Urbanity and the Formation of Religious Groups

This exploratory workshop asks how an 'urban way of life' influenced the genesis of different religious and confessional groups. The workshop considers processes such as the definition of groups by members of that group as well as descriptions of groups by "outsiders". Notions of urbanity could also shape the discourses around religious group formation, for instance the Heavenly Jerusalem as a key aspect of Puritanism. Adaptations to religious rituals and belief systems because of urban demands could lead to the emergence of religious groups that could later spread beyond the urban environment. In South Asia, for instance, different religious, ethnic and caste groups coexist, and while they can be spatially separated, there is still a large degree of interaction between them.

Urbanity not only influenced the formation of groups, but their presence also shaped urbanity. The monumentalisation of religion in cities meant that some religions were clearly visible, while other preferred to forego such a spatialisation of belief, preferring to stay hidden. Groups formed quarters based on religious affiliation or they were organized in parishes in dense urban settings. For example, the presence of a Jewish population in many medieval cities changed the political, economic and cultural features of urban life.

The study of group formation has a long history itself, starting with theories of their formation in the 1950s, and especially since the late 1970s with the emergence of group sociology as a distinctive sub-discipline within sociology. Sociologists distinguish between a range of different kinds of groups, including formal and informal, primary and secondary as well as self-defined groups (Preyer, 2012; Tajfel, 1978; Neidhardt, 1979). In religious studies and church history, researchers have likewise investigated the close interaction of people and resultant formation of distinctive religious groups, for example when it came to the spatialisation of these groups in quarters or the formation of Christian confessions after the "urban Reformation" (Maier and Urciuoli, 2020; Moeller, 1962; Ozment, 1975). Finally, recent studies on cities have stressed the importance of a plurality of different groups, for example when Monika Smith described how through the creation of the first cities, different groups started interacting with each other (Smith, 2020).

The working hypothesis of the workshop is that by considering the mutual formation of religion and urbanity, we can also gain new insights into the phenomenon of religious group formation(s) and find new ways to understand how, when and why, groups formed and how they were visible (or invisible) in cities. Many of the processes of group formations show that both local and trans-regional points of reference played a part, which is why the workshop takes a broad geographical view. It addresses religious group formation and urbanity in a long-term perspective and in a wide range of different settings, in order to ask:

- What are the motives of individuals gathering as groups and which (legal?) tools were used for gaining recognition? How were groups named, promoted and how did they become (in)visible in urban settings?

- Where are religious semantics and practices used for non-hierarchical segmentation, where for pragmatically relevant or irrelevant differentiation or even discrimination? Where do they intersectionally reinforce or conceal different kinds of inequality?

- How was cohesion within a group formed? What role did urbanity play in this process?

- How do religious groups relate to each other and what role does urbanity play in their (self-)definition vis-à-vis other religious groups?

- When can we speak of a group in a meaningful way?

The workshop is organised by the focus group "Group Formation, Segmentation and Fragmentation", which is part of the KFG "Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations" (DFG, FOR 2779). It connects to previous work of the KFG, which argues that religion and urbanity continually shaped each other (Christ et al. 2022; Rüpke and Rau, 2020). In many of the group's publications, groups and their formation play an important role, for instance the confraternities of medieval Lyon (Rau, 2021). Many group formations were not simply hierarchical processes of the top-down creation of a group identity, but rather power was dispersed between a wide range of actors in a heterarchical ways (Urciuoli, 2021). Likewise, the complex demarcation of groups in a spatial sense, the overlapping and switching between different layers is a kind of co-spatiality (Lèvy, 2021).

Bibliography and Further Reading

Christ, Martin, Fuchs, Martin, Iori, Elisa, Keller, Sara, Lätzer-Lasar, Asuman, O'Reilly, Klara-Maeve, Rau, Susanne, Rüpke, Jörg, Urciuoli, Emiliano Rubens, & Wagner, Simone. (2022). Entangling Urban and Religious History: A New Methodology (Version 1). Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7002796

Lévy, Jacques (2021) "Co-Spatiality: An Introduction". Religion and Urbanity Online, edited by Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke. https://doi.org/10.1515/urbrel.17481739. Accessed 2022-12-02.

Maier, Harry O.; Urciuoli, Emiliano R. (2020), Religion in the Roman Empire 6/1. Special Issue: Religion of Quarters.

Moeller, Bernd (1962), *Reichsstadt und Reformation.*

Neidhardt, Friedhelm (1979) Das innere System sozialer Gruppen. In: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 31: 639–660.

Ozment, Steven (1975), *The Reformation in the Cities. The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland.*

Preyer, Gerhard (2012), *Rolle, Status, Erwartungen und soziale Gruppe. Mitgliedschaftstheoretische Reinterpretationen*.

Rau, Susanne (2021) "Canons, Councillors and Confrères: Changing Power Constellations in the City of Lyon (Late Middle Ages, Early Modern Times)". Religion and Urbanity Online, edited by Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke https://doi.org/10.1515/urbrel.13901209 . Accessed 2022-12-02.

Rüpke, Jörg and Rau, Susanne (2020) "Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations". Religion and Urbanity Online, edited by Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke. https://doi.org/10.1515/urbrel.13230336 . Accessed 2022-12-02.

Schäfers, Bernhard (ed.) (1999), Einführung in die Gruppensoziologie. Geschichte – Theorien – Analysen. 3.

Smith, Monica L. (2020), *Cities. The first 6,000 Years*.

Tajfel, Henri (ed.) (1978), *Differentiation between social groups. Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations.*

Urciuoli, Emiliano R. (2020), "Heterarchy: A Valuable Category for the Study of Urban Religion", Numen 69 (2-3):121-139.