

Research Project

Urban Green Religions? Religion in Low Carbon Transitions in two Western European Cities

Third-party funded project

Project title Urban Green Religions? Religion in Low Carbon Transitions in two Western European Cities

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Project Website <https://greenreligion.theologie.unibas.ch/de/urban-green-religions/>

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This research project explores the role of religion in urban low carbon transitions. As Western European countries struggle to implement more sustainable forms of living, vast research is being conducted to study and inform these transitions processes. Sustainability transitions research has highlighted the role of actors from a variety of social spheres in promoting low carbon transitions. However, it has thus far ignored religion as a potentially important factor, despite the growing number of academic contributions in religious studies that underscore its role in promoting low carbon transitions. In particular, religion's impact on current low carbon transitions in cities remains largely unexplored. This research project addresses this research gap by studying how religion manifests itself in urban low carbon transition processes.

The research project combines insights from (a) sustainability transition studies, (b) sociological theory, and (c) contributions to the debate on religion and ecology, to evolve a framework for the study of religion in low carbon transitions. This framework identifies two ways in which religion may become manifest in urban low carbon transitions: (a) religious actors (e.g. Christian churches) acting as "service providers" for low carbon transitions, contributing to these processes with specific functions (i.e. public lobbying, materialization of transitions, environmental value dissemination); and (b) "non-religious" actors involved in low carbon transitions employing religion in their communication (e.g. politicians referring to the sacredness of nature). Accordingly, the proposed research will focus on two potential manifestations of religion in urban low carbon transitions: (a) contributions from religious actors to these transitions, (b) religion manifesting itself in the environmental engagement of "non-religious" actors.

Focusing on these two types of actors, the project will undertake research in two benchmark cities with multiple research methods, including qualitative interviews, analysis of document material, and participative observation. A comparative analysis of the results from the cities will provide first empirical insights into the roles of religion in urban low carbon transitions and thereby contribute to the debate on religion and sustainability. Emphasizing a, to date, neglected factor, the project endeavours to promote a more encompassing and inclusive understanding of sustainable transitions, which may reveal new possibilities for advancing these transformation processes.

Keywords Religion; Sustainability; Low Carbon Transitions; Green Religion; Ecology; Cities; Energy; Spirituality

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