

# SEMINARIS ISOR

## INVESTIGACIONS EN SOCIOLOGIA DE LA RELIGIÓ

### "The Limits of Religious Diversity in the Public Sphere: Freedom of Religious Expression and Worship in the city of Athens"

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**Sala de reunions de la Fac. de CCPP i Sociologia (UAB)**

This study examines a timely issue that has recently brought the question of the place of religion in the public sphere to the fore, namely the freedom of religious expression and worship in a context of increasing religious pluralism. It focuses on the Greek capital of Athens as an indicative case of a city in which the rising waves of immigration have, since the late 1990s and even more recently, challenged both the “prevailing” position of the Orthodox Church in the country and longstanding perceptions of the meaning and use of “public spaces”. Debates over the use of such spaces in Athens revolve primarily around two religious minority groups: the large and heterogeneous Muslim community – and the pending creation of the first official mosque in the capital – and the Polytheistic communities that seek to use open sites for their rites of worship. As part of a project funded by the European Research Council, titled “Grassrootsmobilise”, this is the first scholarly attempt to consider the interaction between different actors over the above debate: the intervention of the local and national authorities, the reactions and mobilisations of religious minority actors and of the Orthodox Church and, lastly, the role of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) which, through its religion-related jurisprudence, has provided a platform of rights-awareness and rights-claims in the country. The paper demonstrates the differential treatment of religions and their right to establish places of worship in Athens. It then moves on to show the varying ways in which the ECtHR, as an external intervening factor, has contributed to such national debates. Lastly, it argues that national established perceptions of the meaning and use of “public spaces” – equated with Greek – Orthodox – re-emerge particularly over the treatment and accommodation of Islam in the capital of Greece.