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“The spatiality of religion – a geographer’s view”

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Summary

This paper focuses on the spatial aspects of religion(s), including membership distribution, places of worship and symbols. Obviously the characteristics of human membership and of the artifacts of religion differ considerably in terms of time-space occurrence and stability. Examples will mainly be taken from contemporary or 20th century Europe and from autochthonous variants of cult, with some examples from émigré and immigrant communities.

Studies of religion within the discipline of geography have traditionally been very descriptive, often concentrating on the spatial distribution of physical objects (e.g. churches) within areas, often territorial states. In studies of religion the interest has mainly focused on membership and cult, whereas the locational aspect until recently, with the ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities, has been less developed, and even now mainly concentrating on metaphorical interpretations of ‘territory’ and ‘border’.

Spatial aspects of religion include location (place), distribution (space), networks, core areas and boundaries. These ‘chorological’ aspects can then be related to different influencing factors; nature, demography, technology, regulation, social coercion and cultural conventions, communication (especially the role of language), and of course the inherent spatial characteristics of different religious practices. Change in religious practices (innovation) usually also has a spatial aspect.

Examples will mainly be taken from Northern Europe, including the Baltic and Barents Sea area. This study is part of a multi-disciplinal project [Teaching Religion and Thinking Education on the Baltic-Barents Brim](#) carried out at Södertörn University.

