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CoMRel

Popular presentation – results– activities per 1 October 2015

This project studies the intertwined role of media and religion in conflicts and tensions in contemporary Norway and the other Scandinavian societies under the acronym **CoMRel** (Co for Conflict, M for Media and Rel for Religion). When this report is given by the end of September 2015 the project has been active one year. It lasts until the end of 2017.

The main aim of the project is to examine how religion in public spaces becomes thematised and enacted through mass media and social media, and further articulated in social interaction, both as the object of conflict and as resources to handle tensions. In this first project year theoretical work has been done on the relation between media coverage and the following social interaction.

Through empirical studies of such processes, the project will develop knowledge about the changing conditions for social interaction and communication at times of conflict.

The social tensions that are addressed revolve around uses of various public spaces. The studies relate to three arenas where people engage in conflicts over religious symbols, items and claims that are made visible through the media:

The first subproject concerns contested media voices in the main public service broadcasters in Scandinavia. In Norway the debate that followed in social media when a news anchor was prohibited from wearing a tiny cross while presenting the news, is being studied. The goal is to contribute to an in-depth understanding of audience interactions and provide new insights on the multiple ways in which media audiences discuss and shape debates on media and religion.

The Danish case is the TV-satire show "Still Veiled" and its influence on public discussions and controversies concerning religion. The programme addresses various stereotypes and prejudices flourishing in the ongoing Danish public discourse about Islam, integration and national identity. Focusing on the intense public debates engulfing the TV-show this case study contributes to an in-depth understanding of how preexisting framings of religion inform public discussions of religion and the potentials of a public service broadcaster to influence and inspire such debate through satire.

The Swedish participants in the project study content and interaction around two programmes: a dialogue on TV between representatives from different religions and a current affairs program on "people and faith" in radio. The program aspires to represent cultural and religious diversity, counter prejudices and stereotypes and include new and "unexpected" voices. The analysis focus on how this policy is mirrored in the actual programmes.

The second subproject looks into the ways in which media portray and enact religion and ethnicity in public conflicts and it further investigates the dynamics of religious-secular interaction in localities in Kristiansand and Oslo with a strong Muslim presence. The project particularly focuses on interfaith and secular dialogue encounters and initiatives. Of special interest is the exploration of the degree to which dialogue organizations, initiatives, representatives and members rely on mass and social media to handle religio-ethnic conflicts. This subproject is in its beginning as it started right over the summer 2015.

The third subproject enters classrooms in public schools with pupils from varied religious backgrounds. The project explores classroom interaction on religion and conflict in Norwegian secondary schools, with a specific focus on the subject "Religion and Ethics". The classroom studies in Norway started early autumn 2015. The experiences from Norway will later be compared to a similar study in Sweden.

CoMRel did in April 2015 undertake a survey on attitudes and practices in relation to media and religion. The survey was based on population wide web-panels with approximately 1000 respondents 16 years and above in each of the three countries Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Islam is considered a threat to own national culture by approximately half of the Scandinavian respondents, some more than half of the Danes, less than half of the Swedes, with the Norwegians in-between. More than half of the respondents in each country discuss news on religious extremism with others at least once a month, in Norway somewhat more frequent than in Denmark and Sweden. The survey is under analysis.

Researchers from the universities in Uppsala and Copenhagen contribute to the international comparison in the project. The Norwegian national collaboration is between the University of Agder, MF Norwegian School of Theology and the University of Oslo.

The project is theoretically informed by research on media and religion, on what is termed the "mediatization" of religion. This concerns how culture and social relations are changed by the intensification of mediated communication in contemporary society, including the moulding of religious imaginations and interactions.