From Vision of the Future to Building Permit

Communicative Constructions of Space in Interreligious Negotiations

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"…this unique space [made up] of us four women around this table"[2]

1 Introduction

"Conviviality depends on demographic and educational overlaps, rather than upon a moral commitment or guarantee of collaboration with others." (Georgiou 2016: 266) Building on the work of Myria Georgiou, who examines conviviality in the contexts of communication and urbanism, this essay will explore communicative interactions that represent a demographic-religious overlap during an effort to build a shared space for early childhood development. We first set out to identify and examine the communicative practices partners use during their negotiations, and how an interreligious initiative can execute the idea of co-creating a highly unusual and innovative day care center[3]. The focus then shifts to the interactive communication practices employed by the partners from three religious communities and their joint communicative practices in constructing the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus*[4] ("Three-Religion Day Care Center") in Berlin, Germany, as a space shaped by a vision for the *future*. In doing so, we refer to the research on questions of interreligious communication and political friendship in the context of this day care center (Radosh-Hinder: 2021). This chapter will begin by describing the specificities of the stakeholders' communicative interactions, then

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2 Quote from the negotiations for the construction of a three-religion day care center on March 9, 2017.

3 In Germany, children ages 1–6 attend a daycare center.

4 "The word Kita is a commonly used shortening of the longer German word for daycare center, *Kindertagesstätte*" https://dreireligionenkitahaus.de/.

proceed to explore how they employ these specific structures of communication to shape constructions of space that will later emerge in the project's implementation. Georgiou particularly emphasizes the processuality of communication: "In the process, communication supports – and sometimes critically obstructs – a range of politics for living together in difference." (Georgiou 2016: 278) The concept of space in this essay is developed through interactive communication practices. This contributes a distinct perspective on something Andrea Bieler has elaborated as one dimension of "doing" conviviality: spatial-temporal constellations (Bieler in this volume).

The initiative to build this unique project has partly centered on the negotiations between the partners involved: a group of interreligious (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) negotiators, initiated in 2015 and dedicated to the question of how children can coexist in three different religious institutions under one roof, fostering an environment of equality, respect, and shared responsibility. At the same time, the interreligious negotiation processes between stakeholders in the construction of the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* have revealed aspects of the architecture of communicative constructions of space underlying the production of a social reality.[5] If a communicative, social, multireligious reality is indeed being produced here, it is through the process of communicatively constructing spaces, which will later materialize as physical construction projects. Such projects, which at present usually occur in urban spaces, also take on a symbolic function within urban topographies as materialized and solidified forms of conviviality.[6] Andrea Bieler describes "conviviality as a set of practices that are in constant motion. In motion relates to the fluid, the repetitive as well as the process character in which these practices unfold in particular moments and over time. These practices are situated in fleeting interactions as well as committed relationships, they are embodied as informal and formalized exchanges, as well as routine and improvised performances." (Bieler in this volume) Against this backdrop, we would like to highlight that at a later stage, we will be able to ascertain whether the processuality and fluidity of "doing conviviality" fall by the wayside as structures solidify, or whether and how these solidified forms continue to shape ongoing interactive processes.

2 The Three-Religion Day Care Center in Berlin

The goal of the initiative introduced above is to build a joint day care center that will house separate Jewish, Muslim, and Christian facilities under one roof. Each component day care facility will operate according to its own Jewish, Muslim, or Christian religious educational profile, while from day one every child will have the experience of attending day care center in the same building as peers from other religions. This very experience

5 In light of recent developments, we would like to note that this text was written before October 7, 2023, i.e., before the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel. The implications of this act on the progress of the project are significant, but they also show the urgent necessity of such projects given societal polarization, particularly in the current situation in Berlin.

6 Mattes/Kasmani/Dilger in this volume elaborate on practices of place-making in the urban context.

of equality (one building) and difference (three different day care facilities) aims to reinforce an awareness of equality and cooperation between religions and, crucially, the peaceful interaction between them.

The concept is based on a form of "constructed equality" that does not reflect the true demographics or statistics of wider society. All three facilities will be equal in size with the same number of children and educators, equal access to the same resources, and joint responsibility over the common areas. Crucially, all educators will be accountable for *all* the children in the building, not just those in their own facility. Thus, the project entails both an explicit concept of difference and a far-reaching claim to equality. For this, Annedore Prengel's concept of egalitarian difference is a guiding principle. Prengel describes that egalitarian difference emphasizes equivalence within difference: "Ideas of equality without exclusions imply the acceptance of differences as equivalent and thus qualitatively go beyond visions of equality that only apply to the similar and exclude anything that diverges. Equality as the equivalence of those who differ thus constitute the fulfillment of the promises associated with the universally formulated but only narrowly intended concept of equality." (Prengel 2019: 41)[7] The guiding principle of the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* is the notion of togetherness, which is why the three sponsors share the entryway, the outdoor play area, and the multipurpose areas of the building. On the other hand, the idea of difference allows each religion to shape the daily routine and religious education in the respective day care facility according to its own needs.[8] This means that each facility implements its own religious education profiles, aligns its annual schedule to its respective religious calendar, and observes religious holidays and dietary rules. At the same time, the three facilities work together on an interreligious basis and deal with topics that are relevant for all three day care facilities (in regard to both non-religious and religious themes).

What makes this concept novel and, so far, one of a kind is that it simultaneously recognizes the differences between the respective religions as fundamental, while enabling the development of an experience of togetherness. Thanks to all three facilities' equal provision of resources and educators, the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sponsors are each able to realize their own religious profiles. Interestingly, this aspect has been the most contentious in discussions with funding providers and politically responsible entities. The relevant departments of the Berlin Senate have repeatedly urged the project to develop a shared umbrella organization to facilitate the practical implementation of public subsidies.[9] This demonstrates that what the group of initiators view as a forward-look-

7 In summary: "To talk about equality, you must presuppose difference" (Prengel 2001: 96).

8 This ensures that each religion is practiced and its religious education is implemented following its own expertise and sense of clarity, and is not reduced to the lowest common denominator. This allows for contradictions to coexist at one location. Not all nursery school facilities celebrate all holidays and festivals, but the option to invite the others to holidays and participate as friends is always open. Thus, the center remains conscious of difference without applying universalism to religious education. An interesting question will be whether and how (shared?) religious forms will be established, for example within the common school year (arrival of new children, "graduation" when the children reach school age, etc.).

9 The contexts here include potential liability issues in nursery school operations, as well as the desire to avoid ambiguities regarding who is responsible for what. This issue reveals that

ing concept of egalitarian difference at the organizational level is not directly reflected in day-to-day administrative practices, and that implementing an equality-based concept of this sort takes considerable advocacy. This structural feature of the concept was crucial from the beginning, as it not only incorporates the children, parents, and educators, but also the sponsors in their respective organizational structures. As for the negotiations within the initiative itself, this sponsorship architecture was decided in one of the very first meetings in 2015 and has never been revised in the eight years since, although the possibility has been discussed. While other compromises have been made for the sake of securing funding, the initiative considers the overall tripartite structure as a *sine qua non* of the project.

The *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* was initiated in 2015 by a group of four women who each held leadership positions in their respective religious (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) institutions and associations.[10] In addition to the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian day care facilities, the building will feature shared areas, including the common entrance area and outdoor play area; the shared kitchen, which complies with the religions' dietary rules; multipurpose rooms for joint use (festivals, parent meetings, etc.); and a shared "room of silence." The center's security plan will also be jointly managed, for example. The three separate day care facilities will each be operated by the sponsoring religious body; thus, three distinct day care facilities will be operating and holding joint responsibility in the same building on an equal basis. This fact entails additional legal requirements, as the sponsors are not linked by any existing mutual and (legally) binding relationship.

The preceding section has provided an overview of the initiative's goals. In the research project, the focus shifts to the question of how the initiative's partners communicate and how they construct, reconstruct, establish, and make operational the concept laid out above during their conversations. As an "insider researcher"[11], Radosh-Hinder had access to all relevant conversations, documents, textual materials, and images. She evaluated all 15 negotiation meetings conducted by the initiative's partners during the years 2015–17 and 2019, focusing on how they communicated with one another and thus how they communicated about the future shared space of the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus*. These discussions invariably also entailed negotiations over resources, claims to and enactments of equality, and significant references to the realm of public policy, as the project's implementation requires extensive public funding.

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public administrations and insurance companies are not (yet) prepared for models of shared responsibility and accountability.

10 The puzzling number of four collaborators on the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* project arose because the representative of a Christian day care association sought theological support – an internal differentiation more feasible in larger religious communities; see Radosh-Hinder (2021: 52–78). The core initiative has since grown to include another four women, including regular support from an organizational development consultant.

11 Unlike the distinction between participant observation and observant participation, insider researchers are part of the research field during and after the research process. This allows for significant in-depth insights and easy access to data, but also requires a clearly delineated approach towards one's own research bias, for example; see Carol Costley et al. (2010); Mercer (2007); Saidin and Aizan Yaacob (2016).

3 Communicative Interactions by the Initiative to Build a Three-Religion Day Care Center

According to the observations, throughout the negotiation process, the partners did not solely communicate as representatives of their associations/institutions, but often used an interpersonal style of communication typical of close social relationships (family/friends; Manning/Kunkel: 2014). In other phases, the partners communicated as representatives of their associations/institutions, sometimes making explicit references to these entities and to their own roles within them (for example, when one participant stated that the board of directors would "make hell for her"). This led to a high degree of communicative flexibility and the ability to transcend conflicts resulting from structural factors, such as significant disparities in resources, via interpersonal communication and thus on a personal level. A parallel view of both individual and structural perspectives provides a comprehensive overview, as partners' flexible self-positioning, either as individuals relating to one another or as representatives of their own religious associations/institutions, expands the scope for communicative action.[12] The initiative was founded by individuals who, although they hold leadership and thus institutional roles within their religious communities, act of their own volition and without direct accountability to their respective religious associations or institutions. In other words, the collaborators operate as active subjects without being linked by a fixed legal relationship and without their religious associations and institutions having specifically assigned them the task of building a three-religion day care center. The focus on this ambiguity in the partners' roles – on a spectrum between personal investment and a vague mandate from their institution or association to negotiate – proved essential in two ways. First, this ambiguity facilitated the creation of a web of relationships among the partners, which could be described as "political friendship" in the sense developed by Hannah Arendt (2018: 76). Second, it allowed the partners continually to circle back to the institutional level, without which the realization of such a construction project would be utterly impossible – as none of the partners are undertaking these efforts as private individuals or friends.

This oscillation is particularly relevant to the context of these communicative negotiations. The partners came together to enact a unique and publicly prominent concept for a three-religion day care center and to carry out the associated construction project. For this endeavor, neither they personally nor their respective religious associations and institutions have previously had any formal legal ties with one another. As they negotiated the parameters of a project grounded in principles of equality, *Egalität*,[13] and difference, their interactions immediately adopted forms and styles of communication that either inherently signal friendship or would foster its development through the course of the negotiation process. Friendship, as James Vela-McConnell defines it, is an actively and freely chosen and reciprocally shaped relationship among individuals who view each

12 The dynamics used here to leverage inclusion and exclusion for the communicative success of the initiative are explained by Nagel in this volume in the context of "boundary work".

13 The partners themselves use the term *Gleichheit* (equality); the German word *Gleichwertigkeit* can also be translated as equality, but also equivalence or equitability.

other as equals and demonstrate a deep level of mutual commitment (Vela-McConnell 2017: 231). The political dimension of friendships, especially those that bridge socially constructed divides (in this case religious ones), holds significant socio-political relevance. Vela-McConnel notes: "The pursuit of equality that characterizes friendship represents an ethical practice of friendship as well as a political practice and outcome such that the equality of these relationships has much potential for creating social change" (2017: 234). According to Hannah Arendt, the political aspect of friendship is particularly foregrounded when friends' conversations center on their shared world (2018: 76–77), which becomes part of the human world through shared discussion. Such dialogue is not necessarily about pursuing alignment, but about the ability to bridge diversity and even opposing beliefs within the framework of friendship.

> The political element in friendship is that in the truthful dialogue each of the friends can understand the truth inherent in the other's opinion. More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different. This kind of understanding – seeing the world […] from the other fellow's point of view – is the political kind of insight par excellence. (Arendt 2004: 437)[14]

The notion of political friendship is illuminating for another reason: because it speaks to the element of public visibility within the political sphere, underlining the political and not merely personal significance of friendships formed in such contexts.

Since the partners did not have explicitly defined communicative roles from the start, they were able to forge, through their interactions, a meaningful interpersonal relationship that embodies all the hallmarks of a friendship but is grounded in a public context – thus, a *political* friendship. This dynamic exposed us as a researchers to forms of communication that typically receive limited attention or valuation in academic inquiry such as shared bouts of loud laughter that echoed through many of the negotiation talks as well as modes of communication that could be described as sociability and everyday communication.[15]

These communication processes, specifically, play a crucial role in forming such political friendships. They are instrumental in nurturing the web of relationships and rising above significant conflicts around issues such as the considerable disparities in the resources contributed by the participating associations and institutions. These friendships were able to bridge even yawning differences among partners and were central to the success of the three-religion day care center project. The model of Jewish/Muslim/Christian interactions becomes particularly relevant when interreligious initiatives aim to carry out a project with high public visibility in which participation and responsibility are shared, for example, when designing a common building. In such projects, not

14 In response to the shock and consequences of the events of October 7, 2023, Roger Berkovitz considered this to be almost the only course of action, as he expressed in his introductory lecture at the Conference on Political Friendship at Bard College (October 22, 2023); Berkowitz (2023).

15 In the academic context, the second form of the partners' communicative interactions were at first dismissed disparagingly as "women chitchatting".

only the communicative co-production of all involved becomes manifest, but structural differences and the imbalance of access to resources among the religious communities involved also become apparent and can only be overcome – as the research has shown – through the formation of close interpersonal relationships and political friendships. These interpersonal relationships often bear the burden of unequal structural relationships, which can lead to new conflicts. This web of relationships is fundamental for developing "communicative (re)constructions of spaces" (Christmann 2021: 89). In the context of the current case study, this term describes the interactive process that plays out between the establishment of a political friendship, on the one hand, and the implementation of a viable building design, on the other.

4 Between Religious Questions and Structural Engineering Requirements

Interreligious or multireligious building projects often require years of negotiations before they can be realized.[16] Even when partners quickly agree on the general conceptual framework, securing financing and support for such construction projects usually requires stamina and patience (compare the House of Religions in Bern, the House of One in Berlin, etc.). Several aspects shape the implementation of multireligious building projects. Legal structures are not designed to accommodate more than one operating organization. In metropolitan areas, available land in the urban core suitable for new construction is highly sought after, and finding such a plot often requires a stroke of luck. The discrepancies between religious communities in terms of various resources required (money, expertise, available human resources, well-placed political contacts, etc.) necessitate intensive negotiations and a high degree of cooperative willingness from all involved to strike a balance and successfully implement the project. In addition to these practical challenges, issues of fairness, equality, and mutual trust are also at play when partners engage in a joint construction project while also negotiating a viable foundation for collaboration.[17] Bieler, in this volume, develops conviviality as a critical approach that is particularly attentive to what she calls the "messiness" of conviviality: the asymmetries, moments of separation, and misunderstanding or misrecognition (Bieler in this volume). The term "interreligious dialogues" in the narrow sense is hardly adequate for describing these negotiations given that the complex layers of pragmatic negotiation leave little opportunity for discussion of religious topics, let alone theological concepts. However, (conflicting) religious issues do arise when it comes to concrete aspects of the joint construction project – such as how to implement dietary rules in a shared kitchen or what sort of holiday or substitute coverage arrangements are needed to accommodate different religious holidays. Thus, while the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* has explicitly adopted an approach based on acknowledging the differences, in which three religions

16 In this volume, Hoffmann discusses the terms "multireligious" and "interreligious". Kalender reflects on the definition of multireligious or interfaith encounters, favoring the term "religious plurality".

17 Sérgio Costa problematizes the fact that conviviality is often only associated with positive interactions and that the concept rarely addresses structures of inequality (Costa 2019).

operate separate day care facilities on an equal basis, there is a simultaneous need for unity to carry out a joint construction project with a shared architectural design and shared financing to assure construction and operation.

5 Communicative Construction of Reality

Communication is a core component of every interreligious interaction. Although this is directly implied by terms such as "interreligious dialogue," to date not much scholarly attention has been devoted to the actual communication processes in interreligious initiatives. This may be because research on interreligious initiatives generally focuses either on the individual or on the societal aspects, as Karsten Lehmann emphasizes: "It approaches IRD [interreligious dialogue] primarily as an individual endeavor. Most present-day research models the notion of dialogue along the lines of hermeneutic processes of individual learning and understanding." (Lehmann 2020: 238) However, a second group of sociologists and religious studies scholars (Griera 2020; Nagel 2015)[18] has only recently begun to "shift the focus away from a notion of dialogue as a practice of individual hermeneutics. Instead, they regard IRD more as a social phenomenon within differentiated, pluralized (post- or late-) modern societies" (Lehmann 2020: 239). But even these concepts do not devote much attention to communicative interaction among stakeholders. While the first category centers on the individual, the second focuses on broader societal implications yet overlooks the communicative processes between the primary actors. However, if social reality is indeed constructed through communication, as Hubert Knoblauch argues in his theory (2020: 13–53), examining interreligious communicative interactions can contribute significantly to understanding societal constructions of reality, especially in cases that will eventually be materialized as buildings.

> The empirically communicative nature of social action is also of eminent importance to the actors themselves. […] these actions only become part of societal reality upon being communicated to others. Whatever the nature of the meaning or whatever the intended action – meaning and action must rise above the realm of subjective meaning and become the subject of others' experiences. The empirical feature of social action is that it can be perceived and experienced both by other actors and by scientific observers (as observing actors). (Knoblauch 2016:29-30)

Hubert Knoblauch highlights the necessity of the medium of communication for the joint production of social reality. This aspect becomes even more important when the material reality to be constructed lacks any precedents and therefore does not build on an existing social reality.[19]

18 In this volume, Nagel discusses the term "interreligious dialogue" and relates interreligious activities to the concept of boundary making.

19 This fact likely explains why the project does not easily fit into the application forms and structures of existing funding opportunities.

6 The Communicative (Re)Construction of Space[20]

When partners in collaborative interreligious initiatives negotiate joint construction projects, they are, at the same time, engaging in dialogue about notions of space. On one level, this encompasses the specific sites suitable for the project and the local constraints – such as the scarcity of buildable land in urban cores – as well as broader conceptual considerations. On a second level, the project's conceptual framework, along with the associated aspirations and hopes, and eventually the specific blueprints and designs of a prospective construction project lead to the communicative construction of future spaces. On both levels, the partners are simultaneously navigating the physical reality of these spaces and the discussions surrounding them, which precede the materialization process and set the stage for its tangible realization. Martina Löw explains this insight, associated with the "spatial turn", as follows: "In essence, the spatial turn represents the […] challenging realization that spaces become spaces for people only insofar as they must be constructed as social entities." (Löw: 2015) According to Löw, the emergence of spaces hinges on the convergence of two critical processes: "spacing" and "synthesis". The first process, "spacing", involves the interactive placement of human beings and social goods, laying the groundwork for construction (Löw 2020:150). The second phase, the "successful synthesis", is a cognitive process of imagination, perception, and memory whereby the "arrangements of bodies" (Löw 2020: 154) is again perceived or interpreted as spaces. "Once formed or [arranged], spaces exert an ordering influence on action" (Christmann: 2016, 14–15). Communication is key in this two-factor framework for the formation of spaces: both the dynamic processes of spacing and the development of a mutual understanding about spaces as an act of synthesis occur through communicative interactions, often transcending or bypassing intentional communication: "While the act of speaking itself is conscious to the speaker, the effects of space formation are unconscious." (Löw 2001: 80) Gabriela Christmann delves into the central role of communication in the construction of space, which she describes as follows: In an "act of synthesis", she argues, subjects construct spaces by integrating the material components with the applicable rules, memories, and other subjects, at first forming a space for themselves. A space thus takes on an individual existence for each person. As different subjects engage in this process simultaneously, spaces are constructed not objectively, but subjectively and multidimensionally (Christmann 2021: 94–97). It is through the process of communicative interactions that spaces gain social reality. In this context, Knoblauch and Steets emphasize that every communicative construction of space always occurs as a "triadic relation:" mutual communication between at least two subjects in reference to some third thing, which represents an instance of "objectivization" [*Objektivierung*, in the sense of producing an objective material reality] and thus constructs the spatial dimension of communicative action (2021: 24–26).

> Due to the different subjective perspectives – as is the basic idea behind relational concepts of space – there is not 'a' space as such, but variations of this space that

20 For further reflections on the constructive processes of space, see Ketges and Kalender in this volume.

> exist for the individual subjects, each in a specific way. Subjects act communicatively in various ways, sometimes in cooperation with one another. (Christmann 2021: 95–96)

The initiative to create a three-religion day care center exemplifies the essence of communicative spatial cooperation. In communicating about space, the subjects share their individual interpretations of reality, interpretations that might be grounded in different religious beliefs, associated with different cultural or religious traditions, or based on fundamentally different understandings of space. Beyond merely verbal speech acts, this communicative negotiation process can lead to transformative effects on the physical space, potentially resulting in tangible changes or revised designs. The concept of "spacing," encompassing both communicative actions and spatial alterations, always occurs in tandem with the act of synthesis. These two processes, in conjunction, result in the subjective construction of space. In the negotiation processes, communicative coordination that is focused on each individual's subjective construction of space paves the way, in turn, for the development of intersubjective constructions of space. In the context of the day care center, this approach fosters the creation of a unique space that is intrinsically linked to three distinct religious traditions. The *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* concept merges communication about a group's autonomous space (each of the three day care facilities) with communication about the shared space (the building as a whole). Solidification follows from there: "Processes of objectivation [i.e., *Objektivierung*] in the form of action routines, linguistic definitions, institutionalizations, and legitimizations thus lead to increasing consolidation of the construction of space in a social context." (Christmann 2021: 97)[21] Ultimately, a dynamically conceived and materially constructed reality emerges. The space is solidified and continually reproduced through further institutionalization and legitimation (Christmann 2021: 97). Public communication in the media plays a reinforcing role in this, as does the process of architectural design, which in turn is communicated in public. Consequently, these constructions come to be perceived as objective realities. The stabilization of these spaces is facilitated by the functions of collective memory, which is itself a shared communicative process.

As an example of how these communicative processes play out within the initiative's negotiation processes, consider the following brief segment:

> Stefanie: "So the question is, what kind of setting are we creating here? It all ties back to the fundamental idea of saying, 'There are three of us and we have this common space to fill.' This makes the next stage of negotiations and the whole construction process incredibly complex; it's going to be super challenging. [Agreement] So we also need to think about whether this structure can still function effectively in that regard. As important as it is to us."
> Rosa: "Exactly. If we change the legal structure, if we were to make the decision to change the legal structure… I'm just thinking out loud here, if we were to say it's

21 The communicative process in the public space has apparently already led to people who are not directly involved in the negotiations perceiving the *Drei-Religionen-Kita* as though it has already materialized, that is, as though it hads already been built and commenced operations (feedback from a conversation with the initiative in June 2018).

> all not feasible – again, without your pain points, headaches – if the conclusion were that only the Day Care Association can manage this entire thing, and we can only contribute, then we need to think very carefully about what this means for our equal footing. I'm quite glad. I've been feeling like, why haven't we tackled this head-on sooner, gotten down to the brass tacks a long time ago? And I think it's good that we haven't done it yet because I think the foundation that we've built is absolutely, otherwise it would blow up into… Woah! … 4 million, hello?"
> (4th recording dated April 20, 2016, pos. 49–52)[22]

This passage captures a discussion about a possible structure for the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* construction project. Stefanie emphasizes the foundational principle behind the initiative: three different religious organizations aiming to build a day care center together. The involvement of these three organizations introduces potential challenges, not only in terms of securing funding and grants but also when it comes to navigating the complexities of building ownership. She touches on the notion of space, without further elaboration, but with a comment about the necessity of specifying that all three partners would be "filling" the space. She thus connects both the idea of public communication ("if we were to say") and the concept of space as a dimension that can be filled. However, she also hints at a tension between this construction of space used by the three partners and the possible structure of a single building owner. Rosa confirms that she is concerned that the "equal footing" established among the partners might not persist through the construction phase. She considers changing the "legal" structure, although one has not yet been established, thus constructing a legal relationship between the partners in relation to the future object (the day care center). In her opinion, a change in the arrangement under which only one of the participating religious organizations would be responsible for the future construction project could affect the partners' internal relationship ("equal footing"). Her subsequent unfinished sentences poignantly reflect the delicacy of the previously constructed, fillable space. Rosa describes the process of the previous negotiations using space-constructing images, as "the foundation that we've built." The final clause "otherwise it would blow up into… Woah!" stands in an interesting linguistic contrast to the materiality of space (the inflexibility of matter). She eventually returns to materiality via the projected sum of the construction costs, thereby shifting from the idea of building ownership construction as a fragile vision back to materiality in the realm of construction costs that revolve around implementation processes.

In this segment, the complexity of the various negotiations is highlighted through the reference to the three participating religious communities, which Stefanie refers to as "us". Here, the triadic structure invoked by Knoblauch and Steets becomes very apparent. As Stefanie communicates with the other participants, she refers to the shared future building (objectivization of their concept) and assigns it the collective task of construction. This reveals a dynamic process of constructing space. At the same time, by using the word "fill", she indicates her reference to the idea of space as a container. This illustrates Löw and Marguin's explanation "that speaking as a routine aspect of action is

22 Transcript from audio recording, translated from the German original.

regularly (i.e., not always, but often) integrated into the dynamics of spatial constructions, and that while the speaker is aware of the speech act itself, they are not aware of its space-forming effect" (Löw/Marguin 2021: 114). Rosa responds by invoking the term "legal structure" twice, thereby communicatively reinforcing the process of institutionalization and objectivization of the previously loose collective agreement of the initiative. The metaphorical term "to contribute" is also oriented towards materiality. That this section ends with a reference to the spatiality of the partners' internal relationship shows how the various dimensions of spatial reference and communicative spatial (re)construction are related and connected in this short passage. A while later during the same conversation, the following exchange took place:

> Rosa: "Just to circle back to what Stefanie mentioned: We can make all sorts of quirky constructions work, it doesn't have to be a pie cut into thirds, as long as it… works for us internally."
> Stefanie: "Yeah, as long as everyone involved says, 'This is the level I can agree to and this [arrangement] works for us.' That way, we don't lose out on something else that's crucial for our collaboration level. I think that just needs to be clear. If we decide, 'This is how it's going to be,' then we need – and that's why I'm glad you brought it up – to lay our cards on the table." (4. April 20, 2016, pos. 109–10)[23]

This section contains one of the seminal moments of communication during the negotiations in terms of the communicative construction of reality, based on the vision of the future *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus*. Rosa proposes an option for the future, which she calls a "quirky construction", thereby again including the dimensionality of space that must be constructed (made to work) by the partners. She is thus touching on the paradox of finding a structure for internal equality that works for the partners even if it is not actually equal ("pie cut into thirds", "quirky"). Stefanie confirms in her response the spatiality of the construction and implicitly refers to the "quirky construction" when she asks the partners to consider whether they can commit to this "level". This is subsequently defined as a "collaboration level". The fact that she then talks about not "los[ing] out on something else" but seems to trail off in two of her subsequent sentences suggests a certain inconsistency in her previous statement and vividly illustrates this quirky constructed level of collaboration. This (communicative) error in construction is then repaired through the imagery used later when she speaks of "laying our cards on the table" – a statement that seeks to restore the level playing field through the image of a flat table, but also connects with the dynamic act of "spacing" (in this case, disclosure of the partners' positions and resources). These sequences illustrate the "messiness" (Bieler in this volume) of communicative conviviality processes; Bieler emphasizes that this is about sketching a vision of community "that has not yet been realized, that is painfully absent and simultaneously hoped for. This hope might be grounded in different affects which could range from joy to despair" (Bieler in this volume).

This concrete example of the initiative's interreligious negotiations demonstrates how communicative interactions are a central component and reference point of a prac-

23 Transcript from audio recording, translated from the German original.

tice-oriented understanding of conviviality. The construction of the future building, where the three day care facilities (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) will be both separate and interconnected, in turn shapes the conviviality structure during the negotiation processes.

Design by the Stark and Stilb architecture firm, 2021; © Evangelischer Kirchenkreisverband für Kindertageseinrichtungen Berlin Mitte-Nord.

Christmann, as a social scientist researching space, fundamentally believes that spaces only emerge when they are charged with meanings and thus become (material) reality. Spaces are, therefore, to be understood as social constructions of culturally shaped reality. The significance of communication and communicative action in this context has only been recognized relatively recently in scientific research. Christmann explains, "there are only a few theoretical approaches that treat communication as a factor in spatial construction processes" (Christmann 2021: 89). In regard to the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus*, we refer to "communicatively constructing space" on two levels. First, this notion can explain the way in which the spatial construction of the future *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* has been implemented through communication, and thus how the vision of equality and cooperation is translated into the structure of a building. At the same time, it constitutes the creation of the partners' communicative vision, which then guides the material change. Through communication about the future building, images and memories are created that shape the future mode of implementation and subsequently become guiding elements in the implementation process, thus producing a communicated spatial reality. Second, the concept's relational aspect – in terms of the partners' own communicative interactions – is of particular relevance. Löw and Marguin

emphasize: "As spaces involved in communicative action also emerge from the manner in which subjects mutually relate to one another and to objects, spaces thus also become meaningful in that they become a part of communication through subjective, physical experience." (Löw/Marguin, 2021: 114) However, conflicts also arise in the context of this communication about constructing spaces.

Christmann stresses that these conflicts are often structural and rarely arise within the internal groups themselves (Christmann 2018: 125). In this case study, however, conflicts have also appeared within the initiative itself, conflicts that can and must be transcended via the internal network of personal relationships and interpersonal communication, as described above. Finally, communication in public media plays an essential role in the process of communicatively constructing space because it re-solidifies what has been communicated and the space's further modified reality. This is particularly the case when the idea of the future construction of a *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* is accompanied by the publication of the corresponding building designs, thus making a significant design contribution to the construction of space.

"Since architecture […] constitutes a distinctly 'heavy' and thus inflexible medium for the social [realm], the durability of religious plurality and its recognition by society are particularly reflected in architectural forms." (Burchardt/Häring, 2021: 118) Georgiou also builds on this, emphasizing that while direct (analog) communication plays a significant role in cooperative coexistence and conviviality in diverse neighborhoods, it is shaped and partly challenged by social and public media communication: "Face-to-face communication in the city always co-exists with the rich and fragmented universe of mediated communication" (Georgiou 2016: 268). Therefore, the various forms of communication, especially in the context of practical conviviality arrangements, must be examined in relation to one another (Georgiou 2016: 275–277).

In the context of conviviality as conceptualized by Bieler in this volume, the initial focus was primarily on the forms of communicative interactions among partners in the process of jointly constructing a building project for a three-religion day care center. The envisioned practice of conviviality within the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* represents a novel approach, necessitating extensive and recurring phases of communication in order to arrive at ritualization and ultimately objectivization. Surprisingly, a significant contribution to this comes from phases of communicative interaction characterized by sociability (see Bieler in this volume) or casual [*Alltag*] conversations, during which partners construct a shared interreligious base of casual knowledge. Although this base of knowledge does not exist in the wider society, it lays the communicative "foundation" upon which to build a jointly operated day care center.

> Everyday life [Alltag] encompasses a multitude of social relationships between subjects; these relationships are established and reproduced through activity (between individuals, mainly through communication) with the establishment and reproduction of social relationships themselves forming an aspect of activity or even taking on the character of an independent activity. (Mackeldey 1991: 140)

These processes initially take place within the direct negotiations of conversations between the partners themselves. Another dimension arises when space is consciously

and communicatively constructed in the context of various public spheres. This applies to public events as well as to the frequent media coverage of the planned construction project (Gürler 2018; Katholische Nachrichten Agentur 2018; Mayer 2017). Most importantly, the physical construction project itself, once materialized in public spaces, will visually inscribe and reinforce these constructions of space within the larger social fabric.

7 Multireligious Buildings in Public Space

From a legal perspective, the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* is only being built in public space to a limited degree – depending on whether one classifies a religious property as public space. However, in any case, the building project is a publicly visible result of the partners' interreligious communicative negotiation process and thus impacts public space.

"Worldwide, public urban spaces – including streets, squares, and parks – are increasingly becoming sites for the production and performance of innovative religious forms" (Griera et al. 2021: 1), and this also applies to multireligious buildings planned and constructed by initiatives that included partners of different religious affiliations. The intention to construct multireligious buildings as a joint initiative is rather new, but it is also being pursued in other countries and cultural contexts.[24] The notion seems to have inspired both small grassroots initiatives and national governments around the world (Burchardt/Häring 2021: 121). There are many indications that, following years of interreligious discussions and cooperation, the era of these interreligious efforts' long-term manifestations is dawning: "[Multi-religious buildings are] officially construed as the material manifestation of interreligious dialogue, as translating immaterial aspirations into material form." (Burchardt 2021: 236) These efforts may also be accompanied by an emerging social consciousness of the fact that society is plural and diverse, which is now also finding expression in corresponding construction projects and finding reflection in the urban landscape. Burchardt calls these buildings "multireligious spaces by design"[25] (Burchardt 2021: 231) because they are created with the express intention of operating as multireligious spaces. One important criticism of these projects is the question of which religious communities are represented by these projects and which are not. "Multireligious buildings by design" have the potential to forestall those conflicts, explains Burchardt: "Multi-religious places by design, by contrast, almost never exhibit the same level of conflict, chiefly because participants are self-selected and voluntarily agree to engage in sharing (in whatever concrete way) religious space." (Burchardt 2021: 235) At the same time, he voices the criticism that such a construction project, "which is supposed to express and promote equal belonging in urban space – and, in way, does so

24 One example of this is the Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, Georgia; see Ginsberg (2022).

25 In other words, contrary to historically developing multi-religious sites, these places are designed to enable particular interactions and to discourage others; Burchardt and Giorda (2021: 18). Meyer in this volume describes the project of a shared church building that, in contrast, has not been built as a multireligious space. Kalender in this volume investigates spatiality as a crucial dimension in encounters of religious plurality.

– paradoxically also [makes] urban hierarchies as well as inclusions and exclusions more visible" (Burchardt/Häring, 2021: 135).

The public plays an important role in the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* project in several respects. The partners' negotiations have now entered the public discourse (the political sphere and the media), which also frames these conversations as a religious contribution to urban discourse. This underscores the need to understand interreligious projects and initiatives within the framework of governance as it relates to religious pluralism. Alexander-Kenneth Nagel explains this aspect of governance with the observation that state authorities often have no way of contacting and influencing peripheral (religious) communities. Driven by the desire to avoid interreligious conflicts and to facilitate social cohesion overall, there is a rise in public interest in interreligious initiatives and networks with the expectation that these developments (interreligious peace and social cohesion) have impact on the different (religious) communities as a whole. Thus, interreligious initiatives are increasingly gaining importance in public policy, perhaps independent of the relevance they might have otherwise (Nagel 2019: 104). Mar Griera and Nagel assert: "Religion has become a matter of public concern, and the cultivation of multireligious coexistence has come to be increasingly considered as decisive to ensure social cohesion, inclusion, and peace. In this context, interreligious initiatives have gained momentum and public legitimacy as valuable tools for the governance of religious diversity" (Griera/Nagel 2018: 302). The day care center's construction creates a public building that has an impact on public space, both through its negotiation processes and through its materiality in the realm of urban development. It is worth mentioning here that such a project also enters the realm of urban city planning. This introduces new angles for analysis, such as exploring the role these buildings might play in city planning in the context of "convivial space." As Maria Beltran Rodriguez and Madlen Simon describe it: "In our research, the term conviviality has the potential to describe social interactions in environments characterized by population diversity. As rapid urbanization takes place around the world and urban places in the United States and Europe in particular become increasingly diverse, it is important for urban designers to understand how to design for and measure positive human interaction among diverse groups in public spaces" (Beltran Rodriguez/Simon, 2015: 315). Further research is urgently needed into the ways that multireligious buildings themselves function as "convivial urban spaces" (Beltran Rodriguez/Simon, 2015: 315).[26]

26 "Conviviality describes a type of social life in urban places. Convivial places are characterized by being friendly and lively. Convivial places promote tolerance and mutual exchange of ideas among the people and groups that inhabit them" Beltran Rodriguez and Simon (2015: 315). The concept of urban convivial spaces is becoming increasingly important in the field of urban city planning. This involves aspects of security, accessibility, authenticity, aesthetics, diverse options of activities, quality of life, etc. While urban city planners rely on sociological concepts, the aspects of conflict and fluidity within conviviality seem to be scarcely addressed by the concepts theoretically. However, a hint of this can be found in the fact that the aspect of "security", in the context of a residents' survey, was mentioned as the most important factor for convivial spaces (Shedid and Hefnawy 2021, 1–13).

8 Conclusion

Starting with the communicative negotiation processes of the initiative to build a three-religion day care center in Berlin, the initial focus centered on showcasing the communicative practices the partners used to establish a stable and resilient network of relationships that can be described as political friendship. This relationship structure, based on equality, reciprocity, voluntariness, and trust, enabled the partners to take joint responsibility for managing a multi-million-euro construction project in a setting that required negotiating significant discrepancies in resources, privileges, and conflicts. Communication modes that are often underestimated, such as laughter and sociability/everyday communication, were central to the establishment of this relationship structure. With the implementation of the planned construction project, a solidified form of conviviality in architecture (inflexible matter) is created through the building's materialization. This process is grounded in an interactive, communicative practice by the partners. Using the concepts developed by Löw, Knoblauch, and Christmann, we can portray the process of communicatively constructing space in the context of the initiative at hand. In this instance, communication about factors for equality – as they apply to the future space, but also to the project's current partners – involve a variety of prerequisites, some of which are contradictory and must be rebalanced through acts of communication. The final section described how the construction project becomes visible in public space and thus enters public negotiation processes. Projects that are aware of (religious) differences and therefore cannot follow the measures of public funding are considered to be in need of explanation and justification. Even when they have the political support it makes the practical access to public funding almost impossible. In these projects, it is also essential to critically assess the boundary processes and the potential for perpetuating claims of religious hegemony, even unintentionally, despite all egalitarian aims. The public interest in carrying out multireligious construction projects by design should also be critically examined in the context of state governance's interests in managing religious diversity in large cities. Finally, the research perspective also overlaps with the realm of urban planning; each of these perspectives should take the other into account. The fact that the sociological and theological analysis is being conducted during this sort of a multireligious planning and construction project offers an opportunity for a critical exploration of how communicative (re)constructions of space, especially in the context of multi-religious buildings by design, might further influence or change our conception of conviviality overall, but also its ramifications for disciplines such as public policy and urban planning.

Lastly, it should be noted that for the initiative at hand, the processes and practices of conviviality do not end with the construction of the *Drei-Religionen-Kita-Haus* but will only truly begin when the day care facilities begin operating and the building becomes a shared space for children, their families, the educators, and the day care facilities' three different religious sponsors. The entire concept from the initiative's perspective is grounded in the intention of ritualizing and institutionalizing novel and egalitarian

forms of lived conviviality in the day care center, which will serve as a formative experience for the children who attend its programs.

> "...that it doesn't matter if people are different, for friendship bears that, which is why they will venture out into the world and make a difference there" (https://dreireligionenkitahaus.de/bau-konzept/ and *https://youtu.be/TPVbs04ZbCU*).

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