

The Impact of Spaces and Places on Theories of Religious Education and Socialisation

1 Introduction

In research on religious and spiritual education a variety of space related contents and imaginings can be shown. Equally, the analysis of qualitative interviews shows that narrators frequently use ideas of spaces or memories of places to illustrate their own religiosity or history of development (Kaupp, 2005).

Nevertheless, empirical research which explicitly uses the dimension of time *and* place to access religious education and socialisation or value learning are largely absent. The following article has two aims: on the one hand it is to be shown how different relationships to places and spaces help to understand how individuals develop religiosity through religious experiences which are influenced by the categories of place and space. Especially against the background of current influx of refugees the interconnectedness of space and biography gains an unforeseen explosiveness. On the other hand, the intention is to show that the analysis of spaces and places can be a methodological tool of empirical research that serves qualitative research into processes of religious development and socialisation.

2 The Dimension of Space – a Largely Unexplored Aspect in Religious Education and Socialisation

Despite the fact that our life and its religiosity, spirituality and its values are experienced in time and space, including cultural and contextual differences, any reflection on the dimension of space has been neglected within philosophy, theology, and religious education for a long time. In the historical and theological development, the dimension of time and the idea of a linear (religious) history of development have been at the foreground for a long time. It can be said, however, that religious learning depends on time (historically and in the sense of developmental psychology) and space (cultural, depending on the environment and relational).

As a result of the “spatial turn” in sociology and cultural sciences, space is not only understood as an object, but even more so relationally, as constructed by actions: people create spaces (see Döring & Thielmann, 2008; Dünne, Doetsch & Günzel, 2012 and Rau, 2013 give an overview of the discussion of the category ‘space’ in different academic disciplines).

It has only been since this “turn” that the dimension of space is being considered in educational studies (Becker, Bilstein & Liebau, 1997; Westphal, 2007; Coelen,

Schröteler-von Brandt & Zeisig, 2012; Burghardt, 2014) and in theology (Jooß, 2005; Beyrich, 2011; Metzger & Pahud de Mortanges, 2014; Kaupp, 2016), too.

So far, there has been little (empirical) theological and didactical research on this topic. How processes of religious learning and religious socialization are shaped due to this spatial dimension is therefore a relevant object of research.

3 The Interplay between Religious Education or Socialisation and Space

Religions, religiosity and spirituality do not only express themselves in contents and ethics, but also in the category of space, as sacred places and ecclesiastical buildings show.

While, in church architecture and liturgy, the meaning of the place and the design of space is an ever-present consideration, in thoughts on religious processes of transmission, the question of space tends to be more of a side phenomenon. Religious acquisition processes do not, however, only relate to dimensions of knowledge. Based on Hemel (1988), religiosity can be differentiated into the following aspects: In addition to “religious contentuality” as the knowledge of contents, “religious sensibility” as an approach to religious questions “religious expressive behaviour” as the ability to behave according to the codes of a religion, “religious communication” as the ability to talk about religion and the “religiously motivated life arrangements” as the action component are central dimensions of religiosity. It is, therefore, necessary to check whether the acquisition of these competencies needs different rooms and atmospheres.

The significance of different spaces for different dimensions of religious learning can be clarified using the church building: while the nave serves, amongst others, the acquisition or the deepening of religious contents and the shared expression of faith, the adoration chapel is more of a place for private religious expression, religious communication takes place in the parish hall, and life arrangements that are religiously motivated are, most of the time, made outside the church building, in spaces of everyday life. These places are different from each other, frequently, in the room quality as well as the size and the seating arrangement. This is, however, little researched from the perspective of the pedagogy of religion.

Susanne Rau defines place/locus as “a certain singled out place in a space. This can be meant in a general and abstract as well as a symbolic ‘holy place, memorable place’ or concrete way.” (Rau, 2013, 58)

To examine the category “space” from a practical-theological perspective, as a first step, a spectrum of places is highlighted where religion locates itself in a room and a space. The leading thought is that these rooms shape religious education and socialisation as much as people and relationships. Therefore, they are a

starting point for the academic reconstruction of processes of religious education and socialisation.

Generally, the relationship between space and religion has to be looked at in a differentiated manner: There is a need to examine whether places are shaped in a religious way by how they are constituted or whether people assign a religious space dimension to a place due to their personal experience of it. That is, a room is being experienced as being shaped by religion because it enables or enabled individual experiences with religion (cf. Dörnemann, 2015, 39–47). This differentiation is important from the point of view of pedagogy of religion, as, although the experience of spaces that are shaped by religion can be stage-managed (didactically), this does not apply to the personal religious experience of space.

This relationship between space, religious education and socialisation will be shown using four different place qualities.

a) Places in nature

Religions have “holy places” in nature, places that are said to have special power: Ayers Rock in Aboriginal culture, the Ganges for Hindus, or the dolmen in Brittany. The multitude of publications on places of energy or power, magical and holy places or the design elements of Feng Shui show the great interest in this field, which is fed by different religious and spiritual traditions. Even though these places are not explicitly said to hold power in monotheistic religions, there are, however, spaces in Christianity, Judaism and Islam that are revered especially, as they are linked to the memory of an important event in the history of the respective religion. They are often qualified as places of pilgrimage, and not few of them were cultic locations in pre-historic times. It remains to be determined whether these places have a function that transcends culture, and is archetypical, as assumed in psycho-analytical theories (cf. the representation of elementary shapes of covering such as roof, wall, door and window in their history of development in: Funke, 2006) or whether these places are shaped differently by social and cultural processes, and are thus also subject to processes of change. In addition to these, there are places in nature that are definitely qualified by such processes, such as places of pilgrimage, cemeteries or wayside crosses.

When examining processes of religious development it needs to be queried which spaces are mentioned and how they are qualified. This can serve the improvement of processes of religious education.

b) Liturgical places

The buildings of the religions prove that the creation of sacral spaces has always been ascribed great significance during the history of humankind. Works of art were made with great effort, which could achieve their perfect form only through the collaboration of many. Although religious buildings outlive many generations, the way the respective founding generation perceived life is materialised in them – at least for the Western hemisphere. A Gothic cathedral is shaped by a different imagining of space than a modern church. The imaginings of space are determined by time and culture and also embody strategies of hierarchisation (cf. Ricker, 2014).

Liturgical places are, on the one hand, architecturally built for liturgy. On the other, they are spaces that are shaped by the liturgy or other practices, the effect of which can be experienced differently for different practices: in a church, both a service or a concert can take place. A service can be, depending on the date in the liturgical year, or the biographical situation of the person who participates in the service, a space of remembrance, of joy, of grief, of prayer, of an encounter with God or of boredom. On the perspective of the aesthetics of effect cf. Bethge, 2015. The dimension of liturgical spaces can be observed as differentiated in a temporal as well as a cultural dimension.

There are numerous publications on the pedagogy of church, sacred and divine space (Glockzin-Bever & Schwebel, 2002; Klie & Dressler, 2003; Goecke-Seischab & Ohlemacher, 2010; Dörnemann, 2011; Rupp, 2017). They primarily look into the didactical question of how a sacral space can be made accessible for people to whom it is foreign. Lately empirical research starts to be conducted on the pedagogy of sacred spaces (cf. Kindermann & Riegel, forthcoming; de Wildt, 2015).

It has not yet been empirically researched, however, which impact sacral spaces have on religious experiences and religious socialisation, or which quality liturgical spaces are assigned in biographical processes of development. Why are churches seen to be positive or negative? Are there certain styles which have a particular meaning for religious processes of learning? It should, however, also be examined what was taught, content-wise, in liturgical places, and which objects were of particular importance for this.

c) Everyday spaces

It is not only at holy places and in liturgical rooms that people encounter religion, but also in everyday spaces: the evening prayer of children does, presumably, take place in children's bedrooms. Religious festivals in the family are being celebrated in the living room, and catechesis leading up to first Holy Communion takes place here or in a more or less appealingly designed room of the parish centre. Religious

education lessons take place – depending on schools – in the classroom, in the video room of the school or in a specifically designed religion room. Questions about death and resurrection may well be asked in a sterile sick room in hospital.

While nature spaces are being revered as holy spaces due to their special atmosphere and liturgical spaces have been created for religious liturgy, it is not an idea of religious design that is at the foreground, but others, for example the communication or withdrawal function of a place or the possibility of using it in a number of ways.

Increasingly, the spaces that are no religious spaces (of learning), are nowadays explicitly “charged” with spiritual or religious elements, and so a mixture of space design and religion develops in areas that are not traditionally associated with religion. For example, the headline “The way to an architecture of ritual” is not followed by an article on the construction of religious buildings, but a description of “culture in the bathroom” with which a plumbing company advertises its products (Firma Dornbracht, n. d.). The connection between the products and the allusion to transcendence increases the value of the way they are presented.

Crosslinks can be made between religious ritual, liturgical places and rituals and places of everyday life (e. g. baptismal font and bathroom). But after the separation of the holy and the profane in today’s societal context the question as to which dimensions of religiosity a space and the design of a space enable, and which they close off, becomes all the more relevant.

d) Museums

Museums do not only shape the perception of religion by exhibitions on religious topics, but also through the architecture of museums themselves. The objects of an exhibition are, at the same time, knowledge and value assets of a culture, and so further an encounter with religion as an element of culture. It is interesting that museums themselves are designed according to quasi “sacral programmes of space” (Offe, 2004, 121). Accordingly there are parallels in the behaviour of visitors to museums and to churches: slow movements, quiet demeanour, and often special clothing.

It is interesting to look into how religion is perceived in a museum. One aspect is which religious experiences are had faced with a religious exhibit and how visitors describe it. Which dimensions of religion are addressed by an exhibition and how do people describe processes of religious learning in the museum in contrast to processes of religious learning in churches or other religiously qualified places.

e) Virtual spaces

While the rooms that were presented up until now were linked to concrete places, virtual space has a different quality of space.

It is interesting that information technology, in particular, uses highly spatial metaphors, such as internet access, open space, data highway, storage. Paradoxically, the computer embodies a narrowing of social space as well as an unlimited widening of the possibilities of the internet.

“‘Cyberspace’ and ‘virtual reality’ imply an explicitly spatial concept, which is, however, in no way comparable to the everyday reality we perceive. (...) The medial appearance of a place is precisely a picture of it, and not the space itself.” (Metten, 2007, 237.)

It is largely impossible to say, yet, how virtual spaces (will) change social and communicative behaviour and also theological thinking (cf. Kaupp, 2010). Virtual rooms make it possible to be in a number of places at the same time and to communicate with each other independently of that via a number of senses (language, writing, picture).

This overview shows the plurality of places which can become religious or spiritual spaces.

4 Biography, Religiosity and Space

After the interplay between space and religion was discussed, this is now to be looked at as the third aspect in the context of biography. This is because processes of (religious) learning can only be understood in front of the backdrop of concrete biographies, that is, processes of religious learning are always biographical.

“Without biography there is no learning, and without learning no biography” (Alheit & von Felden, 2009, 9). This statement frames the fact that processes of formation, education and socialization are co-determined by the experiences and the life contexts of both the teacher and the learner. This proposition can be extended to include the dimension of space: without space there is no biography, without biography no space. Space should, in this, not be understood statically as a container, but relationally as constructed through action: people create spaces. The topic is therefore how processes of religious learning and value education are due to the dimension of space.

The two aspects, how space is meaningful individually and socially for religious learning, and which starting points space offers for research into processes of religious learning, is to be shown here.

a) The biographical perspective

Narratives and novels about life stories open up the vista of the great significance that places and spaces (church, room, nature) have in general (cf. Berghaus, 2015), but also and particularly for the representation of religion and religiosity (cf. Assmann, 2010, 298–339). The memory of certain spaces and atmospheres are often precisely the access point to a religious life story.

Memories are linked to a concrete place, to a *physical space*. A perceptible, three dimensional coordinate system is being remembered. But this *place* becomes meaningful through the people who enliven it: they give places an *atmosphere* and allow them to become *spaces* at which memories are stored, moods are mirrored and behaviour has certain boundaries. In this context the *body as space*, as human interior space which interacts with the exterior space, is a further perspective on space which holds pivotal significance. It is with the body that optical, acoustic, olfactory and haptic impressions are experienced: space, light, sounds, smells. (On how space is constituted in the sensory organs and on the question of which characteristics of the space are relevant, cf. from a theological perspective Joos, 2005, 79–91; from an anthropological perspective Diaconu, 2012).

Atmosphere and *body* cannot be defined independently of the subject. This phenomenon can be described in two ways, departing from the concept of sensitivities:

“‘*Sich befinden*’ means, in German, both to be *present in a space*, and on the other hand *to feel in a certain way*, to be in a certain mood. Both is connected and is, in a way, one: my sensitivities are determined by the space I am in. Of course space is not only what I experience of it, namely the atmosphere. The space also has its constitution as a thing in time and space and many things that belong to it do not have an impact on the way I feel.” (Böhme, 2013, 121–122.)

The terms “atmosphere” and “space of bodily presence” allow us to understand the design or the arrangement of a space not from the point of view of the aesthetics of the space, but also in the light of the aesthetics of reception, of the impact on those who are – “*sich befinden*” in both its meanings – in the room. For the “creation of space” in a practical-theological perspective, it is necessary to take into account both perspectives.

b) The social perspective

Space is also a social category. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are being decided via the social space. The codes of the respective social spaces, i. e. language, symbols, things and their evaluations, make it possible to observe

“through which discursive strategies in social and cultural theory ‘space’ appeared firstly as an *instrument of placing self and other which gives identity and determines differences* and could secondly become a *metaphor for social systems*.” (Bormann, 2001, 266–267.)

The concept of an “orientation towards the social space” has been developed in social care and youth work since the beginning of the 1990s. (On this concept and the debate about it cf. Früchtel & Cyprian & Budde, 2013; Noack, 2015). It does not define ‘space’ as an object (container), but

“as an activity that relates to other people. Space is relation and is created through relationships. The part of the city in which one is at home emerges through contacts and connections that the person has there. Via the friend in Singapore, a street does, as a manner of speaking, become Singapore. The focus of the orientation in social space is the relation.” (Früchtel, 2014, 6.)

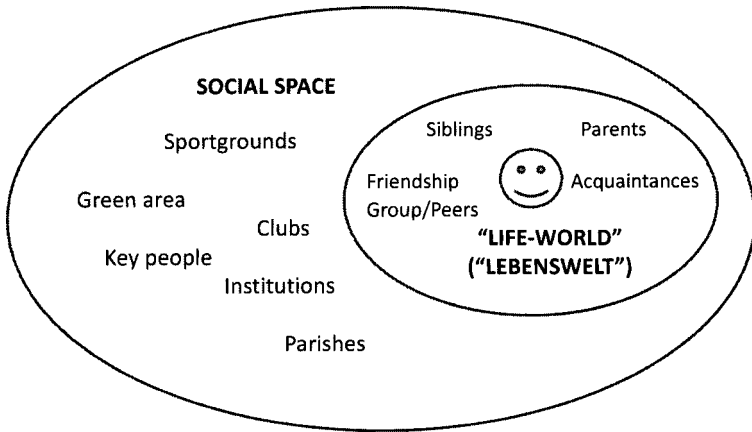


Figure 1: Life-world and social space (Noack, 2015, 115)

The context of life can, thus, be differentiated into “life-world” (“Lebenswelt”) and social space: “The spatial dimension of individual living environments (“life-world”) can extend across *different geographically determinable places*” (Noack, 2015, 77).

This concept can inspire processes of religious and value education. A religious education that pertains to the social space will, as a first step, analyze this space, and is also different when it comes to its content, due to the structures of different social spaces. Religious education then defines the processes of religious learning as a process that is shaped by space relations. This is why faith cannot be learned out of context. This fact is valid for processes of value education and socialisation in a similar way.

Theological pioneers in this were the “theologies of liberation” of Latin America. They stressed the meaning of the respective ‘space’ as do the theological approaches from Africa and Asia. The social space has, if you will, an educational function. The orientation towards the social space prevents the danger of an individualistic narrowing which describes faith as an exclusively inward matter. It fosters and demands the shared acting of teachers and learners.

5 The Spatial Dimension and its Impact on the Research of Religion and Spirituality

What does the dimension of space contribute to the exploration of religion, spirituality and values in a context of religious plurality, as well as plurality of values and secularity, with traditional religious and value traditions as just one option among others? This is not about playing the spatial dimension off against the temporal one, but about achieving continuative results by being mutually complementary. It is possible to reconstruct, via the research of spatial reference, how spaces and religion are connected, but also which qualities of space are meaningful for the development of religion, spirituality and values, in sacred spaces and beyond. Accordingly, the dimension of space can provide access to processes of religious development, in which a) a biographical, b) a structural and c) a social dimension can be differentiated.

a) Analysis of spaces as an entry point into biography

Even though there is a large number of religious biographies and although sometimes theological constructs are supported by an idea of space, e. g. Teresa of Avila’s “interior castle”, it is surprising how little researched the dimension of space is biographically. Historically-hermeneutically it is possible to identify the topographic self in religious biographies and, e. g., compare it in contemporary terms.

There is scope for empirical-hermeneutical research into which spaces are of importance for the development of individual religiosity and spirituality in contemporary biographical stories and narrative interviews.

The spaces described in autobiographies are always spaces of the self, as “they are being devised by the narrating self and experienced by the remembered self” (Berghaus, 2015, 11). Berghaus calls this self “topographical self”. If an analysis does not only concentrate on the “narrative self”, but also on the “topographical self”, space, as well as time, can be perceived as an element of the construction of biographical representations and opens up facets which would escape a viewpoint that restricts itself to the dimension of time. It opens up the possibility of seeing the metaphorical and imagery side of the construction of religious biography.

b) Examining the meaning of sacred spaces for life stories

A further option is to conduct empirical research on the effect of different sacred spaces. Which qualities of sacred spaces are being experienced as furthering or hindering individual religiosity? Are there differences, in this, between different age groups, religions and cultures?

There is still plenty of space for this type of research into the interconnectedness of relating to spaces and the Christian message from a practical-theological perspective in general, or from a didactics of religion perspective more specifically.

c) Concepts of space as cultural and social givens

As spaces always reflect cultural as well as social conditions, a spatial dimension of religion, spirituality and values makes it possible to carry out research that compares cultures and religions. Questions such as the following could be directive in this:

- Which topographies can be found in the religious history of development of different times or cultures? (One example: Is Teresa of Avila's "interior castle" still a metaphor, today, which serves an individual spiritual quest, or is there, in a society that is increasingly mobile, more value attributed to the path an individual takes rather than a fixed location)?
- In how far do the topoi of holy texts of different religions correlate? (Do, for example, Christians and Hindus have the same space metaphors)? What are the consequences for interreligious learning of different space metaphors?

The concepts of space have to be examined in the light of their structures and their function. This is not about researching traditional religious functions, for example the worship function of a church, but to discover religious functions which people assign to completely different places and spaces.

This is a new perspective, which grasps religious experience beyond the traditional religious practices as well as the diversity of lived religion. A spatial turn will be a challenge as well as a benefit for theories of spirituality and religious education and socialization.

Under the condition that religion or spirituality reveals itself not only through its contents, but also through the ways in which it expresses itself, the question is, equally, one of the pedagogy of religion. The development of religious spaces and ways of expression is all the more important today, as more and more people have yet to be introduced to forms of lived faith, after the collapse of milieus shaped by Christian habits. They enter, so to say, into unknown spaces. Regarding education processes, the question needs to be asked which meaning different spaces and

atmospheres have for processes of religious education. As the empirical research to the interplay between religious learning and spaces has yet to be done, it was only possible to describe this dimension hermeneutically. The aim was to show in which dimensions a qualitative research of spaces can develop and deepen the results of qualitative biography research (Kaupp, 2015) from the perspective of the pedagogy of religion.

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