

Proposal new Working Group “Theory and Theorizing Religion” within the EASR

Proposal 20 September 2026

Theorizing Religion

The new working group aims to advance the practice of theorizing in research and teaching in the study of religion. By ‘theorizing’ we mean the development and refinement of concepts, classifications, models, and theories, in continuous dialogue with empirical material. We are primarily interested in facilitating collaboration around theory formation and theorizing as *methodological practices* – and less in the content of the specific theories. We do not aim to promote one particular theory of religion.

Questions on theorizing that we want to explore include:

- How do (we as) scholars of religion theorize?
- What is the relationship with our empirical material? How are theories composed?
- How can the analysis of published theories help us to start theorizing? What is the role of auto-ethnography in the context of developing theory?
- What is good theorizing in the study of religion? What are good theorizing practices? Can we learn from other disciplines with a stronger tradition for theorizing (e.g., sociology)?
- How do we / should we teach theorizing in the study of religion?

We will work on these themes through a variety of activities:

Meetings, panel sessions and workshops

We would like to organize regular meetings at the EASR conferences (in panel sessions, PhD workshops, or in addition to the official conference program) and in international workshops organized by different associates. We specifically highlight PhD workshops, as the training of PhD students is important to us.

Publications

The working group aims for a student-friendly output, including various types of publications on theory and theorizing in the study of religion. The main audience for these publications is scholars and students in the study of religion, but we aim for a broader range of disciplinary attraction, thereby making our theorizing accessible to sociologists, historians, psychologists, anthropologists, and scholars in other disciplines. We specifically see publication as a means for collaboration.

Membership structure

Everyone is *doing* theory. We welcome all EASR members to join us in reflecting upon *how* we do this and develop conversations about the role of our theorizing in the field. We envision a flexible membership structure based on participation and interest, not through solidified membership lists. We would like to develop our working group “as we go,” inviting all our European/international colleagues to join us for some time. As such, we will circulate invitations to our events widely.

Current initiators: Markus A. Davidsen (Netherlands), Anja Kirsch (Norway), Mattias Brand (Switzerland), Lech Trzcionkowski (Poland), Indrek Peedu (Estonia), Göran Larsson (Sweden), Steven Sutcliffe (UK), Alexandra Grieser (Ireland), Katharina Wilkens (Germany)

Chairs: Markus A. Davidsen M.Davidsen@hum.leidenuniv.nl; Mattias Brand mattias.brand@unifr.ch

Past, current, and planned activities

- EASR 2024 Gothenborg, three panels on Practicing theorizing religion.
- Book launch, Michael Stausberg’s *21st Century Theories of Religion* (April 2025, online).
- IAHR 2025 Krakow, PhD Workshop Theory and Theorizing in PhD Research.
- Book discussion, Michael Stausberg & Katharina Wilkens (eds.) *Religionswissenschaft: Aktuelle Annäherungen* with Katharina Wilkens and Wanda Alberts (January 2026, online).
- EASR 2026 Bucharest, Panels on Steps in Theorizing, Roundtable Discussion Women Pioneers in the Study of Religion.
- Special issue on teaching theory and theorizing in the study of religion (planned publication in *Numen* 2027).
- Conference 2027 Leiden on theory and theorizing in the study of religion, on the occasion of the 150-year-anniversary of the appointment of C.P. Tiele as professor of comparative religion in Leiden (29 June – 2 July, 2027, with Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion).