

From National to Local (and Back). Religious Freedom and the Right to the City in Italy

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Abstract

Urban space can be seen as the social field in which the religious diversification of European societies emerges and assumes visibility. In this contexts, minority places of worship can be used at the same time as the marker of the presence – past and/or present – of a specific religious group and a reliable marker of religious diversity, helping assess the state of health of religious pluralism in itself. More than the national level of State-religions relationships, the local milieu of the city contributes in shaping and assessing contemporary forms of religious life. At the same time, cities represent the arena where old and new minorities struggle for space, visibility and recognition. At this level, the right to religious freedom interacts with the right to the city: local public institutions increasingly stand at the forefront in the regulation of religion-driven needs. This contribution presents evidences from research conducted in the city of Turin, a representative case in the Italian scenario on the above-mentioned issues. Based on a comparative case study, it focuses on the different dynamics of symbolical positioning and material placing enacted by four different minorities: Islam, Judaism, Orthodoxy, and Scientology. Drawing on empirical evidences collected over a period of three years, we analyse the actor constellation involved in the regulation of religious diversity in the city, discussing both policy implications and policy transferability guidelines.

Keywords: religious diversity, places of worship, Italy.

1. Introduction

Religious complexity is increasing in a Europe that is struggling to maintain the policies of recognition and protection of rights, as well as social inclusion

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and welfare that characterised it in the second half of the last century (Dick & Nagel, 2016).

The presence of Muslim, Orthodox, Sikh and Pentecostal communities has become more visible as a consequence of migration flows towards Western European countries. Yet the pluralism of faiths is a historical theme on the European scene. The renewed social mix emerging from globalisation and international mobility processes, has put the theme at the centre of a debate that, for many, was confined to the history books or fuelled the philosophical debate. Migration, in every historical moment, and with its protagonists, has therefore forced societies and institutions to confront different actors and unprecedented ways of managing social phenomena. Even from a religious point of view.

Often this transformation has been a source of concern and anxiety for native communities, to the point of provoking alarmist reactions (Vertovec & Rogers, 1998; Lefebvre, 2020). Faced with these, local authorities have tried to put in place some responses, also with regard to religious affairs, which have so far been very heterogeneous. To date, there has been no European model for dealing with religious diversity; the experiences of countries that have been dealing with a vast number of foreign residents over a long period of time are in fact quite diversified.

Not all minorities worry in the same way, as the Italian case exemplifies. After a long and troubled history, the Italian Waldensians are today an important subject in the management of the refugee emergency, through the humanitarian corridors (Ricucci, 2017). Just as the Sikhs are concerned in a fluctuating way, whose requests to wear traditional clothing, especially the Kipar, the ritual dagger, become – more than anything else when they arrive in a courtroom – the subject of decisions of strong symbolic importance in the long-standing dispute among universal rights, i.e. to profess one's own religion, as protected by national and international regulations, and instances of cultural assimilation. The absence of media attention on Sikhs, and their relatively limited number, reduces public relevance when compared to that of Muslims. The latter remain the absolute protagonists of the challenge to the legal-administrative architecture built to govern among laws, democracy and fundamental rights (Ferrari, 2018). If a transversal element can be traced, it concerns the (difficult) relationship with Islam.

A relationship that fulfils the so-called '*mirror function*' (Sayad, 2002), i.e. it makes critical issues and distortions evident again, which have been cast in the shadows over time. And the theme of the management of religious diversity fits perfectly into this dynamic. The growing multi-culturalisation of cities as a result of globalisation and immigration and the demands for visibility and participation of Islam have highlighted the many limitations of legal systems

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anchored to historical and socio-cultural periods in which it was not necessary to decline in concrete terms the respect of religious freedom of everyone, since countries were (or considered themselves) intrinsically mono-religious; and Italy made no exception (Zapata-Barrero, 2015).

In fact, in Italy, apart from constitutional references, there is an absence of organic legislation on religious freedom, to which in recent decades – urged by growing migration – several actors have tried to respond – case by case – to interventions of heterogeneous bodies and at different levels. The result is a confused legal situation, and a corresponding intricate jurisprudence, which has produced different practices and solutions in different regional or sub-regional contexts.

It is a case where political discretion produces policies and practices that determine different local forms of secularism and law (Mazzola, 2010; Marchei, 2015). Urban policies can inform the socio-cultural fabric to a particular configuration of relations among public space, citizenship rights and diversity. If the Italian landscape is an archipelago of differentiated rights, the cities that rise there are islands within which public dynamics of inclusion and exclusion can take shape.

2. Data and methods

This work is the result of comparative theoretical, archival and field research conducted in Turin on organisations belonging to four religious minorities: Islam, Judaism, Orthodox Christianity and Scientology¹. The selection of cases was made because of their historical, numerical and social presence in the local context, as established versus outsiders, or newcomers – and the different forms of legal recognition they enjoy or not.

Table 1. Selection of cases.

	Established	Outsider
Legally recognised	Judaism	Orthodoxy
Non-recognised	Scientology	Islam

The fundamental objective was above all to study the change in relations between secular and religious institutions. Among the questions that prompted

¹ In particular, to focus on the dynamics of settlement of Islam and Orthodoxy, public policies for religious diversity and the urban regime that emerged from the peculiar Turin case study, see Bossi (2018, 2020a, 2020b); Mezzetti and Ricucci (2019).

the survey: Which secular actors have intervened urban religious field²? What kind of urban policies have been developed in the matter of public regulations of religious diversity? Apart from its symbolic and formal value, what practical consequences does legal recognition by the state entail?

Thus, the research focused on the theme through two fundamental lenses. The first was that of public policies practiced by cities, with regard to the regulation of urban religious diversity. On the other hand, the research adopted the lens of religious actors, with the aim of understanding the dynamics of positioning, settlement and visibility in the public space of religious organisations intended, here, as a meso level that mediates the demands and relations between believers and public institutions. Archival research work, participant observations and interviews with public officials, representatives of religious organisations, experts and policy-makers over a three-year period (2017-2019) made it possible to collect data and information to answer the research questions.

3. Urban space as a lens for social research

In studying the relations between secular and religious fields and the forms of public regulation of religious diversity, great attention was paid to the dimension of the national state, the institutional and legal relations with religious organisations and their variation from country to country (Ferrari, 1988; Chaves & Cann, 1992; Soper & Fetzer, 2007, 2018).

Over the years, however, several authors highlighted the limits of such state-centric approaches (Bowen, 2007), highlighting the difficulties in grasping the complexity of historical processes of change and the propensity to fix social reality in a static image (Bader, 2007). Others criticised the normative reading, which did not grasp the internal variety, and which did not consider subsidiarity and decentralisation (Borraz & John, 2004; Schmidtke, 2014) of regulatory policies oriented towards multi-level governance (Scholten, 2015; Dawson, 2016).

Taking advantage of the call for a reorientation of the research focus, in the wake of the proposals made by the *Spatial turn*³, we witnessed the progressive consolidation of an analytical turning point in the social sciences, which identified in the local and, in particular, the urban space a more promising

² For a detailed definition, see the following paragraph.

³ For more information see, among others: Soja, 1996; Hervieu-Léger, 2002; Knott, 2005; Warf and Arias, 2009; Davie, 2012; Hopkins and Kong, Olson, 2013; Grüning and Tuma, 2017.

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empirical level. The rebirth of the local scale of governance and the attention to the interpenetration among different levels, actors and processes of public regulation (Catanzaro et al., 2002; Bobbio et al., 2017), brought attention back to cities and metropolitan areas, today crucial spaces for the contention on the reconfiguration of contemporary citizenship and the recognition of minority identities and their needs (Habermas, 1994; Honneth, 2007). As a result of greater autonomy in the design and implementation of their own decisions, regions and cities acquired greater political agency, giving up the role of mere receivers of centrally defined policies and proposing themselves as political entrepreneurs tout court, even in contrast with the national legislator.

The terrain of policies for diversity is crisscrossed by disputes about the right to recognition of peculiar instances, which are rooted in national or ethnic affiliations, as well as in the most intimate, relational and identity aspects of the person. In this sense, the right to the city can be understood as the right to legitimate and recognised spaces of autonomy and existence – both in a material and symbolic sense – expressed through the agency of individual and organised actors. Within this framework, regions and cities are increasingly called upon to take political action aimed at regulating fundamental aspects of a person's life, integrating, or innovating, the national legislative body, opposing or filling regulatory gaps in national politics. Cities can thus represent the first level of direct regulation by themes and issues, interest groups and organisations that find little or no citizenship in other arenas (Frégosi & Willaime, 2001).

Emerging literature focuses on cities and explores the ways in which religions are displaced in urban spaces through the dynamics put in place by (and among) old and new residents, and institutional, political and economic actors⁴. Urban space can be understood as 'the iconic arena where religious superdiversity becomes visible through the ways in which confessional spatial strategies interact with the spatial regimes of cities' (Becci et al., 2016, p. 87). In such contexts of multiple secularities and religiosities, the symbolic and material boundaries between these two dimensions are constantly questioned, negotiated, redefined. Thus, religions and cities can be considered as lenses for social theory (Sassen, 2005) and studied in a comparative perspective (Ward, 2010; Robinson, 2011). Urban planning and the theme of building mosques have been the focus of the media and researchers in recent years (van den Breemer & Maussen, 2012; Zwilling, 2015). The promotion of comparative research, capable of including different religious cases (Ambrosini, et al., 2019), appears increasingly necessary to verify and, in that case, overcome the widespread hypothesis of an Islamic exception.

⁴ On this subject please refer, among others, to: Molendijk et al., 2010; Becci et al., 2013; Russo and Saggiaro, 2018.

4. The city as a field: an introduction to the urban religious field

Within this framework, the city can be taken as a Bourdieusian field – whose complexity is linked to the increasing pluralisation of actors, arenas and regulatory sources. Within it, the needs, instances and requests for recognition are catalysed by religious organisations that compete or conflict with each other in order to allocate limited material and symbolic resources. Each of them can count on different sets of capital – cultural, economic, social, symbolic, and political – which contribute to define the agency they are able to practice. In this perspective, religious organisations represent intermediate bodies of mediation between individuals and government (Giorgi, 2018). Together with their places of worship, they increasingly emerge as central in the processes of reception, orientation, integration and inclusion of *newcomers* and in the mediation of the requests of the diasporic communities (Ricucci, 2017). Therefore, religious organisations constitute a meso level that intercepts the bottom-up instances and mediates the top-down relationships between the population of believers and that complex network of actors, secular and not, who intervene in the field.

As Monnot and Stolz (2018) among others recall, the hypothesis that the religious field is characterised by competition among groups for recognition and resources became the subject of scientific discussion at least since the vast publication of Weber's works (1906) and, subsequently, Bourdieu (1971). For Bourdieu (1994) the field is a social arena in which different actors compete for different types of resources: a structured space of positions and power relations around common themes, challenges and objectives. The field includes different types of capital and is crisscrossed by contentions for positioning among those who try to impose themselves and those who intend to maintain the dominant position acquired. A key to interpretation, in this sense, is seen in the status of established and outsider or newcomer as a differentiating factor of religious organisations.

The hypothesis put forward therefore assumes that the most entrenched, dominant organisations are favoured to enjoy a range of privileges from which they would tend to exclude potential competitors. Monnot and Stolz (2018) introduced the concept of (religious) establishment as 'preferential treatment towards one or more religious groups, their members or institutions' (p. 3). The authors used the legal recognition status of religious congregations on Swiss territory as an indicator of belonging to the *legal establishment* and *non-establishment* categories. They then introduced the *de facto establishment* category to indicate the preferential treatment deriving from society, consisting of a time variable and a status variable. Following the authors, belonging to a *legal* or *de facto establishment*

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might explain the differences in the distribution of resources among congregations.

Moving from these considerations, the present work assumes the religious field as that space characterised by dynamics of strength and power and by asymmetries in the distribution of rights and capitals, within which a struggle develops for the recognition and supply of capitals. The different distribution of resources gives rise to different configurations of organisational capitals. With the aim of controlling the uncertainty of the field and facing the challenges of settlement and positioning (both material and symbolic, between physical space and space of legitimacy), religious organisations can draw on different internal and external resources, also by converting available capitals into others that are insufficient. However, these configurations depend substantially on the position occupied by each organisation within the religious field, vis-à-vis other organisations and the state: access to differentiated forms of recognition and financing can only play a fundamental role in the balance of the field. As will be seen, in Italy legal recognition by the state plays a key role in this sense, marking a fundamental difference in the distribution of public resources among *de jure* and *de facto* religions. To trace the boundaries of the urban religious field means, first of all, to ask oneself what internal and external forces are at stake: What constraints and opportunities underlie the action of those who act there? The regulatory sources and the actors called upon to put them into practice play a fundamental role.

5. Regulatory constraints: state legal recognition and local administrative practices

In Italy, religious organisations other than the Roman Catholic Church can today be divided into four macro-categories: those with an agreement (“Intesa”) with the state (Art. 8, par. 3 of the Constitution); those with recognition of legal personality (Law 1159/1929, known as *admitted cults*); those constituted according to their own statute (Art. 8, par. 2 of the Constitution with reference to the different forms of association provided for by the Civil Code); and, finally, informal religious groups. The Italian religious field has thus come to be constituted according to a pyramidal structure, at the top of which is the concordat between the state and the Catholic Church and, immediately below, the organisations with agreement. To date, twelve denominations have had access to this second category, of which eight are Christian, two Buddhist, one Jewish and one Hindu. The agreements include specific legal obligations for both parties and give access, inter alia, to public funding through the 8x1000

(contribution from state taxes to religious organisations etc. deriving from choices of the single citizen).

The *admitted cult* represents the third level of the pyramid and includes, today, forty-eight religious organisations, of which thirty-eight belong to Christian tradition (including most of the Orthodox organisations), four to Buddhism and one to Hinduism (all with agreement), one to Baha'ism and, finally, the only Islamic organisation legally recognised by the Italian state today: the Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy (Centro Culturale Islamico d'Italia), the body that manages the Great Mosque of Rome.

Below the two levels of state recognition is the fourth level of the pyramid: here are the religious organisations that have not requested or obtained recognition of legal personality or agreement and which, in its place, have been constituted as associations of a different nature, according to their own statutes. A large part of Italy's religious plurality – and with it, churches, mosques, temples, etc. – is attributable to this category. Here, for example, there are Islamic associations, but also numerous Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh entities, Christian churches of various denominations, as well as the Church of Scientology in Italy.

Finally, at the base of the pyramidal system are the informal religious groups: made up of individuals with the aim of practising shared worship collectively, without any form of legal representation and mostly in spaces not open to public activities, they represent the most fluid and spontaneous way of aggregation for religious purposes.

Urban planning regulations and policies have an immediate impact on human and social practices. In the case of places of worship of non-recognised religious organisations and, above all, of those born from immigrants, a fundamental element of full inclusion is the possibility of understanding settlement regulations, technical-bureaucratic procedures and methods of access to public contributions and facilitations.

In Piedmont, the discipline of places of worship is regulated by regional Law 15/1989 and subsequent amendments. Together with the Catholic Church, among the other religious denominations recognised as beneficiaries of public contributions, are also other religious denominations 'which have an organised, widespread and consistent presence at national level and a significant settlement in the local community of reference'. Although the previous requirement of the state agreement has been repealed⁵, access to funds and land is still complex for

⁵ Its unconstitutionality was defined by the Constitutional Court which, expressing its opinion on the appeal of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses against the Municipality of L'Aquila, with its historic sentence No. 195/1993, repealed discrimination on the basis of agreement. In the same sentence the Court also ruled on

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those organisations not formally recognised by the state, including many created by immigrants.

In the absence of a specific category for religious associations or, at least, of a municipal register of confessional entities, regional and local public administrations recognise the requests of organisations with an agreement or *admitted cults* only. Despite the provisions of the Constitutional Court, public office managers and technicians do not have the necessary tools and skills to distinguish a religious body from other forms of associationism⁶.

With regard to this, it may be interesting to observe the trend of public contributions allocated by the City of Turin to the construction or renovation of religious buildings over the last twenty years, starting from the period immediately before the Olympic building boom. To cope with the city's public debt, in 2018 and 2019, the city government suspended the distribution of funds, then resumed in 2020⁷.

The distribution of funds gives back a rather liberal image of the Turin administration: although with an extremely limited number of religious buildings, between 1997 and 2017 the minorities in the city obtained 15.8 per cent of public contributions. Yet, at a second glance, the absence of immigrant denominations and, on the other hand, the almost exclusive presence of state-recognised entities is evident. Therefore, in order to obtain the possibility of constructing or installing a building of worship in an area destined for religious services, in practice it is necessary to have an agreement or, at the very least, to be an *admitted cult*. These requirements are, however, far from the possibilities of the majority of organisations, which in the meantime choose simple associationism.

the case of the religious denomination and the criteria by which the public administration can define the legitimacy of the requesting body. From the interviews with local administrators, it became clear that these criteria are not compatible with the competences of urban planning departments and remain, *de facto*, inapplicable.

⁶ As shown in all the interviews conducted with the relevant offices: Integration Department; Rights Department; Urban Planning Department of the City of Turin – Private Building and Planning Department – Urban Planning and Territory Division; Urban Planning and Building Department of the Piedmont Region; Prefecture of Turin – Cult Affairs Department. Further confirmation can be found in the words of Deputy Mayor Guido Montanari; see: Interpellation 2018-05311 (<http://www.comune.torino.it/consiglio/prg/web/verbali/interventi.php?cod=13365.5.0.c>).

⁷ See: Città di Torino, Deliberazione della Giunta Comunale 2020 00809/061, 21 aprile 2020.

http://www.comune.torino.it/giunta_comune/intracom/htdocs/2020/2020_00809.pdf

Table 2. City of Turin – Regional Law No. 15/1989. Contributions related to places of worship and functional outbuildings for the activity of worship (1997-2017)⁸.

Years	Roman Catholicism	Evangelicalism Protestantism	Jehova's Witnesses	Seventh day Adventism	Judaism	Annual amount
1997	1,962,537	103,291	0	0	0	2,065,828
2002	1,497,725	330,533	219,494	18,076	0	2,065,828
2007	1,602,000	300,000	90,000	8,000	0	2,000,000
2012	467,000	18,000	8,000	2,000	5,000	500,000
2017	360,000	40,000	0	0	0	400,000
Total amount 1997-2017	24,882,354	3,213,421	1,061,552	196,039	172,000	29,525,363
Percentage on total amount	84.3	10.9	3.6	0.7	0.6	100.0

Source: personal data processing by the City of Turin – Public Telematic Service.

In addition to the *de facto* exclusion carried out by the public administration is self-exclusion: what emerged during all the interviews conducted with associative or religious representatives, minority organisations, especially those made up of immigrants, are not aware of the possibilities offered, believing that the agreement still is an essential criterion. Thus, without specific preparation on the subject, the religious fabric of Turin remains largely unknown to its own administration; and, on the other hand, the regulation remains far from the daily life of individuals who often face linguistic difficulties, economic shortcomings, low social capital and limited agency.

The regulation still appears today to be the expression of a historical period far from the most recent changes in the Italian religious panorama and the needs that have arisen from them. Conceived in the 1960s in a period of strong urban expansion to encourage the presence of spiritual services in newly designed neighbourhoods, today the urbanistic regulation produces the undesirable effect of excluding the new minorities from public contributions and terrains.

Therefore, the most widespread pragmatic solutions among religious organisations follow two fundamental models: the conversion of disused Catholic churches or the re-functionalisation of secular buildings – usually artisan or commercial, due to their size, lower costs and greater availability.

⁸ All amounts are expressed in euros.

6. Consequences on the positioning of places of worship in the city

Behind the discussion on places of worship we can see first of all the knots of the relationship between religious minorities and local reality, especially when this relationship is superimposed on that between immigrants and citizenship, especially in the case of Muslims, less so in that of the Orthodox, who suffer from processes of positive discrimination. The debate on the construction of a mosque thus takes on a symbolic meaning, opposing those who are against or in favour of the very presence of foreign citizens and the transformations it entails, also with regard to the wider urban space. In fact, the imprint of Islam in the cities of migration is given not only by its protagonists and the buildings in which they pray, but also by many other factors, for example the presence of commercial activities that refer to religious precepts and whose diffusion and concentration often frighten citizens, becoming a source of political representation.

At a time marked by great difficulties in the relationship with diversity, one cannot consider that processes of coexistence and protection of religious minorities, which have become the emblem par excellence of diversity, are created spontaneously. In this sense, a revision and updating of regulations and policies represent key elements to respond to new needs that come to the fore, and that specific groups question public decision-makers and civil society. These solutions require to redefine the boundaries of belonging, recognition, urban space and architecture (Foner & Simon, 2015), promoting a different and updated representation, of which Muslims seem to be the most visible novelty – but certainly not the only one, nor the most numerous, as the estimates on Orthodox presences indicate (Giordan, 2015). Yet on a symbolic level, Islam maintains a prominent place. The possibility of accessing and/or building a place of worship becomes the emblem of social recognition, even before reflecting a right recognised by national and international law. In the (also digital) frame of identity debate and struggle for social and political rights, gaining visibility in urban space is considered a priority. However, this priority requires high capitals: one should know how to find and decipher rules and regulations, how to navigate through bureaucracy, departments, and offices, developing strategic partnerships to foster claims and solutions. In fact, obtaining a physical space does not protect against conflicts or reprisals. Building a civic partnership with religious and non-religious associations becomes necessary to create paths of coexistence and social cohesion. These are long and difficult processes, which the different minorities face in different ways.

The organisational structure and seniority, together with the degree of institutionalisation, are incisive factors: the secular experience of Turin's

Judaism, or the high national and international structure of Scientology, constitute conspicuous organisational capitals, which religious organisations born from the most recent migrations still do not have, or only partially. The resources that an international macro-organisation such as the Church of Scientology is able to deploy locally are different from the investment for a small Islamic place of worship which, often results from the initiative ‘of a group, or an individual, who with their economic resources rents a room and opens it to the community’, as one representative from Turin reminds us.

Thus, the different spatial strategies in place emerge. Judaism, which in Turin does not seek new spaces but maintains the existing ones, draws on the 8x1000 fiscal contributions, organises internal fundraising and sporadically requests funds for religious buildings, in a private and public mix. Scientology, with a purely private initiative, invests its own funds in buildings already destined for services and employs a range of professionals, from property search to purchase, from the design of the spaces to the request for permits, up to the realisation of the works.

Private initiative is also used by the various Islamic organisations who, except in rare cases of foreign financial support, can only count on internal fundraising, and they turn to real estate agencies to identify commercial spaces – the least expensive – to convert to services and employ a smaller number of professionals or, in the absence of adequate funds, rely on volunteers. Orthodoxy, financed by diocese and patriarchal funds and internal collections, set up in legally recognised places of worship thanks to the private initiative of the Catholic diocese, in Turin has so far tried in vain the road of building through public dialogue. In an attempt to find stable spaces to be transformed into places of worship, some have followed the same path as Islam, associationism for religious purposes; a path undertaken first of all by those who can count on scarce organisational resources, such as unrecognised autonomous churches or minor patriarchates.

Therefore, instead of urban expansion or redevelopment projects, the positioning of the new minorities refers to two criteria, relating first of all to the choice of the area: *i*) proximity – the proximity to areas with the greatest demand for religious assistance (e.g. neighbourhoods with a high concentration of residential areas or high attendance for study and work), and *ii*) nodality – the correspondence with infrastructures and reference points for city traffic (such as railway stations, ring roads, motorway junctions).

In the case of Islam, above all, non-compliance with building regulations can be costly: in the absence of a favourable urban regime, publicly overexposed and subject to stringent controls, Muslim organisations may find itself with a structure declared unusable, reduced capitals due to the useless work carried out, with no community space and no liquidity or guarantees to offer for loans.

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Settlement in areas for religious facilities and buildings for suitable use is decidedly more sporadic: this criterion seems to be favoured by the organisations with the most capital – at least cultural and economic. With the exception of the Orthodox social capital which, with the support of the Catholic dioceses, leads to settlement in buildings already destined for worship; for all the other denominations the opposite is the case: the regularisation of the space takes place later, depending on – and in support of – the persistence of the place and the political support obtained by the organisation.

The visibility of places of worship is very much absent among the criteria for the positioning of minority religions in the city: their recognisability, monumentality, beauty, architectural dialogue with the urban panorama, symbolic dialogue with history and religious identity, and socio-anthropological dialogue with residents are mostly lacking, except in peculiar cases.

7. Conclusions

There are still three key issues in the debate, which could be summarised by the 3Rs: Representation, Redress, Review. Starting from the issue of representation, it is essential to understand “who represents who”. Grasping the real significance of religious associations, and their bond with the whole communities of believers, is no trivial matter – especially locally, where negotiations take place in a climate of increasing competition among civil-society organisations for ever-diminishing public resources. Numerousness, historical presence, diffusion throughout the socio-economic fabric of various contexts, active participation in cultural and charitable initiatives promoted by institutions and associations, all contribute to give a hearing to minority religions, and demands who are politically confined in the request for places of worship.

This, however, is only one side of the coin. The other concerns informal means of representation, translated into encouraging organisational systems, which are closer to the public: from neighbourhood round-table debates to gathering in community meeting-places. It is not easy to identify the last, as a lot of research pointed out in various contexts. At the same time, working on redressing the imaginary on religious diversity among citizens who belong to the religion of majority has been identified as one of the key policy actions. Indeed, setting up research initiatives and facilitating inter-institutional collaboration to strengthen informative initiatives, updating images and improving opportunities of knowledge and chatting directly with the representatives of the *otherness*, i.e. mainly the Muslims and the Orthodox and their various and heterogeneous groups, from adults to young people, from

men to women. Cultural and social capitals also matter and sometimes these variables could mark a generational difference. This is very particular in the case of Muslims. Even if studies (Conti, 2016; Zanfrini, 2020) revealed a cautious, softly-softly attitude, behind the lines on the part of young Muslims towards putting forward their point of view, things seem to be changing: second-generation visibility and self-promotion have grown. This process leads to the third issue, dealing with a review of policies and the institutional setting.

In Turin, at least, minorities have so far been able to count on a positive and welcoming institutional climate that avoids forcing the links among immigration, poverty, places of worship and community capitals, applying flexibility – and the contribution of a generalised inattention – to remedy legislative gaps. In response to the criticism of the political opposition in the city council, a system of government has unfolded in Turin which – thanks to the role and position of secular and religious actors – has brought religion to the centre of institutional representation and social planning. The (political) definition of (bureaucratic) strategies and practices, guaranteeing the possibility of legitimate alternatives to formally defined places of worship, has indeed allowed the recognition and consolidation of existing places, organisations and communities but, on the other hand, it has also contributed to the material and symbolic invisibility of the religious settlements of new minorities, and encouraged adaptation rather than building from scratch.

Above all, the symbolic and material dimension of the pyramid of rights and the disconnection of administrative practice from constitutional principles stand out. Even in a local institutional context, which is largely favourable to religious diversity, minorities and the inclusion of immigrants, the system of state legal recognition permeates the organisational culture of public administration, constituting impassable barriers between *de jure* and *de facto* religions. This discrimination produces inequalities that fuel existing asymmetries, to which religious formations try to respond with the resources and means at their disposal. By rewarding legally recognised actors with privileged forms of support – such as access to funds or land for religious building – public institutions strengthen the position and power of established organisations in the national religious field. By excluding those without legal recognition from the allocation of resources, public institutions hinder attempts to improve the condition of outsider denominations, contributing to define the marginality of their positioning in the local and national religious field.

As emerged by the analysis of archive documents, in the case of Turin the pressure from the political opposition in the city council since September 2001 caused an overexposure of Islam, forcing city administration to focus on the Muslim population and its organisations, often forgetting other less threatened denominations, such as Christian Orthodoxies. Above all, an open institutional

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climate towards religious minorities, including those migration-related, at a local level may not be sufficient to overcome the inequalities and obstacles imposed by national laws and politics. The pyramid of rights is the cause of asymmetries and inequalities that even good local practices struggle to remove; the unpreparedness of public administrators may exacerbate those inequalities, as in the case of access to regional funds for religious building mentioned earlier. Moreover, elections can change the orientation of local government, and so the fate of minorities is completely in the hands of the arbitrary power of politics.

Finally, the symbolic value of legal recognition by the state reverberates on the public perception of religions and their organisations, further penalising those that do not enjoy recognition. Already endowed with little symbolic and material capital, subaltern minorities are unable to realise the conditions necessary to emancipate themselves and improve their positioning in the religious field. They cannot access public aid, and thus cannot structure themselves sufficiently (physically, or politically) to obtain legal recognition; and without legal recognition, they struggle to improve their capital endowment.

Within this framework, relations within the religious field constitute a further element of difficulty. Turin represents an open and pluralist local context, where experiences of interreligious and interinstitutional collaboration (such as the institutional Interfaith Committee and other spontaneous networks) represent a flagship on the Italian scene. Yet the cooperation that is well expressed at the local level of the urban religious field does not lead to set up a national collective initiative, which could exert pressure on the political field to revise the laws on religious associations. The agency of *de jure* and *de facto* minorities would benefit from the support of well-established organisations; but such a national alliance is still a long way off, and the local level does not seem influential enough to change the national *status quo*, where the defence of privileged positions still seems to prevail, encouraging a competitive approach that contributes to the fragmentation of the religious field and the marginalisation of non-established religious organisations.

However, beneath the confessional structures and infrastructures, all those residents, especially immigrants, who are guilty of identifying themselves with a religion not recognised by political discretion, are the ones who suffer the greatest consequences. They are forced to make daring adaptations to practice worship, to exercise sociality, to access the services offered by community spaces. The shortcomings recorded in the current *status quo* particularly burden residents of foreign origin and groups with a migration background. Along with their religious organisations, the living conditions and needs of a portion of the population – over-represented in xenophobic campaigns but without a voice on the national political agenda – remain in the shadows. Minority places of worship then become conquered and liberated urban spaces, an expression of

the right to the city: their preservation means the survival of the communities that inhabit them, the cultures that identify with them, the collective practices that take place there, and the values and bonds that derive from them.

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