VALUING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AS KEY ACTORS OF SOCIAL COHESION

Handbook for Local Authorities

The views expressed in this work are the responsibility of of the authors and do not necessarily reflect Council of Europe policy.

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MONDINSIEME
Intercultural Centre

The **Intercultural Center Mondinsieme** is a Foundation of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia. Its main mission is to promote the value and the respect for cultural diversity in different social contexts. Over the years, Mondinsieme has become an important organization and accredited with various levels (local, regional, national and international) for its strong intercultural competences and also for its planning and training skills, which have made it an advisory body for policy development and capacity building.

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Content

Preface 5

Introduction 16

Local authorities and religious pluralism: normative instruments and institutional orientations 22

Recommendations 29
Best practice: Milano 31
Focus: The right to religious freedom 32

Public space and freedom of worship: inclusion strategies and territorial enhancement 35

Recommendations 41
Best practice: Donostia-San Sebastián 43
Focus: Strategies to dignify the different faiths in public spaces 44

Strengthening welfare and social cohesion: the contribution given by places of worship 48

Recommendations 54
Best practice: Bradford 56
Focus: We learn from childhood 57

Conclusion: Consortes 60

Questionnaires results 65

Reference texts 70

Preface

Luca Vecchi
Mayor of Reggio Emilia

Elena Carletti
Mayor of Novellara

The recognition of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion are among the principles shared by a number of articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, and even the national Constitutions. The principle of freedom of worship and religion is formally protected in the nations of the world by various means, including through mechanisms for the legitimation of religious institutions.

The aim of this publication, which seeks to offer some ideas to public administrators and officials of the local authorities of the Intercultural Cities network, is to fit between the official recognition through protocols and understandings and the "practice" of religious freedom.

In fact, when dealing with practical issues related to the exercise of religious freedom, it is necessary to refer to local institutions and administrations; from problems related to the opening of places of worship to those related to food standards in school canteens, from the celebration of the various religious holidays to the right to be buried in accordance with one's own will.

Regions, Provinces and Municipalities are required in

in different ways to define strategies to apply such principles within societies characterized by different cultural backgrounds, which enrich urban areas, and affected not only by migration processes, but also by a mobility deriving from professions, research, training and, more generally, from the processes favoured by globalization.

In this context - among the cultural aspects that belong to the intimacy of each individual and, more generally, to the family dimension - the religious and spiritual dimension is an area that local administrations must approach in a holistic way. Defining a strategy for inter-religious and spiritual dialogue not only is important in terms of inclusion and social cohesion with the communities in the area, but it also defines the attractiveness of a territory and its international vocation.

Also due to substantially recent migration processes, Italy is a country which, until a few years ago, saw no need to develop in a fully structured way a regulatory framework for the application of Articles 19 and 20 of the Constitution.

Probably, it is thanks to such a particular context that the will to reflect on the political reasons for which it is considered important to address the issue of inter-religious and spiritual dialogue within administrative practices arose.

When governing our territories, it is necessary to look ahead and think of our urban contexts of 2050. The overall investment in intercultural dialogue is in fact a necessary element for the promotion of cohesion and social inclusion in urban contexts that will be deeply diversified and stratified compared to a few decades ago.

Seeking dialogue and collaboration with the less and more recently established places of worship in the territory serves not only to comply with the principles of the articles of

the international conventions and the Constitutions, but it is also a fundamental element in creating alliances to promote dialogue between public policies and private social actions inspired by a religious or spiritual sensibility.

This process aims to highlight that there is a public interest in sharing the objectives of the projects promoted by places of worship, which integrate the social, educational and cultural services system of local administrations. This framework can also facilitate dialogue between places of worship and faiths in the territory. Facilitating dialogue and participatory processes puts different ideas and beliefs in synergy, promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between places of worship, believers and also non-believers, which is fundamental.

Through this publication, which aims to be a stimulus for reflection also for the administrations, a dialogue between our twin cities and those partners of the Intercultural Cities network was established. Inter-religious dialogue often focuses on theological, philosophical, political and jurisprudential aspects. This publication instead focuses on the relationship between cities and places of worship.

With the valuable work of the Mondinsieme Foundation, which has edited this volume, we hope to contribute to the debate and exchange of good practices, experiences and recommendations between local authorities.

Novellara

For years Novellara has become a crossroads of communities and religions. The various administrations that have succeeded one another have facilitated the establishment of places of worship, being aware that to welcome means to recognize and give dignity to all religious groups and that through dialogue it is possible to build relationships and opportunities for growth and exchange. A constant and continuous attitude of openness has always been maintained with the religious communities with whom we meet periodically to exchange information, important themes and projects. Several communities have decided to form an association and even set up their places of worship in Novellara. The Sikh temple, inaugurated in 2000, has been expanded and constantly upgraded in recent years, becoming a point of reference in Italy. The Hindu community has also invested in a new temple, inaugurated in 2017. Other religious communities, such as the Muslim community or the Orthodox one, continue to keep alive the dialogue with the municipal administration.

In 2016, the Administration decided to approve the "*Open cultures*" programme; a series of guidelines for the development of intercultural and inter-religious policies to continue promoting and directing daily actions aimed at increasing dialogue, giving value to differences and building bridges in every sector of the Institution.

One of the most important objectives is that of promoting the sharing of religious celebrations which are what the Communities hold most dear and which characterize their identity. They include the Vaisakhi festival which, in the month of April, brings more than 10,000 believers with their colours, traditions and prayers to the Novellara Square, and the end of Ramadan which is celebrated together with all the religious communities thanks to a rich cultural and musical programme.

The resulting wealth of values is a heritage shared by all the institutions and associations of Novellara and this undoubtedly supports and strengthens our actions and projects that we want to keep alive for years to come.

Reggio Emilia

In 2001, thanks to the experience of the Mondinsieme Intercultural Foundation, Reggio Emilia began a journey that led it to deal with policies aimed at promoting diversity and intercultural dialogue. The adhesion to the Intercultural Cities network programme of the Council of Europe increased dialogue and exchange with initiatives of other territories.

The promotion of inter-religious dialogue has become over the years one of the areas of research and analysis of the municipal administration, and in 2020 it became one of the objectives of the administration's programme, as part of the actions called "*Ditutti*".

Among the experiences that led the territory to invest in the promotion of inter-religious and spiritual dialogue, there is the one carried out in 2018 as part of the Journey of Remembrance promoted by Istoreco. In that occasion, the Mayor Luca Vecchi and 200 students from Reggio Emilia schools visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp accompanied by Monsignor Massimo

Camisasca, Bishop of the Diocese of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla, Rabbi Beniamino Goldstein of the Jewish community of Modena and Reggio Emilia and Imam Yosif El Samahy, representing the Islamic communities of Reggio Emilia.

In the same year, the first performance of the "Alif Aleph Alfa. Let's raise our voices, jubilant, to God! A cultural perspective of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue" project was held in the Aula Magna of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, promoted within the exhibition Soli Deo Gloria by Renato Negri. A project that has involved for several years the faithful of monotheistic confessions residing in Reggio Emilia and the citizens of the city, a collaboration based on the principle of mutual listening and cultural-religious exchange. The concert - based on Jewish, Christian and Koranic chanting done by the three groups belonging to the three monotheistic religions - was the culminating

moment of a sort of "workshop" for mutual cultural understanding, characterized by a series of in-depth secondary events, including educational ones.

Matteo Rinaldini
Chairman of the Mondinsieme Foundation

Professor of Sociology of economic processes and of Labour at the University of Modena-Reggio Emilia

Modern civilization has elected the principle of freedom as its foundation,whereby man must not be a mere instrument in the hands of others, but rather an autonomous centre of life
Altiero Spinelli from Manifesto of Ventotene

Publishing a research on places of worship in cities and on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in a period such as the current one - a period of strong, global geopolitical polarizations determined by socio-economic, health, but also cultural dynamics - is even more important, if possible, because it acts as a symbolic barrier against the tendency to resign ourselves to seeing our cities as hostile and diversity as a source of threat.

The research in the following pages aims to give a useful overview of the complexity of the urban realities in which we all live. It is not a research that starts from a pre-constituted thesis, but it intends to explore a "world" that we all deal with, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, but that at the same time continues to be unknown to many i.e. the places of worship, their functions and their relationships in urban contexts. It is clear, however, that even when we limit ourselves to exploring and describing a phenomenon,

refraining, as far as possible, from offering explanations and creating theories, we must ask ourselves "for whom is this being done?" or, in other words, "who is the target audience of the research?"

This is the first question we actually asked ourselves when the research was commissioned to us by the Council of Europe, and we immediately agreed that this type of information could be useful for policy makers involved in the governance of cities, as well as for the representatives of the various religions that perform their duties in urban settings. The topic of inter-religious dialogue, in fact, is a highly topical issue and is undoubtedly a key issue for those who have the task of creating inclusive cities. "City" understood, as the French would say, both as *cité* and *ville*, i.e. both as built and planned territories, and as the ways in which citizens inhabit and live those territories. To create inclusive cities, in fact, it is also necessary to harmonize these two souls of the city (or at least attenuate their reciprocal conflict); the concrete and rational soul and the soul emerging from the interactions and subjectivity of those who live in the cities. It is clear that to achieve this harmonization, it is necessary to know the context in which one operates. Today people talk a lot about smart cities and they usually associate the term smart with the massive use of new technologies used to regulate urban life. It is certainly true that new technologies open up new opportunities for regulating cities, but any attempt to make cities smarter can only be possible with a deep knowledge of the city. This is our intent: to provide a small contribution in terms of knowledge, a first step in a work that could be developed both intensively and extensively.

While we are happy with this first survey about the practices and actions regarding inter-religious dialogue, we realize that much

remains to be understood and that from a methodological point of view our research shows some weaknesses. An important bias to be taken into account, for example, is the fact that the questionnaire of this survey has been administered to cities that are part of the Intercultural Cities network (plus other twin cities of Reggio Emilia on other continents) and therefore municipalities that, in fact, give great importance to interculturality and inter-religious dialogue.
It is clear, therefore, that the responses come from contexts in which interculturality is at least present in the agenda of policy makers and this evidently does not reflect the general situation of European cities, nor that of other areas of the world. Nevertheless, we believe that the results are still interesting, especially because, as it emerges in the following pages, many of them offer a conflicting reading, not celebratory, nor apologetic, able to give further insights for research (by surveying the people of the places of worship in order to learn more about their experiences and their expectations) and to encourage further contributions. The research also shows which cities, among those surveyed, carry out actions and interventions concerning places of worship and the characteristics of such actions and interventions, providing a useful comparative framework for evaluating what is being done on their territory. Obviously, it is not a question of establishing rankings between cities, nor of determining which is the best city. Each context has specific cultural, social and economic characteristics and it would be a mistake to ignore them to find generalized best practices. At the same time, knowing what is being done elsewhere can be an incentive for possible actions to be developed in one's own city and can lead to framing the territory in a wider context. Therefore, we believe that based on these

results, a public administrator could already start to understand the level of interaction between local institutions and places of worship in their own territory and even think about possible interventions on the matter.

Introduction

This publication was conceived to support public administrations required to manage increasingly complex local contexts, where religious pluralism is one of the fundamental aspects for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

Defining a strategy for inter-religious dialogue is not in itself a critical issue; much depends on how such dialogue is perceived and managed within the territories. Suitable governance strategies and tools can not only effectively tackle these complexities, but also transform religious pluralism into a resource accessible to the whole community.

It was decided to deal with the issue by referring to three areas deemed particularly significant, since they fall within the competence of politics and public administrations.

The first chapter describes the regulatory and guidance tools developed by supranational institutions. Being aware of how religious freedom is protected and how it is expressed represents the first step to create a normative continuity that can be guaranteed by local authorities.

The second chapter focuses on the relationship between religion and public space that local authorities are charged with managing. The regulatory protection of religious

freedom and its expression inevitably affects the way in which religions are involved within the territory. Considering that exclusion and discrimination are phenomena that need to be tackled, the question remains how to welcome, but above all how to valorise, religious plurality.

The third chapter focuses on the relationship that local authorities can build with the different religious communities, by managing what can be defined as community welfare (social, health and education dimensions).

The places of worship can represent a precious resource for the territories that give value to the contribution they provide in taking care of social and other vulnerabilities and make them potential interlocutors and allies when it comes to welfare planning.

At the end of each topic, indications have been included on potential concrete actions that could be put in place by local authorities to foster the creation of multi-cultural contexts within their cities.

Each chapter contains a positive example of a city's good practice that emerged from the results of the survey carried out, and which should be taken into account when dealing with the topic of reference.

At the end of the chapters room was left for reflection, giving voice to experts who could give cues and ideas which could inspire further considerations on the subject.

The three key areas identified in the publication are the same ones that we have tried to detect in the initial phase of the survey. The main objective was to identify the level of development of the actions concerning inter-religious dialogue, and to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, in order to guide local authorities in their efforts to improve the effectiveness of their actions in the future.

For the purpose of the research, the questionnaire was deemed the most suitable

survey tool. Precisely in consideration of the cities involved and of their specific socio-demographic and institutional contexts, a questionnaire that could reconcile existing differences was designed. The questionnaire is the result of a process that paid particular attention both to the relevance and usefulness of the questions asked and to the order in which they were asked. Before administering the questionnaire, it was useful to test it on the lead cities of the project, Reggio Emilia and Novellara, which belong to the sample under survey. Once the questionnaire was perfected, it was administered to the other cities belonging to the Intercultural Cities (ICC) network and to the twin cities of the leading municipalities through the Google Forms tool, which was specifically designed to fill in and administer questionnaires online, to collect the data contained in the individual answers and to process the aggregated data.

The questionnaire was divided into three main parts, each one corresponding to a macro area of survey. The first part of the questionnaire collected information on the presence of the topic of inter-religious dialogue in local documents and regulations, on the level of recognition on the territory of existing places of worship and on the criteria for assigning new spaces for worship, in order to understand the situation from a regulatory perspective. The second group of questions examined the relationship between religion and public space - understood as the provision of space for religious activities by the local authority - and the degree of detection of requests related to the religious profession. The third and final part asked participants to select which cultural and welfare activities and services are organised by the places of worship and with which areas or departments of the local authority there are collaborations or relations.

Officials from 25 local administrations answered the survey, 17 of them belonging to the ICC network (12% of the total number of member cities). 80% of the responses came from Europe and the remaining 20% from outside Europe, including Africa (Pemba in Mozambique and Ekurhuleni in South Africa), Asia (Hamamatsu in Japan and Beit Jala in the West Bank) and America (Montreal, Canada).

The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions, mainly multiple-choice questions, which produced comparative results and quantitative data of indicative value. The questionnaire also included 4 open questions, which were optional and subordinate to a positive answer to a yes/no question, which registered a percentage of answers almost always in line with that of the relative question. In addition, a further final section was included for the insertion of documents and references related to the topic in question. Although the percentage of respondents to this final section was only 16%, it was still possible to obtain useful information - supplemented by a desk analysis and data from other questions - in order to identify practices and significant city experiences for each of the macro-areas, of which there is evidence in the publication.

The outputs of the questionnaires are given in the appendix to the publication. Hopefully, this study will serve as a guide for local authorities that wish to follow an innovative path - still little explored from a political and administrative point of view - in their own territories, whose spiritual and religious complexity will change profoundly over the next years.

* Beja, **Portugal**
Bergen, **Norway**
Botkyrka, **Sweden**
Bradford, **England**
Donostia - San Sebastian, **Spain**
Geneva, **Switzerland**
Girona, **Spain**
Górowo Iławeckie, **Poland**
Iasi, **Romania**
Ioannina, **Greece**
Kragujevac, **Serbia**
Limerick, **Ireland**
Lutsk, **Ukraine**
Milan, **Italy**
Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz, **Germany**
Reggio Emilia, **Italy**
Novellara, **Italy**
Portimão, **Portugal**
Sarajevo Centar, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**
Setúbal, **Portugal**

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance

Article 9.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights

Local authorities and religious pluralism: normative instruments and institutional orientations

Current political institutions must increasingly face high social complexities due to an increased ethnic, cultural and religious plurality in their territories.

These conditions lead to a process of regulatory expansion. On the one hand there are the safeguards guaranteed by supranational legal and regulatory systems, on the other hand there is a consequent adaptation of national legislative references and their respective subsystems. If the macro dimension has above all a regulatory and guiding function and responds to the ambitious need for political and social integration between countries, the micro level is concerned with making the recognised rights tangible, concrete and exercisable. Moreover, national political strategies are aimed at maintaining a delicate balance between "periphery" and "centre", to guarantee an efficient and effective local policy.

Therefore, the protection of citizens' diversity and rights is a multi-actor, multi-level task. The principle of subsidiarity allowed the peripheral level to play an ever-increasing role. In fact, in many countries it holds significant territorial government and management powers, which encourage the design and implementation of policies aimed at integrating

diversity. Within local contexts, where a network of identities, cultures, beliefs and emerging values is intertwined, integration policies must be conceived with the aim of recognising and valuing the different social actors. When diversity is not met with a sensitive attitude, particularly by politics, people run the risk of becoming withdrawn. As a result, there is a proliferation of high and solid barriers behind which the different sets of values defend themselves, which is an obstacle to the preservation of democratic social structures. The appeal offered by isolation must be overcome with appropriate instruments that encourage and promote a sense of belonging, participation and trust.

Public administrations have at their disposal a broad international legal framework of reference which represents an essential guidance tool for the implementation of local policies.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[1], recognizing diversity as a necessary element and ally of democracy, states that "*Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security*"[2].

Where culture is defined as "*The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs*"[3].

1 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was established in Paris on 4 November 1946. It was founded on the belief that lasting peace between peoples could not be sought exclusively through political pacts and agreements.

2 Preamble to the Declaration

3 Ibid.

The difficulties caused by a lack of political management of diversity increase and become more acute when more intimate aspects related to the moral and conscience of individuals are at stake. The challenge posed by cultural pluralism is inevitably joined by that of religious pluralism. In recent decades there has been a growing interest in the religious phenomenon, which perhaps few had imagined, at least in the ways in which it has reappeared. Due to migratory flows, which in more or less recent times have affected all countries, people have physically moved from one country to another, taking with them their religious affiliations and spiritual dimensions. It is no coincidence that migration plays a fundamental role in the process of religious revitalization.

The important role played by the religious dimension in the life of individuals, but also in the life of the community, is already acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to express one's faith or belief (Art. 18) is one of the universally recognised and protected human rights. The administrations, called to develop management and governance strategies within such complexity, have at their disposal other supranational instruments that can guide their choices.

These include the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms[4] and its Article 9, which reads as follows:

1. *"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*

4 Written in 1950 within the Council of Europe.

> *2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*

This fundamental statement is often accompanied by a second article, which reinforces its principles. Article 14 of the Convention:

> *"The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."*

Article 9 does not contain any additional definition or specification of religion. This "omission" represents a clear intention of inclusiveness of multiple religious experiences, large and small, ancient or recent. The article also gives prominence and equal value to two different ways of living religious affiliation or belief. On the one hand, there is the absolute and unconditional right to have a belief or to change it; there is no subject or institution, not even the State, which has the authority to interfere with this individual right. On the other hand, the article acknowledges a collective dimension to religious experience and recognises the right to manifest one's beliefs, either through individual or collective practices.

The right to manifest ones' beliefs individually or collectively, however, is not viewed as absolute. Paragraph 2 of Article 9 of the Convention specifies, in fact, that individual States may impose restrictions on the freedoms recognised where these are justified on grounds of threat to "public safety, the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others". It is also true that if

the decisions regarding the application of the restrictions in Article 9 were assigned exclusively to the States, there would be a risk that the objectives and therefore the Convention itself would be frustrated. It is for this reason that the Convention also provided for the establishment of the European Court of Human Rights.[5]

The Court is called upon to give a second opinion, in order to judge whether or not the restrictions acted upon are legitimate. If they are not legitimate, the countries accused may be ruled guilty of violating Article 9 of the Convention.

Besides the Council of Europe, also the European Union has long since begun to be a reference point in matters of religious freedom. The jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice, in fact, accepts the principles for the protection of human rights by borrowing them from the European Convention and embodying them in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which, with the Lisbon Treaty, takes on the same legal value as the Treaties.

The European Union, although its structure and objectives are of a purely economic nature, is therefore on its way to becoming a legal area that also regulates matters of freedom of religion, both individual and collective, and regulates national relations with religious organisations, a clear example of which is Article 17 of the TFEU:[6]

1. *The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.*
2. *The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.*

5 Established in 1959

6 Article 17 TFEU - Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty of 13 December 2007

3. *Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.*

The article shows the importance attributed to religious pluralism, churches and religious organisations, recognizing them as necessary and fundamental elements for the building of inclusive, fair, supportive, cohesive and peaceful societies. Without the involvement of all the actors of the public sphere, the driving force towards the values of Dignity, Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Citizenship, Justice as desired by the Treaties themselves is weakened. Religious pluralism, like cultural pluralism, is considered an element of vitality, functional to a society that wants to define itself as truly democratic. Religious pluralism and its place within society can therefore be considered as an indicator of the health of a democratic society.

The right to have and be able to express one' s faith or religion is protected by supranational conventions and treaties and any unjustified restrictions are sanctioned by Appeal Courts. These guidance and protection instruments, however, do not negate the autonomy of individual States in ecclesiastical matters. Today, the human rights recognised by supranational systems have their place in numerous national Constitutions.

Public administrations, as well as relying on supranational recommendations, must also follow the principles enshrined in the Constitution of their country and exploit the flexibility that it may provide. States also have the possibility to decentralise or not ecclesiastical issues, making them fall within the competence of Regions, Provinces and autonomous territories. This is justified due to the fact that certain needs or the management of certain issues relating to the social fabric are better addressed at a local level, which is more aware and sensitive to

the specific contexts.

The supranational regulatory framework and the constitutions that refer to it create the conditions to fully protect religious freedom. The promotion of local policies aimed at fostering dialogue and confrontation, at establishing cooperative working methods, and at supporting mutual understanding and exchange, are the basis on which a plural and democratic society can flourish. Public administrations should strive to implement their own integration policies, with a view to social and territorial valorisation. Embracing complexity means addressing it with a sensitive but decisive attitude, it means prefiguring the culture and values to be promoted in one's territory and adopting coherent strategies and tools. The powers and degrees of autonomy increasingly granted to local authorities constitute a new opportunity, but also a great responsibility.

The **Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities** in the city of **Bergen (Norway)** brings together 18 religious and life stances member organizations. It aims to promote mutual respect and dialogue between them and provides an arena where members are able to define and pursue common political goals.

For more information: https://www.bergen.kommune.no/

Recommendations

01 Provide a reference to the implementation of policies for the harmonization of inter-religious and spiritual dialogue in the Statute of the local authority, in the article dedicated to the principles or functions of the authority.

02 Make explicit reference to inter-religious dialogue in policy planning documents and set up a dedicated office within the organisational structure.

03 Provide for the inclusion of references to documents of international, national or regional bodies in administrative and political documents concerning intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

04 Implement a protocol of cooperation with those religious organisations that believe in legality, are transparent in their activities, promote equality between women and men and recognise the neutrality of the local authority and of the non-discriminatory principles.

05 Promote discussion or coordination with representatives of religious communities, lay associations or entities related to spirituality, for the development of joint projects and the sharing of work proposals that may also involve other departments of the municipality.

06 Consider setting up a municipal register of places of worship that commit themselves to depositing their statutes, which must be compatible with the Statute of the Municipality and the relevant Constitutions.

Best practice

Milano - Italy

The Administration promotes harmonious and constructive coexistence between the different religious communities also in order to consolidate social cohesion and promote integration processes. Furthermore, it considers the role that churches and religious and cultural associations play in combating all expressions of religious radicalism to be strategic. It also continues its commitment to guarantee the possibility of creating places of prayer and worship that are respectful of the norms, accessible and open to all and which promote the training of religious guides who - also considering the role that they play in their communities and the functions that they may be called to perform in public places such as hospitals, reception centres and prisons - can act as effective mediators to ensure the full implementation of the constitutional principles of civil cohabitation, secularity of the State, legality and equality of rights between men and women. The construction of religious buildings and of equipment for religious services is by its very nature a matter caught between the protection of religious freedom and regional urban planning regulations. The purpose of the **Religious Equipment Plan** (PAR) approved by the Administration is to provide rules to promote and improve the settlement of new places of worship of any religion, whose demand is closely linked to the evolution of social dynamics that change the natural development of society, and to obtain a constant and updated framework of the existing places of worship

For more information: https://www.pgt.comune.milano.it/piano-le-attrezzature-religiose

Focus: The right to religious freedom

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The right to religious freedom is protected in various national, European and international legislative sources. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is recognised in international law by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and by the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief of 1981. While at Community level, the right to religious freedom is enshrined in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and in Articles 10, 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. With regard to freedom of worship, there are numerous safeguards granted by the various Constitutions of the individual member states of the Council of Europe. For example, Article 19 of the Italian Constitution recognises the right to freely express one's religious faith and to practice it in public and in private, except for rites contrary to morality and public order.

The right to worship is identified in the various fundamental laws of the Member States of the European Union as an absolute, personal right. Indeed, it applies to all persons, both public and private, within any social context, just like the other articles

articles considered as inviolable human rights. It should be further clarified that the freedom to freely profess one's faith implies the right to choose what to believe in, to change or abandon one's religion or belief without any limitation, as well as the right to practise and express one's opinion in a religious context. The right to profess one's faith also implies that communities of believers have the right to organise themselves and to defend or abandon their ethics, as well as the right of religious, secular and non-confessional organisations to have their legal personality recognised. It follows that Member States of the European Union and of the Council of Europe are obliged to protect individual religious freedoms in a concrete and effective manner, taking into account their different needs. Nevertheless, religious minorities living in the Member States of the Council of Europe do not find adequate national legislation that allow them to exercise their fundamental right as sanctioned by the various fundamental laws of the same States. Furthermore, in some cases there is a real interference with minor cults. This happens whenever attempts are made to regulate the exercise of a minor faith within a State. For example, in France people felt the need to create a French Islam, while in Italy they wanted an Italian Islam. Unfortunately, religious freedom is also being exploited for political purposes by some European political parties. This is due to the fact that the concept of religion is not yet completely detached from that of identity. Therefore, when a person goes to a different country where the prevailing faith is different from their own, it follows that their religious sphere is also required to have a certain degree of conformity with the national faith. Consequently, when one is part of a minority, not only the person but also their God migrates and it goes without saying that they have to ask permission to be recognised, to be similar to that of the host country.

various

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Public space and freedom of worship: inclusion strategies and territorial enhancement

The overview of the regulatory and policy instruments (supranational and national) presented in the first chapter showed how religious matters have been given great attention for many decades. An interested and attentive look at ethnic, cultural and religious plurality and a knowledge of the instruments developed to guarantee and protect it characterise the work of public administrations, which are called to effectively manage the phenomenon within their own territory. Cultural, religious and normative illiteracy at a political level are included, not by chance, among the possible causes of social costs borne by the community that negatively affect the quality of social coexistence. A strong political sensitivity towards religious plurality, on the other hand, can result in detailed policies of integration, participatory democracy and active citizenship, aimed at enhancing and absorbing the different realities within the social fabric. Public institutions, in fact, perform their functions in order to regulate religious freedom, religious pluralism and inclusion with the aim of establishing processes of dialogue, confrontation and mutual knowledge.
Political choices can be dictated from above, or they can be the direct consequence of a synergetic work involving

multiple actors (public administrations, religious representations, citizens). However, in order to achieve a sense of cooperation and co-planning, it is essential to previously act in a way that promotes a sense of widespread and mutual trust. Religious plurality is made up of subjects who must be able to feel that their needs are listened to and that their contribution is valued.

There are many areas in which the religious component interacts with local authorities and institutions; among these, the relationship between public space and religion is certainly one of the most interesting. From a first general look at this relationship, it is possible to identify the two main tasks assigned to public authorities tasked with planning how to use the territory and manage religious pluralism within it. The first one demands that religions do not suffer discrimination with regard to access to public spaces, the second one implies the provision of public spaces for religious activities. The issues that can come into play are many and each country can decide to resolve them in a different way, elaborating different strategies also starting from the interpretation given to the principle of secularism.

Public space is a multifaceted dimension around which complex issues revolve. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to refer to different public spaces that require different approaches to the same issue: streets, neighbourhoods, parks, squares, stations, airports, hospitals, schools and public offices. However, it is not obvious that religion should be present everywhere in the same way; faiths can interact with the public space in different ways, which need to be discussed with local authorities or bodies that are responsible for the management of such contexts.

For example, public spaces, whether they serve an institutional function or not, can

contain Multifaith rooms. These rooms, which have become increasingly more interesting, are spaces where people of different beliefs (religious or not) are able to spend time in contemplation or prayer. These places are attributed a certain degree of sacredness and are becoming more and more common in hospitals, places of detention, airports, railway stations and sports stadiums. Often, they are not immediately identifiable since they are placed slightly separate from the context in which they are located, this choice seems dictated by the need for greater intimacy and discretion.

The biggest challenge regarding these places concerns their interior design. Many architects asked themselves which design choices were most suited to give shape to a space capable of transcending all beliefs and religions and of being equally inclusive for everyone. The most common rooms are white, without windows and are equipped with wardrobes/shelves containing sacred books and ritual objects. The walls are voluntarily left without any symbols, so as not to affect people's sensitivity, their right to religious freedom or discriminate against them in any way. Therefore, through the use of a subtractive logic, maximum inclusiveness is achieved. The planning of Multifaith Rooms represents a very important political choice.

In a globalised environment in which many religions have become de-territorialised, the religious and spiritual needs of people are being met in order for them to develop new and positive forms of attachment to the territory, which significantly affect the process of defining a collective identity. Therefore, symbol management can receive different answers depending on different cases and purposes.

Religious recognition, integration and valorisation may also be achieved through

choices that require a certain degree of investment in terms of human and material resources.

Just think of the religious assistance offered in places of detention, in nursing homes and hospitals, the regulation of ritual slaughter, or the allocation of burial space within cemetery regulations. The management of these issues requires a far-sighted vision and a co-planning with the different representatives of all religious denominations present in the territory.

Besides guaranteeing access to public space, local administrations are asked to grant spaces that make the collective dimension of the religious experience, characterised by celebrations, rites and moments of prayer, truly feasible. In many countries, it is up to local governments to provide for specific procedures in their territorial regulatory plans that allow for the identification or construction of churches, mosques, temples and so on, just as it is up to them to understand the different needs involved and act in order to meet any territorial needs.

It may happen, however, that local planning instruments are not sufficiently consistent with national and supranational legal instruments. In this case, religion may face a real risk of being undermined and marginalised. When the right to space is not answered, an extremely fluid and difficult to monitor proliferation of more or less informal spaces for assembly and prayer (abandoned

In November 2007, **Geneva (Switzerland)** officially inaugurated in the largest cemetery in the city and in the presence of representatives of the religious communities (Muslims and Israelites) the burial sites with confessional orientations (towards Mecca and Jerusalem)

For more information: https://www.geneve.ch/fr

sheds, houses, garages...) occurs. This phenomenon should be avoided for several reasons: first of all, it is clearly incompatible with Territorial Regulatory Plans which identify functional areas taking into account various variables; secondly, there is no health, hygiene and safety guarantee for the faithful and, moreover, conflicts with other groups present in the same territory may emerge and exacerbate.

Being anonymous, such places do not help people to become aware of the presence of such a religious phenomenon in their own cities. When the eye cannot capture an architectural peculiarity because of its absence, one risks missing the presence of a place of worship. Public administrations can prevent such risks by using and implementing their own instruments for the government of the territory. It is a question of working alongside the various religious representatives to avoid critical, unsafe and unsightly solutions, while relying on a democratic urban planning capable of offering the same quality and opportunities. It is important to notice that it is not only a matter of recognizing the rights of the religious communities, but also an opportunity to enhance and enrich cities.

Sacred space represents a challenge as it requires reflection on the founding elements of architecture itself. Concepts and elements such as gravity, light, the threshold and the relationship with the divine can be solved through creativity and innovation. This is why local authorities not only have religions as interlocutors, but also architects and town planners who are specialised and committed to the design of sacred space. All these figures work to meet people's spiritual needs and to give them a public space of greater beauty and quality. Throughout history and through the work they have commissioned, religions have contributed enormously to the

artistic and cultural heritage of different countries. Churches, monasteries, mosques, temples and synagogues help to define and enrich cities. In this sense, they should be considered as part of the heritage of the entire community and as objects of great interest, which can also have a positive impact in terms of tourism and territorial marketing.

Religious communities and public authorities can together build a new paradigm of coexistence and work together to build more conscious and cohesive cities. Much can arise within dialogue experiences such as Inter-religious Dialogue Councils, Boards, Forums and Workshops that involve different actors who have the dual purpose of educating themselves and raising awareness among their fellow citizens.

Many of the strategies undertaken by different countries are partly based on the interpretation of the concept of secularism.

There are, however, different ways of understanding it. In some countries, secularism is a process of subtraction, oriented towards the removal of religion from public space. Other countries choose the opposite strategy, opting for approaches aimed at recognising, including and valuing diversity and pluralism.

The challenge for local authorities lies precisely in understanding how to regulate public space and its use in order to enhance diversity and at the same time direct it towards a sense of common identification.

Recommendations

01 Enhance the architectural and aesthetic features of the places of worship in the territory as they are part of the cultural and artistic heritage of the community.

02 Verify that the regulations for the concession and use of public spaces have neutral criteria and are equal to all religions.

03 Promote religious neutrality within the structures and services promoted or economically supported by the local authority.

04 Activate programs for the definition of shared regulations with religious communities in order to promote the creation of "Multifaith Rooms" in places of care, detention and residence (e.g. university campuses, centres for the elderly, etc.).

05 Renew local regulations relating to places of worship (e.g. contributions or economic benefits) or religious practices among citizens (e.g. dedicated cemeteries).

06 Make it easier to use public spaces to celebrate religious rites or practices that respect the constitutional principles and the regulations in force and that are open to all citizens.

07 Verify that all places of worship and burial sites are marked with the correct symbols, respectful of all faiths, in the maps and street signs made by the public administration.

08 Promote the creation of InfoPoints or the distribution of information in several languages concerning services and opportunities accessible to citizens in the vicinity of places of worship (e.g. information on vital records, permits, social support and assistance, school enrolment, language and professional training, financial support for the repatriation of remains, etc).

Best practice

Donostia-San Sebastián - Spain

The creation of the Möbius building in Donostia-San Sebastián is a practical example of the recognition of religious diversity. It is a visual representation of how religions can use public spaces and how public institutions can dialogue with them to understand their needs and respond accordingly. The design of the building was selected among the various proposals submitted by the students of the Higher Technical Institute of Architecture as part of a contest held in the year San Sebastián was chosen as the European Capital of Culture. The university students met with the members of the religious and spiritual communities of the area, to learn about their peculiarities and respective needs. The modernist wooden structure, which can be used by different religious groups separately or together to promote initiatives and programmes, has a geometric shape that evokes the concepts of eternity, cyclicity and infinity. Through the creation of an essential space devoid of religious symbols, visitors are able to feel at ease as human beings and share their spirituality, whatever it may be, with others. The building is part of the *Baitara baita* project, which addresses the challenge of managing religious diversity through the positive role that different confessions play towards social cohesion and at the same time promotes intercultural and inter-religious dialogue on the basis of human rights.

For more information: https://www.donostia.eus

Focus: Strategies to dignify the different faiths in public spaces

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Faith and pastoral support in European institutions have changed significantly over the last 10 years. With increasingly diverse populations they have had to review how such support services are provided in key statutory agencies. Much of this work has developed rapidly to keep up with changing populations and migration due to international conflict, though some of the provisions of these pastoral services has been driven by a need to increase integration and reduce extremism. These developments have been mirrored in the United Kingdom and I will explain these social developmental changes in some detail.

There has been a debate in the United Kingdom over the last two decades that has taken two positions on the issue of faith spaces in statutory agencies, to ensure that users and staff can have access to emotional and spiritual care at the place of their employment. Given the diversity of communities in the United Kingdom, the growth of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in core agencies like the National Health Service, GP surgeries, fire services and public transport authorities in the 1970's, 80's and 90's, meant that a growing sense of religious identity within these communities, (and particularly within British Muslim communities), meant that core statutory services were

under pressure to provide inclusive quiet spaces where staff could pray. In the context of practising British Muslims, this meant short prayer times of between five to ten minutes approximately three times during the working day.

Many of these institutions had Christian prayer spaces in place and increasing calls for inclusion of other faiths in these quiet prayer spaces meant that the thrust of thinking in the 1990's and in the first decade of the new millennia was around creating separate prayer spaces that were mainly used by practising Muslims. The premise was sound and was to create an inclusive working space for other faiths though with increasing negative newspaper articles suggesting that Muslims were 'asking for special treatment', the view mainly taken over the last decade was to have a shared prayer space for all faiths. This latest position was therefore partially influenced by such headlines, but also by thinking that equality meant access to shared spaces rather than creating separate spaces which could create a view of hierarchical support within the work space.

Institutions have developed work policies which have encouraged the use of the prayer spaces with a reduced sense of permanent symbolism so that people looking to prayer can have a space where they feel comfortable for a short period of time. Some institutions have minimised religious symbols and allowed for them to be temporarily covered for a period as others use the space.

Allied to this, institutions such as hospitals have employed multi-faith chaplains that provide pastoral care to different faiths and who also signpost local prayer spaces for use for families and patients.

It has been this investment into chaplains from various faiths that has been at the forefront of ensuring the dignity of people from different communities who use core statutory services

such as hospitals, schools and even within the armed forces.The role of chaplains has been to provide pastoral care and practical and spiritual support to staff and to beneficiaries of services. This intervention has ensured that families have emotional and religious support at some of the most turbulent and critical points of their lives and also ensures that they feel that their identities are respected within state institutions which are maintained by public taxpayers monies. This chaplaincy has also helped to reduce access to such vulnerable families and people by groups seeking to cause divides in society and this is one of the reasons why the Prison Service within the United Kingdom is the largest employer of Muslim chaplains in the country. The Prison Service understands that prisoners require support in prison and that they are supported in their resilience against those seeking to inculcate them with divisive ideologies.

These are some of the core ways that different faith communities are supported within mainstream statutory agencies in the U.K. It serves the integration of communities into the country and helps to build safer and stronger communities.

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace.Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life

Article 2 - UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

Strengthening welfare and social cohesion: the contribution given by places of worship

The current complexity that societies must face does not derive exclusively from an increase in ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Historical, political, economic, cultural and now also climatic changes have increased social vulnerabilities and changed the map of social risks. These critical issues call for welfare models that are as participatory as possible and that favour planning and forms of public investment aimed at promoting the development of human and social capital. In today's models of welfare mix and welfare community, all private social training which pursue economic and social solidarity aims are of fundamental importance. Given the activities they promote, religious groups fall fully into this category.

In some religions, the faithful consider solidarity a real duty (zakat for Muslims and tithing for Mormons), and this is a highly mobilising objective. Religious revitalization refers, in fact, also to the relocation of the experience of faith. This no longer finds expression exclusively in moments of personal and collective prayer, but also through social activism on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Many countries can count on solid and structured experiences of solidarity promoted by major religions,

historically rooted in the territory. These, however, are no longer alone. Migration has encouraged the birth of multiple religious experiences whose solidarity actions enrich the overall picture of religious welfare. These realities can represent hubs around which specific ethnic and cultural communities gravitate, or they can be the point of reference for those belonging to a faith even if they come from different countries and continents.

There are different ways to contribute to religious welfare. Religious groups can choose their own way and much depends on their human and material resources. There are, therefore, organisations capable of involving a very high number of believers, of creating sophisticated services of education, care, hospitalization and assistance, or of activating onerous social projects on a wide scale; just as there are cases involving a smaller number of believers and acting on a more local dimension, responding to needs related to a specific context.

To the second case belong many religious groups born as a result of migration and processes of territorial rooting, which do not always receive adequate visibility and appreciation. By listening to people, they are able to read and respond to their needs with stable solutions. By resorting to human and material resources, they are able to offer essential welfare services (shelter, meals, clothing...) to those who are forced into serious poverty, but at the same time they can also to solve more complex problems, such as the repatriation of remains.

Many of these groups also demonstrate that they are able to respond promptly to contingent emergencies, for example, by collecting financial donations or goods of necessity for communities affected by crises. Religious communities can also be a place for education and cultural promotion for children

and young people who can rediscover their roots by participating in religious, linguistic and cultural education and training. They are the place where young people and adults can develop a civic awareness and attitude, committing themselves to organise and participate in events, discussions, assemblies and debates on issues of common interest. Last but not least, communities are places of socialisation, where the faithful can find familiar elements that help alleviate melancholy and culture shock.

It is clear, therefore, that the various religious communities and minority groups show a certain enthusiasm and interest in combining services offered by public welfare with self-organised solidarity activities. Such initiative must not be discouraged, lost and left to its own devices. It is necessary that these forms of solidarity be met by a territorial, social and political context ready to recognise, welcome value and implement them for the benefit of the community, also through strategic political actions aimed at preventing any possible risks of ghettoization and social exclusion. What must be sought is an alliance between local authorities and welfare promoted by the private social sector (in this case promoted by religious groups) that is in line with local governance strategies and able to improve the initiatives without wasting resources. While religious organisations wish to fully embrace the tasks they feel invested with, public administrations work to develop and support programmes of integration and empowerment, in order to combat all forms of linguistic, cultural, social and economic closure and marginalisation.

Religious pluralism can become a valuable ally in the field of cohesion policies. Bearing a great responsibility, they can take on the role of important social intermediaries, facilitating communication processes with

the different actors of the area in which they are located. On the one hand, they voice the requests of the community, which are loaded with value, meaning and intent, making it feel like a possible interlocutor; on the other hand, they can be the bridge between public authorities and parts of the population that are difficult to reach.

In turn, local authorities play the role of mediators. Their regulatory function, which is that of coordination, rallies, catalyses and connects the different souls of religious and cultural pluralism, promoting processes of community planning that are participatory and open to all.

Religious communities can also be a resource for public welfare services. Valuable skills that can support the work of different professionals can be identified between the communities and their representatives. The areas that deserve special attention are the local healthcare and education systems.

The relationship between religion, health, illness and care is a close one and can also support health care facilities. Ethnic and cultural elements can be added to the religious element. It is very important that doctors, nurses and all healthcare workers be able to benefit from training opportunities that give them the tools to decode the behaviour and needs expressed by patients with specific religious or cultural backgrounds. Awareness-raising campaigns on the prevention of certain diseases and health risk behaviours and on the promotion of good parenting are particularly significant for the general public. These campaigns are aimed at promoting awareness of the right to health, so it is essential that they are understood by everyone.

The members of religious communities can give important contributions to training activities, they can also play the role of linguistic and cultural mediators and assist in

the production of information material translated into different languages; they can also contribute to the distribution of such material within their own communities, thus supporting local authorities in the important work of psycho-physical health prevention.

Being aware that religious ethics and medical ethics can sometimes disagree is important. They may disagree significantly on what is good or bad, right or wrong, which can lead to critical situations. Mental health, sexuality, birth control and abortion, blood transfusions and organ transplants are just some of the most debated issues. In everyday medical practice, it is possible to imagine how the different spiritual figures could contribute to the management of possible disagreements regarding treatments and alleviate the patient's sense of bewilderment.

Special attention should be paid to schools that, together with families, are the main agencies of education. Schools are a public space where religious diversity can be found everywhere: in classrooms, canteens, school corridors and courtyards. Schools are assigned the task of educating future generations; they play a fundamental role in promoting global citizenship education.[7]

Without challenging fundamental rights, it is possible to respond to the different needs that arise within a plural context like school, such as providing alternative diets in canteens, or negotiating specific aspects regarding sports activities during physical education.

Moreover, religious plurality can become an object of study. It can be approached in a transversal way by analysing historical, cultural and geographical aspects.

7 Global Citizenship Education is mentioned in target 7 of Goal 4 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda

It can be an opportunity for celebrations in a school environment where the different religious calendars find the same recognition, or it can become something to be discovered during educational visits.

It is clear that these choices are the result of a sensitivity but also of a management ability to be learned. Once again, important stimuli can come from the different religious communities, which can organise complementary activities in support of conferences, cultural initiatives and refresher courses for teachers, collaborators, school operators and the wider public.

Such solicitations also come from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe which suggest educational strategies and significant tools to promote knowledge and prevent any risk of radicalisation at the local level[8]

Religious communities can be a precious resource for the territory and for the community at large. They can support both the implementation of actions and the diffusion of highly formative moments of confrontation. It is important that local authorities promote and support this concept.

The Municipality of **Ekurhuleni in South Africa**, to ensure food security to the vulnerable groups during the lockdown caused by he Covid-19 pandemic, has created a partnership with the Covid-19 **Food Bank and Faith-Based Organizations** (FBO) to supply these with food parcels for their distribution, avoiding queues and gatherings in front of the places of worship.For about 3 months, 1000 food parcels were daily distributed

For more information: https://www.ekurhuleni.gov.za/

8 Organising intercultural and interreligious activities: a toolkit for local authorities_Resolution 397(2016)

Recommendations

01 Make agreements with places of worship that recognise the full autonomy and neutrality of the local authority, for the recognition of welfare, fragility support, education, culture and sport activities promoted by places of worship in a formal or informal way

02 Encourage the representatives of places of worship to participate in institutional round tables promoted by local services or authorities

03 Create a synergy between the educational and school support proposals promoted in places of worship and the territorial educational services

04 Promote initiatives on transversal issues (e.g. the right to health for all, guidance and support for work integration, computer and language literacy, support in obtaining a driving licence) in places of worship, also in partnership with local institutions or associations

05 Provide information on the various welfare activities of the places of worship within institutional channels (websites, paper and online media, social media), facilitating contacts and supporting the creation of activity calendars

Best practice

Bradford - England

The Interfaith Education Centre in Bradford has developed a religious literacy programme, widely accepted both by local teachers and teachers from other European countries, through which pupils in different education cycles are taught to meet diversity, to understand the importance of religious and non-religious worldviews and to express their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences in a clear and coherent way, while respecting everyone's rights. Bradford, a city with a wide variety of faiths and cultures, desires to affirm that religions have equal rights to the maintenance of their distinct identities; moreover, their rich diversity, as well as their spirituality and attachment to common values, should be seen as a positive contribution to the life of the whole community. The general aims of the educational programme are to help young people to deepen their knowledge of their own and other people's religious and spiritual dimension and to develop a positive attitude towards other people, acknowledging what they have in common, respecting their right to have different ideas and appreciating the richness of life in a society characterized by religious pluralism.

Per saperne di più https://bso.bradford.gov.uk/Schools/Home.aspx

Focus: We learn from childhood

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Childhood is a time when curiosity, research and listening are fundamental attitudes. They characterise the culture typical of childhood that we should always keep alive. If school is the place where cultures and religions come into contact the most, it is not only because there, more than elsewhere, different peoples meet, but because at school different peoples meet during their childhood and youth. It is often children and young people who open adults' eyes to diversity's beauty. Children and young people are attracted by it, they are amazed by it and their wonder guides them towards diversity.

Societies should therefore learn from children and trust what we like to call the pedagogy of listening. Listening is the first step for a coexistence between religions, as well as between cultures; only then can dialogue and relationships happen.

Listening intended as openness towards the Other, waiting for the Other, in their uniqueness, as an attribution of value to the Other because we think they may have something important to say. It is a matter of reciprocity, which leads to the creation of a relationship and, finally, of a community.

Overwhelmed by epochal events such as migration, pandemics, climate change, climatic disasters, economic crises and, last but not least, wars, our societies find in religious

religious communities a place of ethical protection and cohesion, a place for interpretations and the construction of meaning.

When thinking about the Common Good, religions and their activities occupy a prominent place in the Social Capital in our cities. They are widespread units that can work for peace and harmony. This is why it is even more important to listen and dialogue not only between religions, but also between religions and cities, to build networks, bridges and communities.

Religious places can act as real social infrastructures. They are able to interact with civil society, neighbourhoods and local administrations, to open doors and to offer and exchange activities in support of the population.

"No one is saved alone" was the title of a recent religious meeting held in Rome with Pope Francis, which brought the different perspectives of salvation back to a common destiny. "No one is saved alone. People save each other, through the mediation of the world", is a saying by Paulo Freire, much loved and known.

It is only through care and reciprocity, so inherent in education, that a community can become ever richer in its Social Capital. This way, it can become an open society that dialogues with its different cultural, social, political and even religious expressions.

> By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

SDG (Sustainable Development Goals)
Target 10.2:Promote universal social, economic and political inclusion

Conclusion: Consortes

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The fact that perception and reality do not always coincide is something that various disciplines and even common sense teach us. From social psychology to statistics, from sociology to history, there are many ways in which one can examine a discrepancy that, in democratic systems, increases consensus.

Therefore, it is not unusual that the multifaceted religious landscape of today's Europe generates distorted perceptions of a reality looked through blue glasses that mix culture and acculturation, faiths and customs, minority logics and majority self-perceptions. This is affected both by a growing religious illiteracy, which denotes a scarce knowledge of oneself and of the other, resulting in religious traditions being claimed by those who profane their substance, arbitrarily attributing racist or terrorist impulses; and by caricatures of the other that turn symbols and their harmless reference to those freely assumed higher duties that are the marker of “religions” a trigger for war, even before rights or powers.

Although easy to describe, the problem that arises is serious and it is connected with what we might call a political addiction to inequalities: just as in Italy for decades the

southern question was considered as the subject of rhetoric to obtain easy votes, only to realize that criminal realities had made these lands the platform of a much more European financial criminal system, much more active on international markets than many legal business realities, in other countries it was thought that the confinement of entire generations of underclassmen of the banlieue could have no repercussion in the fight between spiritual preaching and terrorist recruitment that takes place within the Muslim communities of Europe. Not because Islamist extremism - the one that really profanes the figure of the Prophet, caricaturing him as a vulgar preacher of hatred - only takes root in there and has no capacity to reach more sophisticated or camouflaged environments within the urban fabric, as it had been with Al Qaeda's cells before 11 September, but because in such frustration a mass of people with characteristics far from its core is formed. And they affect the places of civilized living and the cities.

Giorgio La Pira - seer saint, constituent jurist, mayor - in the middle of the Cold War, when the nuclear threat was no longer great, but more perceived, announced that one of his visions of peace started from the cities: places, or rather consortia (in the etymological sense: sharing the same fate) that aspire to reject war and reach an understanding.

Today, in a changed religious landscape, cities are once again at the centre of two dimensions.

The first one is that of the Napoleonic "compulsory communities": those institutions - the registry office, the hospital, burial and imprisonment, school and justice - that the French emperor secularised, removing them from the control of the church and generating a non-religious rituality and legality

(secularism, France would say starting from 1905) that without major changes invented a different "public space" where civil religions lived, both democratic and totalitarian. In those compulsory communities an increased religious diversity generates complex needs and requests: just think, for example, of dietary needs which, in their profoundly and structurally ascetic nature (all religions command not to eat this or that product), are often the catalyst for barbaric resentments, as if avoiding one food meant giving another the right to ignore it as an affirmation of the self.

The other is that of "open-membership" communities, which are established in places of prayer: namely where the belonging to a tradition and to the dynamism that shaped it into the form of a religious practice - with all due respect for all fundamentalisms and all returns to the "primitive" state of a faith - is manifested in the clearest way. It is a practice embedded in ever-changing cultures, languages, aesthetics, dogmas, morals. The old anti-religious rhetoric thinks that this depends on the fact that, being a man's invention or a projection of his needs, religions are empty rhetoric that imprecise "hierarchies" propagandize as immutable. The believing conscience instead knows that loyalty to a revelation or to a dharma requires an incessant hermeneutic and ascetic work, which does not change what is given but makes it more comprehensible, more lived-in.

Breaking down the political, juridical, administrative background of these dimensions shows how cities - interpreted according to La Pira's notion - remain the place where, in the dialogue between compulsory and open communities, peace can nurture; while in those cities of Europe most exposed to the continuous metamorphosis of violence and hatred can

emerge forms of antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism or ethno-nationalism.

Looking at these problems from Europe, however, another trait that should not be underestimated emerges; two recent crimes perpetrated in France have provided evidence of this. The first one was committed in the cathedral of Nice where a Tunisian man stabbed defenceless believers; the last of a series of crimes perpetrated in places of worship which caused rivers of blood to flow in synagogues, churches and mosques. It is a type of crime which adds to the contempt for human life proper to all terrorist acts and to the contempt for God proper to all terrorists who claim to be religious, something more; the Nice crime gave the investigators the impression of being the product of a craftsman of death and not of a criminal organisation of some kind.

The second one was the murder of Prof. Samuel Paty in Conflans committed by a Chechen man, convinced that he had to punish the teacher who, in order to explain the democratic values of freedom of expression, began a discussion with his students about the cartoon caricatures that for years have vulgarly targeted religious and political faiths. A crime similar to that committed in Italy by left-wing terrorists who murdered professors guilty of having a background of political or labour law knowledge. This crime, too, seems to have been an individual gesture without terrorist networks behind it.

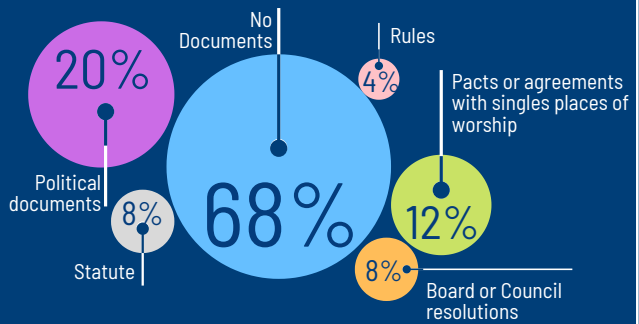
In one case and another - some have spoken of community terrorism - there is evidence that the capacity for hatred and resentment can develop beyond the usual channels of structured preaching, organised militancy, methodical indoctrination and disciplined mobilisation. A society where respect for those who are different (due to religion or gender) is not "naturally" rooted in one's

deepest ethical and religious values, is a society where the logic of murderous craftsmanship can get out of hand and get out of hand.

If this is true or not entirely inaccurate, then local policies are no less important than general policies related to security or the implementation of religious freedom: and knowledge policies - building knowledge, disseminating knowledge, reviewing knowledge - are no less important and less demanding for the ethical standing of those with political responsibilities. They do not serve as a means to placing oneself in one of the many rankings of urban quality and to be complimented among friends; they serve to make the city a consortium of equality and diversity.

Questionnaires results

1) Does the municipal administration have political or programme documents to foster interreligious dialogue and the participation of places of worship in community life?



2) Within the municipality, is there a representative (a political actor, a public official, an external collaborator etc.) and/or an organizational structure that manages interreligious dialogue policies?

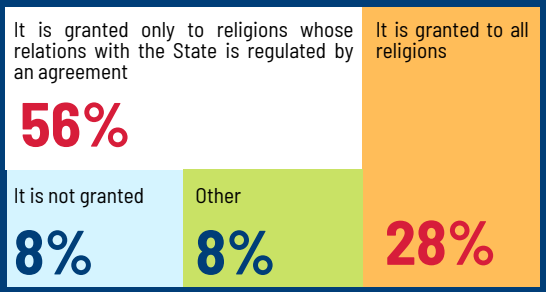
58% ↗
42% ↙

3) Are minority religions' places of worships mapped?

4) In the city planning and management documents (urban planning), do places of worship have a specific denomination and classification related to their use (e.g. privately owned public space, city-owned facilities loaned free of charge to the religious communities, etc.)?

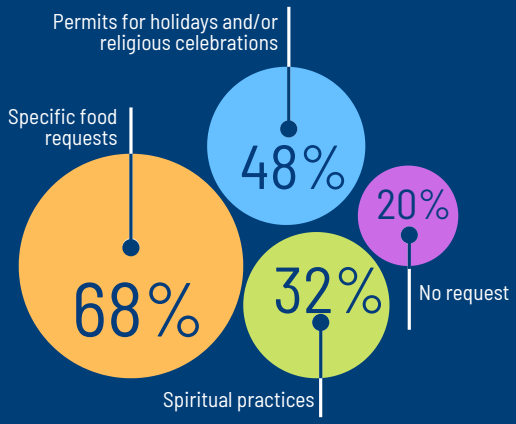
60% ↗
40% ↙

5) Which criteria, indicated below, are used to issue the building permit for the construction of a place of worship?

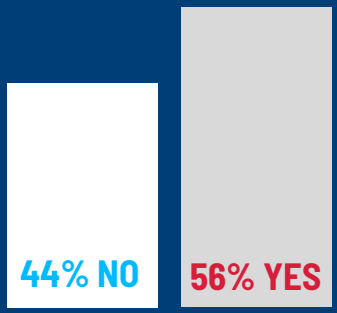


6) Do different places of worship have any agreement on the use of the national language?

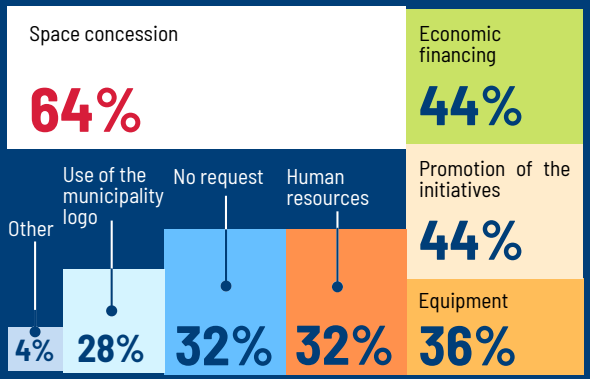
7) In public structures (schools, medical centers, detention structures, old age home, etc.) have you detected specific requests from staff and/or users related to the observance of religious precepts?



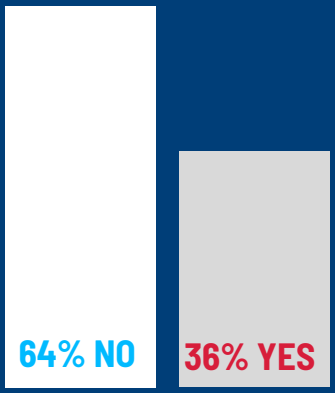
8) Does your municipality have burial sites dedicated to different religions?



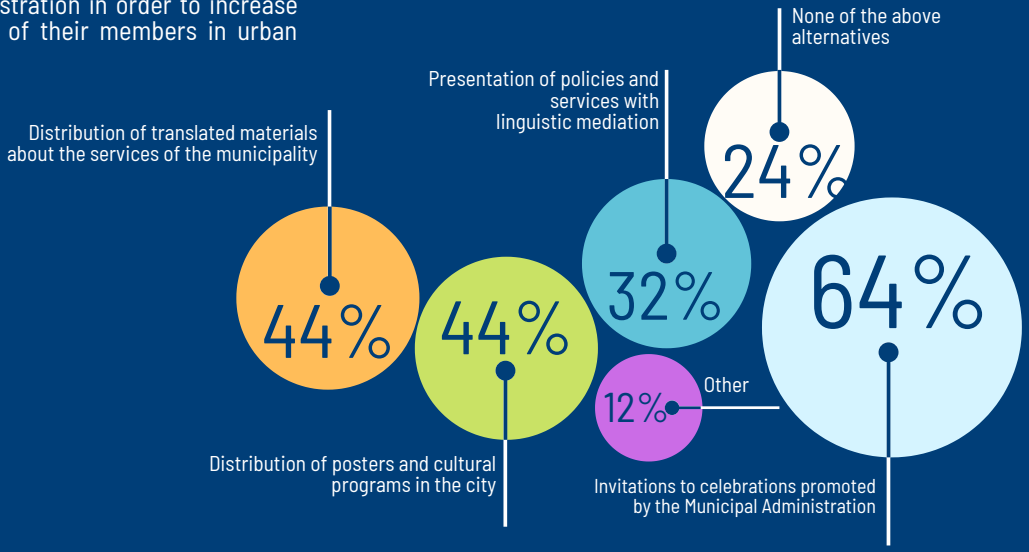
9) In the event of initiatives organized by the places of worship and open to all the citizens, which of the following requests have you received as municipality?



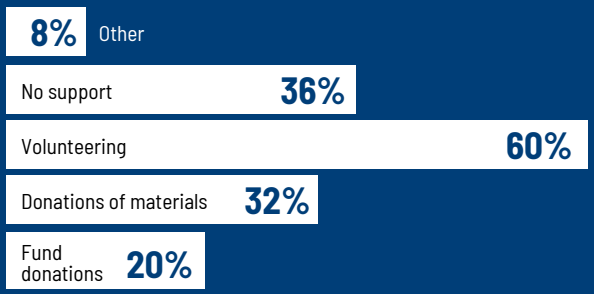
10) Does any public official authority participate on behalf of the municipality in initiatives promoted by places of worship?



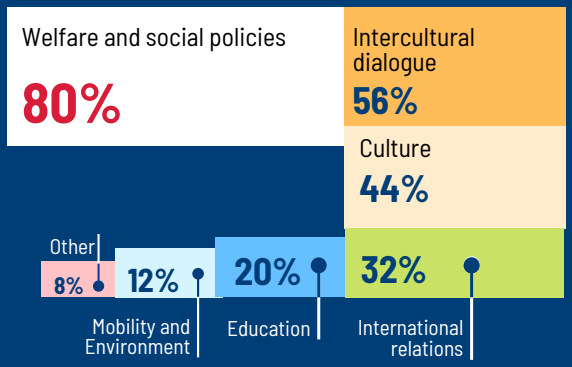
11) Are the places of worship engaged by the municipal administration in order to increase the participation of their members in urban life?



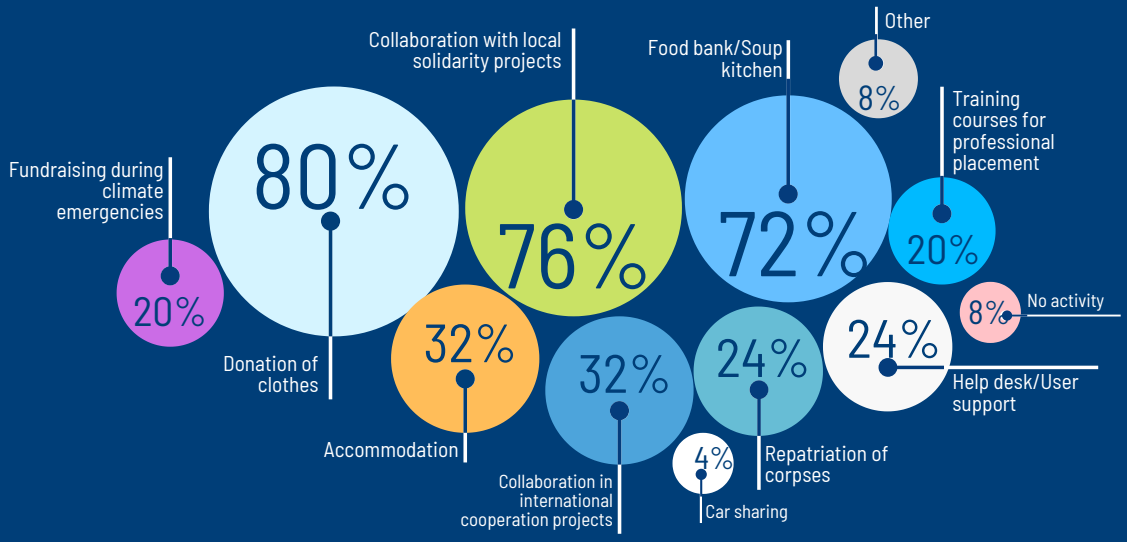
12) During the Covid-19 health emergency and/or in the past, did you receive any support from places of worship and/or religious associations?



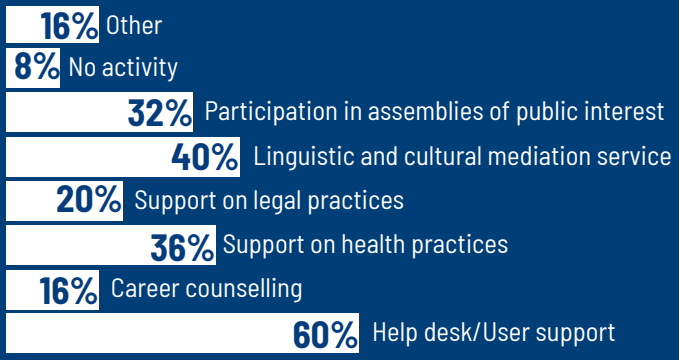
13) Which sectors/departments of the Municipal Administration collaborate with places of worship in the implementation of local policies?



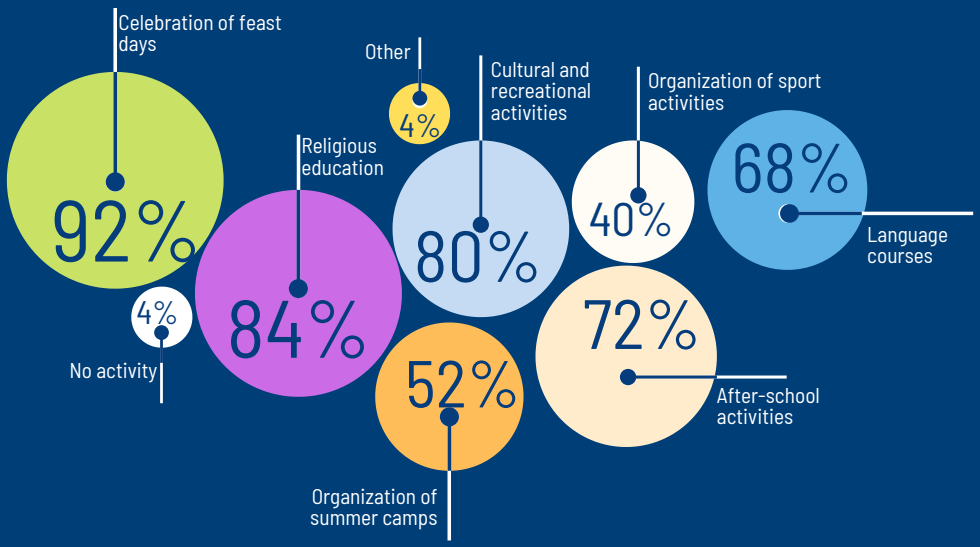
14) Are you aware of forms of spontaneous welfare activated by the places of worship in the area?



15) Are you aware of counselling service offered by places of worship and/or religious associations informing and assisting individuals about the local welfare system?



16) Are you aware of social and educational activities for families, young people and children promoted by places of worship and/or religious associations?



17) Is there any organization supported by the municipal administration (for example intercultural centers, etc.) that act as mediators between places of worship/religious associations and the local administration in order to further social cohesion?

32% ↗
68% ↙

Reference texts

Council of Europe-European Convention on Human Rights
https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf

Council of Europe-European Court of Human Rights-Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights
https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_9_ENG.pdf

"Organising intercultural and interreligious activities: a toolkit for local authorities"
https://rm.coe.int/168071ad9f

"12 PRINCIPLES FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AT LOCAL LEVEL"
https://rm.coe.int/168071b354

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together As Equals in Dignity"
https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf

United Nations- Universal Declaration of human Rights
https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

UNESCO- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf

Documents consulted: July 2020

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