

Press release

International comparison of religious diversity

NRW graduate school on the regulation of religious diversity enters its second funding phase

Münster/Bochum, October 13, 2020 (exc) The NRW graduate school “Religious Plurality” at the universities of Münster and Bochum is to be extended and will in future examine regional religious diversity in comparison with different countries. This was announced by the University of Münster’s Centre for Religion and Modernity (CRM) and the University of Bochum’s Centre for Religious Studies (CERES) on Tuesday. The graduate school, which will receive 2.3 million Euros in funding from the NRW Ministry of Science from 2021 to mid-2024, explores, for example, country-specific differences in how religious communities regulate themselves, the regulation of religious groups in different economic systems, and how these religious groups are represented in the media and education.

Under the new name “Comparing the regional regulation of religious plurality”, the graduate school will again support five doctoral students each in Münster and Bochum in their doctoral projects. The directors of the graduate school are the political scientist Prof. Dr. Ulrich Willems from the CRM and the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster and the religious scholar Prof. Dr. Volkhard Krech from the RUB. In its first funding phase from 2016 to 2020, the graduate school, under the name “Religious pluralization and its regulation in the region”, explored the challenges of growing religious diversity in the Münsterland and Ruhr area. In the new funding phase, it will again work with partners from the field, such as administration, religious communities, and organizations in civil society.

Religious diversity often poses challenges for societies, say those at CRM and CERES. This is the reason why it is regulated at various levels: through legal regulations governing religious dress or holidays, political instruments and measures taken by civil society such as the German Islam Conference or local initiatives promoting dialogue, economically through membership fees or government grants, or the self-regulation of religious communities, each of which gives itself its own structure in order to function in plural societies.

The different levels of regulating religious diversity will be investigated by the ten doctoral students together with academics from the University of Münster and the University of Bochum, as well as with partners from the field. The graduate school will build on the successful work carried out in its previous phase, when it used the example of North Rhine-Westphalia to examine the regulation of religious diversity and its effects on different areas of society. In its new phase, it will expand its geographical interest to include other regions both in Germany and abroad.

The focus of the new graduate school will be on comparison: How is religious diversity regulated in different countries? Are there local differences in self-regulation within a religious community? What does the economic regulation of religious groups look like in, for example, different economic systems? Which religious communities are portrayed in the media or in the

education system, and how? And which are not taken into account? These and similar questions will be addressed.

In order to establish a link to various disciplines and to enable doctoral theses on very different themes, the graduate school has deliberately chosen a broad concept of regulation. The aim of the graduate school is therefore also to link doctoral students with those academics from different disciplines who are participating, so that they can gain new and exciting research perspectives on religious diversity. Another feature of the graduate school is its close cooperation with partners from the field, e.g. from administration, religious communities, and organizations in civil society, who will help develop questions for the research, identify where action is needed, and work out solutions to practical problems. (CERES/CRM/sca)

Image: Logo graduate school RePliV (Credit: RePliV)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change. The researchers concentrate on the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and on their polytheistic precursors. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025