NORWEGIAN
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PUBLIC RELIGION IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

An empirical study of religious leaders in minority and majority faith communities in Østfold, Norway.

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Foreword

This master thesis has been written in association with NOREL (2009-2014), an inter-Nordic research project of the role of religion in the public sphere in the Nordic countris. This study addresses religious leaders in the local context of Østfold, and is a comparative study of a national study of religious leaders in Norway, by Inger Furseth, Pål Repstad, and Sivert Skålvoll Urstad. I was lucky, as a master student in the program *Religion, Society, and Global Issues*, at The Norwegian School of theology (MF), to become part of this group of fine researchers. This study would not have been a reality without your critical and constructive contributions. I thank the three of you for that, and for including me in your book project! I will also extend my thanks to the rest of the NOREL researchers who were kind to include me in seminars and meetings. This has been a fantastic learning experience for me.

I also extend my thanks to my informants, whose contributions have been priceless for the realization of this project.

Finally, my special thanks goes to my supervisor Inger Furseth for her contributions, generosity, and patience with me during this process.

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Abstract

This is an empirical study of the publicness of religion. Its focus is on religious leaders in the local context of Østfold, Norway, and seeks to explore the role of religious leaders and their faith communities in their local communities. A main theme of this study is to explore religion in an increasingly multireligious context, and it employs the concepts of civil society, the public sphere, and social capital as its theoretical lens. The empirical basis of this study is nine structured or semi-structured interviews with local religious leaders representing eleven faith communities. On the one hand, I argue that religious actors and faith communities are visible actors in civil society and the public spheres of their local communities. On the other hand, interreligious dialogue seems to be problematic among minority churches in Østfold. While religious leaders in this region are outward looking and active in their local communities, the majority of them have conservative views on social and political issues of gender and gay-lesbian rights in relation to employment in religious organizations.

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1. Introduction

This is a study of religious leaders and their faith communities at a local level in county of Østfold. It is a continuation of NOREL's study of Norwegian national religious leaders (NOREL), at a local level (Furseth et al. 2015: 139-182).

Over the last 30 years we have seen a growing religious diversity in Norway (Daugstad and Østby. 2009). This development poses new challenges to religious leaders, as well as to their faith communities. The central thesis of sociologist José Casanova's study (1994: 5) is that faith communities are becoming more and more visible as part of civil society, and that they no longer merely play a privatized role, but also a public role. Jürgen Habermas (2006: 15), in his essay *"Religion in the Public Sphere",* employs the term "post-secular society" to denote this development, and the continued presence of religious communities as legitimate voices in the public sphere of modern democratic societies. My core task here is to examine how the publicness of religion through its representatives as religious leaders and faith communities plays out a local level. The focus in this study is therefore to try to understand the role of local religious leaders, and their faith communities at the level of civil society and the public sphere of their local communities, in the context of a growing religious and cultural diversity.

The key focus of this study, parallel to NOREL's study of national religious leaders (Furseth et.al.: 11-12, 139), is therefore to examine to what extent local religious leaders and their faith communities engage as part of civil society in in their local communities, and what is the nature of their engagement? Who are the local religious leaders and what are their views on a number of social and political issues? How do they relate to a growing multireligious society? Do they engage in activities towards new immigrants and in interreligious dialogue? The aim is to see if local faith communities are outward looking and building ties to society in general, and other faith communities, or if they are more tightly knit and inward looking communities, with few links outside their own networks (Furseth et.al. 2015: 11-12).

To answer these questions, I have conducted a comparative study of nine religious leaders representing eleven faith communities in Fredrikstad, Sarpsborg and Moss. Eight of the informants represented eight Christian communities, while one represented three Muslim congregations. The empirical basis for this study is therefore qualitative data from nine structured interviews with leaders of these congregations. My informants represent

In developing my answers to the key research questions in this study, I will draw on theoretical concepts of the public sphere, civil society, and social capital. These concepts have

been central in theoretical debates and empirical studies of the role of religion in society (Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2011; Habermas 2006; Casanova 1994; Foley and Hoge 2007).

Sociologist Jürgen Habermas pioneered the concepts of the public sphere and civil society in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991). He emphasized the functional aspects of modern liberal democracies, and the legitimation of political power through popular sovereignty. His concepts of the public sphere and civil society are rooted in an ideal of free public deliberation as the basis for determining the common good (Furseth et al. 2015: 12). Habermas has in the last decade revisited his position on the role of religion in the public sphere. Whereas he earlier subscribed to the standard thesis of secularization, implying that religion would be marginalized and eradicated from the public sphere of the modern secular societies (Casanova 1994), he now seems to have taken a "theological turn", acknowledging that religious actors are legitimate voices in civil society and the public sphere (Dreyer and Pieterse, 2010). In his essay "Religion in the Public Sphere" (2006) he presents his views on the role of religion in the public sphere of modern constitutional democracies. As I will show later, Habermas sees the potential of public religion as a moral voice in postmodern societies.

Sociologist José Casanova, based on five case studies of public religion Spain, Poland, Brazil, USA), also claims that religion is back on the public agenda (Casanova 1994). He posits that in the 1980's religion "went public" (1994: 3). According to Casanova, the lessons we can draw this decade are that "religions are here to stay", contrary to some "cherished dreams of the Enlightenment, and that "religion are likely to continue playing important public roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world" (1994: 6). Casanova is therefore critical to some of the core tenets of the thesis of secularization. He rejects the idea that the processes of secularization necessarily lead to privatization and marginalization of religion in the public spheres of the modern societies. His thesis is that at the close of the twentieth century we were witnessing, what he calls, the "deprivatization" of religion. The central thesis of his study was that "we are witnessing a "deprivatization" of religion in the modern world" (1994: 5). What Casanova meant by this term is that faith communities are becoming more and more visible as part of civil society, and that they no longer merely play a privatized role, but also a public role. On this background, he posits that there is a fundamental need to revise our conceptions and theories of the relationship between religion and modernity.

In addition to Habermas and Casanova, several other scholars have been critically engaged in scholarly debates on the relationship between religion and modernity, and the role

of religion in the public sphere. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor is also a key figure in this discourse, both a dialogue partner and critic of Habermas. In his his *A Secular Age* (2007), he traces the the genealogy of the secularization process of Western societies. This work has triggered many responses and commentaries, and has to a great extent formed the backdrop for later scholarly works and discussion on the reconfiguration of the role of religion in contemporary societies. (Warner and VanAntwerpen 2010; Calhoun, Jürgensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011; Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2011). What these studies have in common is a critical discussion of a reconfiguration of the role of religion in contemporary societies. They underline the fact that religion and religious actors are on the agenda within the social sciences.

The concept of social capital has become an important key concept within social and political sciences during the past twenty years. Part of its growing importance has to do with its purported ability, in the context of multicultural societies, to advance national and social cohesion (Brink-Danan 2014: 3). My aim is not to map the whole debate on the concept of social capital theory, but to explore some possibilities for theorizing social capital in relation to faith communities. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, and political scientist Robert Putnam, the "fathers" of the contemporary use of the concept, have different approaches to the concept of social capital, which I will come back to later. Crucial for this study, however, are Putnam's types of social capital of "bonding" and "bridging" social capital (Putnam 2000: 22), and Woolcock's later development of Putnam's work to include "linking" social capital (Woolcock 1998). Bonding social capital is characteristic of "thightly knit communities" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 31) who are more concerned with building strong internal loyalty than engagement in society. Bridging social capital, in contrast, is more outward looking and seeks to build links to people and institution outside "the confines of their own narrow circles" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 31). Linking social capital focuses on the role of public and state institutions as sources of social capital in the meaning of general trust in the key institutional structures, especially the welfare state (Furseth 2008: 154; Wollebæk and Selle 2007: 2-3; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Woolcock 1998).

The concept of social capital in the sense of bonding and bridging social capital will play a key role in this study. Their importance is rooted in their usefulness in explaining the type and quality of civic engagement in faith communities. In the NOREL study, Furseth argues, building on Putnam (2000), that his types of social capital are useful to differentiate between worship communities that are outward looking, that is, concerned with society in general and the common good, in contrast to "inward looking", that is, communities that can be

characterized as “thigtly knit communities” (Foley and Hoge 2007: 31) who are more concerned with building strong inward ties, than engagement with social issues (Furseth et al. 2015: 143). I will discuss this theoretical approach in more detail in my chapter on theory.

The NOREL study on national religious leaders (Furseth et al. 2015), mentioned above is central to this study, and represents the findings from the Norwegian part of this inter-Nordic study. While this study looks at religious change over the last 30 years, on a national level, from several perspectives - religion in relation to state, politics, media and civil society – my study is limited to religion and civil society in a local context. It is therefore the part of NOREL that focused on religion and civil society that is of importance to my study. The findings of NOREL’s study of religious leaders will be presented and compared to my own findings in later as present and analyze my own data.

Why is this study important? A main answer is that research on local religious leaders and their faith communities at a civil society level and how they relate to the fact of a growing multireligious society is an understudied area. Further, the findings of this study may complement other studies of the role of religious leaders in Norway. NOREL’s study of national religious leaders included religious leader from 28 majority and minority faith and life view communities in Norway (Furseth et al. 2015: 139-162). My study, as I have mentioned already, is a continuation of the NOREL national study at alocal level, to examine similarities and differences between national and local leaders. Further, a number of the questions in the interview guide, used in my study and NOREL were drawn from *Maktutredningen* (1998-2003). A central part of *Maktutredningen* was a comparative study of several Norwegian elites, and among them religious leaders in the Church of Norway (Gulbrandsen et.al. 2002). It explored their background, views, and attitudes on central social and political issues. Part of the findings of my study is therefore comparable to the findings of both NOREL and *Maktutredningen*.

The outline of this dissertation is as follows. In chapter 2, I give an overview and discussion of research literature relevant for the topic of this study. Further, I give a presentation of the theoretical framework that will be used to analyze the empirical data. In chapter 3, I formulate and discuss my research questions, and the methodological approach of this study. In this chapter I will also relate the findings of NOREL’s national study of national religious leaders to my research questions. In chapter 4, I will present the collected data that forms empirical basis for this study. Further, I will analyze the data and discuss my findings. The NOREL study will be central to my finding and compare my findings with the this study

and look for similarities and differences. Finally, in chapter 5, I will sum up my findings and make some concluding remarks.

2. Research literature and theoretical perspectives

In this chapter, I will review relevant research literature and theoretical perspectives on the relation between religion and the public sphere, civil society and social capital. Research on the publicness of religion, is closely related to these theoretical concepts, and they inform much of recent research in the field. The way I will do this is that I will first present some scholarly studies on the relationship between religion and the concepts of social capital, civil society, and the public sphere. In this section, I will look at relevant research on faith communities and their potential role as civic actors, and look for findings that can be useful for my study. Secondly, I will present different perspectives within the social sciences on social theory related to the notions of social capital, civil society, and the public sphere. I hope that, finally, this will enable me to formulate the theoretical architecture that I will use in this study.

2.1 Nordic studies

Several studies have been done in the Nordic countries on religious leaders and the role of religion in the public sphere. A systematic comparative study, by the Swedish sociologist Göran Gustafsson, focused on religious change in the five Nordic countries between 1938 and 1978 (Gustafsson 1987). The main conclusion from this study suggested a growing privatization of religion in the Nordic countries over the period.

The NOREL project is the most recent study. Its key focus is on religion in the public sphere, and religious change over the last 30 years, is the most comprehensive study on the societal role of religion in the five Nordic countries. A key question in this study, based on Casanova's study (1994), is if we can see a deprivatization of religion over the last 30 years. This study is a follow up on Gustafsson's study, mentioned above. It looks at religious change from four perspectives: state and religion, religion and politics, religion and media, religion and civil society (Furseth et al. 2015). Its core focus was to analyze change in the presence of religion in the public sphere over the last 30 years.

A main conclusion from the study is that the data do not support an undisputable trend toward the resurgence of religion in the public sphere. Its findings on religion and civil society, especially relevant for this study, suggests several new developments (Furseth et al.

2015: 169-182). First, that an interreligious infrastructure, with representatives from a wide range of religious organization, has formed both bilateral and multilateral groups and organizations. The function of these platforms is to promote mutual understanding, and encourage dialogue on common interests and concerns. Second, the study claims that we can see a broader engagement from religious leaders on a range of social and political issues. While religious leaders used to limit their engagement to religious questions and social issues with a religious dimension, now they engage as moral voices on a number of issues relating to the common good of society, including questions on climate change, immigration, refugees, and global challenges. Third, the public discussion has changed from a focus on "Christianity to "Religion", reflecting the new multireligious context. The study also indicates that religion has become a more complex and contested issue in recent years in the Norwegian society.

On a theoretical level the findings also problematizes certain assumptions within theories of secularization and de-secularization. Furseth claims that the general theory of a resurgence of religion in post-secular societies lacks support by the data from NOREL's Norwegian study (2015: 181). Furthermore, she argues that Casanova's notion of a fusion of state and religion in the Nordic countries is misleading. To the contrary, she claims that we have witnessed a differentiation between state and church in recent years. She also concludes that the differentiation between religion and other functional social spheres in the Norwegian society is not watertight, but that the borders between them are porous. Religion shows up in several of the other functional spheres – state, politics, media, and civil society. Based on these findings, Furseth claims that the core thesis of functional differentiation in theories of secularization is in need of adjustment (2015: 181).

Finally, Furseth also questions the sub thesis of religious decline. Does the deprivatization of religion in the public sphere necessarily mean that religion is not in decline on other levels of society? (2015: 181). She argues that the findings of decline in religious convictions and participation; an individualization of religion, both within and outside of organized religion, indicates a secularization and decline in religious adherence at the individual level.

The part of this study that looked at religion and civil society in Norway is, as mentioned earlier, of great importance to my study. I will present and discuss the more specific findings of this study at a national level in my analysis of my findings at a local level.

A group of Norwegian researchers have conducted a study on religious leaders in a Norwegian context from a wide variety of both majority and minority faith communities, across world religions (Døving and Thorbjørnsrud 2012). This study focuses on the

ambiguous role of religious leaders in relation to power. Sociologist Pål Repstad, who participated in this study, has also published an article of the Norwegian church elite (2005) in relation to *Maktutredningen* (Gulbrandsen et.al. 2002). Repstad's article focuses on religious elites within the Church of Norway. This study is relevant for my study of religious leaders in relation to their self-understanding of authority and power. I will therefore draw on both of these studies in the analysis of my data.

A recent study and evaluation of the religious infrastructure supporting interreligious dialogue, "Det Handler om Verdensfreden" (It is all about world peace – my transl.), has been published by Kifo – Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research (Brottveit, Gresaker, and Hoel 2015). This study evaluates the roles of The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL), The Christian Council of Norway (NKR), and The Islamic Council of Norway (IRN) in interreligious dialogue at a local level in Norway. The aim of this report is to document the extent to which these organizations contribute to dialogue across different religion and worldviews, in local communities. The report bases its conclusion on three local case studies: STL Bergen, the Faith- and Worldview forum of Drammen region (DoTL) (my transl.), and UngDialog. This report is relevant for my study of interreligious dialogue at a local level in Østfold.

2.2. American and European studies

In recent years, we have seen a growing interest among scholars to understand the public role of religion and associational life. Research suggests that religious involvement is among the most powerful predictors of social and political engagement (Putnam 2000: 66-67; Meisner and Traunmuller 2010). Some argue that religious organizations can be a "prime source of social capital" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 92). Others, that religious engagement is a strong indicator of engagement in societal issues (Meisner and Traunmuller, 2010; Bekkers, 2005; Borgonovi, 2008; Campell and Yonish, 2003; Stolle and Hooghe, 2004; (Cnaan, Boddie, and Yancey 2003).

Corwin Smidt's edited volume, *Religion and Social Capital* (2003), is among the first systematic attempts to map the relationship between religion and social capital (Furseth 2008: 155). A main conclusion from this study is that social capital generated in faith communities can play an important role in American democratic life (Smidt 2003: 13). What the above studies indicates are that faith communities can be an important arena for acquiring the necessary links and capabilities for engagement in social and political issues in society in general.

Another and more recent study is a study conducted by political theorist Michael W. Foley and sociologist Dean R. Hoge, published in their book *Religion and the New Immigrants – How Faith Communities Form our Newest Citizens* (2007). Their study included empirical data from 200 faith communities in the greater Washington DC area - Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Catholics, and Protestants. Their aim was to explore the type and level of civic engagement in these communities, and explain variances. They were looking for indicators of whether these communities provided resources for support, mutual aid, and access to jobs or other benefits for their members. They were also drawing on Putnam's forms for social capital – bridging and bonding. Some of the main conclusions from their study, relevant for my task here, was that faith communities can be a "prime source of social capital" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 92), and that bridging social capital is a strong indicator for social and political involvement, in addition to providing jobs, educational and training opportunities for its members. Foley and Hoge's study has relevance for my study in the sense that it demonstrates that the different types of social capital formation, in faith communities, is of crucial importance for involvement in society in general.

British anthropologist Marcy Brink-Danan has studied social capital in relation to interfaith dialogue in the UK over the last two decades from a meso-macro perspective (2014). She emphasizes the value of bonding, bridging and linking social capital for interreligious dialogue and the creation of national cohesion. She argues, "knowing how to talk to those of other faiths is a new, institutionalized demand placed on religious leaders and laity alike" (2014: 3). Religious leaders and clergy are expected to play a key role in interfaith dialogue (2014: 4). Her study stresses the key role that religious leaders can play in interreligious dialogue at a local level.

I will now turn to a more detailed discussion of my theoretical framework.

2.3. Theoretical framework

As I have mentioned earlier, my theoretical framework consists of the concepts of the public sphere, civil society, and social capital. Due to limitations of space, I will not be able to give an exhaustive exploration of the concepts, but will limit my discussion to what is relevant for my task in this study.

2.3.1. The concept of the public sphere and civil society.

There has been a renewed interest among scholars in the concepts of the public sphere and civil society in recent years, "particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Block" (Fleming 2000, p. 2). The concepts of a public sphere and civil society are closely related and will therefore be discussed together. Both is based on the idea of collective action and civic agency in participatory and deliberative constitutional democracies. As such they are rooted in the "democratization of political power" (Habermas 2006: 4). Its genealogy stretches back to Greek antiquity. Michael Edwards points out how Aristotle valued "a disposition to seek each other's company and form 'political friendships' in search for the common good" (Edwards, 2009: 65).

Jürgen Habermas (1989[1962]) is among the pioneers in the study of the concepts of civil society and the modern public sphere. His notion of the public sphere and civil society entails ideas of a social space of free public deliberations and social contestation about shared interest, outside of the coercive spheres of the state and the market (Herbert 2003: 96).

For my purpose here, it is sufficient to outline the crucial components of the concept of the public sphere and civil society. First, its normative function emphasizing the "cultural and symbolic dimensions of civil society – its role in the formation of values, action-orienting norms, meanings and identifications" (Fleming 2000: 2). This normative function is often associated with norms of reciprocity, cooperation, and trust (Edwards, 2009: 52), and relates closely to Putnam's notion of social capital, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Second, the institutional core of civil society consists of "voluntary associations outside of the sphere of the state and the economy" (Flyvebjerg 1998, p. 210). This institutional core, according to Fleming, constitutes the "creative side of civil society", in that it "struggles over democratization, and [it seeks] to reform not only the polity, but also the institutions of civil society itself" (Fleming 2000, p. 2). Faith communities can therefore be viewed as part of the institutional core of civil society (Casanova, 1994), and are, as such, participating in the public will-formation of constitutional democracies. The third component is the "public sphere", Fleming, building on Habermas' concept of the public sphere, emphasizes the communicative and deliberative character of the Habermasian public sphere. He claims that its deliberative ideal is to assert

> "itself as a bulwark against the systematizing effects of the state and the economy" …where people can discuss matters of mutual concerns as peers, and learn about facts, events, and the opinions, interests, and perspectives of others in an atmosphere free of coercion and inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent". (Fleming 2000, p. 2).

The public sphere, according to Habermas, can therefore be defined as a "space of reason-giving, a realm in which reasons were forwarded and debated, accepted or rejected …. An indefinitely open space in which all reasons could be expressed and heard" (Mendieta, Van Antwerpen 2011, p. 2-3).

Habermas claims that the role of religion in this deliberative space is to functions as a counter-force, against the negative effects of a capitalist system, understood in terms of a modern functional sub-system [1] that "penetrates the lifeworld with its claim to universality" (Habermas 1987, p. 385). Against this, he sets religious voices as possible sources of meaning, motivation, and ethical values, deeply rooted in the human interpretive traditions (Mendieta, Van Antwerpen 2011, p. 15). Religious traditions, he claims, "have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life" (Habermas 2006, p. 10).

Sociologist David Herbert argues that the concepts of civil society and the public sphere, though they are closely related, they should not be conflated: "civil society organizations channel private opinion into the public sphere, they do not constitute the latter" (2003:75).

As normative ideal-types, the concepts of civil society and the public sphere go to the core of the very condition for open public communication and contestation in a well-functioning liberal democratic society (Habermas 2006: 4). According to Michael Edwards, any discussion of the public sphere must start with the fact that "publics are formed when we turn from our separate affairs to face common problems, and face each other in dialogue and discussion" (Edwards 2009: 63). Most scholars would agree that this is a valid rationale for developing a concept of a civil society and a public deliberative space as a platform for dialogue on the common good (Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, eds.: 2011: 2).

However, the concepts are contested. David Herbert points out that the traditional concept of the public sphere, as a "unitary" space, "is no longer viable and needs to be replaced by an account of multiple intersecting and contesting public spheres, whose inter-relation is problematic" (2003: 95). He argues, "citizens of modern societies simply do not share enough in common to have the kind of debate that the idea of the public sphere implies", because the discursive ideal of the public sphere is blind to "epistemological diversity that makes resolution of difference through rational discussion impossible" (Herbert 2003: 95). In addition, he addresses the need for a "reassessment of the relationship between

[1] For Habermas's critique of Niklas Luhmann's system theory, see his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) pp. 368-385.

religion and civil society, and hence for a rethinking of public religion in the contemporary world" (Herbert, 2003: vii).

Habermas's "theological turn", and his recent acknowledgement of religion as an important voice in civil society and the public sphere, is a reassessment of the relation between religion, civil society, and the public sphere (Habermas 2006; Calhoun, Mendieta, VanAntwerpen 2013).

2.3.2 The concept of social capital

The notion of social capital has become an important key concept within the social and political sciences during the past twenty years. The use of the concept in the social sciences is closely related to the concept of civil society as defined above (Smidt 2003: 3). Voluntary associations may have an impact on the public realm by fostering civic engagement that can contribute to democratic life. While the concept of civil society is much wider than that of social capital, social capital can be seen as a feature of and originating within civil society, and expresses the extent and quality of social interaction and networks in civil society. The social capital framework thus presumes and builds on the concept of civil society.

Social capital is generally described in terms of social networks and connectedness, trust, norms, reciprocity, community and civic engagement. The importance of social capital is related to the productive capacity of collective resources embedded in networks – "….making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence" (Coleman, quoted in Putnam 1993: 167). Its added-value is understood as its capacity to transform the interest of individuals into that of a community, with a moral commitment expressing shared interest for the common good (Smidt 2003: 5). According to Furseth social capital "facilitates and lubricates cooperation, and increased trust leads to the likelihood of increased cooperation" (Furseth 2008: 152).

The notion of social capital and the value of associational life is an old idea, going back to thinkers like Tocqueville, Durkheim and Marx (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 156; Portes 1998: 2,). Tocqueville has been called the "patron saint of contemporary social capitalists" (Putnam 2000: 292), reporting on the vibrant associative life of America in the 1830s. In recent years we have seen the revival of this concept in the social and political sciences, and it is applied to a broad variety of social entities and issues (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 157). Some even argue that social theory is being redefined through the lens of social capital (Fine, quoted in Adam and Roncevic: 2003). Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James

Coleman, and political scientist Robert Putnam are reckoned as the "fathers" of the contemporary use of the concept.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu gave the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Portes 1998: 3). Bourdieu offers a structural definition of social capital, as one of several forms of capital, and defines it as

> ….the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition… (Bourdieu 1986: 248)

His definition of social capital emphasizes resources available through participation in networks, which can be used instrumentally by members to secure benefits. According to Bourdieu, the amount of social capital available in a given network depends on the size of its connections and their stock of capital. Further, social capital has a "multiplier effect" on the capital possessed by each member, and group solidarity is secured through these accrued "profits" from membership. He also argues that social networks are not "given", but a product of conscious "investment strategies" (Bourdieu 1986: 249). Portes decomposes Bourdieu's definition to two elements: First, the social relationship itself as a gateway to resources, and second, the amount and quality of these resources (Portes 1998: 3-4).

Simultaneously with Bourdieu, sociologist James Coleman pioneered the concept of social capital in the United States. Coleman's main interest was to explore the role of social capital in the creation of human capital (Portes 1998: 5). In his empirical work, he focused on the relationship between educational achievement and social. He defines social capital as

> Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structures of the relations between and among persons. It is lodged neither in individual nor in physical implements of production (Coleman 1990: 302).

His definition parallels that of Bourdieu's structural definition, treating social capital as something that cannot be evaluated without attention to the context in which the individual operates. For Coleman social capital includes a set of "moral resources" – social trust, obligations, expectations, norms, sanctions – which produce increased cooperation among individuals or groups of individuals (Furseth 2008: 151).

In contrast to Bourdieu's focus on individual outcomes of social capital, Coleman also includes its positive outcomes for "corporate actors", i.e. groups, organizations, institutions or societies. Whereas, Bourdieu emphasized the egocentric perspective of social capital, Coleman emphasizes the sociocentric perspective (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 159).

Robert Putnam, influenced by Coleman's sociocentric focus (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 159) and concept of social trust (Furseth 2008: 151), is considered a key figure in theorizing the concept of social capital, by popularizing it and introducing it into mainstream political and policy discourses.

On the one hand, Putnam's focus is on the structural nature of social capital, understood as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993: 167). On the other hand, he defines social capital as an individual phenomenon in the sense that "social capital refers to connections among individuals", generating trust and reciprocity (Putnam 2000: 19). According to Putnam, social capital has both a collective and an individual aspect – "a private face and a public face" (Putnam 2000: 20).

Putnam admits that social capital is "by no means always positive" (Putnam 2000: 21), and that there is no guarantee that the outcomes of social capital are beneficial for society (Putnam 2007: 138). Therefore, he distinguishes between different forms of social capital. Putnam's main categories are defined as *bridging* and *bonding* social capital (Putnam 2000: 22), and these categories have become common distinctions when discussing social capital. Bonding social capital tends to produce strong internal loyalty and external suspicion, whereas bridging social capital, in contrast, tends to produce thinner internal loyalty and has a more positive view of outsiders. These categories are not mutually exclusive, as groups may bond along some dimensions and bridge along others, (Putnam 2000: 23). However, Putnam seems to favor bridging social capital when it comes to creating cohesive and well-functioning societies (Sobel 2002: 151).

Putnam's approach has criticized (Furseth 2008; Portes: 5). It has been argued that while the outcomes of social capital are clearly distinguishable, "the analytical and conceptual distinctions between social capital and its sources are less clear" in Putnam's works (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 165). In contrast to Putnam's "bottom-up", with its emphasis on face-to-face interaction, some Nordic sociologist have introduced a "top-down" approach to social capital defined as *linking* social capital. This approach focuses on the role of the state and public institutions as a source of social capital. Whereas, the socialization model emphasizes horizontal sources of trust in non-political and social networks, the institutional approach emphasizes vertical sources of trust, in the meaning of trust in key institutional structures, and the welfare state (Furseth 2008: 154; Wollebæk and Selle 2007: 2-3; Rothstein 2004; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Woolcock 1998). Two Norwegian studies draw attention to the

importance of institutional resources of the Norwegian welfare state in the creation of linking social capital (Rognstad 2007; Ødegård 2010).

2.3.3 Critique of the concept of social capital

The aim here is to give a brief overview of some of the main issues taken up by critics of the of social capital theory. First, critics have argued that the concept is too broad and its application has tended to explain a multiplicity of social change and problems. As such it is vague and has been stretched to cover too many types of relationships and processes, and thereby its explanatory power has been weakened, if not lost (Portes 1998: 5). Second, the concept of social capital, as developed by Coleman and Putnam, fails to mention any specific influence of gender ideologies and power relations in social capital formation. It has been suggested by some that there is a possible conservatism in Coleman's and Putnam's work which assumes the virtue of the "traditional American family" (Furseth 2008: 153). Third, some argue that social capital theory builds on a false metaphor, and that the term does not belong to the species of "capitals", and thus attempts to gain explanatory power from a false analogy (Sobel 202: 144-145;). Sociologist Claude S. Fisher, criticizing Putnam's work "Bowling Alone", points out that the term "social capital" is not "capital" at all, and is therefore a misleading metaphor borrowed from the economic sciences. He argues that "clearer and simpler terms – like membership, family, sociability, and trust" are more useful than social capital, and that the term has "infested sociologist' prose. Using it does allow a sociologist to play in the same sandbox as economists" (Fisher 2001: 3). Fourth, Putnam's claim in *Bowling Alone* that social capital has declined in America in the last 30 years, based on measurable declines in group activities characterized with face-to-face interactions, dismisses a discussion of countertrends and new forms of civic engagement (Portes 1998: 19; Sobel 2002: 141; Fischer 2001: 8). Some argue therefore that Putnam has simply "confused change with decline" (Smidt 2003: 10; Sobel 2002: 140-142).

A more fundamental problem with social capital theory, as it is presented by Putnam, is that it suffers from circular arguments, in the sense that it confuses cause and effect (Furseth 2008: 153; Sobel 2002: 140, 144; Portes 1998: 19). It is argued that while the outcomes of social capital are clearly distinguishable, "the analytical and conceptual distinctions between social capital and its sources are less clear" in Putnam's works (Adam and Roncevic 2003: 165). Social networks tend to become both a source and a form of social capital. This circularity is evident in Putnam's research on the performance of Italian regional institutions and economic development (Furseth 2008: 153; Portes 1998: 20-21).

Putnam's "bottom-up" approach to social capital, with its emphasis on face-to-face interaction as crucial for social capital formation, is based on the premise that institutional change is a function of individual change, has been countered by a "top-down" approach, addressing the issue of *sources* of social capital. This approach focuses on the role of the state and public institutions as a source of social capital, and avoids confusing cause and effects of social capital. In contrast to Putnam's "socialization model", this model is called the "institutional model", and social capital in this perspective is defined as *linking* social capital. (Woolcock 1998)

The issue in question between the socialization and institutional models is the *sources* of social trust, or generalized trust in a society. Whereas the socialization model emphasizes horizontal sources of trust in non-political and social networks, the institutional approach emphasizes vertical sources of trust, in the meaning of trust in key institutional structures, and the state (Furseth 2008: 154; Wollebæk and Selle 2007: 2-3; Rothstein 2004; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Woolcock 1998). Norwegian sociologist Jon Rogstad, drawing on Putnam's concept of social capital, in his study of political mobilization of ethnic minorities in Norway, argues for a differentiation between horizontal trust, created in face-to-face interaction, and vertical trust, defined as institutional trust. His findings show that while horizontal trust was important for political mobilization of ethnic minorities in Norway, vertical trust was crucial for political mobilization of ethnic Norwegians (Rogstad 2007: 148). Likewise, sociologist Guro Ødegård, in her study of integration of ethnic minorities in Oslo, draws attention to the importance of institutional resources of the Norwegian welfare-state in the creation of linking social capital (Ødegård 2010).

Despite criticism of social capital theory from a variety of perspectives, the concept of social capital still remains attractive as an analytical tool in several disciplines. In the social sciences, a majority of scholars agree that participation in voluntary associations have a positive effect on creating social trust and the integration of core values in society, which in turn may lead to societal consensus and contribute to sustain a stable development of society (Furseth 2008: 155; Smidt 2003: 11). Economist Joel Sobel, argues in suooprt of the concept of social capital that a "vague keyword is not sufficient to condemn a promising line of research" (Sobel 2002: 145), and that the concept of social capital can provide important insights for social sciences. Religious organizations constitute a major part of associational life, and it is thus reasonable to argue that faith-based communities and religious networks are important actors in trying to understand the relationship between religion and social capital formation.

2.3.4 The concept of social capital used in this study

A key question in this study is the role of religious leaders and their faith communities in society. To answer this question, I will use Putnam's concepts of bonding and bridging social capital. These theoretical concepts have also been employed in the national study of Norwegian religious leaders. Furseth, drawing on Putnam, suggest two analytical dichotomies as heuristic tools in analysing the societal role of faith communities (Furseth et al. 2015: 142-143): "outward looking versus inward looking" social capital, and "bridging versus bonding" social capital. The first dichotomy, she argues, differentiate between faith communities that have little or no engagement with society (inward looking), and those who engage with society outside the confines of their religious organization (outward looking). Her second dichotomy differentiates between those who communicate with diverse actors and institution in society (bridging), and "tightly knit communities" (bonding) who tend to stay "within the confines of their own narrow circles (Foley and Hoge 2007: 31). Furseth stresses that these categories are not mutually exclusive, but overlapping (Furseth et al. 2015: 143). Are religious leaders and their faith communities mainly inward looking with strong internal ties, or are they mainly outward looking, creating links to people, communities, and institutions outside of their own confines? Or can they both bridging on some issues and bonding on other issues?

3. Research questions, informants, methodology

In this chapter, I will present my research question and describe and discuss methodological issues related to data collection and analyses.

3.1. Research questions

The research questions in the NOREL's study of national religious leaders are divided into five thematic categories: (1) profile of religious leaders, (2) views on their own power, (3) views on important social and political issues, (4) political lobbying, and (5) dialogue and practices of inclusion. For each thematic category I will present the findings from NOREL's study of national leaders (Furseth et.al. 2015), and in my next chapter I will see how these findings compare to my findings.

3.1.2. Profile of religious leaders and their organization

Who are the religious leaders? In this section, I will draw a personal profile of these leaders. I ask about their personal background variables such as gender, age, where they grew up, education, the title of their present position, how long they have held it, previous vocational career, and if they have work experience from abroad.

In the national survey 28 religious leaders were interviewed. A striking feature from this survey is that men dominate in leadership positions. Only five of the informants were women, and three of them represented the Church of Norway. Furseth, Repstad and Urstad point out that this gender imbalance among religious leaders has been found in earlier studies, i.e. Maktutredningen (Furseth et al. 2015: 150). However, women seem to be represented in middle management positions, especially in the Church of Norway with over 50 % (2015:150). The share of women in middle management positions in other denominations varied from 0-50 %.

A majority of the informants has higher education in theology at bachelor- or master-levels. Educational and professional background varies among the informants. This is especially true for minority faith communities. Some of the leaders have work experience from abroad, and among these minority faith communities dominate. The age distribution is between 25 to 75 years, with an average age of 57 years, in accordance with earlier studies (Maktutredningen). The national study point out that the typical religious leader is a male in his mid-fifties with higher education, who has had his position for approximately 5 years.

3.1.3. Views on their own power.

I also asked my informants to what extent they have power to influence their organization and members. In this context, the term power, following the national study, should be understood as: 1) formal power, 2) normative power, 3) limitations of power (Furseth, Repstad and Urstad: 2015:151).

The findings from the national study (Furseth et al.: 2015:151-153) are as follows:

Formal power:

Several informants stated that they have formal power in questions of decision-making, for example on issues of appointments to positions in their organization. The leader for the Salvation Army has power to order people to different positions.

Normative power:

As pointed out in the national study, this type of power can be defined as a kind of soft power, in the sense that it is not based on written rules. It can be defined as a kind of influence based on tradition, authority vested in the position of a religious leader, and individual charisma. I can, however, be an effective form of power, for example on attitudes, values, morality and life views.

The majority of the informants claimed that they have this form of normative power, in sense of being a spiritual leader, and influencing their members in spiritual matters and practices.

Limitations of power:

Several of the informants claimed that their power as leaders are limited, due to the fact that many of them came to position through elections. Their mandate as leaders is therefore defined by their constituency, and they are accountable to a board or a general assembly. This places limitations on their use of power. Others claimed that their members also place some limitations on their power, because as leaders they are dependent on trust from their them.

A democratic ethos:

Most of the informants emphasized that their organizations are built on democratic principles of elections, regulated by checks and balances on their use of power. Sociologist Pål Repstad (Repstad, 2012) claims that there has been a democratization of power within religious organizations over the last years. Very few leaders, except for some charismatic faith communities, legitimize their position through a call from God. He further claims that this development of a democratic ethos contributes to legitimize their position, both within their own organization and in relation to society in general.

3.1.4. Views on important social and political issues

Informants were asked a number of questions on social and political issues. The questions in this section included a number of issues: social and economic inequality, the societal role of religious values, questions on immigration and asylum policies, political affiliation, gender equality, and gay-lesbian issues in relation to employment in religious organizations.

The findings from the national study on these issues (Furseth et al.: 2015:153-157) are as follows:

A general observation is that the Church of Norway, through its different organizations and bishops, is by far the most active in publically voicing their opinions on social and political issues. Minority faith communities are less active in these issues, although they also found some variation. The national study has taken a thematic approach in their presentation of these different issues, which I will follow here.

Radicalism in relation to social equality and environmental issues:

A majority of leaders claimed that that social inequality in Norway is too high. All informants from the Church of Norway and several of the minority churches totally agreed or partially agreed that there is a need to reduce economic inequality. In contrast, informants from the Catholics, Adventists, Mormons, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, claimed that there are little economic inequalities in the Norwegian society.

Only a few faith communities are engaged in environmental issues. The Christian Council of Norway adopted a resolution in 2013 on climate policy. The Church of Norway has been engaged on issues of oil policy and other social issues. It has also in cooperation with the Islamic Council of Norway made a public statement on family violence and religious extremism. The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL) has been more reluctant on social and political issues, but issued a statement in 2013 on climate policy.

In favor of a less restrictive immigration and asylum policy:

The national study found that a great majority of the informants were in favor of less restrictive immigration and asylum policies. In contrast, faith communities with a great share of immigrants and ethnic minorities were more restrictive on these issues than the majority. A vast majority agreed that immigrants themselves should take more responsibility for integration in the Norwegian society. All agreed, totally or partially, that immigrants should be allowed to keep their religious traditions, and practice them without interference from local or central authorities. However, the Islamic Council of Norway pointed out that religious practices that are against Norwegian law and basic human rights, for example like circumcision of girls, should not be allowed.

As a summary on these issues, the national study claims that whereas religious leaders are positive to immigration, they are to some extent critical to whether Norwegian authorities

and the immigrants themselves take sufficient responsibility for integration into the Norwegian society.

Leftist leaders – but morally conservative on issues of marriage and cohabitation:

In the national study only 19 out of 28 answered on the question of political affiliation. The rest refrained from flagging which political party they voted on. Especially the leaders from the Church of Norway were reluctant on this question. Those who answered voted for the Socialist Left Party (SV), the Norwegian Labour Party (AP) and the Christian Democrats (KrF). A majority of the Christian minority churches voted for KrF, while one voted for the Conservative Party of Norway (Høyre), but none for voted for the Progress Party (FrP). AP had some support from the non-Christian faith communities, among them a Muslim leader who expressed support for the Norwegian welfare-state, claiming that it represented Muslim ideals and values. The voting pattern for national religious leader is therefore on the scale from red/green to yellow. Whereas leaders in the Church of Norway have a center-left profile, leaders in minority churches support Krf.

However, when it comes to issues of moral values, national religious leaders tend to take conservative positions. This was reflected in questions of statutory equality and gay-rights. A majority agreed that gender equality should not be enforced by law. Leaders from the Church of Norway claimed however that they were in favor of more gender equality in the church. Whereas religious leaders in the Church of Norway were more positive to employing gay people in religious leadership positions, representatives from the minority churches were unambiguously negative. Some admitted, however, that gay people could be allowed to have administrative position.

Anti-political rhetoric?

Findings from the national study confirm that practically all informants would encourage their members to take an active role in social and political issues. This indicates that the religious leaders of today are outward looking and value engagement in society in general, both locally and globally. The findings from this study also confirm that whereas religious leaders, only a few decades ago, were concerned with Christian social and political matters of abortion, sexual morality, religious education and Christian private schools, they now have developed a much broader agenda on social and political matters.

3.1.5. Political lobbying.

Here I want to know if they have engaged in political lobbying. They were asked they if they, during the years 2008-2010, had actively tried to influence public decisions on issues of importance to their organization. If yes, who did they contact – civil servants in Ministries, members of the government, including undersecretaries and political advisors, members of parliament, local politicians, organizations, or mass media?

The findings from the national study on these issues (Furseth et al.: 2015:158-160) are as follows:

Types of issues:

A majority of informants answered that they had been engaged in political lobbying. First, some of the leaders were concerned with issues of politics of religion. Whereas representatives from the Christian churches were concerned with the relationship between the Church of Norway and the state and the framework for private schools, others were concerned with religious practices of circumcision, religious headwear. Second, others had tried to influence on social-ethical issues like consumerism, immigration and refugees. Third, some of the leaders had sought to influence on issues directly related to their organization, like building permits and registration of membership.

Who were contacted?

Furseth, Repstad and Urstad points out that the answer to this question is to a great extent dependent on type of issues, and what kind of network the leaders have access to. A total of 15 leaders had made contacts with officials and civil servants in Ministries. Only 8 of the leaders had contacted members of the government, and 10 of the leaders had contacted members of parliament. Several of the informants answered that they had contacted representatives from political parties, and local politicians. Others had combined a direct inquiry with mobilizing some of the religious umbrella organizations. They also found that some of the leaders from the religious minority organizations seem to have their “own” representatives.

Religious leaders also use media in their lobbying. This is especially true for the religious umbrella organizations, and the larger religious organizations. The small organizations tend to be more passive in their use of media for lobbying purposes.

3.1.6. Dialogue and inclusive practice.

Are the local religious leaders engaged in, and what are their attitudes to interreligious dialogue and practice? Several of the local faith communities have immigrants as members. My interviewees were also asked if their organization offered any kind of assistance to new immigrants? This question covers practical help, on a number of issues like visa, housing, economic advice and assistance, language training, asylum.

The findings from the national study on these issues (Furseth, Repstad and Urstad: 2015:160-162) are as follows:

Interreligious dialogue:

A majority of the national religious leaders answered that they are active in interreligious dialogue, meeting leaders from different faith and life stance communities. This is especially true for those who are members of the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities, the Church of Norway and Muslim communities. Leaders from Christian minority churches were less engaged in interreligious dialogue. Furseth, Repstad and Urstad claims that leaders of minority churches appear to be more inward looking than leaders from the Church of Norway and other life view organizations.

Some of the national religious leaders also confirmed that they arranged meetings involving members from several faith and life stance communities. This finding indicate that interreligious dialogue is not on elite phenomenon, but also involves the grass root level. As above, leaders from Christian minority churches are less involved in such activities.

Inclusive practice:

A majority of the leaders answered that their organization did not formally offer immigrants practical assistance to settle into the Norwegian community. However, some of them stressed that unformal assistance is often offered at a local level. Some of the Muslim leaders, however, told that they offered some guidance for new immigrants. Further, there are few instances of housing of asylum seekers.

Viewpoints on multireligious societies

This section is divide into five sub-categories: Their views on (1) policies of immigration, (2) immigrants, (3) Norway as a multireligious society, (4) other faith communities, and (5) the societal role of their own faith community.

In this section, I ask about their views on public policies of admission of immigrants and asylum seekers to our country, their attitudes toward the responsibility of immigrants themselves to integrate into their new host society, the extent to which immigrants should be granted freedom to practice their religious-cultural values, without interference from the state or local authorities. Furthermore, I ask questions concerning their general views on living in a multireligious society, and how they view their own social and political role in society.

I will try to answer the above questions in my analytic chapter, but before that, I have to comment on my methodological approach.

3.2 Methodological approach and data.

The empirical basis for this study is qualitative data collected through nine structured and semi-structured interviews with local religious leaders representing eleven faith communities from the three largest towns in Østfold – Fredrikstad, Sarpsborg, and Moss.

I will start by giving an overview of the constitution of the religious landscape in Østfold. The dominant faith community in Østfold is the former state-church, the Church of Norway. Statistics Norway have membership data on faith communities outside of The Church of Norway. These data include faith communities eligible for public funding.

Fig. 1 below is an overview of membership data on faith communities outside of The Church of Norway:

Fig. 1: Members in faith communities outside of The Church of Norway Østfold county					
	2010		2014		
Faith communities	Number	Share %	Number	Share %	Change
Total membership	31 148	100,0 %	38 333	100,0 %	23 %
Buddhisme	1 220	3,9 %	1 489	3,9 %	22 %
Islam	7 460	24,0 %	9 850	25,7 %	32 %
Christianity	18 543	59,5 %	22 658	59,1 %	22 %
Other religion*	225	0,7 %	364	0,9 %	62 %
Worldviews	3 700	11,9 %	3 972	10,4 %	7 %

*Includes: Bàhai, Judaism, Sikhism, and other faith communities

Source: Statistics of Norway

I have chosen to focus on the main religious traditions in Østfold – Islam and Christianity. Compared to Østfold's neighbouring counties of Akershus and Vestfold, Østfold has a higher share of Muslims (25,7 %) compared to Akershus (20,9%) and Vestfold (16,4%). Based on

Eight interviewees represented Christian communities, while one represented three Muslim congregations. At the time of the interview, Muslim communities in the Fredrikstad area did not have resident imams, but one spokesperson who represented three congregations. Of the Christian communities, two came from the Church of Norway, three from Pentecostal churches, one from an independent Charismatic church, one from a Baptist church, and one representing a Methodist church. The interviews were conducted during the fall of 2010 to the spring of 2012.

The mapping of religious organizations in these towns was done through search on internet, Yellow Pages, and personal contacts in various faith communities. Based on this a list of faith communities with possible informants was prepared.

Informants from the different faith communities were selected based on their position in their organization as formal regional or local leaders, parallel to NOREL's national study. My

selection is thus limited to formal positions as dean (prost), vicar (sogneprest), pastor or spokesperson. In my study, I define them as local religious leaders.

A possible weakness of this approach is that other powerful persons ("grey eminences") in the selected organizations fall outside the reach of my study. However, I think it is reasonable to assume that people holding formal positions in religious organizations and faith communities, are one of the most reliable sources of information on the communities they represent. This is because it is reasonable to believe that religious leaders, not just at a national level, but also in a local context, are expected to conform to the religious tradition they represent. I therefore consider my informants to be reliable sources of information.

As this is a continuation of NOREL's national study at a local level, the choice of a qualitative methodological approach follows that of the national study, and is based on the same interview guide. The interview guide used in this study was prepared by Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad, for their study of national religious leaders, and is based on a structured interview technique. A number of questions were drawn, as previously mentioned, from *Maktutredningen*. The reason for using the same interview guide, at both a national and a local level, is that it enables comparison of findings at a national and local level.

The interview guide is comprehensive and divides into six sections. I adhered to the guide during the interviews. I allowed my informants to talk freely on each topic if they felt a need to explore some of the questions more than others.

I contacted each informant by phone to set up an appointment. The interviews took place in the offices of the interviewees, except for the Muslim leader who came to my office. Each interview lasted approximately from one and a half hour to two hours, and was recorded. Recording the interview did not seem to bother the interviewees. All the interviews were done in the Norwegian language, and I have transcribed each interview.

The interviews were conducted "one-on-one", and this approach was suitable, due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions. Informants' names were not mentioned during the interviews, except for community affiliation and informant's position in it. Some of the interviews were conducted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Norway on July 22 (2011), and these tragic events may have had some influence on answers relating to questions on multicultural and multi-religious societies. I noted a certain caution among some of the informants when asked about their personal views on gay/lesbian issues, and if they were compatible with the official view of their organization. One example is one informant from one of the Pentecostal churches who was reluctant to give his personal views on gay/lesbian-issues, limiting himself to refer only to the official position of his organization.

A number of questions were multiple-choice questions and some of the informants struggled to place their answer in one "box" only. This may also have influenced some of their answers.

Finally, I will comment of some of the ethical considerations. This study had permission to conduct the interviews from the Norwegian Social Science Dataservice (NSD). The collected data were handled according to their general regulations, and in conformity with the description given in my application. At the outset of the interview, the interviewees were given information about the scope of this research project, their role in it, and how the results of the findings would be published. They were also informed that they were free, at any time during the interview, to stop and cancel the interview. On the question of anonymity, they were told that total anonymity could not be granted, although their names would not appear in the final report. Nevertheless, they could be cited in the report as "one Pentecostal pastor in Fredrikstad". They were also offered the possibility of quote check, but everyone declined.

I will now turn to a presentation and analysis of the data that forms the empirical basis for this study.

4. Presentation and analysis of data

In this chapter, I will present and analyze the collected data from the interviews, within the framework of my research questions, as set forth in my previous chapter. The outline of my presentation here is for practical reason slightly different from the outline of my research questions in my previous chapter, but all the questions will be covered. In my discussion and interpretation of the data, I will draw on the theoretical perspective of social capital, civil society and the public sphere, presented in my chapter on theoretical approach. Furthermore, I will compare the findings of this study with the findings of NOREL's national study (Furseth et al., 2015: 150-161) and also link some of my findings to other relevant research presented in my chapter on research literature.

The overarching question of this study, as mentioned in my introduction, is to explore the publicness of religion at a local level. The key focus of this study is therefore to examine to what extent local religious leaders and their faith communities engage as part of civil society and the public sphere of their local communities, and the nature of their engagement. Who are the local religious leaders and what are their views on a wide specter of social and political issues? How do they relate to a growing multireligious society? Do they engage in activities towards new immigrants and in interreligious dialogue? The aim is to see if local faith

communities are outward looking and building ties to society in general, and other faith communities, or if they are more tightly knit and inward looking communities, with few links outside their own networks (Furseth et.al. 2015: 11-12). Further, how do the findings in my study compare to the findings in NOREL's national study of religious leaders?

4.1. *Profile of religious leaders*

I start by asking: who are the religious leaders, and how do they view their own position? These are the questions I will try answer in this section. To do this, I will draw a personal profile of my informants. Further, how they view their role in society.

The majority of religious leaders in Norway, according to theologian Oddbjørn Leirvik, are leaders of faith communities at a local level (Leirvik, 2012: 216-17). Leirvik defines three categories of local leaders: (1) Spiritual leaders employed in formal functions as vicars, pastors or imams, (2) spiritual leaders in informal positions as for example youth leaders, and (3) elected administrative leaders as elders or chairpersons of the board. This study focuses primarily on spiritual leaders in the first category. However, in local communities they may also have overlapping administrative functions in addition to their spiritual role.

According to Berit Thorbjørnsrud and Cora A. Døving, the role of religious leaders is somewhat ambiguous (Døving and Thorbjørnsrud, 2012; 7-9). One the one hand, they claim that religious leaders perform functions that are in demand by a majority of the population, for example rituals connected to birth, death, and marriages. A large portion of population view their ritual role positively. On the other hand, religious leaders are also viewed with skepticism, and sometimes as a source of conflict. Some also view them as narrow-minded, prejudiced, and excluding. In public debates on social issues like gender equality, and issues of gay-lesbian practices and rights, they are sometimes accused of reflecting medieval attitudes, fanaticism, religious fundamentalism, and as such, they prevent social and political integration of minority groups.

All of my nine interviewees were men who had on average been in their positions for 7,5 years. A majority of informants told me that women have leadership roles at lower levels in in their organization. As examples of such leadership responsibilities are responsibility for diaconal work, children- and youth work, and various administrative tasks. This gender inequality seems to be greater in Pentecostal-charismatic churches and mosques than in other faith communities. I will come back to this later in my discussion on gender equality. This gender imbalance in leadership position is parallel to the findings in the national study

(Furseth et al. 2015: 150-151) and earlier studies (Gulbrandsen et al. 2002: 72). I have no figure for the share of women in middle management positions.

The average age of my informants were 55 years, and corresponds to findings in the national survey with an average age of 57 years (Furseth et al. 2015: 150-151). Except for two interviewees who was 39 and 42 years, the others were between 56 and 65 years. A majority of my interviewees came from and had their upbringing at various places in Østfold. However, two had their upbringing abroad. One was born in Morocco (Muslim), and one (Pentecostal) in Paraguay as a child of missionary parents. Two came from different places in Norway. The spokesperson representing the Muslim communities had lived in Norway since 1972, and was fluent in the Norwegian language.

The educational and professional background of my informants varies. Six out of nine of my interviewees had higher education at bachelor and master levels in theology. Two of these represented The Norwegian church, two represented Pentecostal churches, and two represented the Baptist church and the Methodist church. The spokesperson from the Muslim communities had primary school, and two representatives from a Pentecostal church and a Charismatic had primary school plus one year at church owned bible-schools. Whereas religious leaders in The Norwegian church had spent their professional careers in the Church of Norway, leaders from the other denominations had a more varied professional career, like carpenters, sale representatives, youth work, business owner, restaurant business. This wide specter of professional backgrounds is especially characteristic for the Pentecostal and the Charismatic churches. Two of my informants, one pastor in a Pentecostal church and the spokesperson from the Muslim communities, held unpaid positions as in their faith communities in addition to their other jobs.

A majority of my interviewees had experience from working abroad. They have travelled extensively to continents like Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Interviewees from the Christian minority churches, especially from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches did run a number of mission projects, that they either had initiated or supported financially through their faith communities. As such, these local religious leaders were well acquainted with multicultural contexts and had built large networks to people and religious organizations abroad. Their engagement in different countries abroad were also reflected in the fact that most of them kept themselves updated on world events via foreign media outlets.

To sum up on their personal profile, I have found that a local religious leaders have much the same profile as national leaders: a male in his mid-fifties, with higher education, and who

has held his position for approximately 7,5 years. The gender imbalance at the national level is also reflected at the local level.

4.2. Profile of their organization

So far, I have focused on the personal profile of my informants. I will know turn to a short description of their organizations.

Filadelfia, Sarpsborg

Pentecostal faith communities in Østfold are based on a congregational model. This is the largest Pentecostal faith community in Østfold. The leader told me that it has 900 (2011) registered members, and of these 500-550 are active members who attend worship services more or less regularly. The church has, according to its pastor, an even spread across all age groups. Criteria for membership is adult baptism. Children of baptized members are reckoned as affiliated members, and they can remain so for their whole life. According to its pastor, the church has a democratic organization. Power is divided between a general assembly of all registered member and a council of elders. The general assembly meets once a year and deals with matters of business, while the council of elders are responsible for spiritual matters, church teachings, and the appointment of the main pastor. The council of elders also constitutes the board of the organization in public registries. The council of elders appoints its own members, but needs final approval from the general assembly. This applies also to the appointment of pastors. This kind of organization is the same in all the Pentecostal churches I interviewed.

This church has some immigrants among its members, or attendants. The number varies between 15-25 attendants. They come from the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Liberia. They are not organized in a separate group, but are part of the regular cell groups. They do not arrange separate worship services, but take part in the regular services, and translation is provided.

Filadelfia, Fredrikstad

This church has about 220 registered members (2012), according to its pastor. Approximately 150 are active members attending worships services more or less regularly. This congregation consists mostly of older people and had a low share of youth and children. This community has about 10-15 immigrant of African origin. From time to time the arrange African style

worship services in the English language targeting African immigrants. About 60 attend these services. This functions somewhat as a "community within the community". The pastor claimed that they had found it difficult to integrate African immigrants in their regular worship activities, due to language barriers and differences in cultural styles of worship.

Filadelfia, Moss

This is a church of about 200 members (2011), according to their pastor the share of active members is about 100-150, with an even spread across different age groups. They have a large portion of children and youth attending their church services. The share of immigrants attending varies between 15-25 attendants, mainly form the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Liberia. Like the Pentecostal church in Sarpsborg, this church also tries to integrate immigrant into different cell groups. This congregation also gives financial support to mission projects in African countries.

Zoé, Fredrikstad

This charismatic faith community was established in 1989, as an offshoot of Borg Kristne Senter. Both sprang out of *Trosbevegelsen*, a faith movement that emerged in Norway around 1985, strongly influenced by charismatic impulses from Sweden (Livets Ord) and the charismatic churches in USA. This faith movement placed a strong emphasis on healing ministries, and emerged in conflict with the traditional Pentecostal churches.[2] This is an independent faith community, with no formal links to other religious organizations. It is closely tied to its founding pastor. Besides its church activities in Fredrikstad it also conducts or supports mission projects in India, Nepal, Africa and Estonia, in the form of financial support to a number congregations, primary schools, a children home, and an old peoples home.

According to its pastor, their membership rate is around 500 registered members (2011) with a share of immigrants of about 10-20 persons, mainly of African descent. They have an even spread of members across age groups and conduct ministries directed towards children and youth. My intervieweet told me that they struggled to integrate immigrants in their regular church services, due to language barriers and style of worship. The founding pastor has a central role in this faith community, he told me that power is not distributed

[2] For a more thorough over overview of this faith movement and its, often, conflictual relationship with the Pentecostal movement, see Pål Repstad's articticle in Døving and Thorbjørnsrud, 2012, pp. 110-128.

democratically in his organization. The board and the team of pastors are not elected, but selected by the pastor and his chosen team of advisors.

Baptist church, Fredrikstad

This is a congregational church established in Fredrikstad in 1925. Is has about 150 baptized members (2012). Regular attendance at church services is around 70 people, according to its pastor. Only 5-6 persons with migrant background attend the church. The leader told me they have adopted a democratic organizational structure with the general assembly (menighetsmøte) as their highest authority that elects the church council. The latter selects the candidate for pastor of the church, but the final decision of employment of pastor rest in the general assembly. This congregation has chosen to be affiliated with the national Baptist organization in Norway.

Methodist church, Fredrikstad

The Methodist church in Fredrikstad has about 500 baptized members (2011), and around 80 of these attend church services more or less regularly. This faith community is characterized by a high share of old people. They also have a scouts-group of about 115 members, but most of these are not regular members of the church. Few immigrants attend the church, and at the time of the interview, only one immigrant family attended. They are a congregational church, with a democratic model of organization, election of officers and employment of pastor.

The Church of Norway, Fredrikstad

I interviewed two representatives from the Church of Norway in Fredrikstad. One vicar (sogneprest), and one dean (prost). The vicar, who represented a parish in Fredrikstad with about 6.500 members, informed me that attendance is very low and has a downward trend on regular church services. They have a few people with migrant background attending their church from time to time. He told me, however, that a group of ten to twenty immigrants attends Fredrikstad Cathedral (domkirken) from time to time, with ethnic backgrounds from Armenia, Guatemala, Middle East and Eastern Europe.

The leader for the deanery (domprosti) of Fredrikstad informed me that Fredrikstad has 11 churches and 18 vicars, and that out of a population of about 80.000 about 75 % are members of the Church of Norway.

The Islamic Society of Fredrikstad

This organization is an association that represents three different mosques in Fredrikstad with about 300-400 members (2012). Their membership represents 20-25 nationalities according to the leader: Turkey, countries of North Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and several other countries. Their main religious activity is Friday prayer. The leader told med that this organization is affiliated with the Islamic Council of Norway.

In summing this section, it is evident that it is the Pentecostal and charismatic faith communities that have the greatest share of immigrants in their congregations, compared to Christian faith communities. This may be related to the fact that their local leaders and congregations have a more international orientation than the rest of the leaders, through engagement in international networks and mission project in several foreign countries. Some of these leaders even view immigrants as a potential for recruiting new members, as one of the Pentecostal leaders told me.

4.3. Views on power

My concern here is to try to understand how local leaders view the power they have on their members and within their own organization.

Questions of religious power, however, can be analyzed in more than one dimension. Døving and Thorbjørnsrud employs Max Weber's differentiation of forms of power in their study of religious leaders. Weber distinguishes between three types of power: (1) Power based on tradition, (2) legal power, and (3) Charismatic or spiritual power (Døving and Thorbjørnsrud, 2012: 17). Pål Repstad, elaborating on the forms of power (Repstad 2012: 117-18), claims that while power based on tradition can be identified with the power of the traditional chief and is hereditary, legal or formal power is based on the rationality of formal laws. He associates charismatic or spiritual power with normative power.

Døving and Thorbjørnsrud's study point out how power plays out differently in different organizations. Jan Olav Henriksen, in his article on leaders in the Church of Norway, argues "the era of the big chiefs is over" (my translation) (Henriksen 2012: 203). Henriksen claims that formal power invested in the role as a religious leader has been in decline over the last decades, and what is left of it, if any, rest in their symbolic power as interpreters of meaning and existential questions of life (Henriksen 2012).

Kari Vogt, in her article on shia-muslim leaders, emphasizes that imams are not priest, but scholars (Vogt 2012: 47-66). They exercise dogmatic power on behalf of a hierarchy of

scholars, and functions as local intermediaries between Muslim believers and the established hierarchy of scholars of several interpretive schools. The imams derives their power from institutionalized religious power, and not from themselves as individuals. Further, Vogt points out that moral power in a Muslim context must be understood primarily as the collective power of the community. That is, imams have no tools of moral sanctioning at their disposal, because that rest in the collective judgement of Muslim communities (Vogt 2012).

In the following I will adopt the differentiation of the concept of power parallel to NOREL's national study, outlined in my previous chapter on research questions. I will therefore differentiate between formal power, normative power, and limitations on power.

The majority of my informants emphasized that besides their role as administrative leaders, their most important role was that of a spiritual leader. This implies that as administrative leaders they have admitted to have formal power at the administrative level in making decisions, and normative power as spiritual leaders. However, on the question of formal power, all but two, answered negative on this question. A typical example came from a Methodist leader: "No, power is a non-word in my vocabulary. We are democratic." This statement was typical for most of the leaders I interviewed. All of my informants answered that they have normative power. That is, power to form ethical norms, values and religious interpretations. As one of my informants from The Norwegian church phrased it: "We have power over the souls, they listen to their vicar".

One, however, a pastor in a Charismatic church claimed that he not only did have great normative power, but also formal power. He justified this by the fact that he was the founder of the faith community. As he said, "I was the one who took the initiative to start this congregation, and because of this I have more influence in my congregation than many other pastors in their congregations." According to Repstad, this case shows "how charismatic authority may interfere with democratic authority", (Repstad 2012: 121). This is often the case when founders of congregations claim a direct and personal call from God as the basis for their community, as is often the case with c\independent charismatic communities. Challenging the founder, then, turns easily into a question of being "for or against God". This is what Repstad calls "a sacralization of one's own standpoint" (Repstad 2012: 121).

The second informant who claimed both normative and formal power was the dean (prost) of the larger Fredrikstad deanery (domprosti):

> "I believe I have a certain influence as an ideological leader and preacher, grounded in my capacity to define norms and standards for the interpretation of world and life view issues, through sermons, liturgies and

ceremonies. My direct influence on the clergy are greater than on congregations, because of my dialogue with them, and through strategies and prioritizations." (my translation)

As is evident from his statement above, his formal power was not directed towards the congregation, but was part of his administrative duties, whereas his normative power was primarily invested in his position as spiritual leader.

The Muslim leader claimed that he neither had normative nor formal power, because his role was that of a spokesperson on behalf of the Islamic Society of Fredrikstad. He did not function in an administrative function, nor as a spiritual leader.

Several of the leaders emphasized that use of power is closely tied to a transparent democratic ideal of "checks and balances. That is, both formal and normative power has strong limitation. Many stressed that misuse of power could have serious consequences for their position as a spiritual leader of the community. What most of them have in common, was that as leaders of voluntary organizations, dependent on significant financial support from their members, they have to stay on a good footing with their members.

As in the national study, all admitted that they have formal power related to their administrative duties in making decision. Further, all emphasized that they have more normative power than formal power, in forming member's theological interpretations, attitudes on social and moral issues. Several of my informants emphasized limitations of power and that they as religious leaders had been given a mandate and trust by their members, elders and overseers. This mandate places limitation on their use of both formal and normative power. Several of my informants stressed the democratic nature of their organization, and shares in the democratic ethos found among national religious leaders.

4.4. Views on social and political issues.

Religious leaders and their organizations have been accused of being conservative and barriers to societal modernization, by favoring anti-secular religious values over against modern ideals of social equality. Some view them as prejudiced, narrow-minded, excluding, moralistic, and lagging behind the rest of society on socio-political issues. Others claim that Muslim leaders may constitute a threat to core Norwegian cultural and Christian values (Døvig and Thorbjørnsrud, 2012, pp. 7-9). The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, expresses his suspicion against religious leaders, by referring to the "source of the unending debates about creationism and anticreationism", when he posits that "those who are abandoning Christianity are doing so for reasons that boil down to the ecclesiastical claim to know what the true nature of man, the world, and society is." He goes on to say, speaking about the

Catholic Church, that "today the Church's true vocation should be to escape from fundamentalism" (Vattimo, 2009: 92). In Norway, we have recently seen this play out in the battles over issues of lesbian-gay rights within The Norwegian church.

With these reflections as mind, I want in this section to explore the views of my interviewees, and their organizations, on a number of social and political issues. All leaders expressed their own viewpoints, but some seemed uncertain when asked about the official view of their organization, except for the two representatives of the Church of Norway, who clearly distinguished their private views from the official position of their organization. One explanation is the fact that the Church of Norway, compared to minority faith and life stance communities, is by far the most active in expressing public opinions on social and political issues, compared to minority faith communities (Furseth, 2015: 153). The Church of Norway has, as a majority church, through public statements by the bishops and its organizational infrastructure a distinct public presence in media on these issues.

Thematically, this section will include their views on issues of economic and political inequality, gender equality and gay-lesbian rights, immigration politics, multicultural and multireligious societies, how they view the social and political role of their own organization. I will also compare my findings at a local level with the findings in the national study.

Economic equality, political equality, and the role of religious values.

I asked if the Norwegian society has been successful in reducing economic inequality, and if there is a great difference in political influence between social elites and the rest of the population. Further, I asked if religious values should have a more prominent role in our societies that they have today.

Whereas five of the leaders agreed that we have been successful in reducing economic inequality in Norway, four answered no. Those who agreed represented three Pentecostal congregations, a Baptist leader, and one from The Norwegian church. It is interesting to note that the spokesperson for the mosques emphasized that the Norwegian welfare-state model is based on social and political values that are similar to central values in Muslim religious traditions of solidarity, collective ideals and caring for the poor. He expressed that by claiming that "Norway is more Muslim than Muslims", and pointed to the equal distribution of welfare and human rights. On the question of political influence, eight of my informants claimed that there are difference in how political influence is distributed between social elites and the rest of the population. One representative of the Church of Norway voiced the strongest opinion by claiming, "Norway is a society that is controlled by elites, and large

portions of the population do not have a say". Only the Muslim spokesperson disagreed and claimed that Norway is a very egalitarian society compared to countries in North Africa and the Middle-East.

My findings varied from the findings in the national study on the question of economic inequality (Furseth, 2015: 153). Whereas, a majority in the national study claimed that we have not come far enough in reducing economic differences, this was a minority position in the local study. On the question of political influence, the findings from both studies agree. In the national study, the claim by the majority of religious leader's that we have not come far enough in reducing economic differences, is explained by the church's focus on diaconal aspect of the church. Through this, the church comes in close contact with economic poverty (Furseth, 2015: 153). In my view, it is more likely that the reality of poverty is more visible on a local than at a national level, because national leaders are more at a distance from this reality than local leaders. Local leaders are closer to the visible effects of the distribution of welfare benefits in our society. They are, as I see it, in a better position to evaluate how welfare benefits function in equalizing differences.

In my study eight out of nine agreed that there is a great difference in political influence between Norwegian elites and ordinary people. Only the Muslim leader disagreed. In his view immigrants Muslim countries view this issue from a very different perspective, because many of them have a history of dominance and suppression by political elites. One explanation for why all my Norwegian interviewees agreed that there still are significant differences, can be that political egalitarianism is a core value. Norway is among the most egalitarian societies in the world, and an explanation for my finding is that Norwegians may have a very low tolerance for inequality in political influence (Furseth et al. 2015). I could find that the national study addressed the issue of political inequality.

The leaders were split on the question if religious values should play a greater role in our society. The majority of five disagreed or was hesitant on this question, while four expressed that they agreed. Those who agreed that religious values should have a more prominent place in society represented Pentecostal and charismatic churches. One of them, however, stressed the ambiguity of the term. Those who disagreed expressed that the notion of religious values is a multifaceted and foggy concept, and that a definition of the term has to be qualified. A majority agreed that religious values could play a societal role, provided that they not come into conflict with human rights and the separation of church and state. Some claimed that religious values should not be promoted by political means. One representative from the Church of Norway argued that some versions of religious values, rooted in a

fundamentalist world view are often unethical and oppressive. Jürgen Habermas argues that for religious values to be relevant in a post-secular context, it must be based on a post-metaphysical epistemic base. That is, religious values, to be compatible with Habermas's notion of the ethics of citizenship, have to shred its "dogmatic encapsulation" (Habermas, 2006: 14), to enable them to "cope with the fact of pluralism, the public authority of the sciences, and the egalitarianism of constitutional principles" (Mendieta, 2010: 9-10). This underlines the highly problematic and ambiguous nature of religious values. I could not find that the question of religious values was specifically addressed in the national study.

Gender equality and lesbian-gay rights.

Here I am concerned with the leader's views on gender equality and lesbian-gay issues.

My first question was if should be statutory gender equality, both within the Church of Norway, other Christian denominations, and religious organizations outside of Christianity. All answered that they were against statutory gender equality, yet some of the Pentecostal and charismatic leaders gave somewhat evasive answers the question of gender equality itself. One Pentecostal pastor claimed that the Church of Norway because of its close relationship with state authorities had to comply with statutory gender equality within their own organization. Independent worship communities, however, should not have to comply with it. He claimed the same right for faith communities outside of Christianity. One other leader argued that questions of gender equality has to do with the freedom of religion, and should not be enforced by law. The Muslim informant expressed similar attitudes. In contrast, representatives of the Church of Norway fully supported gender equality within their own organization.

Pål Repstad's claims in his article on Pentecostal leaders that the Pentecostal movement as such does not have a defined theology on this issue. One the one hand, he argues that for the founder of the Pentecostal movement, Thomas Ball Barratt, the issue of gender and women's access to positions was subordinate to the spiritual gifts. On the other hand, Repstad points out that there also exists within the Pentecostal and charismatic movements a literal interpretive tradition arguing for a God-given order at creation, giving supremacy to males over women (Repstad 2012: 126-128). Kari Austigaard, however, in her study of immigrant Pentecostal communities did not find that male dominance was the rule (Repstad 2012). My data from Østfold indicate that leaders from Pentecostal and charismatic communities are conservative on issues of gender equality, and this may be explained by a

belief in a theology of a God-given order (absolutist) at creation, assigning different roles to men and women.

My second question was if lesbian and gay people should have equal access to positions in faith communities. My findings indicate that this is a contested issue. The answers split along the same divide as the question on gender equality. Whereas Pentecostal, charismatic, and Muslim leaders were unequivocally against, informants from the Church of Norway were positive. One of them stressed, however, that people of the same sex couples should be married or registered partners to be eligible for position as a clergy. The leader from the Methodist church was hesitant on this issue. One Pentecostal leader expressed it like this: "I am totally against it, because it is against our faith. Though lesbian-gay people deserve respect, lesbian-gay practice is indisputably against the Bible." While the Church of Norway is split in this issue, Pentecostal, charismatic, Muslim, Baptist, and Methodist leaders explicitly claimed that their views on this issue were also representative of their organization, and their members.

The majority of local leaders expressed conservative attitudes on questions of statutory gender equality and lesbian-gay rights, except for the leaders from the Church of Norway. Similar to my findings, the findings from the national survey indicate that national religious leaders are also relatively conservative in questions of moral values. The tendency is the same: whereas leaders from the Church of Norway were more positive to employing gay people in religious leadership position, representatives from the minority churches and the Muslim community were unambiguously negative. One Pentecostal leader admitted that gay people could be admitted to some administrative position at a lower level, while another Pentecostal leader claimed that they should be banned from all positions.

Views on immigration politics and multicultural societies

In this section, I am concerned with their views on politics of immigration, asylum seekers, integration, their reflections on the reality that Norway has changed from a more or less monoreligious to a multireligious society, and how they view their social and political role in society.

In contrast to the national study, where a great majority were in favor of less restrictive immigration and asylum policies, my informants were divided on the question. This has been a highly contested issue in Norwegian politics for more than a decade, as in other European

countries.[3] Five of them wanted immigration policies that are more restrictive. Four answered that the present policies (2011-2012)[4] were satisfying. On the question if Norway should welcome more asylum seekers, the majority answered that they agreed, whereas two disagreed. Similar to the findings of the national study, those who wanted more restrictive immigration policies were those faith communities with the highest share of immigrants: Pentecostal, charismatic, and Muslim faith communities. In contrast to the other leaders, the Muslim leader was critical of welcoming more asylum seekers.

One explanation for the fact that local leaders seems to be more restrictive on immigration policies than the national leader, could be that integration is something that happens at the local level. That is, local leaders have a daily experience with immigrants in their congregation, and have through this a better knowledge of the challenges related to integration, and what happens when integration fails, than national leaders. The reason why leaders differentiated between immigrants and asylum seekers, lies in the fact that they saw asylum seekers and refugees as a vulnerable group in in need of help. My Muslim informant expressed that he wanted stricter immigration policies and also a reduction in residence permits for asylum seekers. He justified his standpoint by arguing that the increase of asylum seekers has caused a fear among immigrants who are well integrated into the Norwegian society. This fear, he said, is a fear of stigmatization; of being identified with immigrants and asylum seekers where integration have failed. He claimed, "ethnic Norwegians do not distinguish between those who are well integrated and those who are newcomers." Further, he argued that many in the Muslim communities fear that an increase in the number of immigrants and asylum seekers could lead to a higher level of social conflict.

In relation to the question of responsibility for integration of immigrants, a majority argued that this must be a shared responsibility resting equally on the immigrant themselves and society. This is similar to the findings among national leaders. The spokesperson for the Muslim communities emphasized the importance of employment and work as the most important arena for integration.

I also asked if immigrants should be allowed to practice their religious traditions without interference from central or local authorities. All agreed that this should be allowed,

[3] For a study of the European context and its challenges of migration, see Tariq Modood et al., *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship*, Routledge (2006). This is a study of seven European countries – Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Italy – on how they manage issues of migration post the 9/11 attacks in the USA.

[4] The Norwegian Labour Party was in power at the time of the interviews.

provided that these practices were not in conflict with Norwegian law or human rights. This finding is also supported by findings of the national study.

My informants were also asked about their general opinions on multicultural societies. They were all positive to the fact that Norway is becoming a more multicultural society. On the one hand, several argued that cultural diversity is a positive development in that it expands our cultural horizon and tolerance for the immigrant other. One posited that this has raised the status of religious reflection in society, also in the public sphere. On the other hand, some warned against oppressive religious practices and power structures in the wake of this development. Some were also concerned with challenges relating to ghettoization and problems with integration. One was concerned for the possible erosion of "Norwegian culture and values". As in the national study, the majority of local religious leaders expressed positive attitudes towards immigration.

Towards the end of the interviews, I asked them what political or social role their faith community should play in society. A majority answered that their role in society is primarily social, not political. Yet, the two informants from The Norwegian church argued that the church also has a political role. They claimed that the church should function as a political watchdog in relation to social justice, development aid, and climate issues. "The church", one said, "should be a church with an eye on those who fall outside the public welfare measures, modelled on the Good Samaritan." Further, the leader for the charismatic church arranged political debates in relation to political elections to fight for political issues that are important to them. Two informants from Pentecostal churches claimed that faith communities could function as important arenas for social and political integration into the Norwegian society, both in relation to immigrants and others. One posited that faith communities could also contribute to the formation of their member's political opinions, while others emphasized their role as a voice in civil society and further civic engagement. Similar to the findings of the national study, local faith communities also encouraged their members to engage in social and political issues

All agreed that faith communities can play an important social and existential role in the lives of its members, and that this is their most important role. Some emphasized the importance of social networks and their potential resources for individuals and families. Others argued that they also play an important existential role in administering the life rituals, by providing meaning and dignity, and creating a sense of belonging.

My findings on the question of what social or political role faith communities should play in society corresponds with the findings from the national study. A majority agreed that

faith communities should not have political role in society, but that they should have a role in civil society. Leaders from the Church of Norway emphasized social-ethical issues like climate change, consumerism, human rights, and the protection of vulnerable people in society. Representatives from the Christian minority churches were concerned with creating a strong social arena for it members, building strong networks, issues of integration of immigrants, and being a visible and positive factor in society. The Muslim leader was reluctant to define the social or political role, but stressed the need for dialogue across religious divides.

4.5 Political affiliation

They were also asked about their political affiliation but two of the leaders declined to answer this question. The leaders from the Church of Norway and the Muslim leader voted for the Norwegian Labour Party (AP) and Socialist Left Party (SV). The leaders from the Pentecostal and charismatic community voted for the Christian Democrats (KrF) and the Conservative Party of Norway (H). Whereas informants from the the Church of Norway and the Muslim communities voted on parties on the center-left of the political axis, informants from the Pentecostal and charismatic churches voted center-right. These finding of political affiliation corresponds both the findings in the national study, and in earlier studies (Gulbrandsen et.al 2002).

Sociologist of religion Pål Repstad, based on *Maktutredningen* (Gulbrandsen et.al 2002) and its research on power elites in 2001, asked in an article from 2005 the question why the Norwegian church elite, represented by Church of Norway, tends to be more politically radical than other elites (Repstad, 2005). He suggested several answers to this question. One is based on ideology. He suggests that one explanation is that the church as a movement is "based on ideas and values, with much ideological sympathy for egalitarianism and solidarity for the weak and the poor" (Repstad 2005: 77). He also connects this to the political radicalism of the 60's 70's, which formed a strong backdrop for reigning church elites in 2001. Second, he argues that because "church elites is the oldest of the elite groups in Norway," they "may have some social characteristics from their background leading them in a radical direction" (Repstad 2005: 78). What he means by this is that "they have grown up under stronger influence of ideals of simple and egalitarian conditions" (Repstad 2005: 78). A third answer suggest a more cynical perspective, namely that "church leaders can allow themselves to nurture radical views, because thy never have to account for these opinions in practical decision-making and execution of power" (Repstad 2005: 78). This, he suggest, can

be seen as a “sign of powerlessness” (Repstad 2005:78)). In conclusion, he claims however, that it is not easy be conclusive on how this phenomenon should be explained.

In my case, whatever the explanation for this phenomenon might be, Repstad’s article documents that there are solid traditions in The Norwegian church for taking a leftist political position. Findings both from my study and the national study confirm that Pentecostal and charismatic churches are relatively conservative on social-ethical issues like family policies gender and gay policies. This may explain why they are center-right in their political affiliation. The Muslim leader, despite being conservative on social-ethical issues, stressed the fact that the Nordic political model of social-democratic parties are based on some of the core values of his Muslim faith tradition. This was his main argument for voting on a leftist party.

4.6. Political lobbying

In this section, I want to map if and to what extent religious leaders engage in lobbying activities to influence public decision makers on issues that are important to their organization. My interest here is to understand if and how they utilize resources available at the levels of the Norwegian administrative bureaucracy and in media.

All except for Baptist and Muslim informants confirmed that they do lobbying on issues that are important to them. These issues are mostly local issues of importance to them. That is, issues of financial support for a variety of social work in their local environment, substance abuse treatment, activities related to inclusion of immigrants, and housing for homeless people. These lobbying activities are mostly directed towards local decisions makers, local politicians, and bureaucrats at municipality levels. A couple of the Pentecostal leaders told that they also had made contacts at Ministry levels in relation to financial support for establishing bible schools.

The leader for the charismatic church, told me that they had contacts with local politicians to influence them on social-ethical issues that are important to them. They also invited local politicians at times of local elections to have public debates on issues like abortion and human rights. I was told that some of these issues were linked with deeply held theological convictions.

The Muslim communities, however, seem to hold a low profile in their local contexts. This social and political withdrawal can largely be explained by their fear of social stigmatization. As my informant said, “We are afraid to identify as Muslims… We pull out.” The Muslim leader explained this by referring to large streams of refugees to Norway, starting in the 1990’s, and the subsequent public focus on the problematic aspects of immigration

related to growth in crime rates, unemployment, and problems of social and political integration. The result of this, he claimed, is that a large number of immigrants experience prejudices against themselves by the majority population, implying that they felt that they could be blamed for these social ills. They were therefore reluctant in engaging in lobbying activities at the local level. One other factor that can explain this withdrawal is that immigrants, and especially refugees, feel strong attachments to their home country. and have little engagement with Norwegian issues. As my informant said, "they have no thought for living in Norway, and they view only news-channels from their country of origin".

The leaders were also asked if they utilized organizations to help further their various causes. One of my informant told that he had used the Christian Association of Independent Schools (Norske Friskolers Forbund) in rekation with the upstart of a local bible school. The spokesperson for the mosques informed me that they, from time to time, had used resources in the Islamic Council of Norway. The fact that local religious leaders rarely make contacts at Ministry levels in the national bureaucratic system, can, as I see it, largely be explained by the emergence of a Norwegian interreligious infrastructure that functions as an intermediary between the local and the national level.[5] These umbrella organization function indirectly as lobbyists on behalf of local faith communities.

In comparing my findings to the national study I find that local leaders are to some extent concerned with some of the same issues as the national leaders, but within the framework of their local context. The charismatic leader was concerned with social-ethical issues in relation to local elections and on issues related to upstart of a Bible school. A Pentecostal leader, sought to influence on issues directly related to them, like building permits.

The vast majority of contacts with decision makers were made at the local level. Only the charismatic leader had made contacts with members of the Norwegian parliament. One Pentecostal leader had made contacts with local members of political parties. Several of my informants used media as a vehicle to further their causes. A representative from The Church of Norway said, "I often use media. My pastoral role is to function as a correction on several issued discussed in the public sphere." The Muslim informant informed me that local media contacted him to take part in interviews, and express his view on issues of immigration, integration and interreligious dialogue.

All confirmed that contacts with local decision makers and media had had a positive influence on the outcome of their issues.

[5] For a thorough description of the emergence of this interreligious infrastructure, see Furseth (eds), 2015: 143-149.

4.7. Dialogue and inclusive practice.

In this section, my focus is on local faith communities' activities related to inclusion of immigrants and interreligious dialogue and practice, both in relation to Christian congregations and non-Christian faith communities. My aim is to find out if the local leaders are engaged in interreligious dialogue and what their attitudes are on this issue. What are the extent, if any, of their involvement in interfaith or interreligious dialogue at a local level? Further do they offer any practical assistance to new immigrants to help them settle into their new environment.

I asked my informants if they are engaged in specific activities to further inclusion of new immigrants into the Norwegian society. The interview guide had a list of suggested activities like assistance in relation to visa-applications, residence permits, citizenship, housing, jobs, language training, economic assistance, housing of asylum seekers, or other. In this latter category, they were free to list activities that were not covered in the interview guide. They were also asked, on the question of interfaith and interreligious dialogue, if they meet with local leaders of other faith communities, and if they arrange internal meetings aimed at theological reflections on issues of dialogue. Further, if they arrange activities together with other faith communities or organizations to further interreligious understanding.

What was common for the leaders, except for the Muslim informant, was that they represented faith communities that were started as ethnic Norwegian communities. However, over the last decade they have received members and attendants that came from different cultures. The number of immigrant members are still at a low level, and varies from one to thirty in each of the congregations. I found the greatest share of immigrants in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, who are among the biggest congregations in Fredrikstad, Sarpsborg and Moss. The explanation for their higher share of immigrants may be the fact that these congregations, over a number of years, have been engaged in mission work abroad, and are thus more open to cultural differences than the other faith communities are.

Five out of nine have activities targeting new immigrants, including the Pentecostal, the charismatic and the Muslim communities, who also had the highest share of immigrants attending their communities. Leaders from The Church of Norway, the Methodist church, and the Baptist church informed me that they had no activities of practical assistance directed toward immigrants.

I found, however, great variation on the scope of activities they offered. All of the Pentecostal and the charismatic community had a considerable work targeting immigrants. They covered almost the whole list of suggested activities in the interview guide, except for

housing of asylum seekers, financial aid and language training. These activities are sometimes carried out in cooperation with local authorities and private actors, aimed at creating meeting-points between ethnic Norwegians and immigrants. This was especially true for the Pentecostal community in Sarpsborg. One example, are groups of women, and children with different ethnic background who met regularly. Together they engaged in various activity like sewing, baking and assistance with children's school assignments. They also engaged, together with the local municipality and local business partner in arranging Christmas parties for immigrants. Others were offered guidance in relation to housing, job opportunities, language training, economic issues, and how get around in the Norwegian society.

Foley and Hoge, in their study of about 200 faith communities in the greater Washington DC area, claims in their study that "social capital starts with social networks, and it is widely assumed that worship communities are apt at providing members with valuable social ties" (Foley and Hoge 2007: 92). What I found is that Pentecostal churches and charismatic churches are supplying linkages to resources both within the community and beyond the community, for example job opportunities. Seen from an immigrant's perspective, Foley and Hoge posit that

> If the community itself provides extensive services, it will be relatively rich in social capital, even if social bonds are weak. And if immigrants can make connections to people and resources beyond the community thanks to their participation, they will enjoy relatively rich social capital, whether or not they enjoy tight bonds with many people within the community. (Foley and Hoge 2007: 92)

My informants in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Østfold paints a picture of their communities as rich resources of bridging and bonding social capital, providing their immigrants with valuable opportunities "to broaden their circle of acquaintance, providing resources for support, mutual aid, and access to jobs and other benefit." (Foley and Hoge 2007: 30). They also offer bonding resources through small cell groups within their communities.

Bernice Martin in her study of Latin-American Pentecostalism support my finding above. She claims that,

> Far from being an escapist ghetto for powerless, these self-governing Pentecostal congregations offer a route to new possibilities, to new experiences of selfhood, new patterns of individual *and* co-operative action, to skills and modes of response which have a real survival value in the secular world beyond the voluntary group. (Martin 1998: 132)

The motivation for facilitating these resources for new immigrants may have more than one explanation. A major explanation is, undoubtedly, located in the core Christian values of compassion for the poor and dispossessed. Why then does it seem that Pentecostal churches providing more resources to new immigrants than the other Christian communities that were part of my study? Martin's suggestion indicates that there might be elements of Pentecostal theologies that can explain this variation, like emphasis on individualism, social mobility and self-determination (Martin 1998). My data also indicate that Pentecostal communities' engagement with immigrants is motivated by the aim of recruiting new members. One of my Pentecostal informants said it like this: "Immigration has located the mission field in our neighborhood. I'm excited to speak with Muslims who have not heard about Jesus." One additional factor is that many of the immigrants from Africa have attended Pentecostal and charismatic churches in their homeland.

Not only Pentecostal and charismatic communities, but also Muslims have activities directed toward new immigrants from the Muslim world. However, they offer no organized activities in relation to housing, job, language training, or economic assistance. What they focused on was to give guidance and information on how the Norwegian society functions and functions. This included information on cultural issues, social codes, resources available the welfare-state, and how to get around in the Norwegian society. There seems to a certain fear among well integrated immigrants, that newly arrived immigrants may act negatively in a way that gives Muslims in general a bad reputation in society.

The findings at the local level confirms the assertion by the majority of the national leaders that assistance to new immigrants are to some extent offered through the local communities.

When it comes to the question of Christian interfaith dialogue, I found that there are well-established practices for this, essentially through local chapters of the Christian Council of Norway. In Fredrikstad however, I found that Pentecostal and charismatic churches do not participate in this fora of interfaith dialogue. The explanation for this seems to be a history of earlier conflicts between Pentecostal, charismatic and Lutheran leaders. This was indicated in the interview with the charismatic leader. Pentecostals and the charismatic communities have therefore their own for fora dialogue.

At the time of the interviews I found that interreligious dialogue was almost non-existent in Østfold, except for a couple of initiatives by the Muslim communities and The Norwegian church. There was no formal arena established for local interreligious dialogue. All my informants, except for informants from the Muslim communities and the Church of Norway,

expressed a decidedly negative attitude toward interreligious dialogue with the Muslim communities. One informant said it like this: “interreligious dialogue is a very controversial topic in our congregation, so we do nothing in this respect. Issues on Islam are very sensitive in our congregation, so we have no dialogue with them.”

In contrast to this, my Muslim informant expressed a very positive attitude on dialogue across religious borders, both in relation to cultural and religious differences. “After all, he said, we are all siblings, because we are all descendants of Adam.” Several years ago, there was some informal contacts between Muslim communities and the Church of Norway in Fredrikstad, I was told. In addition to this, the Muslim spokesperson told that they had, from time to time, arranged meetings for primary school children, Norwegians and Muslims, in one of their mosques to create an atmosphere of dialogue and understanding.

However, in the September 2015 Dialogforum Østfold was established. This arena for interreligious dialogue was established and is owned by the Church of Norway, the Methodist Church and Muslim organizations. It is located in Sarpsborg. Their aim is to further interreligious dialogue and practice, to be a role model in dialogue and practice across in the growing multicultural context of Østfold, and foster mutual understanding and respect among its members. One of their focus areas will especially be young people and schools. It is a bilateral organization and its founders has, according to board member Kari Mangrud Alsvåg, representing the Church of Norway, invited all Christian faith communities in Østfold to become members. At the time of my conversation with her in October 2015, none of the invited faith communities had accepted the invitation. She also told me in our conversation that there is a great skepticism in Christian faith communities in Østfold related to interreligious dialogue. This new dialogue center in Østfold was established because local representatives of the Church of Norway and Muslim organizations saw that there was a need for a dialogical arena. In Norway there is a growing awareness of the need to create dialogical arenas across religious divides. In a recent evaluation of the role that the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL), the Christian Council of Norway (NKR), and the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN) plays in interreligious dialogue, three case studies are presented to explore the development of new dialogical arenas and how interreligious dialogue functions at a local level (Brottveit, Gresaker, and Hoel 2015).

In contrast to the national leader and the growing number of interreligious dialogue centers in Norway, the local leaders from Christian minority churches in Østfold seem to have strong negative attitudes to interreligious dialogue.

What are the reasons behind the apparent lack of dialogue across religious borders in Østfold? One answer could be that religious leaders in Christian minority churches in Østfold are more conservative than national religious leaders. This is supported by my findings on issues like immigration policies, statutory gender equality, on equal treatment of sexual minorities in faith communities, and a center-right political affiliation. Further, Pentecostal faith communities in Østfold are not members of the Christian Council of Norway (Furseth et al. 2015), and this fact illustrates that even Christian interfaith dialogue is problematic, which is also documented in my findings.

Repstad has pointed out (2012: 127) that within Pentecostalism there exist a fundamentalist and literal interpretive tradition of biblical interpretation. Such interpretive traditions often imply a certain absoluteness, and dogmatic attitude in relation to religious truth. This may create some cognitive challenges and obstacles to enter into interreligious dialogue (Habermas 2006). Further along this line, David Herbert point out the multifaceted nature of the public sphere. He argues that "citizens of modern societies simply do not share enough in common to have the kind of debate that the idea of the public sphere implies", because the discursive ideal of the public sphere is blind to "epistemological diversity that makes resolution of difference through rational discussion impossible" (Herbert 2003: 95). My point here is that fundamentalist interpretive traditions of sacred texts, referred to by Repstad above, may be an obstacle to dialogue. This fundamentalist attitude implies a belief in strong metaphysical theologies, that have difficulties in facing the cognitive challenges of more liberal or postmodern pragmatic approaches to religious truth claims. When Habermas talks about "post-metaphysical thought" (2006:16) it is this kind of strong metaphysical theologies that he attacks. What is needed according to Habermas is a "modernization of the religious consciousness" (2006: 16), because it affects the condition to have a meaningful dialogue among the different actors in the public sphere. As I see it, this is also relevant for interreligious dialogue.

5. Main findings and conclusion

This study has focused on religious leaders and their faith communities in the county of Østfold. The aim of this study is to understand the role of religious leaders and their faith communities in the context of a growing cultural and religious diversity. A key focus has therefore been to examine to what extent local religious leaders and their faith communities engage at the level of civil society and the public sphere of their communities? To answer this

question, I have drawn a profile of the religious leader and their faith communities. I have explored their views on a number of social and political issues and if they are engaged in activities of political lobbying. Further, I have also asked about their activities towards new immigrants, in relation to interreligious dialogue and practices, and their views on their role in a multireligious society. The purpose has been to try to understand if local religious leaders and their faith communities are outward looking and engaging in society in general, or inward looking with few links outside their own religious network.

My findings are as follows:

First, the typical local religious leader is a male in his mid-fifties who has held his position for approximately 7,5 years. This profile is similar to the findings in the study of national religious leaders. A dominant feature in both the local and the national study is the gender imbalance. In my study all the leaders were men.

Second, the leaders were asked about their own view of their power or influence over their members. The concept of power was differentiated in three categories: formal power, normative power and limitations on power. All admitted that they have formal power in relation to their administrative duties and in decision making. However, they saw their role primarily as spiritual leaders, and emphasized normative power in forming members' theological interpretations, attitudes on social and moral issues over their formal power. Several of the leaders stressed the democratic nature of their organization and how this fact placed limitations on both normative and formal power. My findings at the local level are similar to the findings at the national level.

Third, they were also asked about their views on a number of social and political issues:

(1) Economic equality, political equality, the role of religious values in society:

On the issue economic equality, 5 out of 9 answered that we have been successful in reducing economic inequality in Norway. It is interesting to note that the Muslim leader emphasized that the Norwegian welfare-state is based on social and political values that are central in Muslim religious traditions, like solidarity, collective ideals and caring for the poor. My findings varied from the national finding on this issue, where a majority of the leaders claimed that we have not come far enough to reduce inequality. In my view, it is more likely that the reality of economic inequality is more visible on a local level than at a national level. National leaders have a greater distance to local realities than the local leaders.

On the issue of political inequality, 8 out of 9 agreed that there is a great distance between elites and ordinary people in political influence in the Norwegian society. I could not find this issue addressed in the national study.

The leaders were split on the issues of role of religious values in society. Those who agreed that religious values should play a more prominent role in society represented Pentecostal and charismatic faith communities. The majority, however, emphasized the multifaceted and ambiguous role of the term "religious values", and claimed that they should be free to practice them, provided that they were not in conflict with human rights and the separation of church and state. I could not find this issues addressed specifically in the national study.

(2) Gender equality and lesbian-gay issues:

A majority of the leaders expressed conservative attitudes on questions of statutory gender equality and lesbian-gay rights in relation to employment in religious organizations, except for the leaders from the Church of Norway. Similar to my findings, the national study also indicates that the leaders were relatively conservative on moral values. However, the local leaders seem to more conservative than the national leaders. One explanation is that Pentecostal leaders, who are conservative on these issues were not part of the national survey, because they declined Furseth et al. 2015).

(3) Views on immigration policies, multicultural societies, and their role in society:

In contrast the national study, where a majority was in favor of less restrictive immigration policies, the local leaders were divided in this issue. A majority wanted more restrictive immigration policies. However, the local leaders wanted to welcome more asylum seekers. The Muslim leader wanted stricter policies, both in relation to immigration and asylum seekers.

All agreed that immigrants should be allowed to practice their religious traditions without interference from central or local authorities, provided that these practices were not in conflict with human rights and the separation of church and state.

As in the national study, local religious leaders expressed positive attitudes towards the fact that Norway is becoming a more multicultural and multireligious society.

On the question of their role in society, a clear majority answered that their role is primarily social, not political. Yet, representatives from the Church of Norway claimed that the church should also have a political role, in relation to issues of social justice, development aid, and issues of climate change. My findings here correspond to the findings in the national study.

(4) Political affiliation:

Two of the leaders declined to state their political affiliation. The leaders from the Church of Norway and the Muslim leader voted for leftist parties, while the Pentecostal and charismatic leaders voted center-right. These findings correspond both with the findings in the national studies and earlier studies (Gulbrandsen et.al 2002).

(5) Political lobbying:

All except for the Baptist and the Muslim leaders confirmed that they were engaged in lobbying on issues of importance to them and their organization. This corresponds to the findings at the national level, except that local leaders lobbying activities take place in relation to local decision makers, and to a very little extent in relation to central decision makers.

(6) Dialogue and inclusive practice:

A majority of faith communities have activities targeting new immigrants, including the Pentecostal, charismatic and Muslim communities. These activities are aimed at helping immigrants settle in their new environment. The Church of Norway, the Methodist Church and the Baptists had no such activities. The national leaders told that they had no formally organized activities, but that this usually happened at the local level.

One explanations for the lack of interreligious dialogue in Østfold, as I have indicated in my analyses, may have to do with conservative theological leaders who have adopted a fundamentalist and literal interpretive tradition of biblical truth. Another explanation is that the Pentecostal faith communities are not members of the Christian

Council of Norway, which indicate a reluctance to interfaith and interreligious dialogue. I have also pointed out how Habermas' concept of the need for a change of epistemic attitude, from a metaphysical to a post-metaphysical attitude, can be relevant to explain why interreligious dialogue seems to be problematic for some of the theologically conservative leaders from minority churches in Østfold.

On the question of interfaith dialogue, except for the Pentecostal and charismatic churches who have their own dialogue arena, there are established practices for this through the local chapter of the Christian Council of Norway. On the question of interreligious dialogue, a majority of the leaders were negative, except for the leaders from the Muslim community and the Church of Norway. It seems that interreligious dialogue is a very controversial topic in minority churches in Østfold.

However, after I finished my interviews, Dialogforum Østfold is established, and is owned and run the Church of Norway, Muslim communities and the Methodist Church. In a telephone conversation with Kari M. Alsvåg, representing the Church of Norway, I was told that this is a bilateral organization, and that it has invited minority churches in Østfold. At the time of the conversation in mid-October 2015, none of the minority churches had accepted the invitation.

My findings indicate that religious actors are more visible in the public space and civil society. All of my interviewees encouraged their members to take an active part in society, also politically. As it is pointed out in the national study, earlier Christians were more concerned with flagging conservative positions on social-ethical issues of abortion, sexual morality, religious education in schools, but they are now more concerned with broader social and political issues. My findings also indicate that faith communities are viewed as important actors in civil society. This is evident in my findings that local authorities view them as important collaborators, for example in relation to integration of immigrants. Further, faith communities vary according to how inward looking they are, with emphasis on strong bonding social capital vs. how outward they are, with emphasis on bridging social capital (Coleman 2003; Foley and Hoge 2007; Smidt 2003). One example of this is the resistance mentioned above on issues of interreligious dialogue. However, the picture is not unambiguously. My findings indicate that one faith community can be inward looking on

some issues, but outward looking on other. This agrees with Putnam's notion that communities can be bot bridging and bonding along different dimensions (Putnam 2000: 23). An example here is Pentecostal churches who are inward looking on issues of interreligious dialogue, but outward looking on issues of assisting in integration of new immigrants. Earlier studies indicate that there is a variation in faith communities in the formation of bonding and bridging social capital.

This study questions Foley and Hoge's claim that "Research on Christian churches confirm that theologically liberal organizations tend to be more actively involved in civil society than theologically conservative ones" (Foley and Hoge, 2007: 117). My study indicates that theologically conservative faith communities, like the Pentecostal churches, can also be active and visible in civil society.

What are the strengths and limitations of my study? A strength of this study is that it is a case study anchored in local contexts. The strength of a local perspective is that it is the main arena where the effects and complexities of a multicultural society plays out, and integration takes place at the local level. One limitation of my study is that the scope of this study is limited, both in numbers of informants and geography. There is a need for more case studies to understand better the complexities of the publicness of religion in multireligious societies, not least in relation to gain a better understanding of the condition for successful interreligious dialogue.

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