

# *Temples, Cupolas, Minarets: Public Space as Contested Terrain in Contemporary Switzerland*

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Cities and their urban spaces are areas of negotiation and domains of contest for reputation, prestige and power. Buildings and edifices play a prominent role in the competitive match for recognition, acknowledgment and respect. This observation applies to the competition of varying social groups within a town or city, as well as competition between different cities themselves. Some city councils opt to restyle central areas by erecting unique edifices in an unparalleled and grandiose architecture such as a concert hall (such as in Sydney and forthcoming in Hamburg), an opera (Oslo), finance towers (Frankfurt) or a world trade centre (New York). Such new prominent and exceptional buildings are usually very visible. Architecturally they dominate the urban public space in prestigious places, providing reputation to the builders as well as the city. Often, such constructions are meant to represent a city's vision for dynamic growth, novelty and openness for innovation and experimental spirit.

However, this observation is not restricted to modern cosmopolitan cities in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Similar developments occurred centuries ago as well. In those pre-modern days, buildings of representation to dominate public space had been cathedrals and churches, parliaments and court houses, palaces and castles, institutions of advanced learning and universities. Such buildings served as the city's symbolic centre and heart of power and not everyone was granted access to such buildings. Indeed, restrictions of access underscored and symbolised the status quo of power.

As a scholar studying religions and men's religious practices and concepts comparatively, my research concentrates on constructions such as temples, churches, mosques, pagodas, and *gurdwaras* (the "temple" of the Sikhs). These, at times, huge and high towering religious buildings dominated for long the public space in a city. Indeed, in Europe, churches most often had been the highest man-built points of reference in public space and church towers were visible from far away. For many towns and cities, this observation is still valid.

This observation is important as the established public space of a city with its churches and church towers is subject to change in Switzerland (and certainly elsewhere). During the recent decade, immigrant minorities such as Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs have built sizeable religious buildings, prominently visible in public. For example, a Thai-Buddhist monastery and temple, architecturally markedly visible from far away, was inaugurated in 2003. Likewise, Sikhs from India opened their marble-like *gurdwara* with its 45 feet towering dome in 2006. In particular, current plans of Muslim societies to build publicly visible minarets attached to existing mosques, created controversies and resistance. In mid-2008, several spokesmen of the right-wing Swiss People's Party and of a fringe conservative Christian party launched a campaign to forbid by law the building of minarets. As these agitators declare, minarets are not religious buildings, but are symbols for a claim to power of Islam. Islam and Muslims are said to infiltrate Swiss society, conquering the public space with visible mosques and minarets. The political campaign against minarets underscores the nature of public space as contested terrain and area of prestige and reputation. Analysed in this perspective, public space carries implicit norms of social inclusion and exclusion and thus ongoing disputes by social groups for conserving or for re-negotiating the status quo.

Following, the article shall clarify the perspective on "public space" in the first part, pointing to the metaphorical rather than place-based approach. The second part shall provide a descriptive account of the changing religious landscape in Switzerland. Whereas in 1970 almost 98 % of Swiss people adhered to one of the Christian churches, the figure had dropped to less than 80 % 30 years later in 2000. Meanwhile sizable minorities of Muslims as well as Buddhist, Hindus, Orthodox Christians and others emerged. This development is predominantly due to processes of immigration and the settlement of people with a faith other than Protestant and Roman Catholic. The third part shall analyse the place of immigrant religions in public space, focusing on recent controversies over "the Islam" and the building of minarets. The fourth part adds a comparative picture, introducing the example of 19<sup>th</sup> century Moorish synagogues built by the Jewish minority as a symbol of political emancipation. A brief conclusion rounds up the paper.

### **Looking at urban public space metaphorically**

Urban historians and social geographers define urban public space as social arenas where all kinds of people meet. Examples of such urban spaces may be market squares, the high street, shopping malls, municipal

parks and green open spaces, public swimming baths, pubs and restaurants, train stations and the post office. These are concrete places where people can go, meet, sit, wait, watch, chat and leave. Some people may feel excluded, i.e. older people in using the city centre market square at night or people with lower salaries banned by prices in pubs and restaurants. On the other hand, people may feel accepted and included on the provision of safety and lighting as well as needed facilities such as suitable seating and public toilets. Of importance is also some freedom and “human unpredictability” – in contrast to over-regulation, sterility and monotony.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to such an approach, the paper looks at urban public space rather metaphorically and less with regard to concrete places and public areas of human gathering and staying. The paper’s interest in urban public space is stimulated by researching the symbolic configuration and the semantic “properties of space”.<sup>2</sup> Public space is conceptualised as a metaphorical terrain inscribed by meanings and significances ascribed by social groups. Public space is not void and neutral; rather it is “filled” with attributed meanings and semantics, hard-won rights and claims for partaking by competing social groups.

As noticed by a variety of studies for Europe and North America,<sup>3</sup> the hitherto uncontested monopoly of Christian churches and towers – dominating the public space – has become questioned due to the emergent plurality of religions. New buildings such as mosques with a cupola and minaret, Buddhist monasteries, Hindu temples and Sikh *gurdwaras* become constructed. Clients of these new religious buildings have been immigrant groups of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh faith who architecturally styled the purposely-built houses according to dominant concepts and images of their country of emigration. To put it in a nutshell, Muslim minarets have become new neighbours to church towers; Buddhist pagodas and Hindu temples display as new landmarks in a town and city. Such changes did not go unnoticed but stimulated debates and controversies, at times developing in fierce local conflicts and heated discussion. In line with the analytical perspective on public space, new semantic players claimed rights for participation while other sociopolitical groups denied such right for access and recognition.

1 Caroline Holland – Andrew Clark – Jeanne Katz – Sheila Peace, *Social Interactions in Urban Public Places*, Bristol: Policy Press 2007; online <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/2017-interactions-public-places.pdf>> [July 3, 2009].

2 Kim Knott, “Spatial Theory and Method for the Study of Religion”, *Temenos* 41, 2005, 153-184: 160.

3 Amongst others, Gerald Parson, *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945*, London: Routledge 1993; Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, San Francisco: Harper 2002; Martin Baumann – Samuel Behloul (eds.), *Religiöser Pluralismus: Empirische Studien und analytische Perspektiven*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2005.

Following second part shall provide a sketch of basic developments and changes of the religious landscape in Switzerland. This will help to contextualise current debates about minarets in this central European nation state.

### **Religions in Switzerland: developments and changes**

Switzerland was formed as a nation state in 1848 though the country and Swiss nation date back their origin to 1291 and the legendary joint alliance of three cantons. Religious freedom and freedom of settlement for all citizens was fully granted in 1874 with the revised constitution. Previously, in most cantons which had been mono-confessional Protestant or Roman Catholic, other faiths and confessions were not allowed and tolerated. This religious coinage of the various cantons still shapes a canton's identity and church-state relationship. Of similar importance in Switzerland is the awareness of four different languages spoken and the federal structure of the twenty-seven cantons, governed quite independently.

As in neighbouring Germany and Austria, Christianity with its various traditions, churches and independent movements dominated the religious landscape almost totally. Up to 1970, 98 % of the Swiss population were members in either the Protestant or Roman Catholic Churches, or in one of the many minority Christian communities. Apart from a very few converts in Buddhist, Baha'i or Theosophical circles, the religious scenery and the public space were undoubtedly dominated by Christian traditions, its churches and church towers. "Religion" in Switzerland was, and to a large extent still is, thought of in Christian terms, religious homogeneity thought of as serving as guarantee of the nation states stability and cohesion.

The arrival of non-Christian religions started with Tibetan refugees and Muslim workers from Turkey and the Balkan in the 1960s. During the 1980s, refugees from South Asia (50,000 Sri Lankan people) and South-east Asia (11,000 Vietnamese and 2,000 Laotian people) as well as from Africa came to Switzerland and applied for asylum. Also, the break up of the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia and its war during the 1990s resulted in tens of thousands of refugees. Albanian and Bosnian Muslims, Serbian Orthodox Christians and Croatian Catholics arrived, though, after several years many returned and were sent back to the newly established Balkan states respectively. Workers and refugees from Turkey, North Africa and Middle Eastern states further multiplied the Islamic plurality in Switzerland.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Martin Baumann, "Researching Religious Diversity in Western Europe: The Study of Diaspora Communities, Religious Conflict, and Public Domain in Germany and Swit-

The national Swiss censuses 1970 to 2000 ascertained the significant change in terms of religion: whereas in 1970, 97.8 % were members of Christian churches or communities, i.e. nearly everyone, the number dropped to 79.3 % of the 7.3 million inhabitants in 2000. In 1970, non-Christian traditions were almost absent, figuring just 0.7 % or some 44,000 people. 30 years later, adherents to Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and other faiths totalled 5.3 % or about 400,000 people. Among the non-Christian religions, the variety of national-linguistically styled Muslim traditions is strongest with some 4.3 % or 311,000 people. The majority of Muslims are of European origin with some 58 % from former Yugoslavia (Albanians, Bosnians).<sup>5</sup> Muslims from Turkey make up 21 % while 11 % are Swiss people with quite a number of former immigrants having acquired Swiss citizenship. 4 % each are Muslims from North and Central Africa and from Asia.<sup>6</sup> Looking back, processes of immigration had been the most decisive factor of the pluralisation of the hitherto bi-confessional nation. It should not go unmentioned that people with no formal religious adherence increased ten-fold from 1.1 % in 1970, multiplying to 11.1 % in 2000. Membership to Christian churches, in particular those of the Protestant Churches, decreased strongly and continuously.<sup>7</sup>

### Debating immigrant religions in public space

Migrants and immigrants settled primarily in the conurbations of Swiss cities and towns as these offered opportunities for work and provided less social discrimination than the villages. Also, settling in or nearby the town and city enabled to meet fellow migrants from the same country and religion. Consequently, towns and cities had been the places and spaces where most religious associations and cultural societies were formed. On a gene-

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zerland", in: K. S. Nathan (ed.), *Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies: Challenges and Prospects for Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States in the New Millennium*, Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung – Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Association for American Studies 2007, 139-157; Martin Baumann – Jörg Stolz (eds.), *Eine Schweiz – viele Religionen: Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2007.

- 5 Samuel M. Behloul, "From 'Problematic' Foreigners to 'Unproblematic' Muslims: Bosniaks in the Swiss Islam-Discourse", *The Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26/2, 2007, 22-36.
- 6 Samuel M. Behloul – Stephan Lathion, "Muslime und Islam in der Schweiz: Viele Gesichter einer Weltreligion", in: Martin Baumann – Jörg Stolz (eds.), *Eine Schweiz – viele Religionen: Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2007, 193-207: 198.
- 7 Claude Bovay, *Religionslandschaft in der Schweiz*, Neuchâtel: Bundesamt für Statistik 2004.

ral pattern, Muslim prayer rooms and mosques, Hindu temples and Buddhist pagodas found a home in private houses, converted industrial buildings and factory halls. Often, the premises have been situated in industrial areas and less prestigious living and working places. Generally, such sacred sites are not to be found in a city centre, but at its periphery. And, with a few exceptions, the places of these religious congregations are invisible and hidden, architecturally unmarked and unnoticed as religious sites.

This situation started to change in recent ten years. Previously, only few purpose-built and publicly visible constructions came into being: a Tibetan monastery inaugurated in canton Zurich in 1968, an Armenian Orthodox church built in Geneva in 1969 as well as a Greek Orthodox church built in Zurich in 1985. Importantly in view of current controversies, also two mosques with a cupola and minaret were constructed. The Swiss Ahmadiyya community built a mosque 1963 in Zurich and Arabian speaking Muslims secured funding from the Saudi-Arabian royal family for a mosque 1978 in Geneva. The two mosques were praised by local politicians as a sign of Switzerland's multiculturalism, internationality and willingness to tolerate and integrate "foreign faiths". Praise and pride dominated. Interestingly, in Geneva the municipal authorities urged the clients of the mosque to increase the height of the minaret in order to "harmonise" with the neighbouring houses, raising the minaret from planned 54 feet to 66 feet.<sup>8</sup>

Since a decade, a move into visibility by religions established by immigrants is observable. Gaining visibility and public awareness is done amongst others through newly constructed buildings, public celebrations, reports in the media, and demands for own infrastructure such as cemeteries and religious education in public school. Reasons for this "stepping out" into public space and visibility are, amongst others, the rise of a second generation which looks for religious education and orientation; the acquiring of financial resources; knowledge gained to apply for purpose-built constructions. Also, the decision to stay in Switzerland for long brought forth the wish to provide children and grand-children worthy and dignified places for religious practice and gathering.

Until about 2000, demands to construct new religious sites designed in the typical architecture of the religion respectively did not create contro-

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8 Martin Baumann – Jörg Stolz, "Vielfalt der Religionen: Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens", in: Martin Baumann – Jörg Stolz (eds.), *Eine Schweiz – viele Religionen: Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2007, 344-378: 361. See also the online documentary "Kuppel – Tempel – Minarett: Religiöse Bauten zugewanderter Religionen in der Schweiz", <<http://www.religionenschweiz.ch/bauten/fondation.html>> [3 July 2009], set up 2009 by the Religion Research Center in collaboration with the Department for the Study of Religions, both University of Lucerne.

versies in Switzerland. However, they became a political issue, in particular so after 11 September 2001. Religion which previously was thought of and perceived as a private affair primarily, emerged on the political agenda. The new political discussion aligned with long established debates of the place of “foreign” elements and “foreigners” (“*Ausländer*”), more often than not associated with questions of compatibility to “Swiss culture” and allegations of sinister infiltration. Furthermore, as in many western countries, a biased perception of “foreign” religions became plainly observable, styling “the Islam” as negative and stereotyped in contrast to a positive awareness of Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. Apart from political debates in municipal and cantonal parliaments, the battle ground for the emerging controversy strikingly was the public space.

In line with ideas of creeping infiltration of so-called terrorist Islam and flooding by Muslim people, the right-wing Swiss People’s Party (SVP) stimulated and polarised the debate. Two examples shall illustrate the direct allusion of Islamic infiltration in conquering Swiss public space.

A well known touristic attraction in Lucerne is its famous tower of the Kappel Bridge. The tower prominently stands in the middle of the River Reuss and forms a major part of the city’s identity and as such is one of the city’s major emblems and symbols. A 2004 published advertisement by the SVP youth wing depicted this famous tower as torn down in favour of a minaret, dominating the whole scenery and being higher than neighbouring Jesuit church. The header in bold asks: “Will Lucerne be Islamised?” Readers could order a brochure of the party about the impending Islamisation and if interested, become members of the party. The advertisement strongly invokes ideas of dominance, foreignness and power, exercised in the city’s centre public space. Swiss culture has become replaced by force by patriarchal Islam.

Two years later the media coverage of the nation wide weekly magazine *Facts*<sup>9</sup> invoked a similar image. The minaret of 1963 built and praised mosque dominated Zurich’s landscape. On the cover picture the minaret’s top and its crescent dominate the public space and even stand out of the picture. The comfortable houses of Zurich are set back and seemingly gaze at the alleged symbol of Islamic power and control. The header in bold reads “Afraid of Muslims”, the sub-header explains “There are already 160 mosques in Switzerland – here is the map”. The cover image suggests that Switzerland is already swamped by some 100 or more mosques and minarets, dominating the public space and setting Swiss culture

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9 *Facts* 10, 9 March 2006.

and customs into second place. Although the articles in the very issue were rather moderate, informed and not anti-Islamic, the stereotyped use of a Muslim symbol as catchy media coverage secured a good selling. Ironically, the minaret of the Zurich mosque itself is dominated by a tall and straight tower of a neighbouring Protestant church, lowering strongly any impact of the minaret in public space and securing the stronghold of Protestantism. Such views and perspectives, however, are seldom displayed in public media which indicates some loss of critical and investigative journalism. Rather popular images and stereotypes sell much better and govern much of current Swiss public discourse.

It needs to be stressed, however, that liberal and progressive voices from Swiss political parties, the Catholic and Protestant Churches and pressure groups strove to calm down the emotionally laden and polarized discussion. They emphasised that the Swiss state and its laws are strong enough to get along well with new developments such as growth of a Muslim minority and the emergent plurality of religions. They underscored that current laws proved well and sufficient as functioning regulators. Diversity of different faiths and cultures should be appreciated as a win and a chance for innovation and development of Swiss society.

Contrary to such inclusive voices, others worked to further polarise and stimulate the discourse on foreigners, non-Swiss citizens and alleged “anti-integrative Islam” for own political interests. In addition to sketching scenarios of risk and danger, based on developments of political Islam outside Switzerland (e.g. Madrid and London bomb attacks), hardliners of the SVP and a right-wing fringe party targeted a new element of agitation. In autumn 2005, a Muslim Turkish society in Wangen, a village with some 4,700 inhabitants in mid-west Switzerland, applied for the building of an 18 feet tall (or small) minaret. A few months later, another application by a Muslim society was submitted in Langenthal, a town with 15,000 inhabitants not far away from the other place and home of the 2006 inaugurated Sikh *gurdwara*. Both applications caused strong rejection by local people, with SVP politicians and conservative Christians at the forefront. They accused that the minaret would be in visual non-conformity to the Swiss towns and would violate regulations for granted height of a building; it would create nuisance and parking problems due to many more visitors to the mosque (situated in a converted industrial hall); the plans for a minaret would disturb religious peace; generally a minaret would give evidence of the threat of the “*schleichende Unterwanderung durch den Islam*” (“creeping infiltration of Islam”) and quite obviously a minaret would be nothing “*Schweizerisches*” (Swiss like).<sup>10</sup> The local community

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10 M. Baumann – J. Stolz, “Vielfalt der Religionen...”, 358.



of Wangen, likewise the other community's parliament, turned down the application for the minaret on grounds of building regulations and that the aesthetics of a minaret would be disturbing. The cantonal department, however, rejected the denial and granted permission to build the minaret. Further trials up until to the highest court were finally rejected by the Federal Court in summer 2008. The court granted to the Muslim society Wangen to build the minaret, in Spring 2009 Muslims proudly inaugurated the minaret.

Right-wing politicians accompanied the controversies with their parliamentary demand submitted to several cantonal governments for a general stop to constructing "disturbing places of worship".<sup>11</sup> In particular, minarets would be "a symbol of the conquering of a territory"<sup>12</sup> and display a claim to religious and political power and reign. The politicians declared that minarets have an aggressive effect and that the insidious infiltration of Swiss society in harmony needs to be stopped right away. Any such parliamentary initiatives, submitted for adoption in several cantonal parliaments, were rejected, however.

Parallel, in 2007 and 2008, SVP supporters and hardliners were able to gather more than 100,000 signatures of Swiss citizens demanding to inscribe in federal law to forbid the building of minarets. The proposal, submitted in July 2008, straightforwardly calls to add the sentence "constructing minarets is forbidden [in Switzerland]".<sup>13</sup> Gathering such an amount of signatures, 2 % of all entitled to vote, due to Swiss grassroots democracy, the Interior Ministry is required to stage a referendum. Voters will have to decide to either accept or to reject this petition for the ban of new minarets.

The Organisation of Islamic States officially criticised the campaign as anti-Islamic and demanded detailed information from the Swiss ambassador placed in Riad. Also, important Swiss finance and economy sectors voiced fears of a negative effect of this campaign. The campaign reached wide attention in the international press, titling amongst others "Swiss hardliners push for ban on minarets".<sup>14</sup> Hardliners in other European countries closely follow the Swiss developments and have already taken up similar campaigns in their country.

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11 Translation of German "*störende Religionsbauten*", quoted in M. Baumann – J. Stolz, "*Vielfalt der Religionen...*", 359.

12 Translation of German "*ein Symbol für die Eroberung eines Gebiets*", quoted in M. Baumann – J. Stolz, "*Vielfalt der Religionen...*", 359.

13 Translation of German "*der Bau von Minaretten ist verboten*", quoted from the pamphlets of the committee to stop the building of minarets. See <<http://www.minarette.ch>> [accessed 25 September 2009] for further information on this campaign.

14 *The Straits Times*, Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 10 July 2008.

In record six weeks later, the Federal government (*Bundesrat*) strongly disapproved the petition as it offends against freedom of religion, violates central principles of the constitution and endangers religious peace. According to the government, an adoption of the petition by the voters would damage Switzerland's reputation abroad and, amongst others, could have a negative effect on the interests and relations of the economy of Switzerland. In June 2009, the Senate (*Ständerat*) also disapproved the campaign and recommended Swiss voters to turn down the petition. The Federal government appointed the ballot to take place in late November 2009 and thus Switzerland will face a debating Autumn about the pro and con of the petition (writing this article in July 2009).

In Switzerland, moderate political parties, the main Churches and liberal voices strongly reject the campaign. They accuse the right-wing hardliners to violate religious freedom and damage the image of Switzerland as a politically neutral, free and tolerant nation state.

### **Comparative perspectives: Moorish synagogues**

The proposal for a ban of minarets by Swiss Federal law underpins the importance of the configurations and "properties of [public] space".<sup>15</sup> Contesting social groups conceive public space as a prestigious terrain with valued significance of ascribed meanings. New players with "foreign" semantic properties claim rights for participation while influential players vehemently deny access. It is not the established Churches which opposed participation in the public space, but a nationalistic party (SVP, 29 % of latest federal elections in 2007) styling itself as brave defenders of glorified "Christian Occident". The political campaign on religion and public space secured a strong win of votes and thus a successful strategy for the party. The Churches, on the other hand, defended the right for expression of religious symbols in public space and spoke in favour of Muslim demands. The churches are wise enough to do so as a ban of publicly exposed religious symbols, not "just" of Muslim symbols, would provide a severe setback to own demands. Expressed calls for a ban of the ringing of church bells are initial signs that the hitherto unquestioned appearance of Christian symbols in public space starts to require a rationale and justification.

Muslim associations opting to attach a minaret on top of the converted hall or house bought years before, express that the minaret should primarily serve as a symbol. It should signify that people gather for prayer in that very building and that the minaret would help to identify the converted house as a religious place. Analytically, gaining visibility and public re-

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15 K. Knott, "Spatial Theory...", 160.

cognition can be interpreted as an attempt to have a share in the public domain and in society as a whole. It is indicative to be able to participate in the scarce resources of society, i.e. of prestige, honour, power. This share in public space is consciously expressed by clients in cases when new and prominently visible buildings, built at prestigious places in a city or town, are striven for. Disputes such as discussed nation-wide with the building of sizeable mosques in Germany in the 1990s and again 2007/2008 (a huge mosque project in Cologne), provide illustrative evidence that a share in a city's public space by "foreign intruders" is far from uncontested. Rather, such issues are discussed as question of say, power, and sovereignty.

In Switzerland, the history of immigration is comparatively young and applications for further purposely-built mosques will emerge sooner or later. As experiences in other European countries illustrate, conflicts and debates about the place of minority and immigrant religions in public space are so-to-say normal and not unusual. They are a way of providing space and a place for the new social groups in society. In the long run conflicts take on an inclusive function for both mainstream society and new players, if proven and well-established democratic rules enable access to society's scarce resources for all.

The current case of debating mosques and minarets underscore that contextual factors such as politics and the societal image of a religion have a strong impact on the inclusion or exclusion to becoming an accepted or a disputed "property"<sup>16</sup> of urban public space. A diachronic perspective provides valuable insights from historic experiences: In Switzerland and other countries, Jews and Judaism were discriminated and banned from cities until mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The granting of rights, of citizenship and an accepted place in society in late 19<sup>th</sup> century found its visible expression in the construction of monumental synagogues, built in specific "orientalising" and "moorish-inspired" styles. As L. Scott Lerner masterly analysed for Italy, the newly built synagogues such like in Florence, Turin and Rome "were extremely large, exotic-looking, and as striking as their predecessors had been discreet. ... Contemporaries looked upon these buildings with pride, inaugurated them with pomp, and invested them with an explicitly communicative function. The buildings were the bearers of the message of the new Judaism of modern times in free and equal societies".<sup>17</sup> Architecture vividly expressed the claim for a prestigious place in urban public space, signalling the emancipation and becoming of a recognized

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16 K. Knott, "Spatial Theory...", 160.

17 L. Scott Lerner, "The Narrating Architecture of Emancipation", *Jewish Social Studies* 6, 2000, 1-30: 3, 1.

part of society. In Switzerland as well, Jews built such highly visible Moorish synagogues in Geneva and Basle, expressing their specific identity and political emancipation by way of these proud edifices.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In comparison to the Moorish synagogues, a century later the building of visible mosques with sizeable minarets is indicative of processes of emancipation of Muslim minorities and their striving to become a part in Western European society. Parallels are speaking and much can be learned from previous experiences of successful inclusion and social incorporation of a non-Christian minority. As pointed out before, already other non-Christian religions constructed visible buildings in Switzerland and most probably in ten, twenty or thirty years, non-Christian buildings will become normality and rarely disputed.

In Switzerland, the avenue to such normality currently occurs with the debating of “new players” claiming place in public space and society. The evolving process of continuing re-negotiation of the established public space will reshape the properties of urban public space; in Switzerland and, as some twenty years before, in countries like Great Britain and the Netherlands. Future developments most probably will, however, also entail developments of accommodation of “foreign faiths” in architectural style. The specific religious buildings most likely will lose some of its exoticism and “alienness” and adapt to mainstream styles of prayer houses and sacred sites. Such developments are not only observable on the side of “foreign faiths” but also on the side of mainstream religions, adapting churches and synagogues to modern styles of architecture. New blends of architectural and religious styles will emerge, continuously providing re-configurations of the urban public space.

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18 See Ron Epstein, *Die Synagogen der Schweiz: Bauten zwischen Emanzipation, Assimilation und Akkulturation*, Zurich: Chronos 2008, 51-58.



## SUMMARY

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Public Space as Contested Terrain in Contemporary Switzerland**

The semantic components of public space are a sensitive and debated issue and, by no means neutral and void of ascribed meanings. Rather, the terrain is contested by social groups and access is disputed and limited. This observation has become vividly apparent in current Switzerland, as controversial debates arose concerning the construction of minarets. More generally, in Switzerland, religious immigrant communities increasingly started to claim their place in the public sphere, in particular in employing publicly visible symbols such as buildings, statues, processions, clothing in order to refer to their existence and right of place. The paper explores the metaphorical use of public space and its conceptualisation as an analytical tool; current debates of the building of minarets illustrate processes of exclusion and inclusion of immigrant “foreign” religion to Swiss public space.

## RÉSUMÉ

**Chrámý, kopule, minarety:  
Veřejný prostor jako sporné území v současném Švýcarsku**

Sémantické komponenty veřejného prostoru jsou citlivou a spornou otázkou, jež rozhodně není neutrální, je jí naopak připisován značný význam. Jde o území, o které se sociální skupiny sváří a přístup na něj je předmětem sporů a omezení. Tato skutečnost vystupuje jasně na povrch v současném Švýcarsku v souvislosti s debatami ohledně budování minaretů. Obecněji řečeno, skupiny přistěhovalců začaly ve Švýcarsku důrazněji bojovat o podíl na veřejném prostoru, zejména za použití veřejně viditelných symbolů, jako jsou budovy, sochy, procesí či oblečení, aby tím poukázaly na svou existenci a právo na místo na slunci. Studie rozebírá metaforické užití veřejného prostoru a jeho konceptualizaci jako analytického nástroje. Současné debaty o budování minaretů ilustrují procesy vylučování a začleňování přistěhovaleckého, „cizího“ náboženství do švýcarského veřejného prostoru.

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