



## CONTENDING RELIGIONS, IDENTITIES AND SPACE

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**PAPER'S TITLE: RELIGION, VALUES AND COMMUNITY IN NORWEGIAN URBAN RENEWAL**

### ABSTRACT:

This paper builds upon fieldwork and interviews with representatives from local religious communities in an urban renewal project in district in Oslo, Norway in 2015. The interviews and the fieldwork was conducted in order to provide politicians and bureaucracy with background material for making economic and political prioritizations regarding the district primarily for the next four years, but also for the longer term. The research group was set up as a transdisciplinary group with researchers from urban studies, anthropology, geography, religious studies, and sociology with the goal of providing a plurality of perspectives.

The rationale for interviewing and including faith-based communities in the district was based a general motive to invite or to include the “silent voices”, those that are seldom heard in political discussions, in order to strengthen the epistemic quality of our research – and hence the decision-making material. On a more specific level, the district has a long history of folk and labour religiosity and is currently the location for the four out of the five purpose-built mosques in Oslo. Since religion already is an active and visible part of the district’s development, the insights from the religious communities could give valuable material on urban renewal and also strengthen the quality.

In this paper we will analyze the faith-based communities’ articulations and valuations of the district: What do they see as positive aspects of the district and what are the negative dimensions they articulate? We will analyze the extent to which the language is based on religious discourse or a secular discourse: Do they justify their valuations through references to central tenets or stories in their religions or do they use a language from the secular sphere?

We will present two separate theoretical perspectives in this paper. One perspective related to sciences of religions and one related to human geography and urban renewal. These perspectives will, we hope, enrich and inform each other.

From the sciences of religion, we introduce the theoretical view of a separation between the secular and the religious as a social fact and a social norm in modern societies. The theoretical underpinning of this divide can be found in different theories of secularization. According to Charles Taylor faith and religious practice and belonging have become one option amongst several in secularized societies – and “belief in God is no longer axiomatic”. An operationalization of this theory would mean that the respondents use the “sphere” or the “structure” or the “frame” that they see as suitable when responding to our questions and discussing with us in the interviews and the fieldwork. From human geography and urban studies, the concepts of image of place. The image a person presents of a specific place can inform us of how the person sees herself or himself in relation to the place. A systematization of how the respondents describe different qualities of the district can tell us much both about the district and about the respondents themselves.



**AUTHOR'S SHORT BIO AND ACADEMIC PROFILE (Maximum 200 words):**

Erik Thorstensen is a researcher with a background in the ethics of novel technologies, sciences of religion, and cultural studies. Erik is currently engaged in the EEA/Norway Grants projects “Resiliency and adaptation to climate change in regional strategies” and “Naturalness in Human Cognitive Enhancement”. From 2016 and to the end of 2019, Erik will be connected as a PhD-student to the “Assisted Living Project”, funded by the Research Council of Norway. His interests include governance and ethics of novel technologies, science of religion, theory of science, public participation, legitimation, cultural studies etc.

Ingar Brattbakk is a researcher in human geography and urban studies. Ingar is lead researcher on the urban renewal project to be presented in the conference and has a long experience in reports and research for urban and regional development.

Aina Landsverk Hagen is a senior researcher and a PhD in social anthropology Aina is responsible for the qualitative work in the urban renewal project to be presented in the conference. She did her PhD on creativity and magic among the architects in Snøhetta.