

# Treatment of the theme Islam in German Geographical Education: Case Study of Bavarian Geographical Curriculum

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## Abstract

Several previous studies have looked at the treatment of Islam and Muslim culture in western curricula. However in Germany, especially in Bavaria where Muslim immigration has been growing since the 1990s, no recent research has covered this theme. As a first step, an exploratory study of Islamic themes in the curricula of Bavarian secondary schools was undertaken. This article describes the results of this inquiry, showing the extent to which Muslim themes appear in the curriculum and how the content has changed through time. The authors analyse the curricula with the help of the quantitative and qualitative method. The main results are that the theme does not appear in the curriculum over the entire post-war period. It appears for the first time in the 1970s. The subject appears mostly in the 8th grade. Students are at the age of 14 for the entire investigation period. The theme is always restricted to the area of Near and Middle East. Islam is presented as a cultural and environment-creating force in the orient. The contents of the theme "Islam" are always very short, and in total, the topic is formulated too generally. Such sparse information can lead to misunderstanding.

**Keywords:** curriculum, Islam, Bavaria, secondary school

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## Introduction

Islam has a special place in European thinking. Since the rise of the Ottoman Empire to a leading power in Europe during the 15th century, it has often been connected historically with fighting, and since September 11th, with terrorism. Contrary to this age-old cliché, most Muslim people in Germany live a normal life.

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About 4 million Muslims were living in Germany in 2013. In the investigation of Haug and about 1.8 million of these had 2009 German citizenship (Haug 2009, 11).

Religions, whether they are Christianity or Islam, shape their cultural surroundings, but conversely, cultural surroundings also shape religions, religious practice and the importance of religion in daily life (Tautz 2008, 86).

Due to the growing number of Muslim people in Germany, German pupils are gaining first-hand contact with Islamic life, beliefs and culture. German people also encounter Islam through the media. Unfortunately, the media have also played a critical role in reinforcing a negative perception of Muslims in the western world, with a coverage more focused on stereotypes and sensationalism than on objective and genuine information (Shaheen 2004).

The whole spectrum of religious beliefs is represented in German public schools. The aim of this pilot study is to present how the geographical education of the theme Islamic culture has been developed in the Bavarian school curriculum since Second World War.

The school curriculum organizes cooperation between pupils and teachers. The curriculum plays an important role in education because the textbooks are based on it. The preliminary decisions of the curricula commission take account of the content of the school text books. (Vollstädt, 2003, 200). In all states of Germany, licensing a schoolbook is decided by the conference of the ministries of culture of each state according to the effective criterion of „the requirement of the curricula and guideline in the sense of the content, didactical and methodical” (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister 1982). Another aspect is that the school lessons are often directly influenced by school books, and the school lessons are based on the curricula. For this reason we can say that the curricula influence geographical education (Detjen 2007, 424/425; Tillmann 1996, 8). Moreover, the International Charter of Geographical Education (1992) indicates that curricula are part of geographical education. (Haubrich 1992). Geographical learning will be influenced by the contents in the curricula. As a consequence, the correct presentation of Islam cannot start with the school books, but will have to start with the curricula. (Vollstädt, 2003, 194) However, curricula should consider the current challenges. Dealing with other cultures and religions is part of the challenge of daily life. Since Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, it plays an increasing role in society, and curricula are always a mirror of the current situation. For this reason the theme needs to be integrated in the curricula. The curricula of geography treat interaction in space, and as Islam leaves various marks in the space and is present in everyday life today, geography can especially regard the effects of Islam on landscape, in a general theme of religion influencing landscape.

Culture is a responsibility of the states in Germany (“cultural sovereignty”), and as a consequence for the school system, each state has its own curricula for the various subjects. However, the diversity of the 16 states should be reduced in a reasonable way. There are several reasons to choose Bavaria for this analysis: Religion has played a prominent role in Bavaria from the very beginning, and the integration of a new religion will be seen more crucial to culture than elsewhere in Germany, which the curricula also reflect. As a consequence, the advent of Islam is taken more seriously than in the more

secular societies of northern Germany and the theme Islam is treated in the whole perspective. Moreover, Bavaria has the second largest population of Germany and is therefore representative for the more conservative part of the country.

The authors chose a long-run analysis because society is changing and also the knowledge imparted and the challenges to society. As curricula mirror society, they show which themes are important for a society in a certain time period. In this case, the authors analyze the changing role of Islam in Germany over a long period.

### **Theoretical Part: The Theme Islam**

Studies aiming at investigating the image of Islam and Muslim culture in textbooks and school curricula have been exist to a certain degree. This is especially true for textbook research (examples Heine 1995; Biener 2007; Tworuschka 1986a,b; Fischer 1987; Ihtiyar 2004; Mc Andrew 2008; Schultze 1988; Lähnemann 2006; Csasza 2012). Most of the studies were done the area of History didactics (Biener 2007; Tworuschka 1986; Ihtiyar 2004) or the didactics of Religion (Heine 1995; Tworuschka 1986a,b). There are only a few investigations in the field of didactics of Geography (Schultze 1988; Csasza 2012). Studies specific to the German field of Geography didactics are not very recent (Fischer 1987; Ihtiyar 2004). The gap in the existing literature is that there are new investigations about Islam in history and religion but not for the subject geography. The newest publication is by Ihtiyar from the year 2004. He only analyzes different geography school books but there is no analysis of the curricula and the books have not been selected very systematically. The only consequent analysis of school curricula is by Schultze of the year 1988. The problem is that this analysis is not up-to-date, and he only used the actual curricula of this period. This investigation tries to close this gap, by analyzing the current curricula of Bavaria and to give a review as well.

The relation between the effects religion has on space is a core question to all such kinds of studies, and a correct representation in the curricula can only be made if the essentials of the religion are also presented to understand the effects on space.

For this reason the author first tries to define religion, then the effects on space, then how these are connected, and last, the author shows the consequences for this investigation.

“Religion” is one of those words that are practically impossible to define in any final sense (Braun 2000). For the definition of religion there are a variety of possibilities, which are as different and complex as the phenomenon religion itself. Kehrer 1998 showed that especially words that try to define a big context are always problematic and that especially in sciences that consider very different societies and their culture. Religions are kinds of orientation systems (Waardenburg 1986), worldviews (Smart 1983), mind-sets, in which the human being is integrated and which is set up and structured. There are orientating systems (religions) and secular orientation systems (ideologies). The basic element of a religious orientation system is the experience that the holy (supernatural) expresses itself in the profane (earthly). This means the ideologies stay in the secular area (Rinschede 1998). However, this intent to define religion in comparison to ideologies is also inadequate, because the efforts to find

essential characteristics that separate the religious sphere from the rest of human life is already part of the western point of view (King 1987).

In short: Religions serve as primary repository of meaning and identity and are used by believers to address issues of ultimate significance in their lives. On consequence is that study of religion provides crucial insights into the structure and substance of human culture. Religious beliefs and practices can for example convert a place into a sacred space. These places can be observed in architectural construction and social structure. (Kong 2010). Geographers need to know the specific beliefs and practices to understand how they influence the society and how beliefs and practices are influenced by social systems (Geertz 1991, 188). The consequence for the investigation is that there is a division in important religious rules and contents of religion, in this case Islam, and the function of religion in the society.

### **Islam as an aspect of culture**

Religion also influences human culture. For quite some time, investigators of different subjects, such as anthropology, social sciences, and psychology, have been occupying themselves with the construct of culture, for which, according to Maletzke (1996), no common definition exists. According to Mossmüller (2007), culture is understood to be both a process and its product. Therefore, culture both influences human action and is shaped by human action. According to Miliopoulos (2011, p. 202), cultures can be regarded both as entities “essentialistically” independent of each other, which are centered on a substantial and almost invariable common ground, and as a very open and dynamic construct. Notwithstanding the difference of these essentialist or constructivist concepts of culture, universal characteristics of culture, which serve to determine “cultural identity” as well as “cultural globalization” can be found nevertheless, according to Miliopoulos (2011). According to this approach, the various definitions of culture share a collective context of meaning and action, which however is particular from a global perspective, and facilitate a linguistic and ethnic basis, in which convictions, values and lifestyles (i.e. everyday usages) founded on moral, ethos and religion are interwoven.

According to Osgood (1951) descriptive elements of culture (“percepta”), which subdivide into observable behavior (such as greeting rituals) and results of behavior (e.g. architecture), can be distinguished from explicative elements of culture (“concepta”). The notion of concepta comprises reasons of behavior like values, norms and attitudes. This approach was taken up and refined by various researchers, among others by Hofstede (2006). These authors try to explain the relation between concepta and percepta with the help of layer models. In this approach, the explicative elements (concepta) form a deeper, invisible layer of culture and are the base of the visible features (percepta). Hofstede (2006) uses the metaphor of “culture as an onion” to represent the layers of culture. The fundamental values of a culture, which are passed on from one generation to the other subconsciously, form the core. The outer layers of the “onion” represent visible practices specific to a culture, which comprise rituals (e.g. manners), heroes and symbols (like status symbols and lucky charms).

This means for Islamic areas that the explicatively Islamic features of architecture can be distinguished from cultural elements (concepta) like the value of daily prayer, the influence of Islam to society or the way of living in the city or suburban areas.

Religion, such as Islam, is an essential part of culture, and a geographer who desires to analyze cultural phenomena, cannot exclude the religious factor. There is an interaction between the religious aspect of culture and geographical space: religions shape spaces, as their principles and values influence the structure of space, such as the structure of the oriental Islamic city, or the economic system Religion is influenced by space in turn, by both the social and the natural environment. (Rinschede 1992, 4). We need to distinguish between cultural features that a religion requires and those that just go along with it (known as “Islamic” and “Islamicate” respectively in Islamic studies). In the case of Islam, minarets e.g. are not an essential part of a mosque, and many Iranian mosques lack them. On the other hand the slender Turkish “pencil minarets” were a token of Ottoman culture and built wherever the Ottomans established their rule, so that Turkish Muslims hardly can imagine a mosque without such a minaret, or with a massive North-African one.

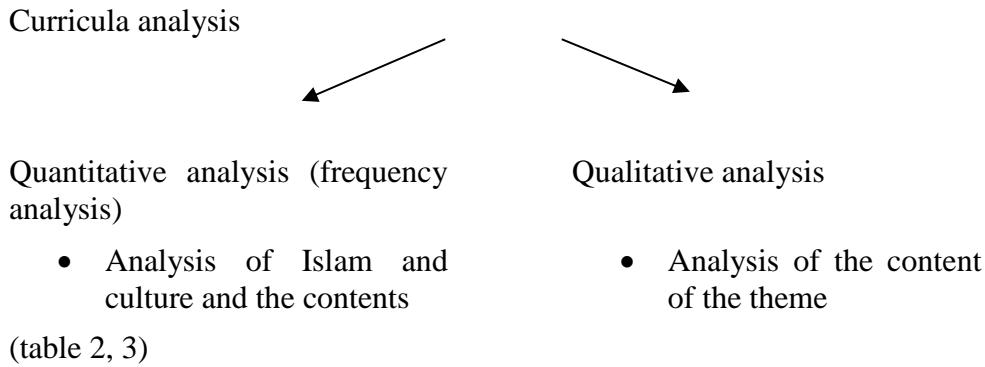
### **Investigation Questions**

The following research questions can be derived from the theoretical chapter: Do Islam and Muslim Culture play a role in the Bavarian curriculum. If so, which topics feature? Which changes regarding the topic of “Islam and Muslim life” have been covered by the geography curricula for the Bavarian Realschulen since 1950? Which changes regarding these topics can be found in the Bavarian Gymnasial curricula for in Geography since 1950? To which territories do the authors refer? How do the Realschulen and Gymnasia differ regarding this topic?

### **Methodology**

A universally accepted method for analyzing curricula does not exist currently (Pingel 1999).

As a first step, the authors developed a system for objective analysis of the curricula that structures the content in categories, so that a comparison of all different curricula is possible. In a second step, the authors try to build a bridge between the quantitative and the qualitative method. Mayring (2002, S. 212) combines the advantages of both analyzing methods and proposes a structural qualitative method of analysis. The theme Islam is divided in categories. The information in the curricula will be divided in small information units, which enable a structurally qualitative analyzing method. First, frequencies are counted. In a second step, the information units will be analyzed in the qualitative way. (Tholey, 1996: 101).



**Figure 1.**  
*Structure of the curriculum analysis*

**Category System**

The base for this category system was the category system of the investigations of Fischer 1987/ Schultze 1986), because it is already tested and so that comparison is possible later. The instrument was adapted to this research through an iterative process as the author explored the curricula. This procedure was used to refine the final sub-themes and categories used in the grid (Kromrey 2000).

**Table 1.**  
*Category system for analyzing the curriculum (changed after the base Fischer 1987/ Schultze 1986)*

Category	Subcategory	Subsubcategory	
Islam as a religion	Different denominations		
	Religious duties		
	Religious code of conduct of individuals (e.g. no alcohol)		
Islamic culture	Islamic elements in the city	Physical division / Structure of old town quarters	
		The mosque	
		The bazar	
		Islamic influence on living in the city	
	Islamic elements in rural areas		
	Cultural achievements in the Islamic world		
	Encounters between Islamic and Western world		

	Relations between Islam and the economy	
	Islam as a political factor	
Regional Case Study		

The author divided Islam into two sections: Islam from the religious perspective and Islam from the cultural perspective. Another aspect was the theme of Islam in Germany and which regional case study the authors used.

### Data Base

To fully capture the topic of Islam and Muslim life, one has to start with the curriculum, since that is the foundation for any school book. The study includes every Bavarian *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* Geography curriculum which has been in force since 1950. The author decided to make a longitudinal study to determine the importance of the topic of Islam and Muslim life throughout this period. Curricula always indicate developments in the field of education and current discourses within society (Apel 1991, 6).

They also give answers to contemporary challenges. The topic of Islamic religions and Muslim life in Geography are one example of these challenges. A longitudinal study hence allows one to follow changes of this topic in the curriculum.

The author chose Geography, because recent studies have not considered it (Biener 2007; Friedrich Eckert Institut 2011). Geography is also an eligible subject to convey cultural differences and connections (Csaszar 2012, 183). The subject of geography is very suitable since it allows the pointing out of region-specific aspects of Islam and Muslim life.

In Bavaria, there are three separate types of secondary school: *Gymnasium*, *Realschule*, and *Hauptschule*, which (ideally) lead to academic, commercial and artisanal vocations. The author chooses the school years from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, because they offer a comparison of the different school types. *Realschule* ends at year ten. Geography does not exist in *Hauptschule* as a separate subject.

The sixteen federal states of Germany have cultural sovereignty, which leads to different curricula for Geography nationwide. This diversity complicates a study for the entire federal territory. In order to manage such an amount of material, the author has to make a systematic choice (See introduction).

## Findings

### Results of the Investigation of the Secondary School Curriculum

#### The Theme in the *Realschule* curricula

#### Quantitative analysis

As a consequence of the quantitative analysis, the following table shows the importance of the theme in the curricula of *Realschulen* in Bavaria since the Second World War.

**Table 2.***Quantitative analysis of the theme Islam in curricula of “Realschule”*

Category			1977	1983	1993	2007
<b>Islam as a religion</b>					x	(x)
	Different denotations					
	Religious duties					
	Religious code of individuals (e.g. no alcohol)					
<b>Islamic elements in geographical space</b>			X	(x)	x	x
	Islamic elements in the city					X
		Physical division/ structure of old town				
		The mosque				
		The bazar				
		Islamic influence on living in the city				
	Islamic elements in rural areas					
	Cultural achievements in the Islamic world					
	Encounter of Islamic and Western world					
	Relation between economic aspects and Islam		x	(x)		
	Islam as a political factor				X	
<b>Area example</b>			Near East	Near East	Orient,	Orient, Turke



					Turkey,	Germany
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### Qualitative Analysis

In the 1977 curriculum, the topic of Islam appears for the first time. Islam is put in relation to rent capitalism. The area it refers to is the Near East. The authors of the 1983 curriculum talk about the near and Middle East and rent capitalism but not in relation to Islam. In these two curricula, no reference is made to Islam as a religion or the effect of Islamic culture on the physical environment.

The topic of Islam appears again as a religious and cultural factor in the 1993 curriculum: “Islam as a religion, which shapes its surroundings” (KM 1993). The authors talk about Islam as a religion and about its cultural influence. In the same line, the authors talk about the “Israel/Palestine problem” (KM 1993), so they mention Islam as a political factor. As regions, the authors choose the Orient and Turkey: “our neighbor: Turkey” (KM 1993), which sounds a little bit strange because turkey is not Germany's neighbor.)

In the 2007 curriculum, the authors talk about “Islam as a shaping factor” (ISB 2007). They no longer mention Islam as a religion. They especially point out “the traditional oriental city” (ISB 2007) and “the role of women” (ISB 2007). Indirectly, you can see that they distinguish between the religious aspects and the cultural aspects. They also distinguish between religious and cultural perspectives. As a region, the authors choose the Orient and Turkey: “Turkey – bridge between Europe and the Orient (Turks in Germany, Germans in Turkey)” (ISB 2007). Two new themes enter into the curriculum: the role of women in Islamic culture and Muslims in Germany. The subcategory “Islam as a political factor in the Near East” disappears.

### Islam in the *Gymnasium* Curriculum

#### Quantitative Analysis

In the following table, you will find the results for the curricula of the secondary school *Gymnasium*.

**Table 2.**

*Quantitative analysis of the theme Islamic culture in the Gymnasium curricula*

Category			1979	1986	1991	2006
Islam as a religion			x		(x)	x
	Different denominations					
	Religious duties					
	Religious code of conduct of					

	individuals (e.g. no alcohol)					
<b>Islamic elements in the space</b>			x			x
	Islamic elements in the city		x		x	x
		Physical division/ structure of old town quarters				
		The mosque				
		The bazar				
		Islamic influence on living in the city				
	Islamic elements in rural areas					
	Cultural achievements in the Islamic world					
	Encounter of Islamic and Western world					
	Relation between economic aspects and Islam					
	Islam as a political factor		x			x
<b>Area example</b>			Near East	Near East	Near East	Orient - North Africa , near and middle east

In the 1979 curriculum, the topic of Islam appears for the first time. First, the authors talk about the “areas where you can find Islam” (KM 1979) and about the “special

elements of the oriental city in comparison to the European city” (KM 1979). Important for the authors is the subcategory “Islam as a political factor” (KM 1979). The authors of the 1985 curriculum talk about the cultural area of the Near (and Middle) East, but they do not mention Islam or the influence of Islam on the environment.

In the 1990 curriculum, the concept of “Islam” only really appears in respect to the Islamic city elements. The authors only talk about the Near (and Middle) East.

In the 2006 curriculum, the theme of Islam appears again. “especially from the Islam influenced cultural area as an area of conflict of world politics” (ISB 2006). The authors distinguish between religious and cultural aspects. From the cultural perspective, elements of an oriental city are present in the curriculum: “characteristics and modern development” (ISB 2006). For the first time, the area is defined: “North Africa, Near and Middle East” (ISB 2006).

## Conclusion

This study has displayed the development of the theme “Islam and Islamic culture” in Bavarian curricula since the Second World War. The theme does not appear in the curriculum over the entire post-war period. It appears for the first time in the 1970s. The subject appears mostly in the 8th grade. Students are constantly at the age of 14 for the entire investigation period. In most of the curricula, comments are very short and not very helpful for a teacher.

The content of the theme is more or less always the same in the curricula for *Gymnasium*. The theme is always restricted to the area of the Near and Middle East. Islam is presented as a cultural and environment-creating force there. This can give the incorrect impression that Islam is the only religion in the area, but for example in the Lebanon, nearly half of the population is Christian. Moreover, important Islamic nations like Pakistan and Indonesia are left out. This can lead to misunderstanding. New themes also enter the curricula for *Realschule*, like the role of women in Islamic culture. Another aspect shown is the role of Turks in Germany. In this way, the theme achieves a tangible relation to the everyday life of the pupils. Most German Muslims come from Turkey. The contents of the theme “Islam” are always very short, and in total, the topic is formulated too generally. Such sparse information can lead to misunderstanding.

Classifying extant research is difficult, because there was only one investigation until now by Fischer in 1987, who analyzed German geography curricula and also Bavarian curricula. For their theses, authors did not use a list of categories. Being from the late 80s, the religious aspect was present in the Bavarian curricula, but only there. Fischer/Schultze looked also to other curricula but in these the religious aspect was missing.

The author suggests several aspects to account for the shortcomings, which can be divided in practical and investigation aspects.

In regard to the planning of new curricula, the theme Islam should be represented more clearly with more details in the curricula. For example, the curricula only have “Islam as a religion”, but how should the book writer know what about Islamic religion should be taught to the pupil to avoid a wrong perception. This is important, because it is not an easy theme. The theme is treated in regard to the Near and Middle East, which

is the main area in this form. But the curricula planner should also put a hint to Germany at the end, as it is the home country to the students and important to their daily life.

In future investigations, the results should be compared with other regions in Germany to see if there are differences. After analyzing the curricula, the schoolbooks should be analyzed, to see how the content was treated. There is no rational reason why Turkey is taken as the reference country in the *Realschule* curricula but not in the *Gymnasium*. Interviews with curricula authors would also be useful for a better understanding of content selection. A further step would be an international comparison of curricula and discussion.

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## **Curricula**

### **Realschule**

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus (KM) (1977): Lehrpläne der Realschulen, Jahrgangsstufe 8. In: Amtsblatt, 138-147.

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Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung (ISB ) (2007): Genehmigte Lehrpläne für das Fach Erdkunde. Realschule, München.

### **Gymnasium**

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus (KM) (1979): Lehrplan 8. Jahrgangsstufe. In: Amtsblatt (Sondernummer), 5-10.

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### **Statistical Data**

<http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/76744/umfrage/anzahl-der-muslime-in-deutschland-nach-glaubensrichtung/>

### **Biographical statements**

**Dr. Stefanie ZECHA** initially majored in Geography and Primary Education, with minors in Population Science, Historic Building Research and Hispanic Studies at the University of Bamberg (Germany), with an Erasmus year in Coimbra (Portugal). Her research interests include the use of new media such as GPS education with QR codes in environmental education. She is also interested in the construction of nature trails as part of a constructivist didactic. She has a further interest in textbook and curriculum research on the topics of natural catastrophes and interreligious dialogue.

**Dr. Stephan POPP** is Junior Scientist at the Institute of Iranian Studies in Vienna, Austria. He specializes in the history of Islamic India (Mughal Empire, Deccan Sultanates), and in Persian and Urdu Literature. He did his PhD from Bamberg University on the Persian poetry of Muhammad Iqbal, both major poet and philosopher of the 1920s and 30s, and posthumously national poet of Pakistan. From there, S. Popp is also at home with the intellectual history of Indian Islam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this article, he is responsible for the aspects dealing with Islam as a culture.