Governing religious diversity in cities: critical perspectives

Julia Martínez-Ariño

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INTRODUCTION

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Julia Martínez-Ariño

The Department of the Comparative Study of Religion, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This collection addresses the question of how cities govern and regulate religious diversity. Its main goals are: 1) to take stock of current research regarding the municipal governance of religious diversity; 2) to put forward new concepts and empirical analyses to enhance this field of study; and 3) to identify potential lines for future enquiry that help move the field forward. The contributions cover a wide variety of topics, such as the roles of laws, state contracts, and urbanism in governing religious diversity, comparisons of diverging governance trajectories in various cities within one country, and the controversies surrounding the celebration of religious events in urban spaces. The contributions also identify factors that influence governance processes at the urban level and their consequences for the practice of religion. The collection covers studies of cities in various European countries as well as in Canada.

Introduction

Urban religious landscapes are becoming more and more religiously diverse. Globalisation and its associated migration flows have transformed the religious geographies of cities in many regions in the world (Henkel 2014; Peach and Gale 2003). However, the presence of diverse religious traditions is not the result of recent migration movements alone. These more recent arrivals interact with existing diversities of religious legacies in urban settings and the religious innovations that emerge in these contexts (Becci, Burchardt, and Giorda 2017).

Cities are not only sites where religious diversity becomes more visible (Becci, Burchardt, and Casanova 2013; Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016), but also sociospatial configurations where controversies over issues related to public expressions of religiosity take shape and are negotiated. From the building of mosques, minarets, and *eruvs* to the use of burkinis on municipal beaches and the display of religious symbols in public spaces and municipal facilities, cities are spaces of public and political contestation over the place and role of religion in public life. And while research in this area is expanding, we still lack a more systematic understanding of how religion is governed in urban settings (Martínez-Ariño 2018).

In 2016 a call for more research on local interactions between religion and politics was made in the pages of *Religion, State & Society* (Giorgi and Itçaina 2016). Giorgi and Itçaina gave four main reasons for this interest. First, such research enables investigation of the

CONTACT Julia Martínez-Ariño ✉ j.martinez.arino@rug.nl 🖃 Department of the Comparative Study of Religion, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

local implementation of national rules and the emergence of national debates out of local controversies. Secondly, in light of the rescaling of government competences, it is likely that local bodies, such as municipalities, may acquire greater relevance in shaping and regulating religious diversity. Thirdly, the local is a central space for the expansion of governance networks in which religious and non-religious actors interact to regulate matters of public concern. Finally, it is at the local level that grassroots religious organisations mobilise and make their claims (Giorgi and Itçaina 2015). Other authors have also advocated the need to examine the municipal governance of religious diversity to avoid becoming trapped in normative accounts of national models of the regulation of religious diversity (Bowen 2012; Downing 2015).

Drawing on this interest in subnational levels of regulation, this collection focuses precisely on the governance and regulation of religious diversity in cities. It addresses the question of how cities in various national contexts govern and regulate religious diversity. While national legal frameworks and policies, as well as discursive repertoires, are of crucial relevance in understanding how religion and religious diversity are accommodated and regulated in different national contexts (Soper and Fetzer 2007), city actors and institutions also play a central role in the regulation of religiosity in urban spaces. Local contexts and their characteristics – including cities' religious histories, their traditions of civil-society participation and engagement, and their actor constellations – matter for the design, interpretation, and implementation of municipal policies (Martínez-Ariño 2018). Moreover, the negotiation and regulation of religion in the context of cities also reflect and are affected by dynamics at different scales and their interconnections – they do not operate in a vacuum.

The main goals of this collection are thus: 1) to take stock of the state of current research on the municipal governance of religious diversity; 2) to put forward new concepts and empirical analyses to enhance this field of study and provide accurate accounts of the interaction between city-level factors and external influences (be they national, international, or global); and 3) to identify potential lines for future enquiry that help move the field forward by broadening the scope of topics of analysis and generating new research questions and hypotheses.

This publication has arisen out of a panel entitled 'Governing Religious Diversity and Conflict in the City', which I organised at the 34th Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR), held in Lausanne (Switzerland) in July 2017. The papers presented in the panel's six sessions addressed a variety of topics related to the governance of religious diversity in cities in Europe, North and South America, Israel, and Southeast Asia. A selection of those papers forms the bulk of this collection. They cover a wide variety of topics, such as a comparison of the governance trajectories of various cities within a single country, the institutionalisation of a local Islam through means of interfaith dialogue and state contracts, and the controversies surrounding the celebration of International Yoga Day in urban spaces, among other topics. They also cover a wide range of geographical areas, including cities in various European countries and Canada, thereby expanding the geographical scope of previous academic endeavours in this area that have focused on Europe exclusively (Oosterbaan 2014).

The contributions to this collection adopt a governance perspective, which allows not only traditional and top-down government-led interventions to be captured, but also other forms of policymaking that involve negotiations between networks of state and

non-state actors, such as governance structures and public-private partnerships and projects (Duemmler and Nagel 2013; Martikainen 2013). Governance refers to the internal and external regulation of religious diversity by 'mechanisms of action-coordination that provide intentional capacities to regulate, including co- and self-regulation' (Bader 2007, 873) and not exclusively through laws and rules. Governance processes involve more actors than just the state, including the religious communities themselves, but also interfaith networks and associations and other forms of corporate governance such as public-private partnerships. With this perspective in mind, the authors contributing to this publication are able to identify the actor constellations that intervene in specific contexts and governance processes.

This perspective, which does not focus exclusively on legal regulations and patterns of church-state relations but also on actual practices, enables the regulation and accommodation of religious diversity to be captured as they are negotiated, contested, and implemented in concrete urban settings. Moreover, adopting a 'practice-oriented analysis', the contributions to this collection are able to grasp the 'messiness' of governance and to recognise 'the potential for the exercise of agency by different actors in reinterpreting, appropriating, contesting or resisting governance practices' (O'Toole et al. 2016, 166). Finally, from this governance perspective, attention is also paid to the ways in which such negotiations and regulations impact on religious practices and their accommodation in a given society. Moreover, the contributions to this collection show how governance practices affect religious groups differently, positioned – as these groups are – on an uneven playing field.

Urban governance of religious diversity: recent developments in the field

Studies of religious diversity in cities are proliferating. Among recent examples of edited volumes that describe the entanglements between religion and religious innovation in contemporary cities are *Rescripting Religion in the City* (Harris 2016), *Spiritualizing the City* (Hegner and Margry 2016), *Religious Pluralism and the City* (Berking, Steets, and Schwenk 2018), and *Religion and the Global City* (Garbin and Strhan 2017). While all of these refer to negotiations around diverse religious presences in cities, their focus is less explicitly on the urban governance of religious diversity. Nonetheless work on this specific topic is also increasing. An example of this is a recent special issue of *Social Compass* on 'Interreligious Relations and Governance of Religion in Europe' (Griera and Nagel 2018), which gives particular attention to local interfaith bodies.

Some recently published articles have focused on particular cities, mostly on questions related to Islam and its public visibility. The construction of mosques and related controversies have attracted much scholarly attention, particularly in Europe (Astor 2016; Cesari 2005; Conti 2016; De Galembert 2005; Jonker 2005; Kuppinger 2014; Zwilling 2015), but also in other contexts, such as Canada (Fourot 2010). The use of religious symbols in public urban spaces, again specifically Islamic ones, has also been the focus of recent enquiries (Burchardt and Griera 2018; Burchardt, Griera, and García-Romeral 2015). Research on interfaith bodies and activities as instruments of public policy in urban governance is another significant development that has increased our understanding of the transformations in the ways religion is addressed publicly (Dick and Nagel 2017; Galal, Liebmann, and Nordin 2018; Griera 2012; Körs and Nagel 2018). All these works provide

rich insights into urban processes of the negotiation of religious difference between different actors. However, further research is needed to analyse other aspects of the public presence and regulation of religions in cities, and to identify the underlying factors that shape the associated policies.

This collective publication aims to contribute to this expanding field by offering a variety of studies that closely examine governance processes in cities, the accompanying policy instruments, the actor constellations involved and the resulting regulatory frameworks and normative categories. Therefore, unlike previous undertakings in this area, the focus here is on governance processes rather than on the religious practices themselves. In other words, the emphasis is on the interaction between state and non-state actors and the regulations of religion that emerge from them. This collection, then, starts by considering the evidence of previous research that urban religious landscapes are diversifying and that this diversification is often accompanied by a variety of challenges and controversies involving state intervention.

The topics and approaches of this collection

The thread that runs across all the contributions in this collection is the identification of urban patterns, the policy tools and processes developed for governing religious diversity and the factors at different levels that shape these different patterns of governance. The contributions take a variety of issues as lenses through which to analyse the urban governance of religious diversity, ranging from legal mechanisms and administrative practices to a failed mosque project, from municipal consultative bodies to the celebration of religious or spiritual events in public spaces. This wide range of topics enables a better understanding of the entanglement of religion with urban and supra-urban spaces and processes, demonstrating the variety of issues at stake when it comes to the municipal governance of religion. Economic interests, diplomatic considerations, local religious histories, urban narratives, and specific political agendas: the contributions to this collection show the multiplicity of factors that interact to shape how religion and religious diversity are conceived of, problematised, and governed in urban settings. They also show how municipal interventions shape religious practices, behaviours, and subjectivities in direct and indirect ways.

Despite their different approaches to the governance of religious diversity in cities, all the contributions to this collection offer critical perspectives on the matter. By revealing the multiplicity of factors at various levels affecting how governance is shaped differently, they all call into question the possibility of straightforward explanations. Similarly, by raising further questions that emerge from their findings, all pieces in this collection indicate the urgency of more enquiries that critically examine how religious diversity, and Islam in particular, are regulated on the ground, in different settings.

Moreover, the broad geographical scope of the contributions included in this collection makes it possible to explore the urban governance of religious diversity in quite different socioeconomic, political, cultural, and religious contexts. Adding cases beyond the European context – represented in this collection by studies on Spain, Italy, France, and Germany – that explore the situation in North America, with studies of French- and English-speaking Canada, makes it possible to consider contexts in which the public presence, legitimacy, and recognition of religion, as well as its interaction with the state and political actors, vary considerably.

The discussion is opened by a piece on French-speaking Canada that provides a broad conceptualisation of 'urban religious diversity assemblages'. This is followed by three contributions that compare urban governance trajectories within three different European countries (Spain, Italy, and France), and a further three case studies of individual cities in Germany (Osnabrück, the city-state of Hamburg, and Munich). In these contributions, the governance of Islam features prominently but not exclusively. Finally, an original piece on the contention over a yoga event in English-speaking Canada provides readers with food for thought on the urban governance of religious diversity with a controversy that few would expect.

In the first contribution to this collection, Marian Burchardt draws on empirical material from his research in the Canadian province of Quebec to argue that religious diversity is produced and shaped by what he calls 'urban religious diversity assemblages'. He defines these as 'heterogeneous regulatory apparatuses that are territorially ambiguous and fluid, change over time, and operate as enabling and constraining conditions for religious expressions in diverse cities'. In his analysis of three empirical cases related to two synagogues in the Montreal districts of Mile End and Outremont and an Islamic centre in the borough of St Leonard, the author identifies the different factors that affected the governance and outcomes of these cases. In addition to zoning decisions based on legal texts, there are other elements – such as ideas around the distribution of populations across neighbourhoods, concerns about real estate value, and legal definitions of what constitutes a place of worship – that influence outcomes regarding the potential to establish and expand places of worship.

The next contribution compares the governance of religious diversity in the Spanish cities of Madrid and Barcelona. Avi Astor, Mar Griera, and Mónica Cornejo show that there are important differences in the governance of religion even between cities in the same country. The authors challenge the idea that these differences are only the result of party politics and identify the different configurations of the local structure of opportunities as a key element in explaining the differences in the two governance approaches. In particular, they point to the relevance of the religious configurations in each city and of the political and territorial position of each city to account for these differences. The centrality of international diplomacy in the capital city of Madrid and the impact of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona as external factors, plus the different composition of the Catholic hierarchy and its relationship to politics in the two cities, have contributed to two divergent approaches to governing religion.

Like Astor and colleagues, Giulia Mezzetti and Roberta Ricucci offer a comparative account of the opportunities for Muslim immigrants and their descendants to mobilise. More specifically, they analyse how the different political and institutional approaches to the accommodation of Islamic practices taken in the Italian cities of Milan and Turin provide different political opportunity structures that affect the activism and self-identification of first- and second-generation Muslims. Similar to the Spanish case, the position of these two Italian cities in relation to the central state impacts on decisions regarding the local accommodation of Islam. Moreover, other factors also affect the ways in which Islam is governed in each of the cities. The authors identify as key elements the dominant institutional and discursive frameworks, the political leanings of the mayors, the predominant national origins of local Muslim populations and the structure of their leadership, as well as the existence – or lack of – a policy to further the participation of younger generations.

In my own piece in this collection, I analyse the role that consultative bodies set up by municipal governments to address issues related to religious diversity play in defining 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of public religiosity. Based on empirical research in the French cities of Rennes, Bordeaux, and Toulouse, I show that in a somewhat similar way to national Islam councils, these municipal bodies not only serve as platforms for the representation of Islam before the state, but also establish the conditions for the practice of Islam, which may ultimately affect broader normative understandings of *laïcité* (usually translated as secularism). Moreover, I show that local contextual factors, such as the history of relationships between religious and municipal authorities, urban political constellations, and the political culture of the cities, matter for the production of knowledge and expectations about acceptable and unacceptable religiosity. This, in turn, proves that there is no single coherent way in which state secularism is understood and implemented, but rather attention needs to be paid to how cities and local actors shape policies in significant ways. My contribution, like those of Astor and colleagues and Mezzetti and Ricucci, shows that it is possible to identify different trajectories of governing religious diversity in cities within a single country, trajectories that are shaped by specific local conditions.

The contribution by Ali Konyali, Laura Haddad, and Andreas Pott examines the use of interfaith dialogue as a tool for the local governance of religious diversity, in particular in relation to Islam. Their study of the German city of Osnabrück analyses how interreligious dialogue initiatives at local level are shaped by a particular idea of harmony inspired by the city's self-image as a 'peace city'. This city narrative not only influences the dialogue, it also delineates a particular type of 'normal' Muslim subjectivity that corresponds to the image of the 'classical' Turkish male guest worker. The limited scope of such an understanding of Muslims in interreligious dialogue has led to the emergence of new spaces and individual figures for the expression of a Muslim identity that is more in line with the interests and lifestyles of the descendants of the first generation of migrants. This connects with the findings of Mezzetti and Ricucci. Finally, the piece shows some of the limitations of interreligious dialogue as a governance tool. The authors show that because institutionalised dialogue involves a power dimension and is shaped by well-established city narratives, it has the potential to exclude and alienate alternative subjects, thereby reproducing the dichotomous positions of insiders and outsiders.

Anna Körs' contribution addresses the topic of this collection from the perspective of 'governance by contract'. More specifically, her research analyses the contracts signed between city-states and religious communities in Germany. Based on empirical research in the German city-state of Hamburg, the piece examines the processes whereby these contracts become tools for the governance of religious diversity and the integration of migrant minority religions, especially Islam. The contribution scrutinises the negotiations that led to the signing of these contracts between the city-state of Hamburg and the Muslim and Alevi communities in 2012, and highlights some of their most controversial issues, especially the selection and legal status of the contracting religious partners. Körs raises the question of whether governing religious diversity through contracts as opposed to other means can actually lead to the recognition and integration of minority religions. Moreover, by showing the influence of processes at the local, regional, national, and transnational levels, Körs emphasises the importance of examining the interaction between different administrative levels in the governance of religion.

Tobias Müller's piece offers an innovative approach to the study of the interactions between the state and Muslims that conceptualises not only space but also the state as relational. Drawing on an empirical study of a failed mosque project in Munich, the author argues that factors and mechanisms playing out at different levels – local, translocal, international, and global – and their relationalities may have led to the mosque project failure. More specifically, he identifies three different narratives that account for the failure of the project and suggests that it is only by taking into account the interplay of the different mechanisms that these stories refer to that the non-realisation of the new mosque can be explained. Ultimately, he shows that even the most 'local' context, that is, the lack of support for the project from many local Muslims, is not disconnected from events happening elsewhere, beyond the local administrative boundaries of the city. He thereby questions administratively defined spatial categories, such as city and neighbourhood, as containers of complex social processes.

Finally, the piece by Paul Bramadat describes how a controversy over the celebration of International Yoga Day (IYD) in Vancouver, Canada, unfolded over a very short period of time and culminated in this public event being cancelled. The author meticulously disentangles the factors behind the event's failure. Finding the three main discourses present in public debates around the organisation of the event insufficient to understand its failure, the author digs more deeply into the structural aspects that led to this outcome. According to Bramadat, the strong opposition the event faced can be understood as a result of the interaction of issues related to politics, real estate prices, the local economic situation, gender, and the claims and recognition of indigenous peoples, among others. Bramadat argues for the need to consider broad sociopolitical and economic conditions, even when initially they do not seem directly linked to the religious issue itself, in order to understand the outcomes of these negotiations and regulations.

Future lines of enquiry

The contributions in this collection identify numerous potential lines of future research. Astor, Griera, and Cornejo ask whether policy transfers across cities do actually happen, and what the role of inter-municipal networks of knowledge exchange and the transfer of best practice may be. Along similar lines, my contribution invites debate over whether public policies implemented at the urban level, such as the setting up of consultative bodies, have the potential to scale up and influence national debates and even legal regulations concerning religion. If such horizontal and bottom-up transfers do happen, what are the mechanisms or channels through which they do so?

Burchardt's and Körs' contributions raise relevant questions about how governance works and what the implications are for different religious groups that have remained under-researched in the literature. Some of these questions are addressed by other contributions in this collection. Others remain open for future research, including whether the urban governance of religious diversity has become more inclusive over time and whether such changes are related to transformations in the religious composition of urban populations or in public and political discourses about religion. Burchardt asks whether urban regulations informed by secularism generate obstacles for religious groups or rather create equal conditions for their presence in urban spaces. Körs raises the question of whether governance tools may create a pathway for the integration of religious minorities in states' legal structures.

In a similar way, the contributions by Konyali, Haddad, and Pott, and by Körs pose the question of the side effects of institutionalised interreligious dialogue and state contracts in the local religious field. More generally, one could examine the effects of different urban policies and policy instruments deployed to govern religious diversity on the configuration of local religious fields, the distribution of power, and the power of representation among the different religious groups and their organisations.

The contribution by Bramadat raises new questions regarding the cultural meanings attached to certain practices and the implications that those meanings have for the recognition and regulation of those practices. In particular, he points to the need to understand the conditions under which certain religious or spiritual practices raise concerns when practised in public spaces, especially those that seem distant from traditional and conventional forms of religiosity as is the case for yoga.

Overall, the role of cities and municipal actors in the governance of religious diversity remains open to further critical enquiry. We still lack a substantive body of comparative research that allows us to identify more systematically the similarities and differences between governance measures at the national and urban levels, and to disentangle the influence on that governance of global, international, national, regional and urban-level factors and conditions, as well as the multiple ways in which they are connected and interrelated, as Müller shows in his contribution. The contributions in this collection provide important hints towards achieving that goal.

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Notes on contributor

Julia Martínez-Ariño is Assistant Professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Groningen. Her main research interests are the governance of religious diversity in public institutions and cities, and the spatial strategies of religious groups in cities, in particular Jewish communities. She has published in international journals, including *Current Sociology, Social Compass*, and *Comparative European Politics*. Julia Martínez-Ariño is convener of the 'Religion and Cities' research cluster of the Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalization at the University of Groningen and Associate Researcher of ISOR – Investigations in the Sociology of Religion research group at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

ORCID

Julia Martínez-Ariño http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8893-0899

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