

# HERMENEUTIC DYNAMICS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNAL ENDOWMENT OF LIFE *with* *Christian-Religious Meaning* *in a Culture of Digitality*

# P6

## Participatory Citizen Science in (Digital) Theology. A Paradigm

*What if it is not the experts but the  
citizens who are the experts?*

## OUTPUT:

- 1 Editorship
- 6 Contributions to anthologies
- 13 Articles
- 3 Monographs
- 13 Public Science Communications
- 4 Presentations



## Religious and Spiritual Apps

*Faith in the app store?  
Piety in the pocket?  
The pathway to God?*

## Outlook

*Which islands do we  
see on the horizon?*

## Religious Influencers

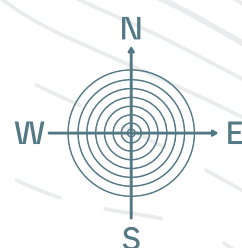
*Our God in heaven-  
influenced be your name?*

NORTH

WEST

SOUTH

EAST



47° 22' 42.96 N 8° 32' 24 E



## WEST

### Participatory Citizen Science in (Digital) Theology. A Paradigm

In theology, the research strategy has only been used sporadically to date. The approach is particularly suitable for practical theological research. A central aspect of practical theology is the perception of religious, spiritual, and ecclesial practices. By including different people's perspectives in the research, practices can be captured more nuancedly. Citizen science in practical theology does not involve testing theories and hypotheses. The aim is to generate research questions and insights in dialogue with various stakeholders. An open and explorative attitude characterizes the approach.

PCS is also highly pertinent for digital research: Participatory research can help researchers precisely capture changes related to religious authority and religious communities within digital settings.

At the same time, religious actors without extensive theological education can be encouraged to shape digital spaces in a way that benefits their spirituality. P6, therefore, established PCS as an important research strategy for digital research.

In our approach, the level of participation is very high. Co-researchers act as co-producers, meaning they are engaged in almost all aspects of the research process: formulating the research question, developing the research design, data collection, etc.

A high degree of participation ensures that the research is also relevant to the co-researchers. Participatory research focuses on people, their lifeworld, and their abilities. The research strategy thus promotes a new type of research that also does justice to the concerns of post-colonial and feminist theologies.



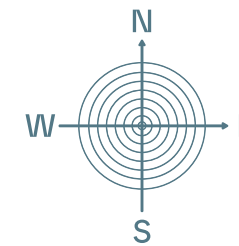
## NORTH

### Outlook (Phase 2): Which islands do we see on the horizon?

The potential of religious influencers and digital networks advocating Queer Theology, gender justice, postcolonial and anti-racism initiatives, as well as issues of climate justice inside and outside the framework of the church, has not yet been explored in the practical-theological landscape: What are the specific concerns of different actors and networks? What theological interpretative patterns emerge in dealing with respective experiences of discrimination, and what implications does this have theoretically for the church, as well as for an intersectional and ecologically sensitive Practical Theology?

Exploring the concept of *Faith in the app store*, we also intend to delve deeper into inquiries concerning spiritual and (trans)religious apps. We want to know more about Smartphones as gateways to (multi)religious resonance spheres: How do spiritual apps shape individual spirituality across diverse religious traditions? Is the smartphone perceived as a medium or as a sacred item itself?

In doing so, we aim to develop the Citizen Science paradigm further and make it fruitful for digital theology and digital research in toto.



## EAST



### Religious Influencers

In various qualitative studies on Christian influencers, we have identified traits defining a Pastoral Theology of Digitality: Individuals and their daily lives wield more influence than formal ordination and theological education. Perceived authenticity is a pivotal currency in Christian faith communication, as evidenced in our work on influencing faith. Digital networks like YEET emerge as significant pastoral theological actors in theological and #digitalchurch discourses. We found that the democratization of ministry unfolds in two key ways: Lay individuals assume priestly roles, as indicated in studies examining the self-conception of Christian influencers, and lay people can now select their „pastor“ on platforms like Instagram.



## SOUTH

### Religious and Spiritual Apps

In the German-speaking region, there has been little to no research conducted on religious and spiritual apps, especially regarding the perspective of users.

In a Citizen Science project involving users and the developer of the EVERMORE app, we investigated the extent to which the app could foster a sense of community. This inquiry aimed to benefit both academic research and app development in terms of user satisfaction. Users shared their experiences with the app-based meditations in chat rooms.

What emerged was an intermittent, emergent form of communal faith—a digital caring community for a limited time—benefiting from the fluid boundaries between pastoral care, self-expression, proclamation, and private life.

Conclusion: Spiritual and religious apps can facilitate intense exchanges and experiences of being church. Thus, ecclesiology may not only occur through long-term relationships and years of companionship but also momentarily, where experiences of transcendence are shared. Our studies indicate that finding spaces and platforms for communities in the moment presents a unique opportunity and challenge for Digital Church. The app developer of EVERMORE is currently working on developing additional formats that would enable users to experience such a temporary community. Furthermore, we have exploratively engaged with other transreligious apps such as Insight Timer and digital spiritual offerings through platforms like WhatsApp (for example netzgemeinde dazwischen). At a conference in December 2022, we collaborated with various stakeholders from academia and practice to develop further research questions related to religious apps. The analysis and addressing of the questions developed there will be a task for the second phase of the URPP.

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