

Participatory or Vicarious? When Networked Belonging Challenges Networks of Belonging

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Abstract

Networks of belonging are still, for most people, rooted in offline interactions and identifications. However, online activities nurture new forms of networked belonging that may challenge existing patterns of belonging. People's relations to organized religion in Europe may throw light on the dynamics. There are, of course, participatory forms of religion but also a 'vicarious religion' where the majority let the few active keep the network of belonging on their behalf. What happens when relations to religious sites and access to religious resources are made available in new online forms? The online/offline interfaces of vicarious and participatory religion are explored with four cases within the framework set by the Church of Norway: a 'net church', a web site with symbolic resources for religious education of children, a regular congregation, and a meeting place for Norwegians abroad. This leads to a proposed general typology on access to symbolic resources from networked sites, as a stepping-stone for further research on networked belonging and networks of belonging that could be applied to other cultural and social fields than the one on religion.

Keywords: Belonging Network Participatory Vicarious Religion Online/offline

People's varied relations to organized religion in Europe may throw light on the dynamics between networked belonging and networks of belonging.

In Europe, especially in the national Protestant churches of Northern Europe, one finds a 'vicarious' form of religion (Davie, 2007). The majority of the members in national churches are rather passive; their public religious practice is almost limited to the transition rites of life and death. They let the smaller circles of active members keep the church open and available in case things happen and they need it. They may have a sense of belonging to the church but do usually not go there. The relatively few active in the local churches, on the other hand, are sticking to a participatory form of organized religion.

This distinction is elaborated upon below. The issue here is to raise the question how participatory and vicarious forms of religion relate to social networks/networking and to various patterns of belonging. With contemporary networks and networking this points towards the online/offline interface.

Online/offline

In today's media saturated society, with personal computers and handy 'personal media' (Lüders, 2008) to communicate on extended Internet and mobile networks, the online/offline distinction become blurred. People switch between available media and go in and out between mediated and face-to-face modes. The online media extend offline social interaction. Both modes feed into social networks. Online networks have offline roots and online interaction is part of the everyday. And, important, the online parts are as social as the offline interactions. People switch 'seamlessly' between social interaction on 'the net' and social interaction in physical proximity. The offline and the online make one reality, one environment. This reality is highly mediated (Lundby, 2012).

'Cyberspace' is becoming a myth. It is now about connections and communication, interaction and identification, regardless of online or offline entrances to such exchanges, Nancy Baum states in her book on *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2010). Digital media are simply tools people use to connect with each other. She looks forward to the day when 'online' and 'offline' are no longer talked about in contrast to each other (Baum, 2010: 150–155). The Internet has become seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of institutional and everyday life (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002; Bakardjieva, 2005, 2011; Baym, 2010, 2011; Consalvo & Ess 2011), and so have mobile networks.

Networked belonging vs. networks of belonging

The terms 'networked belonging' *versus* 'networks of belonging' may seem as play with words. It is not. boyd & Ellison (2008) make a similar distinction between 'social network*ing* sites' and 'social network sites'. For this kind of 'social media' they avoid the first and apply the latter. Their reason is that 'networking' relates to initiation of new relationships while 'social network sites' (SNS) rather are used to articulate, make visible and renew existing social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Online interaction is primarily applied to keep and refresh offline connections (Ellison et al., 2007; Baum, 2011). Although contested (Beer, 2008), I find boyd & Ellison's distinction useful as an inspiration for the present purpose.

This is to simplify, but I take 'networked belonging' to be primarily online-nurtured and 'networks of belonging' to be rooted in offline social relations. However, there is interplay between the two. Online networked belonging draws upon and relates to offline structures. Offline networks of belonging will be further shaped and supplemented in online exchanges.

The research question for this study is how networked belonging challenges networks of belonging. To which extents will patterns of belonging that are nurtured in the flow of online networking play into and even change patterns of belonging in offline networks of belonging?

Patterns of belonging

'Belonging' is a conceptual tool to link 'community' and 'networks'. Patterns of belonging are understood through processes of interaction and identification. Participation or interaction together with identification produces a 'sense of belonging' that is upheld and further shaped in the intertwined processes of interaction and identification. I have elsewhere presented a theoretical argument on patterns of belonging in online/offline interfaces of religion (Lundby, 2011).

'Belonging' captures better than 'community' the fluidity of Internet relations. This concept also covers more stable bonds. Belonging could imply cohesion and contact but also conflict between different relations or responsibilities.

To look for specific processes of identification and interaction is more concrete than trying to capture a community in its entirety. This is even more so with the networked forms of the Internet. ... the combined processes of identification and interaction create and sustain belonging, and patterns of belonging extend across online/offline interfaces. This is relevant to individual religiosity as well as group religion. (Lundby, 2011, p. 1231)

Participatory vs. vicarious

In terms of religion Europe is a special case. As Jürgen Habermas argues, 'Against the background of the rise of religion across the globe, the division of the West is now perceived as if Europe were isolating itself from the rest of the world. Seen in terms of world history, Max Weber's Occidental rationalism appears to be the actual deviation' (Habermas, 2005). There are striking differences in religion and secularity between America and Europe. The United States has all through its history been giving space to extensive religious diversity, where religion in Europe was connected to territories. This stimulated conflicts between the various confessions and countries, invited secular protests, and made Europe less adaptive to immigration with other religions. Europe's historic churches are seriously diminished. However, religious mentalities in Europe 'are far more durable than religious organizations', Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas (2008, p. 139) argue.

Grace Davie, the British sociologist of religion, has throughout her scholarship on religion in modern Europe, pointed out this continent as an exceptional case (Davie, 1999, 2000, 2002). To characterize this, she coined the term 'vicarious religion' (Davie, 2007, 2010). This denotes *'religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing'* (Davie, 2007, p. 22, emphasis in original). The concept of vicarious religion, then, may help to 'reveal forms of religion that normally lie hidden' (Davie, 2010, p. 264).

Davie defined the concept with reference to offline religion and religiosity in Europe. The concept is shaped with reference to the historic Christian churches of various denominations, as they have been the dominant religions on this continent. It gathers religious practices and attitudes that relate to institutional religion. However, these practices and attitudes may not be congruent with the teachings of these churches. Vicarious religion expresses patterns of belonging within the space provided by the material and cultural belongings of the majority of national churches it usually refers to (Lundby, 2011, p. 1229).

Since contemporary religion is within the same matrix of offline and online influence as other cultural and social fields, I assume that vicarious religion could also be found online. I have developed this theoretically (Lundby, 2011). In this article I want to put my theoretical construction under empirical scrutiny.

In terms of the two main components of belonging vicarious religion certainly involves *identification* with a religious collectivity but it appears as a more passive form of religiosity as it involves modest *interaction* from most people.

Besides certain key rites and ceremonies, such as Christmas Eve services in the European Christian tradition, the interaction in vicarious religion may, rather, be mediated: Sunday-service radiobroadcasts and similar programmes on TV still attract a considerable public in many Western countries, as for example in Sweden (Linderman 2001; Lövheim 2008). While established broadcast media may still be more important to people for their religious or spiritual interaction and identification than the Internet, online resources and activities may come to play more and more into the formation of religious belonging as these new media gain a stronger foothold in people's daily mediation. (Lundby, 2011, p. 1229-1230)

In my model, the contrast to *vicarious religion* is what I term *participatory religion*. This is active religious practice within an institutional setting. This activity is primarily offline but could also take place offline. Participatory religion combines identification and interaction and hence shape and sustain religious belonging.

Nico Carpentier usefully clarifies the nuances between the concepts of interaction and participation. His model is aimed at media production, content and reception but may have more general sociological relevance. Carpentier includes the concept of access, which points to presence in the ongoing processes. 'Interaction' is used to denote socio-communicative relationships. With 'participation' he goes further, to imply involvement in decision-making processes. Participation is 'co-deciding' on one level or the other (Carpentier, 2011, pp. 130-131).

My term 'participatory religion' encompasses access as well as interaction. One needs to have some kind of presence within the religious institutional setting to be able to participate. This institutional setting is a socio-communicative space where interaction takes place. This interaction will not necessarily imply co-

deciding activity within the religious institution. There may be a formal opportunity to vote for boards and committees, but the said concept of participation does not primarily aim at formal democratic processes. More to the core of the concept is the involvement in decision-making and power dynamics in the everyday, minor processes. The door to such co-decisions will usually stay open when one engages in an organization, religious or other. The term 'participatory religion' seems appropriate, although many members may not use the participation opportunities.

The typology

I understand religion through the forms and processes of mediation in practices that are considered 'religious' by people, as well as through the patterns of belonging that are shaped in such communication (Lundby, 2011, p. 1226). Religion, the anthropologist Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors argue, 'cannot be analyzed outside the forms and practices of mediation that define it ... the point is to explore how the transition from one mode of mediation to another... reconfigures a particular practice of religious mediation (Meyer & Moors, 2006, p. 7). 'Belonging' in the realm of religion are the social bonds that make an individual part of a 'moral community' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912], p. 44; Lundby, 2011, pp. 1225-1226).

I restrict my discussion to moral communities that take the shape of religious institutions. At stake is people's belonging to such institutions, and the symbolic resources they could access through mediated communication. The religious resources that are available from these institutions make meaning to the religious belonging.

These are the two dimensions in my typology of online/offline interfaces with religious institutions or sites: 1) The relation, or belonging, to the actual site, and 2) The mediated access to the symbolic resources at the site. (I use 'site' as a more general term, as religious institutions could take new forms when online opportunities are added). The typology does not cater for the wide spectre of individual approaches to religious sites. It rather bundles types or patterns of links to the institutions. These ideal types are theoretically developed. However, I will during the course of this article report and discuss actual cases.

The first dimension, namely the relation to the actual site, follows from the patterns of belonging. I distinguish between two rough categories. People approach a particular religious site from a variety of backgrounds or affiliations, and they belong to different social settings. The belonging to an actual religious site may build social cohesion through *contact*, cooperation and participation with the site across the various affiliations people attend to. However, there may also be *conflicts* of belonging – when people relate to several competing contexts or because of struggles over symbolic resources at the religious site.

In the other dimension, access to religious resources could take place by attribution or through authority. Again, this is a rough distinction. As explained in the article that develops this typology in the first round:

With *attribution* the symbolic resources are attributed more equally and flexibly or are more equally accessible within a population compared to *authority*-structures where decision-making power and control of symbolic resources are kept by the few over the many. Attribution may tend to be supported by contemporary personal media and authority by mass media. The 'free-floating' individual religiosity that Beckford (1989) identifies makes use of a wide attribution of cultural or symbolic resources. Participation in a religious organization, on the other hand, implies adherence to some authority structure. (Lundby, 2011, p. 1230)

In this article, the original typology (Lundby, 2011, p. 1230) has been elaborated upon, as the two dimensions of Contact-Conflict and Attribution-Authority have been put in context of the said belonging and meaning aspects of people's relation to a religious site. Whether there is Contact or Conflict depends on the relation to the institution in question. Attribution *versus* Authority are two different ways to religious symbolic resources.

These dimensions of *belonging* (in terms of relation to) and *meaning* (with the symbolic resources that become available) are both part of the wider *pattern* of belonging, shaped in the ongoing interaction and identification processes. Patterns of religious belonging could either be traced as participatory or as vicarious, online or offline respectively. As stated with the original version of the typology:

'Vicarious religion' is religion performed by the few on behalf of the many, while in 'participatory religion' the many take part themselves. 'Participatory religion' may play out differently than 'vicarious religion' online as well as offline. (Lundby, 2011, p. 1230)

The typology (Figure 1) indicates how the two dimensions make four ideal types of online/offline interfaces with religious institutions or sites, as a set of hypotheses.

Figure 1 *A typology of online/offline interfaces with religious institutions or 'sites'*

ACCESS TO RELIGIOUS RESOURCES

		by attribution	through authority
RELATION TO THE	in contact across affiliations	Participatory religion online (type 1)	Vicarious religion online (type 2)
SITE	with conflict of belonging	Participatory religion offline (type 4)	Vicarious religion offline (type 3)

These theoretical assumptions were explained in the initial article:

In short, my argument runs like this: In the first dimension, the *online* context favours *contact* across affiliations, while the *offline* context, in comparison, tend to invite *conflicts* of belonging because one is more heavily immersed in social structures. In the second dimension, *authority* (elites) invite (passive) *vicarious religion* while *attribution* of symbolic resources rather stimulates *participatory religion*.

These are ideal typical tendencies as there also will be conflicting patterns of belonging online but they could more easily be avoided by simply going to another site. Similarly there is contact across religious groups or affiliations offline but an in-group mechanism may not invite crossover as easily as on the net.

Participatory religion online (type 1) makes contacts between people across a wide repertoire of religious symbolic resources. Contact under vicarious religion online (type 2) relates more to religious authority although net users keep their independence. Vicarious religion offline (type 3) may invite conflicts of belonging between various religious affiliations. Religious authority may be exercised within different religious strands but not so easily across them. In type 4, with participatory religion offline, conflicts of belonging may take place in relation to religious communities that are competing for the attributed religious symbolic resources. (Lundby, 2011, pp. 1230-1231)

The Norwegian context

The phenomenon of vicarious religion is prominent in Northern Europe and particularly in the Nordic countries with their majority Protestant national churches. The Nordic countries have small populations with high degree of social equality and highly developed Internet and mobile infrastructures. These countries are like laboratories for mediated social networks

I take my cases from one of these countries, namely Norway, where nine of ten citizens have access to the Internet. Nearly half of all Norwegians, included those without Internet access, are on Facebook every day. Among the young, 15-29 years, nine of ten are on this site every week.¹ The Net is becoming a natural part of the daily environment for more and more Norwegians.

Although plurality and diversity is growing, nearly eight of ten Norwegians still are members of Lutheran 'Church of Norway' but few are really active in congregational religious life. However, as the American sociologist of religion Andrew Greeley put it upon an analysis of the data from the International Social

¹ Figures from TNS-Gallup in Norway, first half 2011.

Science Survey (ISSP) on religion in 1998: 'Norway may be a more religious country than many Norwegians realize' (Greeley, 2004, p. 194). The picture has changed somewhat until the ISSP survey on religion in 2008. Traditional beliefs in God are on decrease and secularity and new forms of spirituality on increase. Still, membership in the Church of Norway is fairly stable (Botvar & Schmidt, 2010). This church makes the institutional frame for the cases I will select for this exploration into the said typology.

As this research takes its point of departure in online-networked relations, all cases should encompass net activities. Although the research question concern 'audiences' in the sense of people or users that relate to the religious sites, I do not make interviews or ethnographic observation at this point. The typology in Figure 1 is rather on four types of religious sites, within the dimensions set by the typology. I have selected the following cases:

Type 1: the 'Net Church' of the Norwegian Church Abroad (nettkirken.no)

Type 2: an online service run by a local congregation in Oslo (BarnOgTro.no)

Type 3: the offline activity in the same church (www.nordbergmenighet.no)

Type 4: an offline 'station' of the church abroad (www.sjomannskirken.no)

To study how they fit the theoretical construct of the typology I search information on the following for each case:²

- *Activity online/offline:* what goes on online and what are the activities offline
- *Audience relation:* participatory vs. vicarious forms of religion
- *Access to resources:* access to religious resources by attribution vs. authority
- *Relation to site:* contact across affiliations vs. conflict of belonging

Case 1: The online church

Nettkirken ('The Net Church') www.nettkirken.no is a purely web-based site.³ It is run by the organization named Norwegian Church Abroad⁴ in cooperation with and on behalf of the Church of Norway. The language is Norwegian throughout, with no English pages, as the service aims at Norwegians in Norway and all over the world.

The site was established in 1999. While the former versions focused web elements that could offer religious experiences, the recent 3rd version is meant to be a 'real church' with real ministers present to receive those who search this site. One female and two male ministers ordained by the Church of Norway work

² Data was collected towards the end of 2011. I am grateful to my informants who took time to provide me with data and judgements on their activities during busy periods of work.

³ Information on *Nettkirken* is gathered from the website and is given upon request by the ministers who are running the service. They also provided site statistics from Google Analytics and *Nettkirken's* annual report for 2010.

⁴ In Norwegian: Sjømannskirken – Norsk kirke i utlandet

part time in *Nettkirken*. The welcoming page, 'On the Net Church' at www.nettkirken.no/om-nettkirken informs the visitor that the site is 'Open to all. Always.'

- *Activity online/offline*

All activity in *Nettkirken* takes place online, except some marketing activities in congregations and during festivals, etc. to make the site known. When you go to the site you see lit candles in the kind of large, circled candlestick called a 'globe', now common in Norwegian churches. You are invited to open a short, written 'Today's Reflection' or you could click a video button to be introduced to *Nettkirken* through the voice and facial expressions of a man in black with headphones around his neck, ready to listen. This man – he is actually one of the three ministers – tells you that faith in God is possible through listening to the gospel about Jesus. At *Nettkirken* you may listen to readings from the Bible, to preaching and worships, psalms and music, he informs.

The opening page (Figure 2) also invites to various prayer activities or to 'Meet the net minister' in chat or via e-mail. This is a core activity at the Net Church. Every day, on average, eight Norwegians use this opportunity.

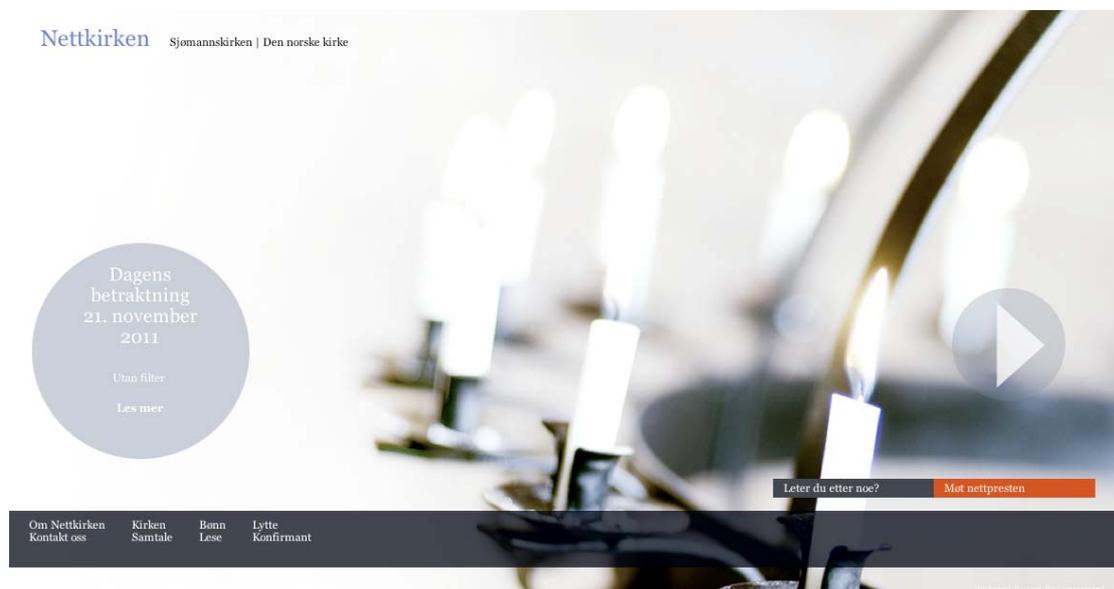


Figure 2. The opening page at www.nettkirken.no [21 November 2011].

In 2010 there were 827 chats and 2116 e-mail contacts with the net ministers. 577 persons did subscribe to the daily reflections, while 1374 asked to have the weekly 'thoughts' for the upcoming Sunday. The figures from first half of 2011 confirm the rising trend from 2009. In total, *Nettkirken* had 27 529 unique users in 2010. Among them are also participants in the confirmation courses run by *Nettkirken* for young Norwegians abroad.

- *Audience relation*

The audience relation to *Nettkirken* has to be participatory. No one else is going to this church on your behalf. Possibly, many of those who enter the Net Church may be members of the Church of Norway letting others be vicariously present in the local church of their geographical neighbourhood. However, in *Nettkirken* they have to come themselves.

The image on *Nettkirken's* front page may indicate the global reach of this site as well as a practice – lighting a candle – that is open to interpretation by the visitor. In *Nettkirken* you could come anonymous. There is no statistics of who they are, or on what kind of relation, activity or sense of belonging they have to religious institutions offline. For some, the Net Church seems to function as a modern form of confessional box, the net ministers comment, where people could come incognito.

- *Access to resources*

Nettkirken offer symbolic resources to their 'church goers', in bible readings, online prayers, candle lighting and so on. These religious resources are accessible by attribution, they are the same and available for all approaching *nettkirken.no*.

Among those who subscribe to the weekly 'thoughts' for the upcoming Sunday there are actually many ministers, preparing for the sermon in their local church. However, most visitors to *Nettkirken* will have limited theological scholarly background. Some ask the net ministers for theological related facts but existential questions on struggling relations, illness and death, loneliness, sexual abuse, suicide thoughts, daily faith and doubts, etc. dominate. They try to answer in an affirmative and guiding mode, not being dogmatic. They do not work through the authority of a hierarchical position, as the net visitor could withdraw at any time. The net minister exerts no other authority than what is in the trustworthiness of his or her advice.

- *Relation to the site*

Although there are no statistics on who come to the Net Church, the ministers there, according to their annual report for 2010, experience that a considerable part of their visitors are at the outskirts or outside

the Christian establishment. They make contact with *Nettkirken* across their various offline affiliations. Hence they avoid conflictual and difficult relations to their local church or to other people and institutions. *Nettkirken* has always tried to keep a user-oriented profile.

Conclusion

Nettkirken fits in as an example of participatory religion online with access to religious resources by affirmation for people who make contact across their offline affiliations. *Nettkirken* makes type 1 in the typology.

Case 2: The online centre

BarnOgTro.no, translated as 'ChildrenAndFaith.no', is a centre in the sense of being a resource centre. It's completely web based and presents itself as a site with 'resources for parents, grandparents and godparents' to kids 0-12 years, and also for use by the kids themselves supervised by their close adults.⁵ The site was developed as part of the national reform of religious education in Norway, decided by the Parliament in 2003.⁶ Within the Church of Norway this reform was followed by a five years development period of local and national initiatives before a coherent plan for the faith education was adopted.⁷ *BarnOgTro.no* was one of the pioneer initiatives. The site was developed with base in a local congregation, *Nordberg menighet* (case 3 in this research), but available throughout the country. Some 45.000 children are baptized in the Church of Norway every year.⁸ *BarnOgTro.no* is meant to support those primarily responsible for the religious upbringing of the baptized, namely the parents and the godparents as well as the local congregations involved in the follow-up of the children.

⁵ Information on *BarnOgTro.no* is gathered from the website and is given upon request by the initial project leader, the vicar in the hosting congregation and the head of these activities in the national council of the Church of Norway. Evaluation reports from the first years have also been available as well as some Google Analytics charts.

⁶ www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=11298 [22 November 2011]

⁷ www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=318694 [22 November 2011]

⁸ www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5685 [22 November 2011]

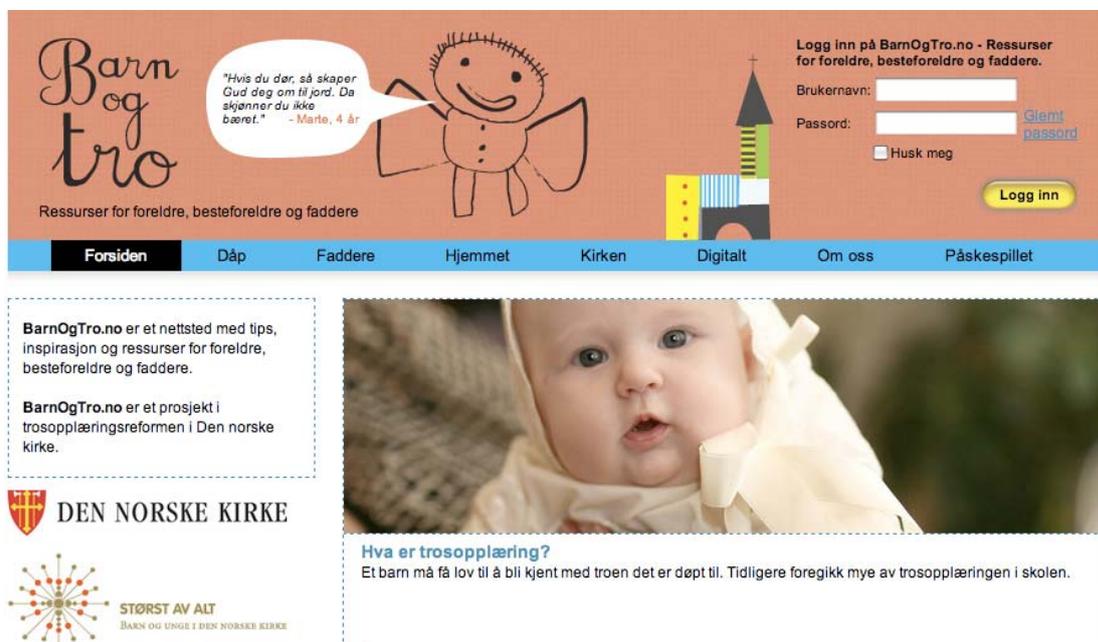


Figure 3. The top of the front page at *BarnOgTro.no* [22 November 2011] where parents, grandparents and godparents could log in for further resources in the religious education.

Following the five years of developments and trials at the local base, the responsibility was transferred to the national council of the Church of Norway. The activity ceased, as there was no maintenance of the site. The plan is to re-launch *BarnOgTro.no* as a national resource centre.

- *Activity online/offline*

All activity at *BarnOgTro.no* takes place online, although there has been some paper-based material that could be ordered for postal delivery. The net resources that are offered contain ideas for how to mark and celebrate the Christian festive occasions throughout the year together with the children, Bible stories, games and music for the kids, articles on children's development in relation to faith, ideas for how to perform the role as a godparent, and so on. The users could subscribe to an annual SMS reminder on the baptism date. *BarnOgTro.no* also has a Twitter account and a Facebook page; however, not updated during the interim period. The Facebook page had no more than 208 likes before it went inactive. However, the web site had 13.700 unique visitors in 2011 until the end of November, with a peak around the launch of a new Easter game. Even after the site went into a pause there was a steady stream of visitors.

The relation to the offline setting may be important: During the first two years following the launch in 2006 some 40 percent of the families coming for baptism in the hosting congregations did register at the site. Many of them were encouraged through the face-to-face preparation before their ceremony in the church. If the offline setting is significant, the users still seem most happy to explore the resources online: While *BarnOgTro.no* was a local project in Nordberg parish they tried to create some offline/online interaction, e.g. with games in the church building that should be replied to on the net. This was not successful.

- *Audience relation*

In a broad institution like the Church of Norway where 7 of 10 newborn are baptized most parents are not into daily congregational life and do not have much specific Bible knowledge. Before the launch of *BarnOgTro.no* the initiators learnt from parents and godparents that they became frustrated if the site took for granted that they knew Bible stories and other faith-related content.

They are part of the vicarious religion. The net-based resource with *BarnOgTro.no* comes in as an additional practice that keeps the church open to them. For many, it is easier to approach the church at a distance via Internet than via the ministers or offline activities in the congregation.

- *Access to resources*

BarnOgTro.no became a resource site in itself, and also a portal for net-based resources from other providers that could help parents, godparent and grandparents to explore the Christian faith together with the children in their homes. Although attributed widely in an accessible form, this is edited material prepared under the authority of the church. Everything on the site should have 'something good to tell about God', they said. People from other faiths could of course come to this open site but the Church of Norway's understanding of baptism is the theological base.

There are some feedback opportunities on the site but it is predominantly a place to collect resources defined by the church.

- *Relation to the site*

As noted in an evaluation report: *BarnOgTro.no* seems to have filled a need the users were not able to express beforehand but which they were grateful for after experiencing. Although the users may feel uncomfortable with the face-to-face practices of congregational life, they may believe and also have a sense of belonging to this church. For some of these people, *BarnOgTro.no* was 'their' site, reports say. The latent conflicts of belonging to the church that people usually handle with silent withdrawal could be left

behind, at least to some extent. *BarnOgTro.no* made contact with the church possible, across their backgrounds or affiliations.

Conclusion

BarnOgTro.no is an example of vicarious religion online (type 2) where the online site in itself gives an opportunity to keep and strengthen a sense of belonging to the church without demanding too much involvement with congregational life.

Case 3: The offline church

Nordberg menighet, geographically within a suburban middle class area of Oslo, is selected as the local congregation (*menighet*) in this research as it was the original home to the *BarnOgTro* website in case 2, thus inviting direct comparisons of online and offline activities based in the same church. The parish of Nordberg also has a good web presence of its regular offline activities www.nordbergmenighet.no and has leaders who are used to media work. Hence, it gives meaning to see Nordberg parish alongside the online Church of Norway activities in this study.⁹

The screenshot shows the website layout for Nordberg menighet. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'Ungdom - NMUA', 'Trosopplæring', 'Konfirmasjon', 'Bryllup', 'Begravelse', 'Om menigheten', 'Kontakt oss', 'Misjon', and 'Artikler'. Below this is a section for 'Maridalen menighet' with links for 'Bryllup', 'Innmelding', 'Dåp', and 'Bilder fra Maridalen kirke Gudstjenester høsten 2011'. The main content area features three event listings: 'JULEKONSERT med variert program' (Christmas concert), 'Misjonærbesøk på misjonsfest' (Missionary visit), and 'Kulturreise til Roma og Firenze 12.-18.sept 2012' (Cultural trip). At the bottom of the main content is a banner for 'Bibel 2011 NY BIBELOVERSETTELSE lanseres' (New Bible translation). To the right is a calendar for November 2011 and a banner for the church's 50th anniversary (50 år Nordberg kirke 3.-12. februar 2012).

Figure 4. From the home page of www.nordbergmenighet.no featuring the 50 years of their church, a Christmas concert with varied programme, visit of a missionary, a tour to Rome and Florence organized by the congregation, as well as information on the new translation of the Bible into Norwegian. [21 November 2011].

⁹ Information on *Nordberg menighet* is gathered from the website, from annual statistics for this congregation and is given upon request by the vicar and the head of the parish council.

The 50 years anniversary of Nordberg church is celebrated in February 2012. The church building has space and rooms for a range of different activities.

- *Activity online/offline*

The core activity in Nordberg congregation is Sunday worships where a range of volunteers takes care of various functions every week, even with an interpreter to make translation in wireless headsets for English speaking churchgoers and guests. 200 persons on average came to Sunday service in 2010. The congregation has a church choir with 25 singers and a children's gospel choir with 120 kids, and also a choir for those 11-13 years old. There is scouting, prayer groups, and cafeteria for elderly and for mentally handicapped, babysong, bible study groups, and more. A considerable part is cultural activity, with arts seminars on Saturdays, concerts and joint events in a Church Academy with neighbouring congregations. Almost all this activity takes place in the church building. Even when there is no specific programme the church is kept open all days from 10 am to 6 pm for those who would like to come for prayers or a quiet time.

The web site has good attendance. The month from 15 October to 15 November 2011 gave 948 unique visits, according to Google Analytics. However, the website is not interactive with online activity per se. It is for sharing information. In addition, mass mail is used to remind of special events, like concerts, or to special groups, like to parents and godmothers.

- *Audience relation*

There are some 10.000 members of the Church of Norway living within the borders of Nordberg parish. This makes up some 2/3 the total population, which is a lower membership rate than on the average national level. Although this church has a remarkable high level of activity compared to most congregations, just a fraction of the membership take part in the ongoing life of the local church.

However, a high portion of the membership is coming for the transition rites as baptisms, confirmation, weddings and funerals. Most of them may have a more distanced relation, but still a sense of belonging to the church as a bearer of traditions and provider of significant ceremonies. People coming to Nordberg church for the cultural events may as well have a somewhat distanced relation to the core congregational activities. However, they obviously feel at home within the frames that are defined for these events.

Those who take actively part in the congregational activities perform participatory religion and keep the church open for the majority of members with a vicarious relationship. However, *Nordberg menighet* demonstrates that there is not necessarily a clear distinction between participatory and vicarious religion. First, it is not primarily the congregational activities that keep the church available to those who limit their

public religious practice to Christmas Eve and the ceremonies of life and death. Even more basic are the local ministers, available to perform these rituals. In *Nordberg menighet* the ministers and other staff bridge the distance to the vicarious membership by home visits to bereaved as well as to parents to newborn that are members of the church. However, the ministers' position as representatives of the local church requires some active congregational life as a resonance board. Second, the cultural and arts initiatives in Nordberg church draw some people to church who may not have come for the regular congregational activities. This is in itself a form of participatory religion with base in a vicarious attitude, which for some may even lead into other activities in the church.

- *Access to resources*

The symbolic religious resources that are made available to members – as well as non-members – of the Church of Norway in the parish of Nordberg, are to a great extent mediated by the leadership of the congregation. Their authority, and especially that of the vicar, is key to the sharing of the religious resources – from worships to arts exhibitions – with people living in the parish. Through the initiatives and authority of these leaders such symbolic resources are attributed more widely than may else have been the case.

- *Relation to the site*

Seen as a site of religious symbolic resources, *Nordberg menighet* and its local church invite contact and belonging across social and cultural affiliations. However, there may be potential and silent conflicts of belonging between the various categories of church members sketched above. These patterns of belonging and possible conflict are not made empirically visible with the methods employed here. Interviews and participant observation will be necessary.

Conclusion

Nordberg menighet is basically a type 3 site, open to vicarious folk church religion, performed offline locally. However, the extended use of online support and information helps to extend the range of participation and attribute religious symbolic resources more widely, strengthened by the non-authoritarian way that authority and leadership seem to be performed in this church.

Case 4: The offline centre

The Norwegian 'Seamen's Church in San Francisco' is situated along the classic cable car line in the hilly Hyde Street, right above Fisherman's Wharf. From the building visitors have a great view to Golden Gate and fort Alcatraz in the San Francisco Bay.

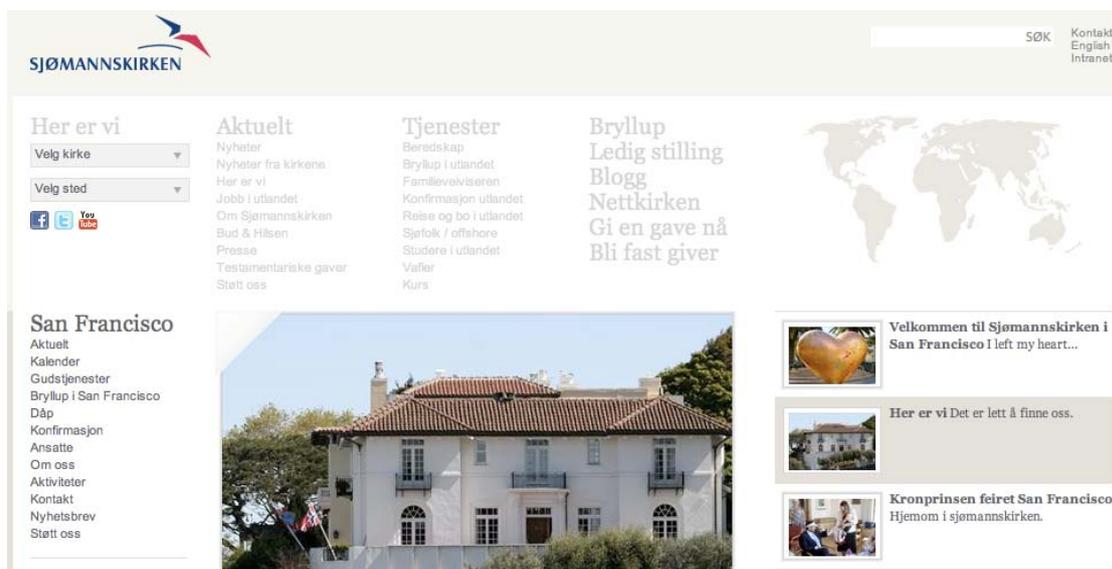


Figure 5. The home page of the Norwegian 'Seamen's Church' in San Francisco with the white building in Hyde Street www.sjomannskirken.no/2190 [22 November 2011].

This site is run by the same organization as *Nettkirken.no* (case 1 in this research) namely the Norwegian Church Abroad. The first part of its name is *Sjømannskirken* ('The Seamen's Church'), from those days when Norwegian ships sailed to many corners of the world with Norwegian crew that could have a home in one of their 'stations'. The Norwegian Church Abroad today characterize their churches with their staff around the globe as 'resource centers' for all Norwegians travelling internationally (www.sjomannskirken.no/english).

These days there are not many seamen visiting this offline site in San Francisco (www.sjomannskirken.no/2190). However, Norwegians living permanently in the area, students and visitors to the city are frequenting the premises. The 60th years anniversary of this site was celebrated in October 2011.¹⁰

¹⁰ Information on *The Seamen's Church in San Francisco* is gathered from the website, from the book published at the 50th anniversary of the church (Kvale, 2001) and from own visits.

- *Activity online/offline*

The Seamen's Church in San Francisco, as elsewhere, keeps an open door for Norwegians – and others – to take a cup of coffee and a waffle, to meet fellow countrymen, or to attend church services. There are weddings, baptisms and confirmations alongside the regular worships every Sunday. The Christmas bazaar and the celebration of Norway's Constitution Day 17 May are among the annual peaks that draw many in their cars to the church.

Besides the information update that is given on the centre's website, some of the regular activities are online. The Seamen's Churches use to have a 'reading room', making Norwegian newspapers available. This service in San Francisco is now offered online on a PC. Those who are preparing for confirmation in the Seamen's Church in San Francisco may live far away. Offline gatherings at Hyde Street are therefore combined with the online confirmation programme at *Nettkirken.no*.

- *Audience relation*

The volunteers at the Seamen's Church in San Francisco, in the women's club 'Tabitha' and in other support groups, has developed a strong participatory relation to their church, which is totally dependent on their fundraising for the ongoing activities beyond staff salaries. At the same time this site has an open and welcoming practice for Norwegians with the typical vicarious relation to the Church of Norway, who may display more of their belonging to the church abroad when at home.

- *Access to resources*

The Seamen's Church is a resource centre – as advertised –, for tourists and business travellers, for Norwegian learners and au pairs in the Bay Area, and for Norwegians living scattered in this part of California. The access to the resources offered at this site is widely attributed, across the different affiliations among the visitors. The minister and the other staff are themselves among the resources. The authority in gate keeping to the site is rather exercised by the residents with positions in the church council, voluntary activities and fundraising.

- *Relation to the site*

There have been conflicts between groups of residents over the material resources that this property represents. These conflicts may also have involved conflicts of belonging. At this site there will also at any time be a potent conflict between participatory forms of belonging among the permanent residents and the vicarious forms of belonging to the church among the temporary visitors. The staffs sent to the site by the

Norwegian Church Abroad has to balance these latent conflicts of belonging that sometimes comes into the open.

Conclusion

The Norwegian Seamen's Church in San Francisco is basically an offline site with some few online extensions. It gives space for participatory religion among the resident Norwegians, and also visitors with a more vicarious relation to the church may feel welcome to participate in the activities at this site, which makes it a case type 4.

The four cases and the typology

To confront a theoretical typology with the actual practices of four cases, of course challenges the theoretical construction. This was an aim with this research. To sum up across the cases in relation to the four aspects studied:

• Activity online/offline

The four cases confirm that online and offline activities are intertwined in contemporary networked societies.

The two web-based cases both have an offline support or reference structure. *Nettkirken.no* does not operate offline but could lean on the offline resources of its mother organization, the Norwegian Church Abroad. It resonates elements of a church visitors may recognize, with ministers, Bible readings, and so on. Still, it is different, online. *BarnOgTro.no* could, as a web site operated from a host congregation, recruit users through local relations. However, it turned out that these users were not keen on a face-to-face supplement to the online activities.

The two cases that have their offset offline, both extend their activities and invite to their church building through online practices. *Nordberg menighet* keeps an informative and updated web page and add well-designed mass emails on upcoming activities. However, this is one-way information. There is no online interactivity beyond return e-mails. The same applies to *Sjømannskirken* in San Francisco. Basically, they both are offline 'sites'.

• Audience relation

In *Nordberg menighet* some 10.000 of those living in the area formally belong to the church. A majority of them may even have a sense of belonging to the congregation. However, despite the active and open

invitations maybe no more than one tenth of the members take part in one or more of the activities throughout the year.¹¹ They still keep their membership. This is vicarious religion. They may come to church for baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals, and at Christmas Eve. The presence of ministers and other staff and the ongoing activities in the church, keep it available for them. The web site *BarnOgTro.no* became an added structure and resource for the vicarious religion in this parish.

The two other cases both operate within the same setting of Norwegian vicarious national church religion. However, they both offer opportunities to participate without having to be involved with too 'religious' activities. *Sjømannskirken* in San Francisco and elsewhere attract many Norwegians that may not be active in their home congregations. To *Nettkirken.no* one can come anonymously with questions and needs on life and faith, without having to be involved in congregational activities. They are both enclaves of participatory religion within a vicarious context.

- *Access to resources*

Sjømannskirken in San Francisco and *Nettkirken.no* both make access to religious symbolic resources within a flat structure, attributed in an easy accessible way and without visible gatekeepers. *Nordberg menighet* and the web site *BarnOgTro.no* are also keeping a welcoming and open mode. However, their religious resources are offered rather than asked for. They are offered on behalf of a church structure and mediated by ministers and web site editor.

- *Relation to the site*

A pattern of belonging becomes manifest in people's relation to a site like those studied here. The online sites make it easy for people to make contact regardless of their background and also outside the relation, experience and impression they have with the church. The online setting makes it possible to make new contacts across these affiliations. This applies with *Nettkirken.no* as well as with *BarnOgTro.no*. In both cases those making contact are able to approach the religious resources at the site and reactivate their sense of belonging to the church without entering a church structure to which they may have a distant or conflictual relation or attitude.

The potential for conflicts of belonging is more prominent with offline church sites, as the physical and organizational structures are more visible and unavoidable. Many of those searching to the Norwegian church abroad may have mixed feelings and experiences with their church at home. Their sense of belonging to this church and its religious and cultural traditions could be expressed more freely at the *Sjømannskirken* abroad. Still, you need to go there and it may be easier to come for a waffle than to a

¹¹ This is an estimate according to national surveys of religious activity.

Sunday service. To enter the church building and take part in worship and other activities at the congregation in the neighbourhood at home seems for many to be even more difficult, although the conflicts of belonging involved need not be made open. People simply stay away. However, *Nordberg menighet* has managed to create arenas, e.g. related to arts and culture and to children's choirs that seem to counter such unspoken conflicts of belonging.

Conclusion: Networked belonging – networks of belonging

Initially, I simplified 'networks of belonging' to be anchored in the offline but they may be changed by their online supplements. 'Networked belonging', on the other side, is online-based although it draws upon the connected offline as well.

Among the four cases, *Nettkirken.no* is the clearest example of networked belonging. In this case it is the individual seeker that comes to the online church. This site has functionalities and personnel for interactivity and personal communication. *BarnOgTro.no* represents, basically, the same pattern of networked belonging but is not that interactive and rely on a church gatekeeper to update material and keep the site available.

Sjømannskirken in San Francisco makes a network of belonging in a double sense: Materially, in sense of the net of physical 'stations' for Norwegians travelling internationally; and following this structure, as churchly homes to play out what may be there as a sense of belonging to the church. The network of belonging related to *Nordberg menighet* is, in comparison, locally based. To those participating in the active core of the congregation, this is a relatively tight and interacting network. For church members coming for ceremonial rituals occasionally, the sense of belonging is weaker as it is not nurtured through ongoing interaction. But identification with values and traditions of the church combined with rare participation, keeps the sense of belonging afloat. In this particular congregation within the Church of Norway there also is a considerable middle category, coming for concerts and other cultural events. Their network of belonging to the church is strengthened through these practices. Regardless of the strength of their sense of belonging, the local church supports network relations with its members through their web site and email practices.

Possible generalisations

It is striking that these four cases make almost no use of 'social media'. The Church of Norway as an institution seems to lag behind in use of blogs and social network sites. Still, all four cases make use of online affordances. The four cases, then, fits into the typology. They are, of course, selected with this

expectation. There are crossovers between the simple dichotomies built into the typology but overall it stands.

The four cases are all from the same context, of institutionally established ‘sites’ – churches and centres – within the national majority Church of Norway. I am not able to make safe generalisations to other religious settings on the basis of this material.

However, broad churches with such a high percentage of the population as members are general institutions in society and may point to general patterns of networking and belonging. From this research I do see a possible more general typology to be further explored, whether it is valid for other context than those related to religion.

Figure 6. *A typology on patterns of belonging to networked sites*

ACCESS TO SYMBOLIC RESOURCES			
		By attribution	Through authority
RELATION TO THE	In contact across affiliations	Participatory Online (type 1)	Vicarious Online (type 2)
ACTUAL SITE	With conflict of belonging	Participatory Offline (type 4)	Vicarious Offline (type 3)

Religion is a form of symbolic resources. Participatory *versus* vicarious social activity could appear in relation to other institutions than churches. Figure 6 is proposed as a typology on access to symbolic resources from networked sites. In this typology ‘access to symbolic resources’ makes a meaning-dimension and actor’s ‘relation to the actual site’ a belonging-dimension. This typology is left here as a stepping-stone for further research on networked belonging and networks of belonging, to be applied to other cultural and social fields than the one on religion.

Final concluding note

The research question that is raised for this study concerns how networked belonging challenges networks of belonging. Or, to put it in other words: How patterns of belonging with a primarily online base may influence or interfere with patterns of belonging that are basically rooted offline.

The present case studies remind that networks grounded in offline material structures still are stronger than online networking. This study confirms the Pew report from the US, that ‘Faith-related activity online is a *supplement* to, rather than a *substitute* for offline religious life’ (Hoover, Clark, & Rainie, 2004).

Nettkirken.no and *BarnOgtro.no* could in present form be nothing more than supplements to well-established institutional organization at home or abroad. However, if local networks of belonging as *Nordberg menighet* or *Sjømannskirken* in San Francisco don't work continuously to extend into online activities, they will miss out on the networked forms of belonging that are on the rise.

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