

Danes frequently confronted by religion: study

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Ramadan dinners in the Danish Parliament, staff parties without either pork or alcohol and prayer rooms at the airport are all examples of how religion is becoming more visible in public spaces.

"Prior to the mass migration of the '60s, '70s and '80s, almost all Danes shared similar values and were members of the national Christian church, so [religion](#) was not an issue in everyday life. There was no need to discuss neither one's own nor another person's religious viewpoint, and secularisation was a matter of course. Today, it is difficult to be in a public place, read the newspaper, or go to school or work without encountering religious expressions and symbols," says Niels Valdemar Vinding, a [PhD student](#) from the Centre for European Islamic Thought at University of Copenhagen and co-author of a recently published report from the European research project RELIGARE that examines religious diversity and secular models in Europe.

Secularism under pressure

"Everywhere in Europe it is clear that the concept of secularism, where religion remains a private matter, is under pressure. Everything suggests that in the future religious organisations will have more influence on schools, [workplaces](#) and the media. This means that both private and [public institutions](#) will be dealing with religion more often," explains Vinding.

The report is one of six national reports examining the nexus between secularism and religion in a specific European country. The reports are based on interviews with a variety of religious, secular and [political leaders](#). The reports are key contributions to the research project RELIGARE, which brings together university researchers from ten different European countries.

A contradictory relationship

The picture the report portrays of the typical Dane's reaction to the tension between secularism and religion is a bit blurry. On the one hand, Danes cherish diversity, support the idea of having room for all and believe in giving each individual the freedom to follow their own faith and convictions. On the other hand, many would like a high degree of legal regulation when it comes to those forms of religion and religious expression that seem strange or different. An example of such regulation was seen in the amendment of the Judicial Code of 2009, which forbade judges and lay judges from wearing headscarves in courtrooms.

"It is not a case of two opposite sides of opinion, it is rather a an overlap of opinions," says Vinding. "People support personal freedom and religiosity, but not at any price. Some Danes can be perfectly comfortable with a morning hymn being sung in school, and at the same time have a problem with halal meat being served in institutional meals without seeing a clear picture of the contradiction or sense of injustice."

More information: www.teol.ku.dk/ceit/religare/Report_Final_2012.pdf

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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