



## **The Urban Sacred. How Religion Makes and Takes Place in Amsterdam, Berlin and London (August 2015)**

### **Project Description**

How do religious practices and religious places structure urban space?

This question lies at the core of the project “Iconic Religion. How Imaginaries of Religious Encounter Structure Urban Space” (hereafter: IcoRel); it investigates the iconic and material presence of religion in the metropolises Amsterdam, Berlin and London

([www.iconicreligion.com](http://www.iconicreligion.com)).

The program “Humanities in the European Research Area” (HERA) provides financial support for the IcoRel project as well as for 17 other projects, all of them focused on Cultural Encounters ([www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info)). Our HERA budget covers field research in Amsterdam, Berlin and London and also exhibition costs such as photographers, exhibition design, and the exhibition catalogue.

### **Background**

Within ongoing processes of pluralisation across Europe religious icons – materialized religion in public space – are becoming increasingly important. To what extent do such icons, in form of sacred buildings, clothing, textual signs, architecture, public events etc. (hereafter: sites), generate shared ideas and imaginaries about different religions and their co-existence? In what ways do they invoke or feed into debates about the management of religious diversity? Do they stimulate positive or negative encounters? How is “iconicity” and materiality of religions denoted or generated?

The project team expects to see how the selected sites relate to perceptions about religions and to what extent they provide opportunities for cultural and religious encounter. The results of this project as well as their dissemination are vital in light of increasing diversity and pluralisation across Europe. By way of a photo exhibition we can reach out to the public in the cities of Bochum, Amsterdam, Berlin and London.

### **The Exhibition**

The IcoRel project is collaborating with three photographers from the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. Their task is to capture selected religious sites in Amsterdam, Berlin and London. In total 100 of these photographs will be exhibited; 35 of each city.

According to Susan Sontag, a photograph contains traces of reality yet also an interpretation of the reality. Although a photograph captures a moment, it is only one portrayal of the moment; it is multifaceted.

The exhibition aims to show the complexity of religious and cultural encounters in urban spaces: it wants to achieve the representation of diversity in relation to religious sites. We will facilitate this by placing the photos into religious, urban and social contexts.

### *Contextualisation*

In preparation for the exhibition the project team will liaise with focus groups and conduct interviews with individuals from different backgrounds, ages and gender, ranging from professors to market-sellers. Their voices will be part of the exhibition.

Audio points will give visitors an insight into the social spaces. They will be able to listen to the voices of the inhabitants, of those who work there and of the passers-by.

The photos will be placed in settings that reflect the religious diversity in the cities named above. With the help of audio and visual stimuli the viewer will be shown the local, regional and migrant traditions. Additionally, the visitors will be invited to take place and study texts, archival materials, transcripts of the interviews, information to the sites, if they would like to do so.

In order to mediate the urban context the exhibition will display maps of the cities (on the floor and/or on the walls), pinpointing the religious sites and the changes they have undergone.

The interaction of photographs and additional materials such as display cases and models of the sites will reflect the complex meaning of religion in Europe's capitals and encourage an understanding from multiple perspectives.

From spring 2016 the exhibition will be on tour: beginning in Bochum it will then move on to Berlin, London and end in Amsterdam. The exhibition will remain in each city for two to three weeks<sup>1</sup>. During the course of the exhibition visitors will have the opportunity to write their feedback and suggestions on information boards, comment cards or online.

The exhibition is aimed at pupils, students, regular museum-visitors and all those interested in religion, culture, migration, urbanity, globalization, history and photography.

An accompanying program will frame the exhibition.

The exhibition catalogue will be published to coincide with the first exhibition.

Its innovative format will include texts and images with additional information on religious diversity in Europe.

### **Participants of the project**

Prof. Dr. Volkhard Krech, Center of Religious Studies, Ruhr Universität Bochum is project leader; Dr. Susanne Lanwerd (Ruhr Universität Bochum / Freie Universität Berlin) coordinates the project; Principal Investigators are Professor Kim Knott (Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, University of Lancaster) as well as Professor Birgit Meyer (Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University); the postdoctoral researchers are Dr. Steph Berns (Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, University of Lancaster) and Dr. Daan Beekers (Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University). Other participants of the project are the photographers, the designer, the focus groups, the interview partner and – the visitors of the exhibitions.

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<sup>1</sup> Time schedule: Bochum (March 2016), London (April 2016), Berlin (May 2016), Amsterdam (June 2016). The IcoRel-project ends on 31 August 2016.