

***Social Space and Religious Culture (1300-1800)***  
Workshop II of the Academic Network  
'Social Sites – Öffentliche Räume – Lieux d'échanges'  
**30 November – 2 December 2006**  
**Technical University of Dresden (Germany)**

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***Opening Remarks***

[Welcome]

*Introduction:*

The workshop intends to investigate the relationship between religious culture and space in the late medieval and early modern period. We have two main focuses: firstly, the extent to which religious culture relies on a clearly defined space; secondly, the development of church space as a characteristic feature of Christianity, therefore taking non-Christian religious sites or confrontations between different religious cultures into consideration. As our approach is inspired by agency theories, we are less interested in the purely material aspects of religious sites, but in questions of representation, perception, design, construction and use and misuse of sacred spaces. Finally, we aim to gain insights into changes and continuities in the long-term relationship between space and religion.

A more recent historical problem is that of the closure of churches due to financial difficulties, but also resulting from the shrinking of parishes and empty church benches on Sundays. The steadily updated article 'Kirchensterben' (i.e. the dying or closing of churches) in the Web-based encyclopedia *Wikipedia* is suggestive of the significance of this problem. Today, at least in Western civilization, we find more examples of the closing or reuse of churches than of reconstructions or new building projects – with some famous exceptions, such as the Church of our Lady (or the New Synagogue) at Dresden.

In late medieval and early modern times, despite well-known examples such as the destruction of mosques during the Spanish *reconquista*, early modern iconoclasm or attacks against church buildings and synagogues during the era of confessionalization, we encounter the opposite trend: the construction, renovation or conversion of church buildings and other religious sites. Yet the early Reformation era as well as the pietistic movement of the seventeenth century also illustrate that church buildings and church services are not necessarily dependant on each other: Luther asserted that church spaces were not sacred spaces and that other places could be made over for worship (at the marketplace, near a fountain).

In anthropological terms, to what extent do religious cultures rely on exactly defined spaces? What types of spaces were produced by various religious cultures? What of the emergence and the disappearance of religious spaces, especially during periods of conflict and crisis? We are thinking of small as well as of large spaces, of virtual as well as of concrete, of ephemeral as well as of institutionalised. Types of religious space taken into consideration include religious sites (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples), building complexes (church and churchyard, cemeteries), landscapes, networks, sacred topographies, virtual or imagined spaces, and atmospheric spaces. What types of space are produced in a context of syncretism, may it be successive (like in colonial contexts) or simultaneous?

*Theoretical orientations:*

1. The 'spatial approach' of the network: a. the distinction between place and space (= Ort / Raum? = lieux / espace?); b. the constitution of 'space' (a relational approach, i.e. space is socially constructed). For a fuller comprehension of 'space', discourses, perceptions, arrangements, atmosphere / effects, uses / practices and the narrativity of 'space' should be analysed.
2. The criteria for the analysis of religious sites as public (or private) sites: a. multifunctional use; b. openness – exclusiveness – secrecy – closeness; c. time.
3. Spatial figures (with regard to religion): a. isotopes – utopias – heterotopias (Michel Foucault); b. simultaneousness (parallel systems) – superimposition; c. ephemeral – institutionalized sites (and their expressions in material forms or spatial configurations).

*Workshop structure and sessions:*

**Session I:** Introduction – until 3.30 p.m. (coffee break)

**Session II:** Construction and perception of religious space – until 6.30 p.m. (dinner buffet)

**Public Lecture** at 8 p.m.

**Session III:** Religious Sites

**Session V:** Religious Space as Conflict Space

**Session VI:** Sacred Topographies and Spatial Networks

*Geographical scope:*

European Latin Christianity including other religious communities present in Europe or in relationships with Europe (Judaism, Islam)

*Chronological range:*

The late medieval and early modern period with exceptions at both ends (Muslim mosques and cemeteries; the cathedral of Cologne)

[Organisation and announcements]