

## Article

# Attributes and Activities of Religious Communities in Italy: First Results from a City Congregations Study (CCS)

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**Abstract:** This article explores the attributes and religious, social and political activities of local religious groups in three Italian cities across all religious traditions. This is the first application of Congregations Study methodology in Italy to analyze the social composition, structure and activities of religious communities. The research was conducted between 2020 and 2021 with a total number of 877 communities mapped in the cities of Bologna, Milan and Brescia, and their surroundings. All local religious groups in three cities and their surroundings were counted and one key informant per group was interviewed ( $N = 566$ ) with a Congregations Study questionnaire. Based on the results of the interviews, we found that, during the last decade, the dynamics of growth of adults' and children's regular religious participation was distinct within the Muslim and Christian Orthodox communities. Social service for elderly, environmental programs and political activity were found to be promoted by the Catholic communities to a stronger degree, while activities linked to the support of migrants were endorsed stronger by Muslim and Orthodox groups. Moreover, this study assessed the theological, ethical and political orientation of religious communities, highlighting different trends across religious traditions. The article discusses various configurations of urban religious diversity by bringing similarities and contrasts between communities of dominant religious tradition and minority religions, thus questioning the applicability of City Congregations Study (CCS) methodology to the analysis of configurations of religious diversity in Italy.

**Keywords:** congregations study; urban religious diversity; local religious community; migration; membership; participation; social service; Bologna; Milan; Brescia



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## 1. Introduction

During the last few decades, Italy went through a profound socioreligious change caused by the interplay of endogenous and exogenous factors. Italian sociologists of religion consider them, in terms of pressures of pluralization, caused by migration flows along with the individualization and diversification of religious lifestyles (Giordan and Pace 2014; Ambrosini et al. 2019; Berzano 2019). An observation upon the continuous growth of adherents to religious minorities and declining number of Catholics simultaneously (Garelli 2020) can be seen among characteristics of increasing diversification of religious life in Italy.<sup>1</sup>

While depicting the changes at the level of individual religiosity, concerning belief, belonging and practices of worship, these studies provided limited observations upon the dynamics and configurations of religious diversity within religious communities, namely within social structures, relations and activities of local religious groups. Instead, the socio-religious dynamics within religious communities, for instance, Catholic parishes and religious minorities groups—“as basic units of religious life”—“represent rich social and organizational settings, in which a wide array of sociological questions may fruitfully be addressed” (Chaves et al. 1999, p. 458). Their analysis shed light on internal organizational

characteristics conducive to religious diversity and pluralism including types of worship, leadership, sociality, voluntary activities and practices of inclusion, as well as patterns of relationship between religious groups. The latter indicate the specifics of the majority/minority nexus the local religious communities follow and serve as an important source of information for religious diversity management at local and national levels (Griera 2012; Lefebvre and Brodeur 2017).

The study of religious diversity within the cities, compared to the national scale, suggests the possibility of more detailed analysis of the dimensions of diversity by discovering “a substantially richer and more dynamic” reality (Bouma Gary et al. 2021, p. 2). It allows us to consider more complex religious composition, migration processes and local community dynamics by showing how religious diversity (Burchardt 2019; Martínez-Ariño 2019, 2021; Becci and Hafner 2023) can be analyzed through the variety of forms of religious participation, teaching, worship, as well as social engagement and interfaith initiatives of local religious groups.

This article explores the attributes and religious, social and political activities of local religious communities in three Italian cities across all religious traditions. This is the first application of National Congregations Study (NCS) methodology in Italy to the analysis of the social composition, structure and activities of religious communities. In employing the NCS methodology at the level of city analysis, we are interested, first, to test it in the Italian context and, second, to explore the features of religious diversity within urban settings. By answering the question, ‘what are the attributes and activities of local religious groups in three Italian cities across all religious traditions?’, we aim to explore the similarities and differences among the local religious groups belonging to the dominant religion (Roman Catholicism) and minority religions and configurations of urban religious diversity to which they contribute.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This article adopted the congregational studies approach (Ammerman et al. 1998; Chaves 2004; Ammerman 2009; Monnot and Stolz 2018a) as a privileged methodology which assumes religious congregations as the cardinal observation point in the study of religious diversity at the urban level. This study was largely drawn on the research design of the National Congregations Study (NCS), first conducted in the USA by Mark Chaves (Chaves et al. 1999; Chaves 2018; Chaves and Anderson 2008, 2014) and in Switzerland by Jörg Stolz and Christophe Monnot (Monnot 2013; Stolz and Chaves 2017; Stolz and Monnot 2017, 2019a, 2019b).

We relied on the definition of ‘congregation’ introduced by Chaves (2004), who suggested that congregation is “a social institution in which individuals who are not all religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled intervals, for activities and events with explicitly religious content and purpose, and in which there is continuity over time in the individuals who gather, the location of the gathering, and the nature of the activities and events at each gathering” (Chaves 2004, pp. 1–2).

Applying the elements of this definitional framework to the study of local religious groups in Bologna, Milan and Brescia, we considered congregations as groups of individuals belonging to a common religion—from the spectrum of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, the Bahá’í Faith, etc. Following Nancy Ammerman’s definition of local religious groups (2009), we specified that, for our research, religious communities, while considered in terms of “places where ordinary people gather,” at the same time present a collective space for common activities and “a way for people to worship” (Ammerman 2009, pp. 564–65). Moreover, “congregations provide an organizational model followed even by religious groups new to this country” (Chaves et al. 1999, p. 458), thus indicating the importance of analyzing the practices of inclusivity, interfaith communication, identity building and social dialogue as religious diversity’s configurations.

### *What Does “Congregation” Mean for the Italian Context?*

The application of the NCS methodology developed within the North-American socioreligious settings to the Italian context required theoretical work of “translation” of key-concepts of analysis (see (Monnot and Stolz 2018b) for explaining the application of NCS in Switzerland). The adoption of the concept of ‘congregation’, i.e., local religious groups, and making it relevant to the specifics of Italian socioreligious landscape and settings of religious diversity was among the first theoretical tasks of this research.

The voluntary nature of religious congregations institutionalized in the forms of self-organized religious communities in the USA (Ammerman 1997) offered various interpretations regarding the multiple forms of collective religious life showing how the elements of organizational life and sociality within religious communities may vary. Against that background, the Catholic parochial model in Italy based on the criteria of ascribed membership presents a collective form of religious life when belonging to the same territorial unit is considered as belonging to the same religious group, a parish of the Roman Catholic Church.

This historical model of organization of local religious life in the form of territorial-based units in Italy, similarly to other European countries, faces the secularization process. This allows us to consider some elements of congregational life to be relevant to social and cultural dynamics in the Italian and European religious field. This regards the decline in religious participation in Italy (Garelli 2020) making worship attendance a matter of a voluntary choice rather than a social convention or family tradition. At the same time, the presence of a significant number of immigrants who tend toward congregating as a form of mutual support and transmission of cultural and religious traditions can be seen as another commonality between Catholic parishes and congregations that accommodate migrants (Giordan and Zrinščak 2018). Moreover, the emergence of alternative and secular spiritualities in Italy (Giordan 2009; Berzano 2017, 2023; Giordan and Sbalchiero 2020; Palmisano and Pannofino 2021) with elements of collective expression in the forms of voluntary organized groups at the local level, made the concept of ‘congregation’ relevant to the Italian context of individualization of religion.

Against this backdrop, the concept of ‘congregation’ can be referred to the one of ‘parish’ for the Catholic reality and to local religious groups gathered in mosques and prayer halls for the Islamic reality, as well as Jewish communities gathered in synagogues. We considered the reality of each religious tradition and more individualized forms of religious life while applying the selected methodology of Congregations Studies toward the analysis of Italian context of urban religious diversity. Thus, in this study, the concepts of ‘congregation’, ‘religious community’ and ‘local religious group’ are used as synonyms with the interchangeable meaning; however, keeping some historical and organizational specifics. This theoretical consideration was important for preparing the instrument for the empirical research, namely, the translation of the questionnaire from English to Italian.

Along with the theoretical challenges of conceptualizing ‘congregation’ for the Italian cultural and socio-religious context, similarly, the concept of ‘religious leadership’ caused additional theoretical work of interpreting it. In fact, within the American context of congregational life, the phenomenon of leadership is understood with a variety of roles performed by leaders of congregations which do not overlap. These roles can be considered separately. For instance, providing spiritual guidance and leading religious services are often seen separately from the roles of leaders performed in organizational and managerial ambits of congregational life. In Italy, instead, this distinction is less evident and organizational and spiritual leadership overlap mostly. In this perspective, the concept of ‘religious leader’ in Catholic reality is associated with the figure of the priest. The situation was more complex for some local groups of religious minorities. For example, for the reality of Muslim communities, one can observe two leadership figures. The first one is the spiritual leader, which is identifiable with the role of Imam, and the second one is the managerial one, which is the head of the prayer room. Considering the differences between these two roles of

community leaders, we studied them as complementary types in our research, specifically during conducting the interviews with key informants in local religious groups.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research Design

The research applied two methods and phases of data collection. In the first phase, we mapped the total number of local religious groups in urban areas of Bologna, Milan and Brescia and their surroundings. In the second phase, the structured interviews were conducted by applying the tested questionnaire. The map of congregations was largely built with the “snowball technique”. It allowed the collection of new information regarding the religious minorities through the requests made to the religious leaders who agreed to participate in the interviews and were available to indicate contacts with the potential communities to be included in the study.

Mapping method allows to determine the broad panorama of urban collective religious life specifying the configuration of religious diversity in each of the selected city and surroundings, as well as spatial location of religious communities and their number. The results of the mapping study of CCS were used to proceed with the second phase of research—conducting the structured interviews with the leaders of local religious groups to gather the information about the attributes and activities of the communities they lead. From the total number of mapped local religious groups, we conducted the interviews with religious leaders who agreed to participate in the study.

The mapping of the total number of local religious groups in urban areas of Bologna, Milan and Brescia and their surroundings relied on the collections of information from various sources. The information about the Catholic parishes comes from the Diocesan Yearbooks of Bologna, Milan and Brescia which contain the complete lists of parishes. The information about religious minorities was collected from a variety of sources. Among them were: (a) the Office for Interreligious Dialogue of the diocese of Bologna, Milan and Brescia; (b) web-sites of the municipalities of Bologna, Milan and Brescia; (c) web-site of the Amicitie project (a survey on the needs and expectations of the religious communities in Bologna); (d) the Observatory on religious pluralism (GRIS)<sup>2</sup> of Bologna; (e) personal contacts of priests who carry out interreligious activities; (f) contacts received during the data collection applying the snowball technique<sup>3</sup> and online research of web-sites of local religious groups.

At the phase of preparing the (almost) complete list of religious communities, we faced the methodological challenges while mapping religious minorities. The first challenge concerned the fluidity of some minorities, particularly the Evangelical congregations. In fact, many of them are born, moved and (sometimes) disintegrate in a short period of time. Consequently, mapping these local religious groups revealed the difficulty in establishing the contacts, thus making the results of mapping not reliable in the long term. The second challenge regarded the low visibility of many minority’ places of worship. This condition makes the places and buildings, in which many of the minority communities gather, hardly recognizable, if not completely unidentifiable.

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face from November 2019 to September 2021. Exceptions were made during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, when some interviews were conducted by telephone and video calls.

#### 3.2. Structure of the Questionnaire

Conducting structured interviews at the second research phase, we translated and adapted the questionnaire previously employed in the NCS (applied in USA and Switzerland) into the Italian context. Further elaboration of the instrument allowed it to include a specific focus on human rights issues interviewing religious leaders from Catholic parishes and minority religious groups in Bologna, Milan, Brescia, and the surrounding municipalities.

The questionnaire was composed of sixty-one questions organized into nine sections: contacts, basic information, staff and governance, volunteers, worship, groups and activities, social composition, values, congregations and human rights. The first seven sections contained questions that covered basic information about the religious community, its social composition, membership, types of leadership and religious practices. In particular, these sections allowed us to collect information about the year of foundation of the community, place of worship, social composition and membership (number of regular weekly participants and formal affiliation), modes of participation in collective religious life, average age of members and dynamics in ratio of females and males. Activities concerning religious rites and their periodicity were considered together with the predominant type of social activities carried out by the religious groups. The latter included support for the elderly, disabled, migrants, activities linked to environmental protection and political activities and any support of specific issues, such as immigration, homosexuality, missions, charity, interreligious dialogue, and others.

While section eight regarded political, theological and ethical positioning of religious groups on the continuum from conservative to progressive views, from the ninth section onwards, perceptions of various human rights of vulnerable groups (in social and religious terms) were studied. In particular, rights of migrants, homosexual people, people with HIV, mental disorders, addicted to drugs or alcohol and divorced people. Moreover, questions regarded eventual lobbying activities by local religious communities in support of or in opposition to ethical and public matters such as abortion, economic inequalities and homosexuality issues. Another area of analysis covered by the questionnaire concerned the attitudes toward controversial issues, such as the full participation in community life (also intending the access to positions of responsibility in the community) of people who are openly homosexual, cohabiting and unmarried and consumers of alcoholic beverages. The CCS instrument allowed studying the openness/closeness of religious groups toward the issues of same-sex marriage or female and homosexual spiritual leadership along with the degree of autonomy of religious communities from the state with respect to the activities of ministers of worship, financial and dogmatic issues.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3. Case Selection

For testing the methodology of Congregations Studies in Italy, we selected three cities of different sizes in the Northern part of Italy. They were Bologna as a middle-sized Italian city with 391,400 inhabitants<sup>5</sup>; Milan, a metropolis with 1,386,285 inhabitants<sup>6</sup> and Brescia, a relatively small city with 196,569 dwellers<sup>7</sup>. We conducted the survey in these cities and their surrounding townships since we were interested in understanding the differences between center-periphery dynamics concerning the migration specifics, presence of religious minorities, forms of religious membership and social services.

All three cities share similar characteristics: level of social welfare and religious diversity. In socio-economic terms, Bologna is a medium-sized city and one of the most proficient in terms of social services in Italy. Its socio-economic life is characterized by the coexistence of «strong cooperativism and capitalist enterprises» (Giovanardi and Silvagni 2021, p. 2). Milan is the second-largest city in Italy and one of the most productive in Europe in the fashion industry, banking and commerce (Carlucci et al. 2018). Brescia is a relatively small city, characterized by intense industrial and commercial activities (De Vincentis et al. 2022; Dada et al. 2022) and shows the dynamics of reducing weight of the industrial sector in favor of social services.

Milan, Bologna and Brescia share a relevant economic and social wealth along with the similar levels of urban religious diversity and strategies of its management. In 2021, the three cities had relatively high proportion of foreign residents, which constituted 15.9% of the total population in Bologna (with 62,422 foreign residents)<sup>8</sup>; 20.1% of the total population in Milan (with 276,776 foreign residents)<sup>9</sup> and 19.1% in Brescia (with 37,720 foreign residents)<sup>10</sup>. The choice to conduct the research of local religious groups in these three cities of Northern Italy was also made on the basis of the common background

of great plurality of cultures and religions, which each selected city shared with some particularities.

In Bologna, almost half of the foreigners were found to be Christians (around 61,000). Among them, the most numerous are Orthodox Christian believers (almost 38,500) and about 23,000 adherents of Roman Catholicism; while Muslims presented almost 42,000 (as shown by an analysis of ISMU-Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity Foundation). In Bologna<sup>11</sup>, the largest ethnic foreign community was that of Romanians representing 22.1% of all foreigners, followed by Moroccans (10%), Pakistanis (7%) and Albanians (6.6%).

In Milan, the majority of foreigners were Muslims (almost 115,000)<sup>12</sup> and Christian Orthodox (88,000)<sup>13</sup>. The largest foreign community in this city came from Egypt, with 13.7% of all foreigners present in the territory, followed by Romanians (10.8%), Philippines (10%) and Chinese (8.9%)<sup>14</sup>.

In Brescia, almost half of the foreigners were Muslims (48%), while 36% were Christians (with 19% belonging to Eastern Orthodoxy and 17% to the Roman Catholic Church). Similar to Bologna, in Brescia, the largest religious community among the foreign residents had Romanian origin (12.5%), followed by Pakistanis (9.4%), Ukrainians (7.9%) and Egyptians (6.8%)<sup>15</sup>.

A high level of religious diversity, considered at the urban scale, highlights the challenges of governing religion for the local administration and other institutional and non-institutional actors, such as dioceses, associations and religious communities. In this regard, Bologna, Milan and Brescia, with some differences, represent three examples of successful religious diversity management revealing a more concrete and practical level of public policies' interventions in the sphere of religious pluralism as well as practices of interfaith dialogue.

The historical background of the institutionalization of interfaith initiatives is an important aspect that reveals the commitment of the three municipalities and congregations to positive attitudes toward diversity. In Bologna, the role of the Diocese in establishing interfaith initiatives was central due to the Institute for Religious Studies, a renowned and influential center founded by Giuseppe Dossetti<sup>16</sup> in 1953. In 2021, this center hosted the G20 Interfaith Forum highlighting the strong commitment of the Diocese of Bologna<sup>17</sup> to greater inclusion of minorities into the public dialogue. Moreover, the city administration endorses various informal experiences which also involve members of religious communities and citizenship more generally, and fosters the development of institutional initiatives, such as the House of Encounter and Dialogue between Religions and Cultures.<sup>18</sup>

In Milan, the strong tradition of Catholic commitment to politics<sup>19</sup> together with the pastoral heritage of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (Bishop of Milan 1979–2002) set up a system that frames an interreligious approach in a series of institutional and formal initiatives mostly managed by the Catholic Diocese of Milan. Among these initiatives, for instance, are the Ambrosian Center for Religious Dialogue<sup>20</sup> (1990), the Forum of Religions in Milan<sup>21</sup> (2000) and the Service for the Ecumenism and Dialogue<sup>22</sup> (2017).

In Brescia, the sociocultural context is strongly influenced by Catholicism, and there is a long tradition of interfaith commitment as well (Naso 2019). The interreligious engagement of the Diocese and the municipality resulted in many common initiatives such as the "Patto di Fraternità interreligiosa"<sup>23</sup> and various initiatives of 'open church' promoted by the Islamic Cultural Center (Colombo 2021). Moreover, in Brescia, a model of multi-religious coexistence was encouraged by "high rates of economic-work and housing integration" and "dialogic relationships between the various communities facilitated and supported by the efforts of institutions and civil society" (Naso 2019).

The above-mentioned similarities with some particular features inherent in each city concerning urban religious diversity, historical contexts of institutionalization of interfaith initiatives and diversity management allowed us to aggregate the data from the three cities and their surroundings at the next phase of analysis.

### 3.4. Data Collection

In 2020–2021, we conducted the census of local religious groups in Bologna, Milan and Brescia and their surroundings, and we identified 877 religious communities applying mapping study methodology (see Appendix A). The findings from the mapping phase allowed us to conclude that, first, there was a similar level of religious diversity in the three assessed cities, where religious minorities constituted around 40% of the total number of congregations mapped in this study. Second, within all the three cities, there were more communities of religious minorities in the urban area than in the surroundings. Third, in the cities of Bologna and Brescia, more Catholic communities were found than in their surroundings; while in the surroundings of Milan, much more Catholic communities were located compared to the city of Milan.

A common feature characterizing the configuration of religious diversity in the three cities regards the coexistence of three diversity-related factors: (a) historical presence and coexistence of religious minorities such as Jewish, Lutheran, Valdesian and Jehovah Witnesses communities; (b) increasing presence of minorities linked to the recent migration process such as Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and ethnic Christian communities became a constitutive part of the religious landscape of Milan, Bologna and Brescia; and (c) changing patterns of religious belonging and practicing, drawing the boundaries between traditional and new congregations in urban spaces.

From the total number of 877 mapped local religious groups, we conducted interviews with 566 religious leaders who accepted participation in the city congregation study. Finally, religious leaders from 65% of mapped local religious groups were surveyed. Being aware that this could be a source of bias in comparing the data results, we decided to analyze the main findings separately by religious traditions. See Appendix A for the total number of congregations mapped in the three assessed urban areas and their surroundings. We interviewed 174 religious leaders in Bologna; among them, 122 were representatives of the Catholic parishes and 52 of religious minorities (see Appendix A). From the total number of 301 interviews in Milan, 195 were conducted with the leaders of Catholic communities and 106 of religious minorities. In Brescia, 91 leaders were interviewed representing 61 Catholic and 30 religious minority's congregations.

## 4. Results

This section explores some attributes, forms of membership and participation in local religious groups along with their social activities across all religious traditions in three assessed cities and their surroundings.

### 4.1. Religious Diversity and Congregational Founding Dates

This section of the article focuses on the results of the interviews; thus, we present a descriptive analysis of the local religious groups which were studied at the second stage of research. For the purpose of our study, we grouped all studied congregations into six religious traditions. They were Catholics (communities of the Catholic Church), Evangelicals (Baptists and Pentecostals), Orthodox (Eastern Christians), Muslims (Sunni and Shia Muslims), Jehovah's Witnesses and Others. Some general observations upon religious traditions in three assessed cities and their surroundings (see Table 1) suggested that Catholic communities presented more than a half of all local groups studied (around 67%), the second large group was Evangelical (around 13%), followed by the Orthodox Christians (around 4%), Jehovah's Witnesses (around 5%), Muslims (around 5%) and others (around 6%). The category "Others" was composed of 1.8% of Buddhist, 1.2% of Jewish, 0.9% of Hindu, 0.5% of Church of Scientology, 0.5% of Mormon, 0.5% of Reformed/Calvinist/Presbyterian, 0.4% of Baha'i, 0.4% of Sikh and 0.2% of Anglican Episcopalian congregations.

**Table 1.** Number of congregations in Bologna, Milan and Brescia (city and surroundings), by religious tradition (*N* = 566, column %, frequency).

	Total	Bologna	Milan	Brescia
Catholics	66.6% (fr. 377)	70.1% (fr. 122)	64.8% (fr. 195)	65.9% (fr. 60)
Evangelicals	12.9% (fr. 73)	10.3% (fr. 18)	13% (fr. 39)	17.6% (fr. 16)
Orthodox	4.2% (fr. 24)	2.9% (fr. 5)	5.3% (fr. 16)	3.3% (fr. 3)
Jehovah’s Witnesses	4.9% (fr. 28)	6.3% (fr. 11)	5.6% (fr. 17)	0.0% (fr. 0)
Muslims	4.9% (fr. 28)	5.7% (fr. 10)	4.3% (fr. 13)	5.5% (fr. 5)
Others	6.4% (fr. 36)	4.6% (fr. 8)	7.0% (fr. 21)	7.7% (fr. 7)
Total (frequency)	100% (fr. 566)	100% (fr. 174)	100% (fr. 301)	100% (fr. 91)

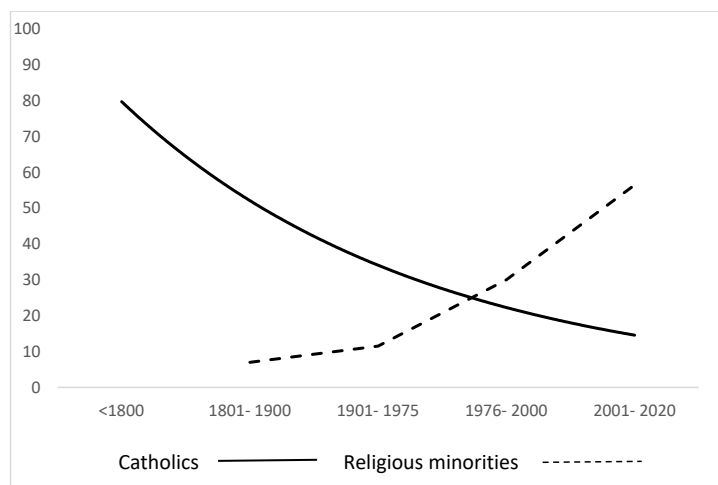
Among three assessed cities and their surroundings, Bologna had the largest number of Catholic communities (70%) and Milan had the largest number of communities of religious minorities (35%), followed by Brescia (34%). In terms of number of local religious groups, Evangelicals were the second largest tradition after the Catholic Church in all three cities with the largest proportion in Brescia (18%). We found the largest proportion of Muslim communities in Bologna (6%), and the largest number of Orthodox Christians in Milan (5%).

In terms of distribution of local religious groups in cities and their surroundings (see Table 2), we found that the majority of Catholic communities (77%) were located in surrounding municipalities, while all groups of religious minorities were predominantly located in cities (from 15% of Evangelicals to 8% of other religious minorities).

**Table 2.** Number of congregations, by city and surroundings (*N* = 566, column %, frequency).

	City	Surroundings
Catholics	62.5% (fr. 250)	76.5% (fr. 127)
Evangelicals	14.5% (fr. 58)	9.0% (fr. 15)
Orthodox	5.0% (fr. 20)	2.4% (fr. 4)
Jehovah’s Witnesses	5.0% (fr. 20)	4.8% (fr. 8)
Muslims	5.0% (fr. 20)	4.8% (fr. 8)
Others	8.0% (fr. 32)	2.4% (fr. 4)
Total (frequency)	100% (fr. 400)	100% (fr. 166)

The analysis of diversity of urban religious communities suggests interesting observations upon its dynamics if we take into consideration the year of establishing the local religious group (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1.** In what year was your congregation officially founded? (valid cases *N* = 464; Catholics fr. 377 and religious minorities fr. 189, vertical axis %).



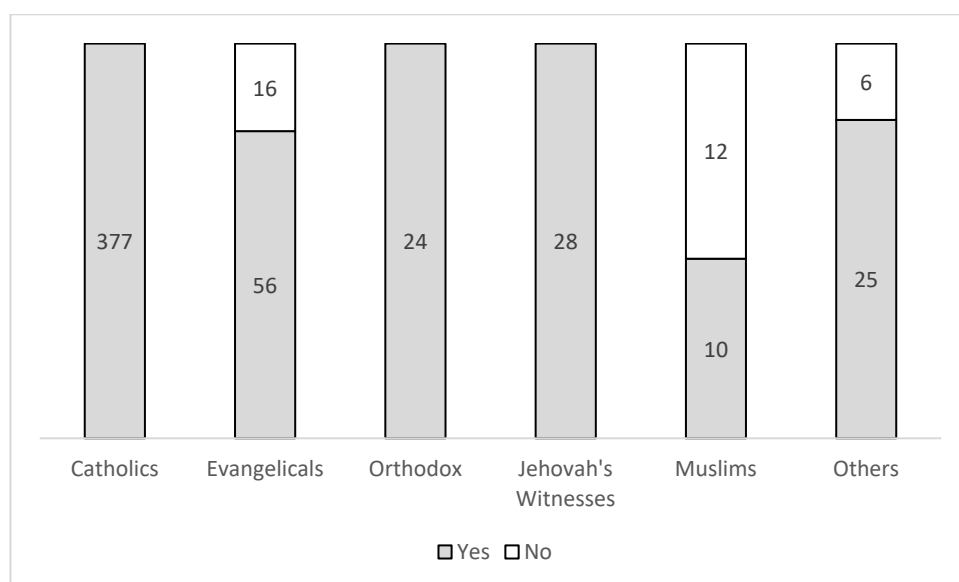
Figure 1 suggests that the Roman Catholic Church, as the oldest and largest religious tradition in three studied cities, had around one-fifth of its parishes founded after the mid-1970s (see Table 3 below for details). Instead, religious minorities have to be seen as newcomers, the majority of which were founded after the mid-1970s (87% if considering all religious minorities together; see Table 3 below). The majority of Evangelical, Orthodox and Muslim communities were established after the 2000s.

**Table 3.** Year of foundation for religious traditions, by five time periods (valid cases *N* = 464, column %, frequency).

	Catholics	Evangelicals	Orthodox	Jehovah's Witnesses	Muslims	Others	Total
<1800	17.4% (fr. 57)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	12.3% (fr. 57)
1801–1900	5.8% (fr. 19)	5.2% (fr. 3)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	12.1% (fr. 4)	5.6% (fr. 26)
1901–1975	58.8% (fr. 193)	13.8% (fr. 8)	21.1% (fr. 4)	0.0% (fr. 0)	0.0% (fr. 0)	12.1% (fr. 4)	45.0% (fr. 209)
1976–2000	16.8% (fr. 55)	25.9% (fr. 15)	15.8% (fr. 3)	100.0% (fr. 4)	36.4% (fr. 8)	42.4% (fr. 14)	21.3% (fr. 99)
2001–2020	1.2% (fr. 4)	55.2% (fr. 32)	63.2% (fr. 12)	0.0% (fr. 0)	63.6% (fr. 14)	33.3% (fr. 11)	15.7% (fr. 73)
Total	100% (fr. 328)	100% (fr. 58)	100% (fr. 19)	100% (fr. 4)	100% (fr. 22)	100% (fr. 33)	100% (fr. 464)

If we consider the ratio between Catholic and minority religious groups, we can conclude that, from 1976 to 2000, the Catholic Church established parishes which represented around 56% of all established groups in that period compared to 44% of religious minorities. However, the situation changed considerably from 2001 to 2020: the Catholic Church established around 6% of new local religious communities compared to 95% of newly established groups by religious minorities.

Figure 2 below sheds light on the configurations of diversity in terms of the organizational structure of congregations. The presence of umbrella organizations is relevant for the religious communities of the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Christian churches and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Instead, local religious groups of Muslim (12 from 22 interviewed), Evangelical (16 from 72) and other religious minorities (6 from 31) highlighted its absence (see Figure 2 below).



**Figure 2.** Is your congregation formally affiliated with an umbrella organization, like a denomination, federation, church, or a similar kind of association? (frequency, by religious tradition).

This finding (see Figure 2) has particular applications for governing religious diversity in urban settings, since it indicates the fluidity of collective forms of social organization of some religious minority groups and specifics of the models of their association. This

organizational dynamic within the urban religious field, according to Silvio Ferrari (2017), also influences traditional legal thinking about religious freedom in Italy. This is due to fluidity of associational forms that presents a complexity of establishing national religious units and lead to “little chance of entering into an agreement with the Italian state” for those new communities (Ferrari 2017).

4.2. Building Use by Outside Groups

Comparing the practices of religious space-making in three assessed cities, we found that 84% of Catholic parishes rented their buildings to groups, programs or events which have no direct connection to their own community life. Among religious minorities, the sharing of religious sites for the same purpose was practiced by Christian Orthodox (50%), Evangelical (48%) and Muslim (39%) communities, followed by other minority local groups (25%) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (14%). Instead, for worship services, religious buildings were used to a lesser degree by any other communities apart from those who historically owned them (see Table 4 below), namely Catholic parishes (14%), followed by other minority communities (8%).

**Table 4.** Agreement with the following attributes of religious communities, by religious tradition (valid cases N = 566, yes %).

	Catholics	Evangelicals	Orthodox	Jehovah’s Witnesses	Muslims	Others
Within the past 12 months, have there been groups, programs, or events that have no connection to your congregation but that have used or rented space in your building?	83.6	47.9	50.0	14.3	39.3	25.0
Is your building used by any other congregation for its worship services?	14.1	2.9	4.2	50.0	0.0	8.3

Catholics shared their buildings with immigrant ethnic Catholic communities from the Philippines, Perù and Hungary, and, in some cases, with the Orthodox groups. A high proportion of Jehovah’s Witnesses communities (50%) who shared their buildings for worship purposes with others referred to a high degree of ethnic diversity within the same religious tradition. The separate usage of the religious spaces by Italian and foreign communities of Jehovah’s Witnesses was due to the presence of immigrant communities from South America and Africa.

4.3. Religious Membership and Participation

The relationship between the number of formal members of the local religious groups, associated members and weekly participants in religious services or other activities (see Table 5 below) disclosed another kind of dynamic within urban religious life, referring to the size of congregations. The average size of Catholic parishes was larger than of congregations in any other religious tradition (see Table 5). However, these data inform us about the number of residents within a parish territory identified by the Dioceses.<sup>24</sup> This particularity in defining the boundaries of the Catholic parish conditions the ratio of formally registered members to the number of persons in any way associated with the religious life of communities. It also sheds light on the differences between Catholic and minority local religious groups while assessing this ratio (see Table 5).

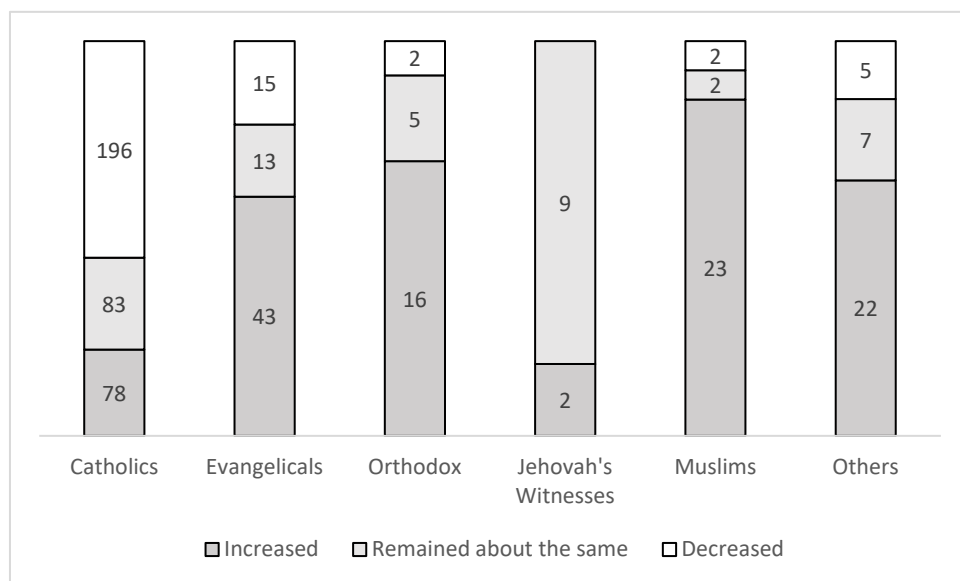
**Table 5.** Membership and participation in congregations and their associated members (*N* = 566, Mean by religious tradition and median).

	Catholics (Mean)	Evangelicals (Mean)	Orthodox (Mean)	Jehovah’s Witnesses (Mean)	Muslims (Mean)	Others (Mean)
Number of formally registered members in congregation	6021 (median 5593)	107 (median 99)	483 (median 99)	306 (median 250)	140 (median 99)	644 (median 99)
Number of persons associated in any way with the religious life of this congregation	1034 (median 800)	162 (median 100)	1105 (median 400)	306 (median 250)	1642 (median 300)	42 (median 186)
Number of persons—counting both adults and children—would you say participating weekly in services or other activities in the congregation	690 (median 500)	96 (median 50)	197 (median 110)	306 (median 250)	521 (median 225)	196 (median 88)

For the Catholics, this ratio was around 6 to 1, while for the Evangelicals, Orthodox and Muslim communities, we observed the opposite tendency. For the latter, the number of associates was larger compared to the formal members. For instance, for the Evangelicals, there were 1.5 times more associates than formal members in congregations; for the Orthodox Christians, they were 2.3 times more; and mostly 12 times more associates compared to the formal members can be found in Muslim communities.

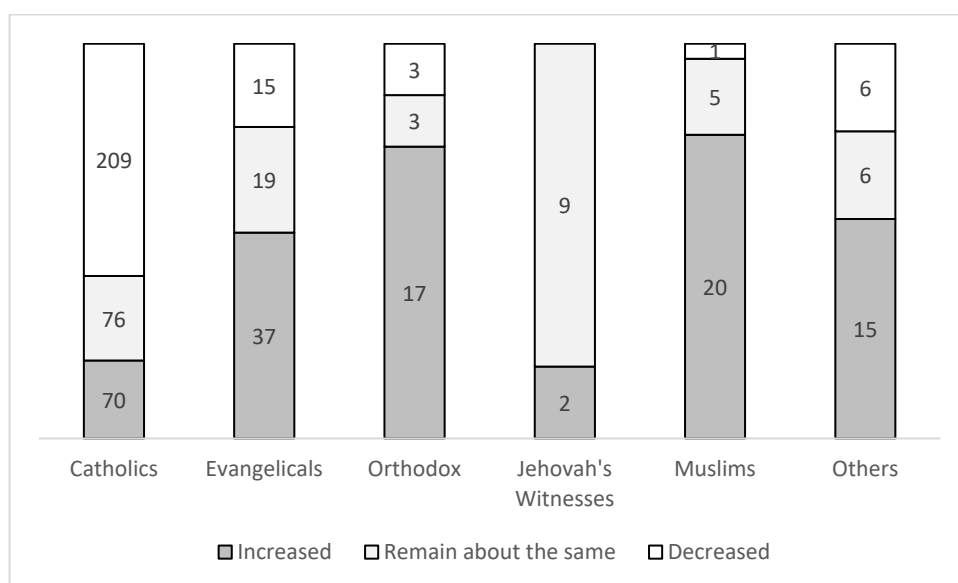
If we consider the number of associate members with weekly attenders, we found that around 67% of individuals who associated themselves in any way with religious life attended the religious services in Catholic parishes weekly. Their share was 60% in Evangelical, 18% in Orthodox, 100% in Jehovah’s Witnesses, 32% in Muslim, and 47% in other minority communities. This contrast can be explained by the varying rules and principles applied to define the concept of ‘membership’ by different religious traditions and communities. While the vast majority of Christian denominations register their members whenever they obtain sacraments (during Baptism or Communion), there are no formal rules for registering their members in Muslim communities. The same can be noted for the denominations with a large proportion of migrants with ethnically homogeneous backgrounds (such as Sikh, Hindu or Baha’i). This means that the formal criteria of membership in Italian congregations have to be contrasted with other characteristics of membership and participation in local religious groups. For the analysis of religious diversity, the category of ‘formally registered membership’ alone does not provide sufficient and informative data about the size of the local groups and their possible comparison.

Figures 3 and 4 below provide more information about the dynamics of aging in local religious groups and sketches of possible trends in the growth and decline of urban religious communities within six religious traditions. The data suggest that during the last 10 years, the number of adults who regularly participated in religious services increased in the majority of Muslim, Orthodox, Evangelical and other minorities’ groups, while it decreased in Catholic parishes and remained the same in the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses.



**Figure 3.** Compared to 10 years ago, has the number of regularly participating adults in your congregation “Increased”, “Decreased”, or “Remained the same”? by religious tradition (frequency by religious tradition).

The changes in the structure of membership during the last 10 years were measured within the group of regularly participating children (see Figure 4 below). The changes in the participation of cohorts of children in the local religious groups showed not only the tendencies related to the past decade but help in understanding and predicting the future dynamics concerning the number of affiliates and regular participants (growth and decline of groups). For instance, the only religious tradition with a strong tendency of a declining number of participating children (up to 15 years old) was Catholicism. More than half of the interviewed religious leaders (209 from 355) confirmed this tendency (55%). The growth in the number of children population indicated 70 parishes (19%), and 76 parishes (20%) of studied Catholic communities had about the same number of children during the last ten years.



**Figure 4.** Compared to 10 years ago, has the number of regularly participating children (15 or younger) in your congregation “Increased”, “Decreased”, or “Remained the same”? by religious tradition (frequency by religious tradition).

Instead, the opposite tendency was observed within the local religious groups of religious minorities, except the Jehovah’s Witnesses communities. There was a rapid growth of younger age cohorts regularly participating in the congregations of Muslim, Orthodox, Evangelical, and other minority traditions (see Figure 4 above). Around 71% of Muslim communities (20 from 26) and Orthodox communities (17 from 23), as well as the half of the Evangelical communities (37 from 71) declared the growth in the number of regularly participating children during the last ten years. Fifteen from 27 congregations of other minorities confirmed these dynamics.

Table 6 below suggests more information about the regular meetings and activities for adults, children and youth, as well as for reaching out to new members. Catholic parishes developed activities for nurturing the spiritual life of adults (95% confirmed that trend), transmitting religious tradition to young people (93%) and 49% of interviewed religious leaders noted that “reaching out to find new members” was among the priorities of their communities.

**Table 6.** Meeting groups and activities in local religious groups for adults, children and new members, by religious tradition (N = 566, yes % within).

<b>Within the Past 12 Months, Have There Been Any Regularly Meeting Groups or Activities Specifically Focused on:</b>	<b>Catholics (%)</b>	<b>Evangelicals (%)</b>	<b>Orthodox (%)</b>	<b>Jehovah’s Witnesses (%)</b>	<b>Muslims (%)</b>	<b>Others (%)</b>
... nurturing spiritual life of adults (e.g., study of scripture, prayer, meditation)?	95.2	100	87.5	100	100	100
... transmitting the religious tradition to young people (children/youth programs)?	92.6	93.2	95.8	96.4	75	66.7
... reaching out to find new members (missionary, outreach)?	49.1	89	8.3	100	0	38.9

In contrast to this trend, Evangelical congregations focused on missionary activities. Namely, 89% of their religious leaders confirmed that there were activities to attract new members during the last year (see Table 6). Instead, only 8% of Orthodox and no Muslim communities developed missionary activities in host societies. One difference we observed within Orthodox and Muslim communities regarded the higher percentage of Orthodox communities focused on children and youth programs compared to adults’ regular meeting groups (96% vs. 88%). The opposite tendency was observed within the activities of Muslim communities in the last year; they were more oriented to nurturing the spiritual life of the adult population than transmitting religious tradition to young people (100% vs. 75%).

*4.4. Social Activities of Local Religious Groups*

The membership and participation patterns in urban religious communities showed strong positive dynamics within new migrant groups. The novelty of their presence within the host society also influenced the type of social and political activities they developed and focused on. The results concerning the events supporting the elderly, disabled people, migrants, environmental issues, participation in political activities and human rights service projects organized by religious communities revealed some trends. They showed how old and new religious traditions within Italian urban spaces were engaging with current social and political challenges during the last 12 months (see Table 7 below).

**Table 7.** Agreement with the statements about social and political activities of religious communities, by religious tradition (valid cases  $N = 561$ , yes % within).

Within the Past 12 Months, Have There Been Any Regularly Meeting Groups or Activities Specifically Focused on Organizing Events for or Supporting:	Catholics (%)	Evangelicals (%)	Orthodox (%)	Jehovah's Witnesses (%)	Muslims (%)	Others (%)
... the elderly	67.9	9.6	16.7	0.0	0.0	8.3
... disabled people	18.3	4.1	16.7	7.1	0.0	2.8
... migrants	41.6	38.4	58.3	7.1	75.0	16.7
... environmental issues	33.4	16.4	8.3	7.1	7.1	33.3
... to prepare or participate in political activities	16.2	9.6	4.2	0	3.6	2.8
... engaging in any human service projects, outreach ministries or missions, social services, or other activities intended to help people whether they are members or not	88.6	80.8	70.8	100	39.3	58.3

During one year, 68% of the Catholic parishes organized and supported activities for the elderly, followed by 17% of the Orthodox and 10% of Evangelical communities. Additionally, around 8% of communities of religious minorities within the group “Others” were engaged with the support of older people. Regular meetings and events supporting disabled people were organized within 18% of Catholic and 17% of Orthodox parishes, 7% of Jehovah’s Witnesses and 4% of Evangelical congregations. Regular activities supporting migrants were reported by religious leaders in 75% of Muslim, 58% of Orthodox, 42% of the Catholic, 38% of Evangelical and 17% of other religious minority communities. The high percentage of commitment to support migrants among the Muslim and Orthodox congregations can be explained by their composition: the vast majority of these communities were found to be composed of migrants from Northern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Eastern Europe. As regards environmental issues and participation in political activities, Catholic communities were more active in that regard; 33% of local Catholic groups were involved in organizing support for environmental issues and 16% in preparation/participation in political activities. They were followed by Evangelical communities, among which 16% participated in environmental support events and 10% in political activities. The weaker engagement was observed within other religious traditions.

#### 4.5. Political, Theological and Ethical Positioning of Congregations

This section delves into the political, theological and ethical positions of the urban religious communities considered in terms of their more or less conservative and liberal views. Religious leaders interviewed in this study were asked to assess the positions of the congregations they are responsible for on the scale from ‘more on the conservative side,’ ‘right in the middle’ to ‘more on the liberal side.’ Tables 8–10 below suggest that the questions about political, theological and ethical positioning of congregations produced many reservations while addressed by religious leaders. These reservations were particularly evident when we considered the missing data. For instance, regarding the political orientations, the vast majority of religious leaders preferred to abstain from the answers. During the interviews, they stated that they tend not to talk about political issues with the members of their communities and, thus, preferred not to answer the question. At the same time, reservations in assessing political, theological and ethical positions of congregations were caused by many factors, among which were their complex and controversial relationships with contemporary debates on abortion, LGBTIQ+ rights, euthanasia and migration, as well as political debates in Italy.

In terms of political orientation, Catholic leaders asserted that they position their respective communities “more on the conservative side” (26%) and “more on liberal side” (24%) with 16% “in the middle”. The leaders of the Evangelical communities were more leaning to the conservative side (32%) vs. those on the liberal side (15%). The majority of Orthodox community leaders (71%) did not reply to these questions, and all Jehovah’s Witnesses abstained from the answers. Among those Orthodox leaders who addressed

these questions, 13% confirmed that their communities shared conservative political positions, while 13% were leaning to the liberal perspective. Among the leaders of the Muslim communities, 29% confirmed that they are more liberally oriented and 4% more conservative. As regards other religious minorities, around 28% confirmed their liberal position and 11% conservative views. A similar question related to theological views was addressed to religious leaders, suggesting that they evaluate the positions of their communities on the conservative/liberal scale (see Table 9).

**Table 8.** Politically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? by religious tradition (N = 566, missing data = 248, row %).

Row %	More on the Conservative Side	Right in the Middle	More on the Liberal Side	Missing Data	Total
Catholics	25.5	15.6	23.9	35.0	100
Evangelicals	31.5	6.8	15.1	46.6	100
Orthodox	12.5	4.2	12.5	70.8	100
Jehovah’s Witnesses	0.0	0.0	0.0	100	100
Muslims	3.6	0.0	28.6	67.8	100
Others	11.1	11.1	27.8	50.0	100
Total	22.4	12.2	21.6	43.8	100

**Table 9.** Theologically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? by religious tradition (N = 566, missing data = 125, row %).

	More on the Conservative Side	Right in the Middle	More on the Liberal Side	Missing Data	Total
Catholics	34.3	15.4	23.4	26.9	100
Evangelicals	80.8	1.4	11.0	6.8	100
Orthodox	70.8	8.3	0.0	20.9	100
Jehovah’s Witnesses	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Muslims	78.6	0.0	0.0	21.4	100
Others	30.6	16.7	33.3	19.4	100
Total	47.1	11.9	19.1	21.9	100

**Table 10.** Ethically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? by religious tradition (N = 566, missing data = 199, row %).

	More on the Conservative Side	Right in the Middle	More on the Liberal Side	Missing Data	Total
Catholics	20.7	12.2	21.2	45.9	100
Evangelicals	83.6	0.0	8.2	8.2	100
Orthodox	75.0	4.2	0.0	20.8	100
Jehovah’s Witnesses	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
Muslims	78.6	0.0	0.0	21.4	100
Others	38.9	8.3	27.8	25.0	100
Total	39.0	8.8	17.0	35.2	100

Two times less, compared to the assessment of conservative/liberal political views, religious leaders expressed their reservations to theological issues (missing data = 125 vs. 248 in the previous question). In theological terms (see Table 9 above), the division between conservative and liberal positions of religious communities was much more discernible. All Jehovah’s Witnesses groups positioned themselves on the conservative side, and 81% of

Evangelical, 79% of Muslim, 71% of Orthodox, 34% of Catholic and 31% of other religious minority congregations expressed their conservative positions. As regards the most liberal local religious groups in theological terms, we can find them among the religious traditions of other minorities presented in this study. Around 33% of them highlighted that they were more on liberal side. Additionally, in the middle position between conservative and liberal theological views, we found Catholics (15%) and Others (17%).

Table 10 below presents the ethical positioning of religious communities, showing that slightly stronger liberal ethical orientation can be found among Catholic congregations (21%); however, the liberal perspective is balanced with 21% of those leaning to conservative views.

Among other religious minorities, 28% positioned themselves on the liberal side, while 39% were conservative. As regards Evangelical, Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim communities, they considered themselves predominantly as ethically conservative. The high percentage of missing data among Catholics indicates that the priests experienced complexities in interpreting their congregations' ethical orientation. That fact could indicate that religious leaders sometimes prefer not to question debated ethical issues with their parishioners in order to escape situations of potential conflict, being aware of their controversial nature.

## 5. Discussion—Testing of the CCS in Three Italian Cities

As we specified in the introduction of this article, this article offers explorative research by presenting a snapshot of congregational life in three Italian cities and their surroundings. The first research phase resulted in mapping 877 local religious groups in Bologna, Milan and Brescia and their surroundings. In three assessed cases, we mapped 507 Catholic communities and 370 religious groups of minority religions (see Appendix A below). The number of mapped religious communities in the cities of Milan, Bologna and Brescia, respectively, reflected the dimensions of three cities: in Milan, which is the biggest among the assessed cities, we mapped the largest number of local religious groups (464 communities, See Appendix A). Bologna, which is a medium size city, had 263 congregations; while in Brescia, the smallest city in this study, we mapped 150 local religious groups.

Our study suggested that, first, there was a similar level of religious diversity in the three assessed cities where religious minorities constitute around 40% of the urban religious landscape (around 44% in Milan, 41% in Brescia and 40% in Bologna and their surroundings). Second, within all the three cities, there were more local communities of religious minorities in the urban area than in their surroundings. Third, regarding the presence of the Catholic communities, we observed two different trends of their distribution: in Bologna and Brescia, there was a higher number of parishes in the urban area than in surroundings, while in Milan, it was the opposite: there was a considerably higher number of parishes in the surroundings than in the urban area.

The second phase of research presented the interviews of religious leaders of local religious groups in three cities and their surroundings ( $N = 566$ ). As regards the attributes of the local religious groups, we took into consideration the year of their foundation, presence of the umbrella organization and sharing of religious spaces with other communities. The mid-1970s saw a historical moment of growth of communities of non-historical religious minorities in the three assessed cities and a simultaneous decline in the number of newly established Catholic communities, meanwhile the majority of Evangelical, Orthodox and Muslim communities were established after the 2000s.

The differences and similarities between the congregations of the Catholic Church and religious minorities referred to the parallel, but not overlapping, processes within organizational dynamics, economic resources, modes of participation in religious life and engagement with public debates on political and human rights issues. In terms of shared religious spaces (buildings), increasing diversity of religious life of the Italian cities can be considered through the lens of multi-religious spaces (Burchardt and Giorda 2021), where belonging and practicing in urban context becomes more fluid, diversified and flexible



(Burchardt et al. 2023). Catholic communities with more material and cultural capital are the first among local religious groups to provide spaces for secular and religious urban groups, gatherings and events. This process also indicates that increasing diversity requires better understanding of spatial dynamics and religious activities “tied to events at other sites associated with the same religious community” (Hayden and Walker 2013, p. 408).

The analysis of aging of urban religious communities in Bologna, Milan and Brescia showed that Catholic communities tended to decrease either in adult regular participants or in the number of regularly participating children during the previous decade; meanwhile, from 42% to 71% of congregations of religious minorities reported the growing youth population. In the Catholic Church, 19% of parishes reported similar dynamics. At the same time, only a small proportion of Orthodox communities (8%) and no Muslim local groups developed missionary activities in host societies, i.e., due to being mostly focused on their own diasporas. In particular, all Muslim groups confirmed that they oriented toward nurturing the spiritual life of the adult population, while 75% focused on transmitting religious tradition to young people (vs. 95% and 93% of Catholic parishes engaged with adult and youth activities).

The same trend was reflected in broader socio-political activities of local religious groups in Bologna, Milan and Brescia. Three-quarters of Muslim and more than a half of Orthodox community leaders confirmed their practices of regular support of migrants (compared to 42% of Catholic parishes). The great majority of services focused on supporting migrants and carried out by the parishes of the Catholic Church refer to the central Diocesan Caritas of the three cities. These institutions run canteens, dormitories, food aid and basic aid distribution centers. Instead, in Muslims and Orthodox congregations, social assistance of migrants is often provided by informal initiatives of the members without strong organizational and institutional support.

As regards liberal/conservative orientations of urban religious communities, we found similarities and contrasts within their political, theological and ethical positions. The similarities regard the high level of reservation of religious leaders toward debated ethical and political issues in contemporary Italian public discourse. The differences reflected various and sometimes contradictory positions of religious traditions toward ethical and theological issues, indicating how dominant and minority religions face modernization in Italy. In this perspective, the divisions of Catholics on the continuum of pro-liberal and pro-conservative attitudes evidence the ongoing religious and secular debates on ethical and human rights issues (Breskaya et al. 2018); meanwhile, religious minorities tend to be less polarized.

Interestingly, the analysis of political orientation showed that the highest prevalence of a conservative position was among the Evangelical congregations. This fact can be linked to their distancing from the stances of Italian progressive/liberal parties advancing the bioethical issues. In fact, these communities often take rigid stances on bioethical issues, such as the euthanasia and abortion, supporting conservative political parties. Instead, the highest prevalence of liberal positions of Muslim communities in our study can be interpreted in response to the anti-Islamic discourse carried out by the conservative parties in Italy, such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega Nord.

In terms of theological orientation, the Catholic leaders, contrary to other religious traditions, are more divided while assessing the positions of their communities. This can be read in the light of the debates regarding the highly contested issues of female ordination and the celibacy of priests in the Catholic Church. The same division can be seen for the ethical orientation. The Catholic Church nowadays is facing debates on ethical issues such as end-of-life and homosexuality that are raising conflicts among different stances. The different visions among the representatives of the clergy evidence the cleavages and polarization, which can be also observed among the faithful and laypersons who no longer have a clear ethical perspective. On the contrary, strong conservative positions on the ethical issues of the Muslim and Orthodox communities indicate a more homogeneous ethical position and absence of open public debate on these issues.

## 6. Conclusions

This study showed the importance of applying the city congregation study methodology to the analysis of religious diversity in contemporary urban contexts. The testing of the instrument in three Italian cities allowed us to differentiate the attributes, social activities and orientations of local religious groups and depict the dimensions of urban religious diversity without reducing them to mere identity differences. The tendency toward the ‘congregationalization’ (Ammerman 2005; Monnot and Stolz 2020)—as an effect of the diasporas and practices of mutual support and transmission of cultural and religious traditions—can be observed on the case of three assessed cities, making the concept of ‘congregation’ relevant for the further analysis of configurations of religious diversity in Italy.

The main results showed that during the last decade, the dynamics of growth of regular religious participation was distinct within some religious communities we surveyed, especially within religious newcomers. Similarly, our study revealed some differences between local religious groups concerning their engagement in social activities. Namely, social activities linked to the support of migrants were endorsed stronger by Muslim and Orthodox groups, while social service for elderly, environmental programs and political activity are promoted stronger by the Catholic parishes.

Concerning the limitations of this research, it is important to take into consideration that it was representative for Northern Italy, since it covered three urban dimensions, reflecting three city-sizes and socio-cultural contexts, as well as the models of religious diversity governance. Therefore, the present study could be seen as a starting point for the further research that deepens the analysis of the configuration of religious diversity nationwide.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Total number of congregations mapped in the three assessed urban areas and their surroundings (frequency).

	City/ Catholic	City/ Minorities	Surroundings/ Catholic	Surroundings/ Minorities	Total
Bologna	99	76	59	29	263
Milan	91	131	169	73	464
Brescia	60	50	29	11	150
Total	250	257	257	113	877

Note: City/Catholic = communities of the Roman Catholic Church mapped in three cities; City/Minorities = communities of religious minorities mapped in three cities; Surroundings/Catholic = communities of the Roman Catholic Church mapped in surrounding municipalities of three cities; Surroundings/Minorities = communities of religious minorities mapped in surrounding municipalities of three cities.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> From 1994 to 2017 the number of Catholic adherents decreased from 89% to 76%, religious minorities grew from 3% to 8%, including Muslims (3%), Orthodox Christians (2.6%), Evangelical Protestants (0.9%), and others. At the same time, the number of religious nones increased from 10% to 16%. See for details [Garelli \(2020\)](#).
- <sup>2</sup> See the website of Osservatorio sul Pluralismo Religioso a Bologna for details. Internet access: <https://www.osservatoriopr.net/#:~:text=L\T1\textquoterightOsservatorio%20%C3%A8%20un%20organismo,Ferrari%20e%20Pino%20Luc%C3%A0%20Trombetta>, accessed 1 December 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> The mapping was built largely with the “snowball technique”, which provided the collection of new information regarding other minorities through the request made to the interviewed leaders to indicate additional potential communities to be included in the survey.
- <sup>4</sup> Three questions measuring the autonomy of religious communities were incorporated into the CCS instrument from the questionnaire Social perception of religious freedom (SPRF). For details see For details see [Breskaya and Giordan \(2019\)](#).
- <sup>5</sup> See the official website of the municipality of Bologna for details. Internet access: <http://inumeridibolognametropolitana.it/notizie/le-tendenze-demografiche-bologna-nel-primo-semester-2022>, accessed 5 February 2023.
- <sup>6</sup> See the official website of the municipality of Milan for details. Internet access: [https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/2012/6/2313917/cleta\\_zone\\_eta\\_2021.pdf/b31d9159-e926-c882-2359-73b77d39b480?t=1644565083441](https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/2012/6/2313917/cleta_zone_eta_2021.pdf/b31d9159-e926-c882-2359-73b77d39b480?t=1644565083441), accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>7</sup> See the official website of the municipality of Brescia for details. Internet access: <https://www.comune.brescia.it/servizi/certificatiedocumenti/anagrafe/Pagine/Dati-relativi-alla-popolazione-residente-a-Brescia.aspx>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>8</sup> See website Tuttitalia for details. Internet access: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/emilia-romagna/32-bologna/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2021>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>9</sup> See website Tuttitalia for details. Internet access: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/lombardia/18-milano/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2021>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>10</sup> See website Tuttitalia for details. Internet access: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/lombardia/65-brescia/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2021>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>11</sup> The data of Bologna and Milan refer to the ‘metropolitan areas’, while the data of Brescia refer to the urban area only. See the website Tuttitalia: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/emilia-romagna/provincia-di-bologna/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2022>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>12</sup> See website Anci Lombardia: <https://www.strategieamministrative.it/dettaglio-news/20167181646-popolazione-che-cambia-in-lombardia-vive-un-musulmano-su-quattro/#:~:text=Si%20stima%20che%20i%20musulmani,oltre%201%2C6%20milioni>, accessed 2 February 2023.
- <sup>13</sup> See website Vita: <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2018/03/27/in-italia-gli-immigrati-ortodossi-sono-piu-dei-musulmani/146372>, accessed 3 February 2023.
- <sup>14</sup> See: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/lombardia/provincia-di-milano/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2022>, accessed 23 March 2023.
- <sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/lombardia/65-brescia/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2022>, accessed 23 March 2023.
- <sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Dossetti was a presbyter, jurist, theologian and academic. He was also a leading figure in the post-WWII political arena.
- <sup>17</sup> Among the several initiatives promoted by the Diocese for a greater inclusion of minorities, the most controversial and debated was the decision to distribute the “welcoming tortellini.” See: “I tortellini dell’accoglienza dividono i bolognesi.” Internet access: <https://www.bolognatoday.it/cronaca/tortellini-accoglienza-bolognesi-tradizione-polemica.html#:~:text=Dividono%20i%20tortellini%20dell\T1\textquoterightaccoglienza,non%20solo%2C%20non%20mangia%20maiale>, accessed 15 March 2023.
- <sup>18</sup> In 2021, in Bologna was founded Casa del Dialogo tra religioni e culture (House of Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue). See webpage: <https://gazzettadibologna.it/cultura/a-bologna-nasce-un-casa-del-dialogo-tra-religioni-e-culture>, accessed 23 March 2023.
- <sup>19</sup> Carried out also by associations, such as Communion and Liberation, whose members often participate in political campaigns and are involved in political parties.
- <sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.cadr.it>, accessed 15 March 2023.
- <sup>21</sup> See: <https://www.chiesadimilano.it/news/chiesa-diocesi/forum-delle-religioni-a-milano-lo-statuto-e-gli-aderenti-71682.html>, accessed 15 March 2023.
- <sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.chiesadimilano.it/servizioperlecumenismoieldialogo>, accessed 15 March 2023.
- <sup>23</sup> “Patto di Fraternità” was signed in 2017. It was a result of a spontaneous aggregation of representatives of different religious traditions in Brescia and its province and initiated by the Catholic Focolare Movement and the Islamic center of via Corsica. Subsequently, other Catholic, Orthodox, Sikh, Muslim communities from various areas, and Hindus joined. Over the years, the network of adherents organized various prayer initiatives, public meetings and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.
- <sup>24</sup> The data on Catholic ‘formally registered members’ have been taken from the Diocesan yearbook of the cities of Bologna, Milan and Brescia of 2021.

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