city at that time, managed to balance the interests and claims of two different groups, the Muslim communities and the political and social opposition, in fulfilling its obligation as part of the French state to grant the free exercise of religion while also limiting state support for religion. This policy, which continued with other projects that were realised without much controversy in the 2000s, including in respect of other religious minorities,

was mostly driven by the rationale that the disadvantaged position of religious minorities in comparison with the funding received by the Catholic Church for the maintenance of churches should be compensated. This path-dependence dynamic has to be understood against the background of a historically strong and rather amicable relationship between the city government and the Catholic Church on the one hand, and the general political economy of the city, characterised by the strong intervention of the city administration, on the other.

In line with this interventionist approach, Rennes has also provided space for the construction of confessional plots for the Jewish and Muslim communities in one municipal cemetery. The city has also set up the *Comité consultatif laïcité*, a consultative body where urban politicians, members of the city administration, representatives of Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism, members of NGOs and secularist groups, and experts meet to discuss the municipal enforcement of *laïcité*.⁴ The ultimate goal of this body was to draft the document *Pour une charte rennaise de la laïcité*, containing recommendations for municipal employees, local associations and private companies to address religious issues. These recommendations, resulting from exchanges between groups with unequal resources in terms of legitimacy and under different conditions of surveillance, may have consequences for the users of public services, and in particular for religious organisations and public expressions of religiosity. A certain notion of religiosity courses through the pages of the document, setting the limits of what are considered legitimate expressions of religion in public.

All these interventions are accompanied by a political narrative about the value of diversity, exemplified by a speech given by the mayor on 6 February 2015, in which she argued that *laïcité* was the pillar of social cohesion, in particular now because 'our society has never been so diverse, so rich in its differences. *Laïcité* is precisely the link between unity and diversity.'⁵ The attendance of city officials and politicians at religious commemorations and interreligious events and the invitation of religious leaders to civic events are further examples of this symbolic recognition of (certain) religious groups in Rennes. Other authors have also shown the increasing prominence of such positive political discourses about religious diversity (Griera, 2012). In generating a particular narrative about religious diversity in the city, these interventions not only address practical needs but also contribute to spreading a specific view of the diverse composition of the city and produce a well-delimited definition of the religious groups that are deemed trustworthy partners and worthy of public support, but sometimes also of control.

Bordeaux and Toulouse have not deployed such a proactive and interventionist approach to the regulation of religious diversity in the city. In Bordeaux, this less interventionist approach is visible in the fact that, unlike what happens in Rennes, some religious minorities have their own private cemeteries and the metropolitan government has created Jewish and Muslim plots only recently. However, Bordeaux has adopted a position in which the symbolic aspects of the governance of religious diversity are central. For the past seven years, the municipality of Bordeaux has celebrated a series of annual interreligious conferences presided over by the mayor called *Bordeaux Partage*. In these conferences, religious leaders from the same religious traditions as in Rennes, but with a higher public profile, especially in the case of the imam, participate in public discussions over topical issues, such as the role of religions in welcoming foreigners,

under the chairmanship of the mayor. Such intervention could be understood as both a public performance of 'good' religion, enacted by these particular religious leaders themselves, and as a strategy to legitimate the figure of the mayor and provide him with political resources, as De Galembert (2006a) has argued.

In 2013, the city of Toulouse created a similar consultative body to the one in Rennes. It was first called the *Conseil de la laïcité* and a later city government authority transformed it into *Toulouse fraternité - Conseil de la laïcité* in 2015. This body, like the one in Rennes, is consulted regularly by the city government to give advice on specific issues. For example, it recently gave the go-ahead for a municipal policy to charge fees for renting out municipal facilities to religious groups. In this case, though, the local conditions for its establishment were rather different from the other cases. The terrorist attack on the Jewish school in 2012 had triggered the creation of such a body by the city administration.

Another example of these interventions at the symbolic level is the creation of the *2017 Calendrier de la laïcité et du vivre ensemble* by the municipality of Bordeaux and the representatives of the major religious groups. The text of this calendar, which is distributed free both in paper form and electronically by the city administration, can be understood as an intervention that recognises some, though not all, of the diverse religious traditions as part of the city's composition. This intervention, which involves certain local actors but not others, has repercussions in the way religious diversity is depicted, thereby reinforcing the boundaries between those religious groups that are deemed legitimate and the rest.

Policies in these two municipalities are not only restricted to symbolic issues. In both cases, the municipalities also provide resources to religious groups by supporting well-established activities of what is often called interreligious and intercultural dialogue. A concrete example of indirect funding is the provision of municipal rooms free of charge for the celebration of activities of interreligious dialogue in the city of Bordeaux. In Toulouse, municipal employees provide logistic support for the advertising of such activities.

Despite variation in the degrees and types of intervention, attributable to a range of local socio-historical and political specificities,⁶ one common element to the three cases presented here is that the urban governance of religious diversity is not restricted to state actors but results from the interaction of a variety of actors.

Regulating from within: Involving the actors from the field

For a long time, relationships between religions and the state have mostly been regulated through the legal frameworks of church–state relations. More and more, though, these arrangements have been complemented with looser institutional arrangements, such as governance networks. When studying the governance of religious diversity in cities, therefore, attention cannot be devoted exclusively to urban government and administration and religious organisations. Other interest groups, such as the opposition in the municipal council, interfaith networks, NGOs, secular associations, associations campaigning for secularism, artists, parents' groups, neighbourhood and small business associations may intervene in quarrels and negotiations over the public display of religion in the city, as in the consultative bodies in Rennes and Toulouse. These actors may intervene

sporadically in specific issues or become involved in more regular and formal settings, such as a consultative body. They may become involved through social-movement types of mobilisation or public–private partnerships. An example of the latter exists in the three cities of my study. Moreover, actors may become actively involved themselves or be mobilised by other actors to form interest coalitions. These could take the shape of a group of local religious representatives regularly working together to address their claims to the municipality, but it could also well be that the municipality itself initiates contacts with religious organisations, as in *Bordeaux Partage*, or invites secularist groups to discuss the drafting of a municipal charter of *laïcité*, as in the case of Rennes.

By means of such an approach, which avoids the top-down regulation of religion, urban authorities attempt to socialise different local actors – in particular Islamic groups – into their policy goals and make them carriers of the message to their communities and networks. As such, religious actors themselves, but also other non-religious actors, may enact and engage in social practices that contribute to the self-regulation of the religious field. As Martikainen (2016: 128) puts it, states use networks ‘to influence the agenda-setting of religious organisations [and other actors as well] through persuasion and encouragement’. As some of my examples show, these interactions produce a variety of interventions that regulate different dimensions of religious practice in the public sphere and ultimately generate normative representations of the sorts of religious behaviour that are considered acceptable in public.

Variety of domains and types of interventions

My empirical material shows that urban interventions encompass a wide variety of objects of regulation.⁷ I have divided them into two groups, following Scott and Storper’s (2015: 13) distinction between policies focused on place and policies focused on people.

In the first category, that of policies focused on place, we can find a wide variety of objects of regulation, some of which I have referred to in presenting the empirical material: (a) the use of public space for religious and secularist or atheist purposes, such as processions and pilgrimages; (b) the construction of places of worship, as well as looser architectural interventions such as the construction of an *eruv*;⁸ (c) the arrangement of religious cemeteries or confessional plots in public cemeteries; (d) the use of municipal facilities for religious purposes, such as large-scale religious celebrations; (e) the display of religious and secularist signs in the spaces of the city; (f) the organisation of interfaith or *laïcité* tours through the city; and (g) the presence of religious symbols in municipal facilities.

In the second category, I have grouped policies focused on people that emerged during the extended fieldwork conducted for my research. These comprise a number of domains of regulation, such as: (a) the wearing of visible religious symbols in the public space of the city and access to municipal premises and services while wearing them; (b) the behaviour of municipal employees; (c) the provision of food in school canteens; (d) regulations concerning extracurricular activities; (e) the participation of politicians and other representatives of the city administration in (inter)faith activities; (f) inviting religious representatives to secular celebrations and commemorations; (g) the celebration of local religious festivities; (h) access to city government subsidies for religious and

cultural activities; and (i) the official registration of religious organisations at the municipal level.

The empirical material from my research also shows that the governance of religious diversity in cities takes different forms. I have classified the more formal types of municipal interventions into four groups. The first groups together all the regulatory documents produced by urban authorities, namely municipal ordinances, decrees and charters, as well as internal regulations for the functioning of the administration and codes of conduct for municipal employees. Examples of this, like the charter in Rennes, are becoming more common in European cities. The second group refers to interventions that promote the symbolic recognition of religious diversity, such as Bordeaux's interfaith conference. Examples of this are also becoming more widespread, especially at a moment when tensions over religious differences are becoming more virulent and mediated. The third type of intervention is material in kind, referring to policies to provide material resources to religious groups. Among these, the provision of public land for places of worship, the arrangement of confessional plots in municipal cemeteries, indirect funding via cultural projects and the renting of municipal premises for religious purposes are the most evident. The fourth set of interventions includes policy tools designed to enhance the political participation of religious organisations, such as the consultative bodies in Rennes and Toulouse and the processes of participation studied by Torrekens (2012) and Fourot (2015). Despite most European states being legally separate from religious organisations, the latter are increasingly present in governance structures (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008; Lamine, 2005) in order to inform urban policy-making.

The interplay of local contextual factors and national frameworks

Explanations for national differences in the accommodation of religious diversity have drawn mainly on the dynamics of path dependence generated by national patterns of church–state relations. Looking at cities urges us to pay attention to a different set of elements, namely the contextual factors that may influence the ways in which religion and religious diversity are dealt with in urban spaces. I draw on Scott and Stoper's classification of five types of contextual circumstances of cities, adapting and illustrating each of them with specific issues related to the governance of religious diversity.

First, a city's level of economic development can determine the share of public resources available to address religious issues. Also, the political economy of the city may lead to different political orientations of public policies that would either intervene in the religious field in the city or leave it free of state intervention, as the cases presented above show. The structures of social stratification that predominate in the city will certainly affect the claims-making capacities, resource mobilisation and access to political elites of different groups. Fourth, the prevailing cultural norms and traditions, such as the Catholic Church's predominance, as in the case of Rennes, or a strong tradition of interreligious dialogue, as in Bordeaux, may shape current developments. Also, the narratives of the past, namely how people narrate the religious or secular past of the city and the ways in which secularism is mobilised politically, may impact on people's understandings of the public role and governance of religious diversity today (Burchardt, 2017). The distribution of urban political authority and local power constellations may

also have a strong imprint in the ways religious diversity is addressed. The colour of the ruling party or coalition (De Graauw and Vermeulen, 2016), the presence of charismatic mayors (Ponzini and Rossi, 2010), as in the cases of Rennes and Bordeaux, and visible religious leaders (see, for example, Baylocq-Sassoubre, 2012), as is the case of the imam of Bordeaux, can influence policies. Also, the power of the local 'civic infrastructure', understood as 'the formal and informal mechanisms' linking 'different local organizations and their activities' and providing 'channels for communication with local policy-makers' (Lowndes et al., 2006: 552), can generate opportunities for participation and mobilisation. Finally, in the context of religious governance, the existence of mediatised local conflicts or incidents more or less directly related to religious issues should also be considered. These include, among others, conflicts over the construction of new places of worship, mobilisation against the wearing of visible religious symbols, the existence of controversial religious leaders and traumatic events such as the terrorist attack in Toulouse. The way such events unfold and their media coverage may strongly influence subsequent policy measures.

Looking at these local factors can help us fine-tune our understanding of the specificities that characterise the governance of religious diversity in each city, as well as the commonalities across cities. However, cities are embedded in broader institutional and discursive structures, namely national laws, policies, discourses and media representations (Uitermark and Gielen, 2010), as well as the struggles and claims-making of religious and secular groups at various levels, which constrain their capacities and mediate their interventions. For instance, the 1905 French law on the separation of church and state limits the scope of action of municipalities, particularly concerning the provision of public funding for religious groups. Yet, simultaneously we see how cities navigate and sometimes push further the contours of the law to find creative responses to specific requests, such as the funding of 'cultural' and not 'religious' centres in Rennes. National institutional and legal frameworks, then, do not disappear or become irrelevant in the context of the governance of religious diversity in cities. Rather, urban actors appropriate and articulate them under particular local conditions. At the same time, international controversies and events and national public debates and images about certain religious groups disseminated by mainstream media may also influence the ways in which local issues are politically framed as religious problems, when in fact they may have more to do with other spheres of social life.

However, the relationship between the national and urban levels of regulation is not unilateral: cities can also affect the ways in which national bodies and discourses portray and address religious diversity. De Galember (2003) describes a number of dynamics whereby local issues are elevated to the status of national issues, some of which are relevant beyond the French context. Local issues can be recontextualised by the media, thereby bringing the debate on to the national scene. I would argue, as the opening vignette on the *burkini* shows, that cities have the capacity to set the policy agenda on certain issues at the national and international levels. A second upward dynamic that the author mentions happens through the intervention of national bodies to solve local conflicts. As the three cases discussed here show, cities may also try to counterbalance polarised national debates by projecting an image of good understanding between different social groups. Finally, I would argue, in line with De Galember, that the transfer of

policy problems, ideas and measures does not only happen in a vertical manner: transfers across cities can also take place.

Conclusions

Drawing on the literature from migration research, urban studies, geography and the sociology of religion, and based on empirical fieldwork, in this article I have argued that we need to consider cities not only as contexts of the presence and expression of religious diversity, but also as relevant sites for its governance and regulation.

My study has shown that the ways in which religious diversity is dealt with in French cities are more fragmentary and less clear-cut than a generalising account of the legal separation of church and state could grasp. While also in cities *laïcité* is a 'ubiquitous' label, in Bowen's terms (2007: 1015), that impregnates public and political discourses surrounding the regulation of religion, French secularism adopts unexpected forms in urban contexts. Municipal regulations of religious diversity operate in multiple directions, stretching the horizons of the 1905 law and more recent state-level regulations. Examples such as the funding of places of worship through the formula of 'cultural centres' by the municipality of Rennes or the provision of logistic support to religious groups under the label of 'intercultural and interreligious dialogue' in Bordeaux prove the inventiveness of urban actors to navigate the constraints imposed by national normative and discursive frameworks.

Cities, then, not only implement national regulations and make sure that national laws are enforced. Their scope of action varies across countries, but overall urban actors can produce a variety of interventions with immediate consequences for people's lives and for the types of religiosity that are considered acceptable in urban spaces. Thus, by observing state secularism from the angle of the urban governance of religious diversity, we are able to account for the less unidirectional and more unpredictable nature of the regulation of religion, as I have been able to show with my study on French cities.

In more general terms, this perspective has the potential for a more nuanced understanding of negotiations over religious diversity in contemporary Europe. An empirically grounded approach to urban regulations and contestations allows us to grasp the many intricacies that underlie conflicts over public religiosity, as well as overcoming a simplistic view that looks at local struggles exclusively through the lens of the confrontation between the religious and the secular. As Griera and Burchardt (2016) have recently demonstrated, it is also important to analyse the role played by conceptions of 'normal' and 'disruptive' behaviour in the city to understand such struggles better.

Adopting this analytical approach also allows us to acknowledge that at a time of the widespread existence of governance networks it is not only political authorities and city administrations but also other actors that shape the regulation of religion, and should be included in the analysis. This will enable a more nuanced account of the power struggles and capacities of different actors to influence urban policy-making through their claims-making and advocacy.

Moreover, this perspective provides more opportunities for capturing top-down as well as bottom-up initiatives in the governing of religion and analysing the informal aspects of policy-making through a microsociological approach to social interactions.

Also, by looking at cities, researchers are in a better position to investigate the influence of contextual factors in urban policies regarding religion, as well as the interaction, coherence or decoupling between the national and urban levels of regulation.

My call that more attention be paid to the role of cities in the regulation of religion and religious diversity does not constitute a dogmatic position. I am aware of the risks of the fetishisation of cities as the context where everything takes place, and we cannot underestimate the international and national legal, political, institutional and discursive frameworks in which cities are embedded. Yet, cities also have a say in immediate everyday-life issues, such as the ways in which citizens are allowed to express their religiosity in relation to different uses of the urban space, which may differ from those of higher levels of government.

The literature has often considered cities to be more pragmatic and accommodating than the national level (Downing, 2015), and to react to specific problems on a daily basis beyond, and sometimes in contradiction with, national laws and narratives. Yet, this pragmatic problem-solving approach does not seem to be exclusive of city administrations, and not all city interventions follow a pragmatic logic only. Cities also have the ability to generate different normative narratives about religion, religious diversity, secularism and secularity. Therefore, while cities often adopt a problem-solving approach to respond pragmatically to needs and requests, they also generate deeper ideological reflections around the notion of *laïcité* or secularism. The example of the ban on the use of the *burkini* on French beaches that opened this article is evidence of this as it is of the influence cities can exert over agenda-setting at the national and European levels.

Finally, one should not assume that city administrations are by nature more progressive in their attitudes towards religion and issues of religious diversity than national bodies. Again, the recent example of the *burkini* ban in France, as well as some examples uncovered in my fieldwork, are in line with Gagnon and Jouve's (2006) argument that cities cannot be considered intrinsically as the privileged spaces of progressive policies for dealing with diversity. In many cases, they may be more progressive and willing to acknowledge religious diversity. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that urban decisions are *per se* more accommodating than national policies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank colleagues at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen and at the Department of Comparative Study of Religion at the University of Groningen for useful feedback on a previous version of this article. I am also grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for their critical remarks.

Funding

This research was funded by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany).

Notes

1. Article 4.3. of municipal decree n° 2016-42.
2. My own translation from the 'Arrêté n°2016-42 Règlement de police, de sécurité, et

- d'exploitation des plages concédées par l'État à la commune de Villeneuve-Loubet'.
3. My research was part of a broader comparative and interdisciplinary project entitled 'CityDiv. Cities and the Challenge of Diversity: A Study in Germany and France' funded by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.
 4. I have written a more detailed account of the functioning of such a body elsewhere (Martínez-Ariño, 2016).
 5. Author's translation from: '[La laïcité] est le pilier de notre cohésion sociale. Un pilier d'autant plus essentiel que notre société n'a jamais été aussi plurielle, aussi riche de ses différences. La laïcité est précisément ce trait d'union entre l'unité et la diversité.'
 6. Limitations of space prevent me from offering a more detailed account of the specific local conditions of each of these cities. However, later in the text I describe some of the local contextual factors that may influence municipal interventions.
 7. Space restrictions do not allow me to present the details of these numerous and varied interventions.
 8. An *eruv* is a Jewish practice that consists in the demarcation of a portion of urban space for religious purposes. In the space contained within the limits of the *eruv*, a space deemed private, orthodox Jews are allowed to carry goods during Sabbath, something that would otherwise be restricted to the home (Siemiatycki, 2005). This represents a symbolic extension of the private space of the home into the public space of the city.

References

- Ambrosini M and Boccagni P (2015) Urban multiculturalism beyond the 'backlash': New discourses and different practices in immigrant policies across European cities. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 36(1): 35–53.
- Astor A (2012) Memory, community, and opposition to mosques: The case of Badalona. *Theory and Society* 41(4): 325–349.
- Bader PV (2007) The governance of Islam in Europe: The perils of modelling. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(6): 871–886.
- Bayloq-Sassoubre C (2012) *Autorité religieuse et normes islamiques en contexte laïque: L'imâm Tareq Oubrou, les musulmans de Bordeaux et l'islam de France*. PhD thesis, Université Bordeaux 2, France.
- Becci I, Burchardt M and Casanova J (eds) (2013) *Topographies of Faith: Religion in Urban Spaces*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Becci I, Burchardt M and Giorda M (2016) Religious super-diversity and spatial strategies in two European cities. *Current Sociology* 65(1): 73–91.
- Beckford JA and Gilliat S (2005) *Religion in Prison: 'Equal Rites' in a Multi-Faith Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bertossi C (2012) French republicanism and the problem of normative density. *Comparative European Politics* 10(3): 248–265.
- Borraz O and John P (2004) The transformation of urban political leadership in Western Europe. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28(1): 107–120.
- Bowen JR (2007) A view from France on the internal complexity of national models. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(6): 1003–1016.
- Bowen JR, Bertossi C, Duyvendak JW et al. (2014) *European States and their Muslim Citizens: The Impact of Institutions on Perceptions and Boundaries*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brenner N (2009) Is there a politics of 'urban' development? Reflections on the US case. In: Dilworth R (ed.) *The City in American Political Development*. New York: Routledge, pp. 121–140.

- Brubaker R (1992) *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Burchardt M (2017) Recalling modernity: How nationalist memories shape religious diversity in Quebec and Catalonia. *Nations and Nationalism*, 23(3): 599–619.
- Burchardt M, Griera M and García-Romeral G (2015) Narrating liberal rights and culture: Muslim face veiling, urban coexistence and contention in Spain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41(7): 1068–1087.
- Cesari J (2005) Mosque conflicts in European cities: Introduction. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(6): 1015–1024.
- Chiodelli F and Moroni S (2017) Planning, pluralism and religious diversity: Critically reconsidering the spatial regulation of mosques in Italy starting from a much debated law in the Lombardy region. *Cities* 62: 62–70.
- De Galembert C (2003) La gestion publique de l'islam en France et en Allemagne. De l'improvisation de pratiques in situ à l'amorce d'un processus de régulation. *Revue Internationale et Stratégique* 4(52): 67–78.
- De Galembert C (2006a) La construction de l'islam comme ressource d'autorité publique du pouvoir local: La parabole de Mantes-la-Jolie. In: Jouve B and Gagnon AG (eds) *Les Métropoles au défi de la diversité culturelle*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, pp. 69–94.
- De Galembert C (2006b) L'islam des acteurs publics territoriaux: Entre incertitude et ressource d'autorité politique. *Cahiers de La Sécurité Intérieure* 62: 33–53.
- De Graauw E and Vermeulen F (2016) Cities and the politics of immigrant integration: A comparison of Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42(6): 989–1012.
- Dekker R, Emilsson H, Krieger B et al. (2015) A local dimension of integration policies? A comparative study of Berlin, Malmö, and Rotterdam. *International Migration Review* 49(3): 633–658.
- Dick E and Nagel A (2017) Local interfaith networks in urban integration politics: Religious communities between innovation and cooptation. In: Hegner V and Margry PJ (eds) *Spiritualizing the City: Agency and Resilience of the Urban and Urbanesque Habitat*. New York: Routledge, pp. 27–45.
- Dinham A and Lowndes V (2008) Religion, resources, and representation: Three narratives of faith engagement in British urban governance. *Urban Affairs Review* 43(6): 817–845.
- Downing J (2015) Contesting and re-negotiating the national in French cities: Examining policies of governance, Europeanisation and co-option in Marseille and Lyon. *Fennia – International Journal of Geography* 193(2): 185–197.
- Duemmler K and Nagel AK (2013) Governing religious diversity: Top-down and bottom-up initiatives in Germany and Switzerland. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 47(2): 265–283.
- Fournier L (2009) Une gestion publique de l'islam entre rupture et rhétorique. *L'Homme et la Société* 4: 41–62.
- Fourot AC (2015) Instruments d'action publique et régulation municipale de l'islam. *Gouvernement et Action Publique* 3: 81–102.
- Frégosi F and Willaime JP (2001) *Le Religieux dans la commune: Les régulations locales du pluralisme religieux en France*. Genève: Labor et Fides.
- Gagnon AG and Jouve B (2006) Métropoles, diversité culturelle et changement politique. In: Jouve B and Gagnon AG (eds) *Les Métropoles au défi de la diversité culturelle*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, pp. 1–46.
- Gale R and Naylor S (2002) Religion, planning and the city: The spatial politics of ethnic minority expression in British cities and towns. *Ethnicities* 2(3): 387–409.

- Gebhardt D (2016) When the state takes over: Civic integration programmes and the role of cities in immigrant integration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42(5): 742–758.
- Giorgi A and Itçaina X (2016) Religion and local politics in southern Europe: A research agenda. *Religion, State and Society* 44(3): 276–295.
- Griera M (2012) Public policies, interfaith associations and religious minorities: A new policy paradigm? Evidence from the case of Barcelona. *Social Compass* 59(4): 570–587.
- Griera M and Burchardt M (2016) Religión y espacio público: el conflicto en torno a la regulación del velo integral islámico. *Papeles del CEIC, International Journal on Collective Identity Research* 2: 6–28.
- Griera MM and Forteza M (2011) New actors on the governance of religious diversity in European cities: The role of interfaith platforms. In: Haynes J and Hennig A (eds) *Religious Actors in the Public Sphere: Means, Objectives, and Effects*. New York: Routledge, pp. 113–131.
- Klijn EH (2008) Governance and governance networks in Europe: An assessment of ten years of research on the theme. *Public Management Review* 10(4): 505–525.
- Knott K, Krech V and Meyer B (2016) Iconic religion in urban space. *Material Religion* 12(2): 123–136.
- Kong L (2010) Global shifts, theoretical shifts: Changing geographies of religion. *Progress in Human Geography* 34(6): 755–776.
- Kuppinger P (2014) Mosques and minarets: Conflict, participation, and visibility in German cities. *Anthropological Quarterly* 87(3): 793–818.
- Lamine AS (2005) Mise en scène de la ‘bonne entente’ interreligieuse et reconnaissance. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 129: 83–96.
- Lamine AS (2015) *La Cohabitation des dieux: Pluralité religieuse et laïcité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lowndes V, Pratchett L and Stoker G (2006) Local political participation: The impact of rules-in-use. *Public Administration* 84(3): 539–561.
- McCann E (2011) Urban policy mobilities and global circuits of knowledge: Toward a research agenda. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101(1): 107–130.
- Martikainen T (2013) Multilevel and pluricentric network governance of religion. In: Martikainen T and Gauthier F (eds) *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 129–142.
- Martikainen T (2016) Managing religious diversity in Finland: From church law to governance networks. In: Dawson A (ed.) *The Politics and Practice of Religious Diversity*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 118–132.
- Martínez-Ariño J (2016) Grupos religiosos y gobierno local en interacción: Un estudio de caso en Francia. *Sociedad y Religión* 26(46): 201–223.
- Martínez-Ariño J, García-Romeral G, Ubasart G and Griera M (2015) Demonopolization and dislocation: (Re-) negotiating the place and role of religion in Spanish prisons. *Social Compass* 62(1): 3–21.
- Maussen M (2007) Islamic presence and mosque establishment in France: Colonialism, arrangements for guestworkers and citizenship. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(6): 981–1002.
- Michalowski I (2015) What is at stake when Muslims join the ranks? An international comparison of military chaplaincy. *Religion, State and Society* 43(1): 41–58.
- Nicholls WJ and Vermeulen F (2012) Rights through the city: The urban basis of immigrant rights struggles in Amsterdam and Paris. In: Smith MP and MacQuarrie M (eds) *Remaking Urban Citizenship: Organizations, Institutions, and the Right to the City*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, pp. 79–96.
- Penninx R, Kraal K, Martiniello M et al. (2004) *Citizenship in European Cities: Immigrants, Local Politics and Integration Policies*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

- Ponzini D and Rossi U (2010) Becoming a creative city: The entrepreneurial mayor, network politics and the promise of an urban renaissance. *Urban Studies* 47(5): 1037–1057.
- Poppelaars C and Scholten P (2008) Two worlds apart: The divergence of national and local immigrant integration policies in the Netherlands. *Administration and Society* 40(4): 335–357.
- Schiller M (2015) Paradigmatic pragmatism and the politics of diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(7): 1120–1136.
- Schmidtke O (2014) Beyond national models? Governing migration and integration at the regional and local levels in Canada and Germany. *Comparative Migration Studies* 2(1): 77–99.
- Scholten PWA (2015) Between national models and multi-level decoupling: The pursuit of multi-level governance in Dutch and UK policies towards migrant incorporation. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17(4): 973–994.
- Scott AJ and Storper M (2015) The nature of cities: The scope and limits of urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39(1): 1–15.
- Siemiatycki M (2005) Contesting sacred urban space: The case of the Eruv. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 6(2): 255–270.
- Sinha V (2016) Marking spaces as ‘sacred’: Infusing Singapore’s urban landscape with sacrality. *International Sociology* 31(4): 467–488.
- Soper JC and Fetzer JS (2007) Religious institutions, church–state history and Muslim mobilisation in Britain, France and Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(6): 933–944.
- Taylor PJ (1981) Geographical scales within the world-economy approach. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 5(1): 3–11.
- Torrekens C (2012) Concertation et négociation à l’échelle politique locale. Le cas de la gestion locale de l’islam à Bruxelles. *Participations* 1: 126–145.
- Uitermark J and Gielen AJ (2010) Islam in the spotlight: The mediatisation of politics in an Amsterdam neighbourhood. *Urban Studies* 47(6): 1325–1342.
- Van den Breemer R and Maussen M (2012) On the viability of state–church models: Muslim burial and mosque building in France and the Netherlands. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 10(3): 279–298.
- Watson S (2005) Symbolic spaces of difference: Contesting the eruv in Barnet, London and Tenafly, New Jersey. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(4): 597–613.
- Zwilling AL (2015) A century of mosques in France: Building religious pluralism. *International Review of Sociology* 25(2): 333–340.

Author biography

Julia Martínez-Ariño is Assistant Professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Groningen (Netherlands). She received her PhD in Sociology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain). She has worked as research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany) and as postdoctoral researcher at the Université de Montréal (Canada). Her main research interests are the governance of religious diversity in public institutions and cities. She has conducted fieldwork in Spain, Canada, Germany and France. She has also done research on the contemporary Jewish communities in Spain.

Résumé

La littérature sociologique s’est moins intéressée aux villes qu’aux États-nations en tant que cadres où s’opère la réglementation de la religion et de la diversité religieuse en Europe. En utilisant des idées tirées des études des migrations, des études urbaines,

de la géographie et de la sociologie de la religion, ainsi que les données empiriques issues d'un travail de terrain mené dans trois villes de taille moyenne en France, cette étude conceptualise la gouvernance de la diversité religieuse dans les villes comme une série d'assemblages complexes où (1) les intérêts et revendications politiques de différents acteurs de position sociale inégale sur (2) un certain nombre de domaines et d'objets d'expression publique de la religiosité (3) font l'objet de diverses interventions municipales, (4) qui sont déterminées par l'action conjuguée de cadres juridiques supranationaux, de la législation nationale, des politiques publiques, de dispositifs institutionnels et de facteurs contextuels locaux. Ces processus de réglementation aboutissent à des définitions normatives particulières (et souvent controversées) des expressions publiques « acceptées » ou « légitimes » de la religiosité, qui sont par la suite instituées par divers acteurs locaux par le biais à la fois de procédures officielles et de pratiques spontanées.

Mots-clés

Diversité religieuse, Europe, gouvernance, municipalités, villes

Resumen

La literatura sociológica ha dedicado menos atención a las ciudades que a los estados nación como contextos de regulación de la religión y la diversidad religiosa en Europa. Partiendo de aportaciones de los estudios sobre migraciones, estudios urbanos, geografía y sociología de la religión, y basándose en el material empírico del trabajo de campo realizado en tres ciudades medianas de Francia, este artículo conceptualiza la gobernanza de la diversidad religiosa en las ciudades como ensamblajes complejos donde (1) los intereses y reivindicaciones políticas de varios actores desigualmente posicionados socialmente sobre (2) una serie de ámbitos y objetos de la expresión pública de la religiosidad (3) están sujetos a una variedad de intervenciones municipales, (4) conformadas por la interacción entre marcos legales supranacionales, legislación, políticas públicas y arreglos institucionales a nivel nacional y factores contextuales locales. El resultado de estos procesos de regulación son definiciones normativas (a menudo disputadas) de las expresiones públicas de la religiosidad consideradas “aceptadas” o “legítimas”. Estas definiciones son hechas operativas posteriormente por una variedad de actores locales mediante procedimientos formales y prácticas informales.

Palabras clave

Ciudades, diversidad religiosa, Europa, gobernanza, municipios