
Religion, spirituality and leisure: a relational approach

The experience of religion and spirituality of Dutch New Christians and New Spirituals during leisure activities

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Summary

Even though church attendance has declined rapidly in the Western world since the 1960s people are still looking for meaning-making in life that is inspired by the belief in something that is beyond human beings, for some a belief in God, for others natural energies (SCP, 2006). A generally agreed upon idea is that spirituality is so diffuse that it is a pure individual process, bound to the limitations of the private realm, think of small altars at home. This idea is disputed by different authors by indicating that spirituality is not just bound to the private, it is also a pervading force in everyday public life (Williams, 2010; Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Livengood, 2009).

This study looks at experiences of religion and spirituality during leisure activities. People encounter different elements: other human actors, but also material and non-material entities. The body encounters the environment and internalises the sensorial information he or she perceives. Furthermore this study has taken into account relational needs that underlie our connectedness to others and therefore affect how we experience the situations we encounter. Here this study aims to formulate an integrated approach which permits a richer understanding of the geographical context of leisure activities and the performance and experience of religion and spirituality, incorporating more of the dynamic interplay between the context and the embodied experiences of the individual.

Two growing groups are taken into account. New Spirituals are a diverse group of people who are interested in the more-than-human, the larger reality we as humans consist of, together with a general aim for well-being in relation to themselves, others and the world. These forms of belief are not institutionalised and aimed at the individual, subjective experience (Baerveldt, 1996). The individual is also important for the New Christians. These New Christians are Christians affiliated to relatively new, evangelical, Pentecostal or non-denominational churches in which there is a strong focus on a personal relationship with God, the Bible as God's word, the power of the Holy Spirit and evangelisation to build a community of believers. These two groups have been investigating by using qualitative methods: in-depth interviews were conducted based on activity tables the respondents filled out and photographs they presented.

A wide range of activities discussed during the interviews has shown that religion and spirituality are multi-faceted phenomena that can be found in various aspects of life and is certainly not bound to the private realm. The relational needs, as part of their personal attributes are contextualised different by the leisure activities they relation to their religion and spirituality.

For New Christians the personal relationship with God and the community of believers are very important relationships in which they feel meaningful, in which they can define themselves and experience love and acceptance. These relationships are performed in their leisure activities by undertaking a lot of activities for the community, such as Bible study. Likewise, New Spirituals are looking for meaningful relationships and find these needs in the connection with their inner spirit and the larger reality in which they believe and perceive. To connect to these situations are sought in which this connection can be made: stillness is therefore valued highly.

We see in this that the experiences of the New Spirituals are highly embedded in the material context. This direct, unmediated relation with their context is part of their spirituality and actively engaging in the material context fosters the connection with a larger reality they believe in. Christians have presented themselves as being less sensitive to the situation and the sensorial impulses they receive from the environment. Their relationship with God is continuous and He is a constant actor in the situations he or she experiences in everyday life.

In reacting to this created affect and experienced emotions from the interaction with human and non-human actors, individuals have different tactics to develop mental or physical boundaries between themselves, other human actors, but also non-human actors by closing themselves off to others, seeking to prevent interaction with offensive or unpleasant contact with their environment.

Urban planning policy should be aware of these embodied experiences since they are stretching into ideas about well-being and liveability. Even though there are general ideas about individualisation of society, we see that there are also signs of re-collectivisation. The results presented here imply that collective experiences are found in the everyday by connecting to a group. Policy makers should question themselves if they want to facilitate for this group and these ideas. In addition stillness is sought in built and natural environments. Ideas are presented to facilitate for this need. Furthermore living consciously with respect for nature is a trend that is broader than just the spiritual group: the relation people have with nature and the responsibility people feel towards their environment is changing.

Acknowledgements

This research project has been a fascinating journey. The subject of religion and spirituality has not only been difficult and intangible, it was inspiring and has brought me to situations in which I would have probably never ended up in my everyday, mundane life. The amazement in friends' reaction was understandable: *you studying religion and spirituality?* They were right; in essence I could not have chosen a subject that seems further out of my league. Interestingly enough this topic caught my attention and after more than a year still fascinates me. Could it be that the participants in this research were right by saying that by immersing myself in the topic of religion and spirituality something happened to me personally, being exactly what I needed at this point in my life?

On top of that during the interviews I was made aware of the difficulties of the writing process:

Luc: You attract those energies that you choose. So when you choose to think I am never going to finish it, this bloody thesis, why did I choose this subject? You name it, almost 100% sure that is not going to happen. It won't work!

And yes, he was right, but in the end I have finished it and in front of you my thesis for the research master Human Geography and Planning.

I want to show my gratitude to all of those who have participated in this research, the respondents, who shared their very personal life stories and beliefs, but also people who I met at the department of religious studies at Leeds University, at the contemplative walk I made with the Graalhuis and the 'Zinroute' in Utrecht. Thanks as well to those who have helped me during research process by giving me some positive energy: my fellow classmates, family and friends, Maren in particular, without whom I would have never spent the whole summer in the library. I am also very thankful to my supervisor Martin Dijst who has guided me patiently and helpfully through to the end by challenging me and giving me constructive feedback, despite the many struggles I had with the subject and the hesitation to actually start writing and drawing conclusions.

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1 Introduction

These [practices of mysticism and contemplation] do not seem practices of a modern world. How can such practices of slowness make sense in an increasingly frantic capitalist world, a ferocious jumble of signals, journeys and screens which has squeezed out or is likely to squeeze out such sedate activity once and for all (Thrift, 2000)?

In this quote Thrift represents others who wonder how it is possible that in our busy, capitalist societies people are drawn to these practices of slowness. This astonishment is not an unusual reaction: at the end of the eighteenth century almost every enlightened thinker thought that with the decrease of Christianity, spiritual ideas would disappear from the public realm, because of the power of Reason (Bell, 1977). Industrialisation, diversification and individualisation were presumed to 'squeeze out' the need for belief in the outer-mundane, the intangible and institutionalised religion in particular. However, the outcomes look somewhat different than expected: church attendance and affiliation have declined rapidly (Bernts et al, 2006), but signs of the presence of religion in western societies have not disappeared at all. The influx of Muslim immigrants and recent spectacular expressions of religion, such as Islamic fundamentalism and the growth of Christian evangelical megachurches but also the growth in attention for all kinds of spirituality, such as New Age prove that religion and spirituality are certainly present in western societies (Wilford, 2010).

These trends are also visible in the Netherlands of which two are taken into account in this study. This study will look at new Christian churches and individual spirituality, since these are clear responses to changes in society and represent the need for meaning-making. Islam on the other hand is a different story, related to immigration and therewith experience cultural differences. There are some Christian congregations, mainly evangelical and Pentecostal that experience growth. From 1960-2006 they have experienced a growth of 138% in number of members (De Hart, 2011). In this research they are called New Christians, after Livengood (2009). The focus in these churches is on the personal relationship with God and Jesus, subjective religious experience, the Bible as God's word, the power of the Holy Spirit and evangelisation to build a community of believers (Vellenga, 1991). The growth of these congregations should not be overestimated however, of the total number of church members in the Netherlands the evangelical Christians only account for 5% (Bernts et al, 2006).

Secondly, a group of people that do take on large numbers is the group of New Spirituals (De Hart & Becker, 2006) or alternative, new age or contemporary spirituals as others have named this group. These people are interested in the more-than-human, larger reality and shape and experience these beliefs individually, without adhering to an institution. It is difficult to present exact numbers of this group, since their ideas and beliefs are so diffuse. According to Bernts et al (2006) around 12% of the Dutch population are interested in spirituality, but do not feel connection to a church or other religious group

What this shows is that a lot of people need inspiration and meaning-making in their lives and find this in spiritual aspects, in the belief in God or other outer-mundane aspects of life. Despite the prosperity we experience, the idea exist that people are not satisfied and are therefore looking for a better balance between material wealth and mental and physical well-being. Spirituality can for some apply balance and direction in a complex world. This relates to the contact with others, our direct environment, but also the planet (Baerveldt, 1996). Spirituality escapes the confines of organised, institutionalised forms of religion and therewith the predominantly Christian model of churches and communities, but so do the New Christian churches: they facilitate for the individual relationship with God without placing too much focus on symbols and rituals. Adherents of these churches feel they go back to the core of Christianity (Van Der Veer, 2008; Sengers, 2006). The

individualistic potential of protestant Christianity is radicalised in this New Christian churches (Roeland et al, 2010).

Since these beliefs are not as institutionalised anymore we can question ourselves if there are other practices people perform, or other spaces they visit in order to act upon their beliefs. The presented trends suggest that religion and spirituality are not just experienced in the traditional sacred spaces such as churches; it can also be performed and experienced at other spaces. A generally agreed upon idea is that spirituality is so diffuse that it is a pure individual process, bound to the limitations of the private realm, think of small altars at home. This idea is disputed by different authors by indicating that spirituality is not just bound to the private, it is also a pervading force in everyday public life (Williams, 2010; Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Livengood, 2009).

A study by Williams (2010) points out that even though religion is less apparent in terms of 'official' sacred spaces, people keep practicing religion and spirituality in their everyday lives. This was earlier confirmed by Schulz (2001) and Holloway and Valins (2002), who argued that for a large number of people religious and spiritual matters still form an important context for living their lives, making sense of the world and performing different geographies. Furthermore religion and spirituality were stated to be central to the construction of identities and pervasive in all aspects of daily life, from the structuring of important life events as birth and marriage, to habitual practices such as dress and food, but also in notions of right and wrong (Schulz, 2001; Holloway & Valins, 2002). This leads to the important question how religion and spirituality of individuals is still supported by the visit of specific places that people consider significant and what these different geographies look like, since '*Religion leaves an imprint on landscape*' according to Park (2004).

Traditionally, geographers have been concerned with mapping religions in terms of beliefs, practices and institutions and with analysing 'officially' sacred spaces, such as churches and pilgrimage routes (Gökarıksel, 2009). Furthermore, the geography of religion has attended mostly to the construction and effects of religious-spiritual space within wider cultural-political discourses of identity, society, and polity (Holloway, 2006). Nevertheless, geography is far more important in the study of religion than is generally appreciated. Religious beliefs, ideas, symbols and practice, are naturally affected by social and geographical condition in which these are elaborated (Hinnells, 2010, pp. 13)

Currently there evidently has been a revitalisation of interest among geographers and scholars in the field of religion (Hinnells, 2010, p. 476). Ivakhiv (2006) argues that geographers should study the religious as a concept that distributes particular kinds of significance across geographic spaces. Individuals are equipped with intellectual and moral freedom that enables them to create their own sacred moments and places in a world that is largely secular (Anttonen, 2000a). Increasingly, geographers have come to recognise that in order to understand religion in the contemporary world it is necessary to examine not just the overly religious spaces, but also spaces of everyday life that may occasionally take on religious functions and meanings or are infused and shaped by religious values.

Kong (2010) noticed that this renewed interest in the geography of religion has been especially visible over the last decade; she particularly observed that there are an increasing number of studies looking at the 'unofficially' sacred. The unofficial are everyday informal and often ordinary practices, opposite to the 'officially' sacred, such as churches. Examples of these more mundane practices are schools and homespaces that both turn into churches, as researched by Kong (2005, 2002) herself, small-scale spaces for contemplation, such as memorial shrines (Preston, 2002; Post & Molendijk, 2007) but also domestic sacralisation and the importance of religion in an English medical centre (Knott, 2005; Knott & Franks, 2007). These studies have in common that they acknowledge that religion is not confined to officially assigned spaces at specific times, instead religion can be performed and experienced in everyday spaces that are spatially and temporally diverse.

Other 'unofficial' sacred spaces are those used for leisure activities. Leisure is assumed to be a defining factor for one's identity and meaningful for behaviour. Religion, spirituality and leisure can

be related by means of their symbolic nature and the general aim for personal well-being and spiritual experiences can be found in leisure activities, such as wilderness activities in nature (Fox, 1999) and sports (Watson & Nesti, 2005). Leisure is also time in which social activities for communities take place (Schmidt & Little, 2007; Livengood, 2009). In addition religion and leisure share a long history in terms of the determination of suitable and unsuitable leisure activities. Furthermore we can argue that religion and spirituality are both focused on the individual, subjective experience. This research will specifically look at the leisure activities New Christians and New Spirituals undertake and how they experience this.

During out of home leisure people encounter situational attributes: other human actors, but also material and non-material entities. Individuals are always emotionally experiencing the dynamic interaction between the physicality of our own bodies and the materiality of their surroundings. The materiality crosses the individual's path and he or she becomes aware through sensory perception: sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. Within each situation they encounter the bodies of other people, the sound of birds singing and the scent of incense for example. The senses possessed by our bodies are the windows we have to receive flows of information about the world around us and by the embodied experience we attribute meaning to it. Unconsciously affect is created by the encounters with situational attributes: sensorial information is internalised and emotions can be experienced (Cadman, 2009). On the other hand, the physical presence of our bodies also sends out messages into the situation. When a Christian wears a necklace with a cross on, the other individuals in the situation are affected and emotionally experience the presence of the human body and objects brought into the situation.

Kong (2010) recognises that geographers have started to examine sensuous geographies of religion in which the body is playing a central role. The body encounters the material and non-material environment and internalises the sensorial information he or she perceives. The nature of these sensuous experiences and their relation with religion and spirituality has not been examined in detail. A study by Connell (2005) on Hillsong church, a Pentecostal megachurch in Australia, is an exception in this respect. In this study Connell describes how the church service commands the senses. The Hillsong services are typified by visual and musical interludes by the usage of large video screens and a band that is playing worshipping songs. These sensorial impulses demand the audience to participate, inducing religious experience. In addition there is a recent interest in therapeutic retreats (Conradson, 2005; Lea, 2008; Ouellette et al, 2005) in which the therapeutic or healing sources of certain spaces have been investigated by looking at the embodied experiences of the practice and spatial situation. These studies have taken a relational perspective on space by looking at the conjunction between the spatial configuration and different embodied and bodily practices.

In leisure studies, religion and spirituality have been taken into account, such as the spiritual sensations during sport and wilderness experiences, the engagement with the church in leisure time, or the search for religious experiences while engaging in nature activities, such as mountain hiking. While it is evident that there is a relationship between leisure, religion and spirituality, not much detailed study has been conducted on the relation between these themes. Several studies have investigated spirituality and leisure, but a distinction between Christian spirituality and individual spirituality is not made. However, New Christian churches are very active in organising meetings, not only church services, but also Bible study and community gatherings, whereas New Spirituals practice their spirituality more individually (Vellenga, 1991; Baerveldt, 1996). In this study we therefore argue that there are differences between the presented groups, New Christians and New Spirituals.

What is more, existing studies have particularly asked specifically for spiritual experiences and therefore have focused on these special situations. An example is the study by Schmidt & Little (2007) who purposefully sampled respondents who had experienced leisure they would define as spiritual. By doing this there is no focus on the everyday, everyday leisure situations such as shopping, strolling in the park, having coffee with friends and the assemblage of the everyday. In

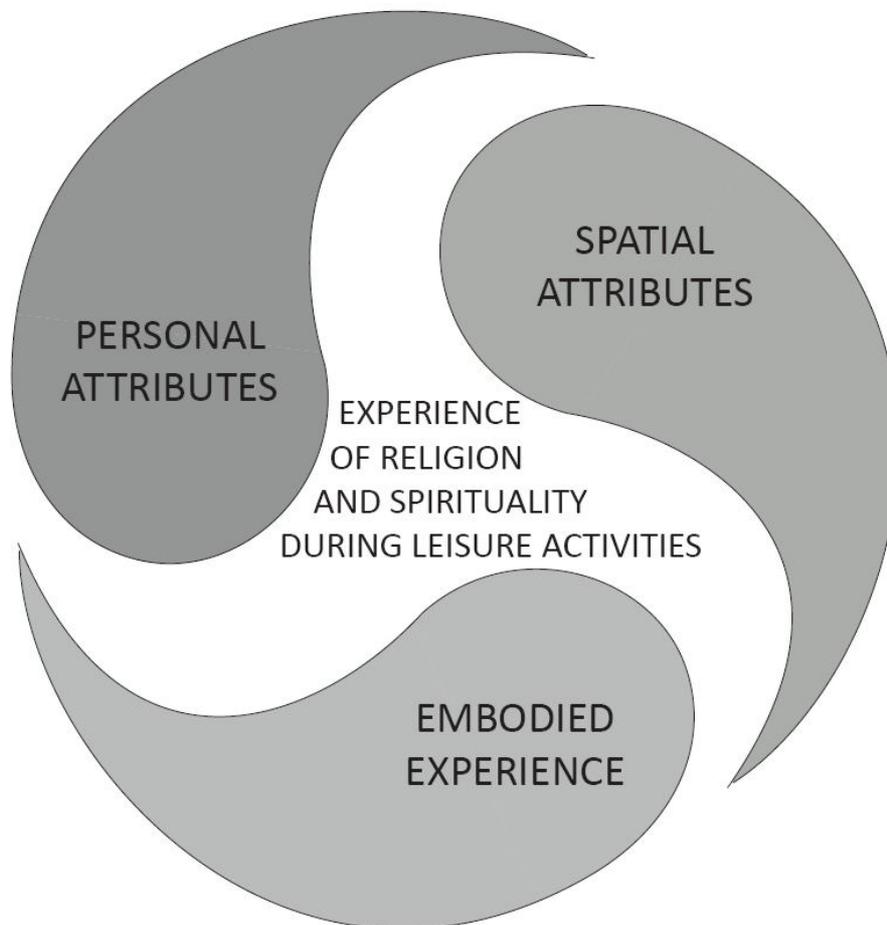
these studies the focus is on the meaning of the religious and spiritual experiences and not on the geographical perspective, the situational contexts of the places investigated are not taken into account.

Not only will this study compare two groups and take the situational attributes of the leisure activities into account, it will also place the embodied experience in a context of broader personal attributes. It is relational needs of individuals that underlie our connectedness to others and therefore affect how we experience the situations we encounter. For example: an evangelical Christian finds talking about God very important, because he perceives this as being his task, preaching the gospel. While he is doing this he strengthens his relationship with God and feels meaningful in this relationship. When someone would ask him what he experiences meanwhile he might say: It makes me feel good, or it strengthens me in my faith, but linking this to the substantive relations that underlie these activities and experiences give a much more detailed account of the experience of the activity and even more, the motivations for religion and spirituality. Theory on these relational needs is derived from psychotherapy and this study will show that these ideas can very well be used in geographical research on activity behaviour.

Hence, the main gap in the literature is a situational perspective on the performance and experience of religion and spirituality in the everyday in which the body, and thereby the sensorial perception are regarded as being central. To contribute to this, this study has adopted a design in which the leisure activities of two groups will be compared; the situational attributes are investigated in relation to the personal attributes and the embodied experience. To gain insight into the spatial situation of the leisure activities this research will adopt a relational perspective on space. This means that the practices are situated in a network of different actors that can be objects, other places and persons that are in a complex process of continuous interaction. The relational needs are the content of these relations with other actors that are contextualised in leisure activities.

Here this study would like to formulate an approach which permits a richer understanding of the geographical context of leisure activities and the performance and experience of religion and spirituality, incorporating more of the dynamic interrelatedness between the context and individuals. This moves past the absolute notion of space that sees sacred space as a geographic aggregate, because it sees humans as mobile agents that encounter other actors in the situations they perform in. These encounters create situations which they relate in some way to their religion or spirituality and fulfil their relational needs. The experience of religion and spirituality during leisure activities can therefore be viewed as a result of the complex interplay between the particular beliefs and relational needs of the individual actors, the spatial situation of the activities they wish or need to participate in and the embodiment of these situations. The key components of this integrated approach are visualised in a conceptual model (figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual model



Acknowledging the importance of religion and spirituality in the everyday lives of a vast number of individuals is of societal relevance because it can be one of the explanatory factors of daily activity patterns of people. Gaining insight in which practices are performed and the experiences evoked because they are associated with signs of the religious and the spiritual is therefore necessary (Ivakhiv, 2006). This is of relevance in a multi-religious society as the Netherlands, because a highly diverse group of people make use of public spaces and may experience and value it differently. Accepting these differences can be useful for policy purposes on public space. This knowledge enhances our perception of leisure experiences and its religious and spiritual implications in order to develop leisure opportunities that are more holistically meeting the range of human needs (Schmidt & Little, 2007). Examples in literature are managers of natural areas and parks that have been encouraged to plan for the provision of opportunities for experiencing the spiritual benefits of outdoor recreation along with other recreation benefits (Driver et al, 1996; Dustin, 1994). Another example is literature on therapeutic retreats in which the importance of physical, social and symbolic aspect of therapeutic landscapes are investigated (Conradson, 2005; Hoyez, 2007; Lea, 2009).

This study has adopted a comparative research design. Adherents of both beliefs were recruited to participate in this study. To come to rich descriptions of the situations in which people perform a qualitative method was adopted. Important to realise in this research is that religious or spiritual experience is something that is highly personal and therefore difficult to put into words, let alone understood by others. In this research every effort was made to respect deeply the phenomenology of religious and spiritual experience and the sincerity of beliefs.

Throughout this study the following research question will be discussed:

During leisure activities, what is the importance of personal and situational attributes for the embodied experiences of religion and spirituality of Dutch New Christians and New Spirituals?

- a) *To what extent are the personal attributes of the individual in interplay with his or her experience of religion and spirituality?*
- b) *How is the experience and performance of religion and spirituality related to the embodiment of the spatial situation in which leisure activities take place?*

The structure of this thesis will be as follows: The presented theoretical framework in chapter two will review the concepts of religion and spirituality, practices, relational space and substantive relational needs. A methodological chapter will follow in which the conducted qualitative research will be described in terms of respondents, methods and analysis. This will be followed by two chapters of analysis, chapter four introducing the beliefs of the individuals and the relationship this has to the societal context and their relational needs. Chapter five will discuss the multidimensional context in which the individuals perform leisure activities and experience their religion and spirituality. Finally a discussion and conclusion chapter reflects on the interplay between religion, spirituality and personal and situational attributes. Furthermore this chapter discusses possible policy implications and makes suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the literature will be put forward on which the conceptual relations and research questions for this research are based. The main concepts are religion and spirituality, spatial situation and embodied experiences, derived from Actor-Network theory and emotional geography. Religion and spirituality will firstly be discussed, together with the trends of religion and spirituality in the modern world. The second section treats the concept of leisure practices, by discussing the interaction between leisure practices and religious and spiritual practices. The last section treats the ideas of spatial situations that will elaborate on the performative turn in spatial research, the relational method of looking at space and the substantive relational needs that are universal in human relations. This chapter will be drawn to a close by a conclusion that puts forward the main hypotheses for the empirical part of this research.

2.2 Religion and spirituality

2.2.1 Descriptions of religion and spirituality

The concepts of religion and spirituality are multivalent and therefore need to be discussed elaborately in this literature review. There is some debate about the distinction between these concepts. Some consider religion to be organised and institutional in nature, with common beliefs and practices, making it a group experience and see spirituality as totally separate, because it is a personal belief in something transcendental. Other authors do not make this distinction; they consider spirituality a concept that can accommodate both personal and organised experiences (Zuefle, 1999). This last idea will be used in this study, which sees religion as one practical manifestation of spiritual life, and certainly not the only one (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). Joblin (2009) states:

"Spirituality is about the path people follow in life and the experience of an inner presence of the divine or sacred as they follow this path."

According to him this path consists of beliefs and types of behaviour that can be seen as bridges to the transcendental, the divine or the sacred. Spirituality can therefore be found in formal religion, but this is not necessarily so. Spirituality can individually be sought and found in different non-religious contexts, such as nature, or meditation (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009; Wood et al, 2009). It is a much broader concept than religion, because according to Schmidt and Little (2007):

"Spirituality is accepted as being a broad concept that refers to the ways in which people seek, make, celebrate, and apply meaning in their lives."

In this description we see that there is no necessary idea of the divine, it refers to meaning in the lives of individuals.

Religion, as one practical manifestation of spirituality, can mean different things to different people, at different places, in different contexts (Küçükcan, 2005; Ivakhiv, 2006) and therefore many different definitions have been put forward over the years. These can be roughly understood in a twofold typology. The first set of definitions is substantivist; consisting of ontological definitions

referring to extra-mundane religious objects. These objects are the main attributes of the religion which are cross-culturally stable. The focus is on the contents of religion and its beliefs. This is rightly represented by Bruce (2002, p.2) who states that religion consists of:

"[B]eliefs, actions and institutions predicated on the existence of entities with powers of agency (that is, Gods) or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose (the Hindu example of Karma, for example) which can set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs."

This definition has a strong sense of the existence of something extra-mundane that has agency and is therefore of influence on the religious individual and broader human affairs.

The other group of definitions about religion is functionalist, implying that they accomplish for the social or cultural context in which the religion is present and the social and psychological functions (Berger, 1974). The content is arbitrary and historically specific and the referent is mundane and neutrally valued (Braun & McCutcheon, 2000, p. 26-27). An example of a functionalist is Flood (1999, p.2), who argues that religions are value-laden narratives and actions that can be distinguished from other kinds of cultural forms. These are given life within specific cultures and should therefore always be studied in context. The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz argues that being religious is part of the way people shape their existence and the way they give this existence meaning by using symbolism. Therefore religion is a cultural system, a collection of symbols that have meaning and that influence people's behaviour and experiences. Due to this symbolism, religion is very much bound to the domain of imagination (Nissen, 2009; Berger, 1974).

When we look at these definitions as two ends of the spectrum, the definition of Yandell (1993, p.15) seems to be positioned more neutrally by leaving in the middle if religion is culturally defined or that the worldview of religion is based on something, an entity, beyond human control. He describes religion as:

"A conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, that builds on that interpretation an account of how life should be lived in that world and that expresses this interpretation and life-style in a set of rituals, institutions and practices."

When we talk about religion in the Western world we often refer to these sets of rituals, institutions and practices. The 'should be lived' is in this sense very important, because it implies that it is normative and therefore means that you and others have the same position towards how life should be lived and what these institutions, rituals and practices should be. It provides people with an ultimate idea of what they should be striving for in their lives (Pargament & Park, 1995, p. 15). The definition does not say anything about belief in God, or another higher power, but it implies that there is more beyond human beings, that these humans are a part of a larger reality.

These ideas are clearly presented by Wood et al (2009), who understand religion as a way of behaving in one's own religious environment or institution plus a mental process that can incorporate a connection to the divine, also called the spiritual. The spiritual can also exist without the religious environment or institution, making it a pure internal process. This way of behaving can be normative and have a strong sense of how life should be lived, as Yandell (1993) called it, but it can also be purely aimed at personal well-being.

2.2.2 A secular world? New Spirituality and evangelical churches

The last few decades have shown a debate on whether or not religion has been a declining factor in modern Western societies. The same scholars, who at the turn of the previous century announced that secularisation would lead to the disappearance of religion in public life, now affirm that this secularisation thesis is false (Berger, 1974). However, on this issue scholars are still discordant with

each other: the question remains if western societies are actually secularised or if secularisation is a myth. Bruce, professor of sociology, who has written extensively on the nature of religion in the modern world, is convinced of the idea that western societies are secular. Industrialisation caused social changes such as individualisation and the inclination to feel less involved in an institution, inducing secularisation processes (Bruce, 2002, p.37). He argues that due to this:

"[A] combination of cultural diversity and egalitarianism prevent our children being raised in common faith, stop our beliefs being constantly reaffirmed by religious celebrations of the turning of the seasons and the key events in the life cycle and remove from everyday interaction the conversational reaffirmation of a shared faith (Bruce, 2002, p. 240-241)."

This idea indicates that churches and religious institutions lose significance making faith and belief less a shared concern. At the individual level religion might still be present, but it is performed privately, resulting in a syncretistic patchwork of beliefs. These beliefs are diffuse and will therefore have little impact on society. The world will be filled with New Age spirituality that holds many different ideas and rituals. Bruce argues this is a process that is irreversible and causes Christian denominations to be doomed (Bruce, 2002, p.240, Henkel, 2006).

An opposite argument is given by Hinnells (2005), who states that the secularisation thesis is false, because in many Western cities religious groups have become more prominent. There is a growth among certain Christian groups, such as evangelical groups whose adherents are middle aged, middle class and generally well educated (Hinnells, 2005, pp.9-10). These new groups are often branches of already existing churches or these groups have derived their ideas from different world religions, mainly Christianity. Growing churches are those related to the evangelical movement. The evangelical church is part of orthodox Christianity and originates from revivals in English and American Protestantism in the 18th and 19th century. In the 20th century this movement spread over the rest of the world. The evangelical church has a strong focus on an individual relationship with God and therewith radicalises the individualistic potential of the Protestant church (Roeland et al, 2010). In a review on secularisation in geographical research Wilford (2010) described the evangelical movement in the United States as follows:

"[A] manifestation of modern religious vitality. Its combination of conservative theological doctrine – centered on individual salvation through Jesus Christ, personal piety, and biblical inerrancy – with contemporary music and fashion, an individualistic therapeutic style of worship and biblical interpretation, highly designed and demographically focused worship services, and an emphasis on weekly small group meetings in members' homes, is often seen as a major innovation in American culture (Wilford, 2010)."

People are going to evangelical churches because they are looking for an enthusiastic church that emphasises a connection between the church and its members. It is highly focused on the individual relationship with God and Jesus, but also on the community. Collectively the evangelicals aim for a pure personal relationship with God, based on subjective experiences (Roeland et al, 2009). People pray for each other and organise a whole range of activities outside the regular church services. Livengood (2009) speaks of New Paradigm churches, recent Christian churches that integrate elements of present-day culture in church functioning. They span different denominations, such as Evangelical and Pentecostal, or define themselves as being non-denominational, have a contemporary way of conducting services with contemporary music and video screens. Worship is very much geared towards each participant's spiritual experience and goals propagated are building a community of believers and the relations of the members.

In the Netherlands these groups are also growing. According to the Social and Cultural Planning agency these groups experienced a growth of more than 138% between 1960 and 2006 and are still growing (De Hart, 2011). These figures should not be overestimated however: these churches are still very small and therefore do not make up for the decrease in church affiliation. In the Netherlands, Pentecostal and Baptist congregations are also part of this Evangelical movement.

Furthermore, though not committed to a church or religious institute, a large number of people still consider themselves in some way religious. They feel less external pressure to be affiliated to a certain religion, instead they feel the opportunity to find their own spirituality (de Hart, 2005, p.100-119, Sengers, 2006). In their book, 'God in Nederland' (God in the Netherlands), Bernts et al. (2006) call this individual spirituality '*new spirituality*'. This group of new, or postmodern spirituals is characterised by the fact that they are non-denominational but are strong believers on the other hand. They have their own rituals: examples are burning candles or having a small altar at home. This means their spirituality is performed and experienced in their daily lives, such as moments of silence or in nature and less during religious services (Kaski, 2010). These new forms of spirituality therefore remind us little of the institutional religions that were present in the former eras. The ideas are very diffuse and range from practical to cognitive and affective descriptions, it was estimated that around 12% of the Dutch populations refers to themselves as being spiritual without belong to a church or other religious institute (de Hart, 2011).

Whereas the traditional notion of religion points at a life according to external expectations, spirituality stands for a life in conformity with your inner and subjective experience. This means it revolves around self-knowledge, self-actualisation, bodily consciousness and living in accordance with nature. Furthermore there is a belief in something outer-mundane, but this is not God, but 'something' that cannot be named, a larger reality (Baerveldt, 1996, p.21, De Hart, 1996, p. 32). This belief in this something, or larger reality provides them with a very well-defined worldview and the place of humans in it that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to existence in general, and that offers an ethical path to personal fulfilment which includes connectedness with self, others, and a higher power or larger reality (Hawks, 1994, p. 6). Woodhead and Heelas (2005) call the tendency towards more individual spirituality the '*spiritual revolution*'. This implies that people are not looking for long-term commitment, to multiplex relations and loyalty to a group and a shared identity. In addition they want to participate in activities when they want to. They are not looking for active participation on set times and spaces (de Hart, 2005, p.74).

What both groups have in common is that they see religious traditions as alien translations of the universal truth of individual spirituality. Adherents of both forms, New Christians and New Spirituals, see their as a purified form of religion, the influence of the institute has diminished. This motivates them to not only practice it in private, but also publicly, according to Roeland et al. (2010). How it is practiced publicly is highly diverse since people participate in sacred-making activities and processes of signification according to the paradigms of the belief systems to which they are committed (Anttonen, 2000b, p.281). This means that the activities can be highly diverse amongst groups and individuals. How the performance of certain practices is related to an individual's experience of religion depends greatly on the particular meanings these practices have in their personal lives (Wuthnow, 2001, p. 107).

2.3 Religious and spiritual leisure activities

To live life devoted to God, or to experience the divine or sacred and experience spiritual growth, people undertake activities in their day to day life that may at first not seem to be related to religion and spirituality. Williams (2004) puts forward that religion continues to show up in everyday life, since religion is not as institutionalised anymore as it used to be decades ago. Not all religious practices are institutional and prescribed by scriptures or the doctrine of the religion one adheres to.

One category of daily activities is leisure activities. Leisure activities are assumed for some to be related to religion and spirituality, first of all because religion, spirituality and related rituals are often cited as powerful influences on leisure activities (Zuefle, 1999). This goes back a long time: one of the first notions of leisure and religion was the Sabbath of the Israelites, whose God required them

to have one day rest from work to worship him. This day was later set to a Sunday by Christians, a day that is still considered sanctified in a lot of western societies. Holidays were created as special days for celebrations and recreation in a religious context and nowadays life still virtually stands still on the originally religious holidays Good Friday and Christmas day. Furthermore in history, Christian believers considered other cultures and religion as anti-Christian and the activities they undertook, Roman activities such as sport and entertainment, were pagan. In this way religion, or the church, not only indicated appropriate forms of leisure, inappropriate forms of leisure were also clearly defined (Schulz, 2001).

In addition to these distinct ways Sessoms and Henderson (1994) take a very broad perspective by suggesting that religion provides a framework for interpreting life and enhancing the quality of life, which as a consequence also influences people's perception of leisure. This is agreed by deLisle (2003), who found that the relationship between leisure and religion cannot be separated from the notion of morality. She sees organised religion as the 'caretaker of a communal vision' and leisure as the medium through which this image is realised. Religion, spirituality and leisure are related since they are all aimed at reaching a certain state-of-mind and well-being. Since people experience freedom during leisure, leisure contexts provide opportunities for spiritual aspects of the self to be dealt with. Leisure has been identified as a forum where people can perfect the self, be inspired to spiritual values and relationships with oneself, or the other and a greater reality, becoming more of who they are and create or find a sense meaning in life (Schmidt & Little, 2007, Hawks, 1994).

According to Chandler et al. (1992), spiritual growth can be prompted by both spontaneous events and intentional activity. Leisure settings have the potential to let the individual explore his or her spirituality; one can seek or create events and conditions in which spiritual growth is most likely to occur. Leisure can provide a context for the experience of religion and spirituality because of the interplay of time, motivation, activity and context (Heintzman, 2002). Some find spiritual experiences in active leisure in nature, such as hiking or canoeing, or they purposively undertake activities that they find morally appropriate in the light of their religion, such as voluntary work in their community (Schulz, 2001). Research by Livengood (2009) amongst New Paradigm Christians revealed that solitary leisure activities were experienced as spiritual (walking, knitting etc.). This can create quietness, creating an atmosphere to think about God. Secondly, leisure activities with Christian and non-Christian friends were described as spiritual by creating an environment to talk about God. Thirdly leisure provided an opportunity to be in an environment created by God, experience being in God's creation.

Fox (1999) found that time for solitude in wilderness enhanced the opportunity for spiritual experience. McAvoy (1992) on the other hand, found that spiritual experiences reported during a wilderness canoe trip were related to the interconnectedness with other human actors. It can therefore be assumed that both relate to spiritual well-being: the solitary activities induce time for contemplation about the meaning of life, whereas the social activities relate to spiritual well-being concerning connectedness with others (Heintzman, 2002). Spiritual benefits have also been found in tourism studies: leisure travel can afford tourists with greater knowledge about the self and the meaning of life. Furthermore sports studies described certain spiritual sensations during sports participation such as calm and stillness, feelings of immortality and the awareness of something beyond themselves (Schmidt & Little, 2007).

The New Christian churches this study specifically looks at are not always part of a larger denomination, but these churches have often made leisure part of their offerings. You see an intensive programme of leisure activities. It is often said that it is exactly this that makes the churches so popular (Livengood, 2009). By performing these religious practices Christians give meaning to their belief system. They seek a deeper connection with their belief system and the higher being that for them is God (Digance, 2006).

We should also not forget the community aspect of religion that shares links with leisure. Traditionally people have been using their free time for ecclesiastic practices in a social scope, in order to achieve a certain social inclusion and sense of belonging (Márcia Mello Costa De Liberal & Eun Yung Park, 2003). Leisure can be used to communicate the values of the religion, inculcating this sense of belonging and responsibility as well as communicating key theological tenets. By this communal aspect, leisure is given meaning in the interaction with others that have the same religion. A study on leisure participation among Muslims in the United States shows that Islam effects leisure behaviour by emphasising strong family ties and therewith family-oriented leisure activities (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006).

It is this community aspect that has especially changed with the decline of institutional religion. We have read that people do not feel the urge to belong to an institution, so question is if people still need, or want collective activities, with like-minded people. How important are the social networks that run through religious spaces and institutional activities? New Spirituality has often been referred to as a very individual form of religiosity that is bound to the private realm and therefore has no social significance. There are also studies that reject these ideas. Aupers and Houtman (2006) strive for a radical 'sociologisation' of research into New Spirituality. They have the idea that spirituality is socially constructed and transmitted and strengthened in a spiritual milieu and aim for a clearer understanding of these social processes. In the next section we will read that the experience of belonging is universal for human existence, is this belongingness found somewhere else? There are differences in performing leisure practices alone or with others. This all shows that there are many occasions when leisure and religion and spirituality deal with essentially similar events in life, because people seek experiences of religion and spirituality during their leisure time (Schulz & Auld, 2009).

2.4 Religion, spirituality and space

As religion and spirituality are enacted, belief is in many ways relative to space: the faithful seek out certain spaces for prayer, they find certain locations especially conducive to religious experience, and they undertake sometimes rather arduous journeys to sites which are associated with sacred persons, or events that were formative for their own religious tradition (Wynn, 2009, p.2). One of the most discussed topics within the discipline of geography of religion is sacred space. It was with the work of the Romanian religious historian Eliade that sacred space became a significant subject to study theoretically and critically. In this book *'The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion'* (1959) he explores how profane space becomes holy or sacred, a symbolic process accordingly. Humans become aware of the sacred because it is showing itself as something totally different from the profane. This is what he calls hierophany. The history of religions is full of these hierophanies, manifestations of the sacred (Eliade, 1959, pp. 11-13).

Just as with definitions of religion, there are also culturalist definitions of sacred space. Chidester and Linenthal (1995), inspired by the social constructionist theory by Durkheim, state that nothing is inherently sacred. The sacred is a relational concept; it is constructed by human practices, agency and social projects. This means that all meanings can be imposed upon the space by everyone. The sacred space must therefore be understood in the social practices of communities which engage with these spaces and derive their identity from it (Kong, 2001; Park, 2004). The sacred is distinguished from ordinary, profane everyday life, because the sacred is a social force present at certain times in specific spaces, giving certain practices and objects extraordinary meaning (Williams, 2010). In most mainstream monotheistic religions sacred spaces are contained with human constructed edifices, whereas sacred spaces for spiritual groups, such as new age and Wicca can be constructed anywhere (Hume, 1998).

Both ideas present a sacred-profane dualism. This dualism is common in studies in the discipline geography of religion. This dualism totally devaluates the profane and makes sacred detached territory. Even though it crosses boundaries towards the divine, because a connection is made with the divine, something higher, it takes a very absolute vision on space: space is self-contained. However, it is not easy, maybe even impossible to give an objective definition of a sacred space, because what is most important is subjective experience. This experience can be a sudden feeling of nature's beauty and power of the instant connection you can feel with a specific space. These feelings can also be evoked by the built environment, by buildings that have a significant history or even the shape, the symbolism represented. The energy released during important happenings can still be present and evoke certain feelings and experiences. The energy present can also be given to a space by the people that use the space (Ganzeboom, 2005; Verkerk & Loods, 2009). There is a constant interplay between the space and its visitors or users. In order to study this a relational perspective on space will be used in this research.

2.4.1 Approaching space relationally: performance and embodiment

Recent years have shown an interest amongst geographers in thinking space relationally as a methodological approach. This view entails that space is not to be seen as a container, a frame for things and events, upon which meanings can be imposed. We must recognise the existence of a wide variety of time-space geographies in places, such as cities. Any interaction between people and other actors, which can be things, object, space, must be seen as a relation between a person and the other actor (Graham & Healey, 1999). Space is therefore not empty; it is an arena of constant interaction and struggle between actors, which is extremely important to recognise when trying to capture the interaction between individuals and the space they participate in (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 417).

In Latour's work on Actor-Network Theory geographers found a persisting attention to the connection and assemblage of all things in space (Bingham, 1996; Murdoch, 1997). By describing how actor-networks are gradually and constantly subject to change by extension and reduction, Latour radically shifts away from a Euclidean concept of space as universal abstract axes which contain and constrain events (Latour, 2005). Space is a consequence of the ways in which particular heterogeneous elements are related to one another. This sense of space implies that space is being made out of relations between its parts (Latour, 2005, Murdoch, 2006). Space is from this perspective never permanent; space is always under construction and in process, it is fluid, constantly open to change (Knott, 2005, pp. 20).

These relational spaces, or situations, as they will be referred to in this study, emerge and vanish with the performative encounters that create them (Murdoch, 2006, pp. 12-12). '*Performance becomes the place of mediation between the body and its environment.*' (Dirksmeijer & Helbrecht, 2010). Performance is seen as imitation and enactment which takes place in everyday life consciously or unconsciously, it is the repeated practices that bring forth subjectivities, for instance gendered or radicalised meaning of space (Cadman, 2009). Practices are embedded in relations between different actors assembled in networks; different activities come with different networks of relations and thereby define their own spatial framework (Latour, 2005; Murdoch, 2006). Nigel Thrift's understanding of practice is ordered through four basic theoretical prepositions. First of all, space is a fundamental element of social life. Secondly, space comes into being through spatial practice. Thirdly, these practices generate subjectivities through which the world is lived and experienced and finally these subjectivities are the products of complex mixtures of human and nonhuman agencies (Latham, 2004a).

This focus on performance aims to understand how subjective experience emerges in the interaction between contexts and the human body (Crouch, 2000). Spaces can be invested with deep emotional meaning, a sense of space that is derived from a certain cognitive and affective

attachment people have to particular spaces (Cresswell, 2007). According to Ivakhiv (2006) these meanings emerge from the interaction of practices of individuals with space. Space itself is objective and contextual and only becomes the material of a particular culture, or ideology by specific activities, or practices (Crouch, 2000). In these theoretical considerations about the meaning of space and the practices that create these meaning, the body is taking a crucial role. Our experiences in context cannot be separated from our own corporeality (Davidson, 2001, p. 287), our bodies allow us to experience and conceptualise the relations between persons, places and things (Knott, 2005b). These ideas derive from the concept of embodiment from Emotional Geography. Following Crouch (2000), embodiment "*denotes the ways in which the individual grasps the world around her/him and makes sense of it in ways that engage both mind and body.*" Bodies move and spaces are what bodies do. It is the bodies that produce and generate spaces. The presence of moving bodies alters space physically, but the imaginative, affective and social dimensions of space change too (McCormack, 2008).

The affective dimension is inherent to embodiment: The concept of embodiment is intrinsically linked with sensory perception of all the elements in the situational assemblages. The sight, sound, touch, taste and smell of the spatial as well as social elements in the situations are internalised by the individual, evoking an affective sensation and possibly an emotional experience. An example is music, a song that can trigger an intense emotional response because it brings you back to an emotional situation in which this song was played. The self-reflexive listening body in music brings about spatial-subjective interconnections, and does so in sensitive emotional ways (Duffy & Waitt, 2011). Affective quality of space in which bodies move is never only personal, it is a product of a complete mix of the intensity of relations between music, light, sounds, other bodies, gestures (McCormack, 2008; Latham & McCormack, 2004). This affectivity does not move through bodies in a process of representation, because it is too quickly. This exists by the rhythmic relations between bodies and spaces through the sensory experiences of everyday life (Cadman, 2009). The notion of affect implies that you know how a room full of bodies feels before you can ever put that knowledge of representation into words; it is a state before it is registered consciously. These rhythmic and affective spaces are ephemeral; they can change as quickly as someone else enters the situation or even when the individual thinks of something else. Developing an understanding of the experience of the situations is therefore one of the most important aspects of thinking through human bodies (McCormack, 2008).

Affect therefore operates before the personal quality of emotion (Latham & McCormack, 2004). Emotions are embodied and mindful phenomena that are fed by, and also feed into the interactions with others, people or non-material objects and space. Our emotions and interactions make up our own, unique geographies (Davidson & Bondi, 2004). This means that spaces can evoke certain emotional experiences and that these emotional experiences can influence how a person thinks about a certain space, what his or her associations are about this space and if he or she thinks it is meaningful. Understanding the experience of the individual's practices by the concept of embodied experience yields a rich picture of the assemblages of the multidimensional context that the individual senses through his or her body.

By looking at the embodied experiences during certain practices in space we therefore must take into account all the aspects of space that might exist in the multiple geographies at specific spaces and understand that these relational configurations are highly dynamic. There can be differences between the use of space during day and night, the weather conditions might have an influence on the way people perform in and experience the situation but it can also be the built environment that holds a specific symbolic meaning to its users, for example a historical relationship. The specific features of that space can recall certain memories by its users to spaces visited for other purposes, or it can lead to imagination of other situations. In addition, the mobility of its users can link different spaces together that can form a network of meaningful spaces. People can go to another space after having a specific experience, passing on that knowledge. Furthermore there are

other bodies intersecting that space that can have certain symbols in their clothing and adornment, or hold a certain culture or ideology which incite again other experiences of that space. Meaningful space experiences most often occur in the presence of significant others (Hay, 1998). These encounters with others are crucial in relation to space. Encounters take place in space, and are not just with people, but also with material things, with imagination and with memory. In everything people do, they experience encounters that enable them to make sense of the world (Crouch, 2000). Moreover, space can be customised by the actors by inserting objects in the situation, such as a necklace with a Christian cross, or a small altar in one's own home with a photograph of a deceased family member, to worship those who have passed away. By their very nature this stands in for a force or process greater than the actor, embodying a conception and an emotional experience (Knott, 2009).

2.4.2 Substantive relationalism

Corresponding with these ideas about relational space is the notion that these relations with other actors come with different expectations, negotiations and obligations that influence one's choices on leisure practices and the embodied experiences. The substantive relations between human actors and other human and non-human actors can be motivations for certain activities and are personal attributes in interplay with the embodied experiences.

The focus on relationships comes with the idea that there is a universal need for the feeling to belong and be part of something that is greater than the individual (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). With the trends in the religious landscape, discussed in the introduction and the previous sections of the chapter, we see that the implications of the idea of belonging, in terms of religion as an institute, have changed over the decades. We have read that generally people do not feel the urge to belong to an institution, so question is if people still need, or want collective activities, with like-minded people. How important are the social networks that run through religious spaces and institutional activities? A publication of the Dutch cultural planning agency shows that people are looking for new ways of solidarity and new rituals. Examples they give are weddings of the royal family and football games that evoke religious-like scenes. However, these are temporary collective experiences; people do not tie themselves to a certain group (Becker & De Hart, 2006).

This study looks at two different groups: a group of New Christians who seem to highly value the community aspect of a church and a group of New Spirituals who do not belong to an institute and therefore seem to be less focused on the belongingness to a group of other believers. We can therefore question ourselves how this sense of belonging is present in the ideas and experiences of these groups.

According to Game (2001) the recognition of the realm of gods or spirit opens up a possibility of revitalisation a sense of belonging, because belonging is experienced in sacred space and time. She argues that belonging is an in-between state of being within and without ourselves and this sense of belonging is found in moments when one feels: this is right. This feeling is the experience of a sense of connection with the world, with for instance the sea. You feel the sand between your toes, the wind in your face and you hear the sound of the waves. The affect created here can cause this experience of belonging.

Relationships are not solely based on sameness and a shared life; difference or otherness is vital for a healthy and stimulating relationship, the individual wants to feel unique and authentic as well. Slife and Wiggins point at the reverse of mutuality. Aiming too much at similarities in relations might lead to inauthentic and manufactured 'sameness'. When this is the case in relationships the person inhabits other's attitudes without leading to true closeness, intimacy or belonging. A balance needs to be found in relationships (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). These ideas about sameness and belongingness

are relational needs. Relational needs are the emotional needs which underlie our social connectedness and help sustain and nurture our attachment to others. They are unique to all (interpersonal) contact we have.

There are eight relational needs described by Stewart (2010) and Erksine (1998)

1. Need for security in relationship.
2. Need to be validated and affirmed as significant. Experience being meaningful
3. Need for acceptance by stable, dependable and protective other.
4. Need for mutuality or confirmation of personal experience.
5. Need for self definition.
6. Need to make an impact on the other.
7. Need to have the other person initiate.
8. Need to express love.

These ideas mainly derive from psychotherapy: if there is a chronic failure to get these needs individuals are likely to experience disturbances in mood, thought, body and behaviour. Often it is in the absence of the satisfaction of these needs that the individual becomes most aware of the presence of these needs. Once one realises these needs are not met he or she is willing to change his or her relations, or search for other forms of connection (Stewart, 2010).

Slife and Wiggins (2009) argue that the "*fear of rejection—the fear that we do not belong, are not acceptable, or do not have meaningful relations—is the greatest of all the fears and anxieties.*" In order to protect themselves against this fear others avoid relationships of closeness and intimacy. They negotiate this in practice by avoiding certain situations in which closeness and intimacy might be expected. It can also mean that an individual is closing him or herself off in relations with others, the individual can position him or herself in a manner as to avoid the experience of the body of the other. This illustrates that dealing with these relational needs is a constant struggle between preserving the self, self-definition, but also adaption to the surroundings and the need for mutuality (Erskine, 1998).

When these relational needs are not met the individual can undertake action. One of the actions one can undertake in this case is undergo psychotherapy. Interestingly enough, it is argued that the search for connection with something that is beyond human control, such as the Christian God, and connection with a group of like-minded people has therapeutic effects (Aten & Leach, 2008). In these relations the different relational needs described might be met. When we look back at the definition of evangelical churches by Wilford (2010) (section 2.1.2) we see that he also argues that the worship in this churches is therapeutic. Moreover, research on New Spirituals concluded that visitors of spiritual centres attend spiritual workshops for psychic, psychosomatic, but also social reasons. For them spirituality is a sort of therapy (Baerveldt, 1996, p. 20-28). Generally it has been assumed that religion and spirituality serve to reduce negative and uncomfortable affect, such as fear and anxiety and to achieve freedom from worry and guilt (Mattis & Jagers, 2001).

Just as described in the previous section, it is practices that are argued to be a person's most important form of relating to others. Practices are engaged and contextually situated activity. Since they are highly embedded in relationships and therefore in contexts they the most important form of relating, because practices have a relation not only with our surroundings, but also with our prior actions and the actions of others. These practices can therefore not be abstracted from them (Slife, 2004). Hence, relational needs can be driving forces for performing certain activities and performing spirituality and religion.

Practices related to religion and spirituality also have therapeutic connotations such as yoga and meditation in nature (Lea, 2008). Woods and trees are seen as affording particular settings for

relaxation, tranquillity and bodily relaxation. The feeling of comfort may be extremely beneficial, a sensation through which an individual may derive a sense of security (Bissell, 2008). In some sense this has high therapeutic qualities. This is in sharp contrast to the perceived pressures of everyday working or domestic routines and especially life in cities (Thrift, 2000). Different processes are embodied during these practices. It can be the relation with the inner self or a something beyond human control that is being felt and experienced or it can be the relation with nature and everything related to nature that offers a sense of being in the world without expectations from this world. The affectual relation with nature and all its features: stillness, animals, spaciousness can give the individual a sense of belonging.

What should also be mentioned is that relations are often mediated through different aids. One can think of a mobile phone through which relations are negotiated. In the light of this research we can take the Bible as an example, a device through which individuals have a relationship with God and Jesus (2004).

2.4.3 The creation of meaningful spaces during leisure activities

As we have seen, significance is spread across the material contents of spaces with these processes of embodied practices and encounters during performances. A full understanding of the experience and performance of religion and spirituality during the leisure activity requires an understanding of the uniqueness of the different situations that are present because of the assembled relationships between the different actors involved in these situations. Especially when thinking about sacred space, one must let go an absolute sense of space as Game has argued (Game, 2001). By taking the transcendental into account one already crosses the borders of absolute space. Religious and spiritual geographies are (re)produced through a variety of embodied practices (Holloway & Valins, 2002). Hence when we refer to spatial practices inducing religious or spiritual experience it indicates that this meaning is attributed to the specific practice by the social and cultural context and the participation of actors and observers. Spatial practice is lent meaning by the spatial context the practice is situated in (Knott, 2005, pp. 40-41).

It is the body that understands and experiences space in the context it is situated in, so by the process of embodiment the material contents of space becomes internalised and signified by individuals (Crouch, 2000). Using the concept of embodiment is placing the emotional experience of the individual in the spatial attributes of the leisure activities and the individual's personal attributes, religious or spiritual affiliation, that people sense through their bodies. The sensorial information the body encounters is internalised, creating emotional experiences that can have religious meaning. Research by Heintzmann (2010) shows that leisure experiences that are considered to be most spiritual were also the most emotionally intense. Therefore the understanding of the emotions people experience in spatial situations must take into account the affect people derive from their bodily senses related to the substantive relations they have with the actors involved (Hubbard, 2005, p.121).

For certain religious or spiritual practices embodiment or embodied relations are central. Both forms of belief enquire a strong sense of individual subjectivity, in terms of the experiential. However, there are also forms of collectivity: New Christians attend church service every week, but also go to other events such as Christian festivals and Bible study. New Spirituals often attend a workshop on a spiritual theme and have online group discussions on spiritual forums in which other human bodies are encountered (Roeland et al, 2009). Holloway and Valins (2002) emphasise that religious geographies are produced through a variety of embodied practices. An example by Holloway is the séance, whereby participants hold each other's hands and make contact with the materiality around them, objects and other bodies (Holloway, 2006).

Another example is given in a study by Martin and Kryst (1998) on apparition sites of Mary. During the practice of the apparition of Mary, the body embodies the knowledge of the sacred space which they again carry with them to other mundane spaces. People have a religious experience at that place by their bodily senses and embody the meaning of this space. This means that the meanings are not objectified in symbols, the meaning of space inseparably related to the material qualities of the site. The experience of the visitors is characterised by blurred boundaries between the forces believed to be contained in materials such as rocks, and the bodily experience of the location where Mary appears. In this we see the assemblage of the material context as inducing spiritual experience. In the example by Martin and Kryst rocks are mentioned as having sacred forces, but other natural elements are also of influence on the experience of religion, according to Buttimer (2006), "*the sensory interactions between human bodies and natural elements of fire, air, earth, and water were seen as essential in the quest for wholeness (holiness) and health that lies at the heart of most world religions.*" Also Tuan (1986) mentioned water as a powerful source of religious inspiration, together with woods (trees).

Another, more mundane example of religious embodiment is given by (Gokariksel, 2009) who writes about the role of the veiled body in the complex geographies of the everyday. A discussion of the mobility of the veiled body shows how the religious and the secular are present in everyday spaces and how they are differently valued, felt and constructed in various situations. By focusing on the veiled body it is possible to see how different regulatory regimes are present in urban spaces and how other actors, bodies and objects are encountered with a different cultural or religious background or with a different ideology. The experience of space is therefore not just about how you encounter others, but also how others see you and experience your presence in that space. Examples of these regimes that are present in inner city areas are flyers for extravagant parties, drug dealers, consumerism and believers who preach the gospel. As a Christian one might be affected by the flyers of the extravagant parties, but on the other hand others might have a strong reaction by the embodiment of a Christian wearing a cross or a Muslim with a headscarf. Multiple geographies are present at the same time, entailing multiple experiences of space (Gokariksel, 2009).

Hence, the objects that people take into the situation change the situation because they use those objects, but other humans also sense them and internalise them. By doing this they alter the situation, or customise it if you like. Another example is the use of a mobile phone. The spaces of everyday life are inhabited by these mobile phones and they extend our reach and memory (Thrift, 2008).

Leisure activities are encounters: with other people, with material space, with one's imagination and ideas about space, but also about leisure, about one's own environment. It can be argued that these can also incorporate encounters with one's own religious or spiritual background or earlier experiences in one's own life (Crouch, 2000). Earlier findings by Martin & Kryst (1998) in their research about the encounters with Mary show that the leisure experiences should be placed in the social context to understand the space that is created during these encounters. This also emphasises the importance of a relational perspective to space in the light of leisure and religion.

What is lastly important to remember about the study of religion and space is that all religions construct space through their own ontological commitments. Religious discourse often embraces interpretative schemas to understand and rationalise specific significant events. Therefore research must be contextualised within a spatial framework specified to these commitments (Brace, Bailey & Harvey, 2006). An example is given by Valins (2000) in a study of Ultra-Orthodox Jews who are practising a social system that structures every aspect of their daily lives. Their lives are extremely ordered and disciplined by the requirements of prayer, monthly visits to the mikveh, the ritual pool, eating kosher food, type of dress, keeping Sabbath and the relationships with other, and therefore clearly situated and ordered in space and time (Valins, 2000). In addition, meaning of a place can be learned through for instance ritual and experience. In this connection it should also be

mentioned that people can feel collective attachment to a place, fostered through for instance congregational focus or collective arrangements (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004).

For New Spirituals this can be the Ayurveda, the traditional medicine native to India. This shows the importance of religion and spirituality as a context through which a large part of the population of the Western world still live their lives and how they perform their different geographies, whether related to work, free time or other practices in people's lives (Holloway & Valins, 2002). They are embedded in the relations with different entities present in the situation in which the activity takes place.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature presented here has put forward a theoretical framework in which the experience of religion and spirituality during leisure activities can be analysed. This has provided suggestions about the relationship between religion, spirituality, leisure activities, personal attributes, spatial attributes and the embodied experience of space.

Based on the literature we can already say that for New Christians the relationship with God and the community are the most important in which their relational needs are fulfilled. In these relationships they find themselves being meaningful. For New Spirituals the relational needs are found in the relationship with ourselves and the larger reality. Their relationship with this larger reality provides them with a meaning in life because they understand the role of humans in it. It is a way to their personal fulfilment in which they have an idea about the connection to others. For both groups these ideas are part of their personal attributes and are therefore integrated in the situations they encounter, such as leisure: these relational needs might be a motivation to undertake certain activities. New Spirituals find their spirituality in more day to day mundane leisure activities and that New Christians are also expected to ascribe a high amount of attention to their beliefs in their daily lives, since their beliefs revolve around their personal relationship with God.

It is leisure that can be used to perfect the self, to find meaning in life and also perfect relationships with oneself, the greater reality and others. The human, material, and non-material attributes encountered in situations are expected to be beneficial for this. New Christians are expected to shape these relationship collectively, in the presence of other, like-minded others. The churches they adhere to are expected to organise a wide range of activities in during leisure. Moreover, they shape their relation with God in solitary activities by thinking about Him and they can experience him while being in nature, by experiencing His creation. On the other hand we can expect that situations encountered that make people experience their religion in a different way, by interaction with different belief systems and regimes.

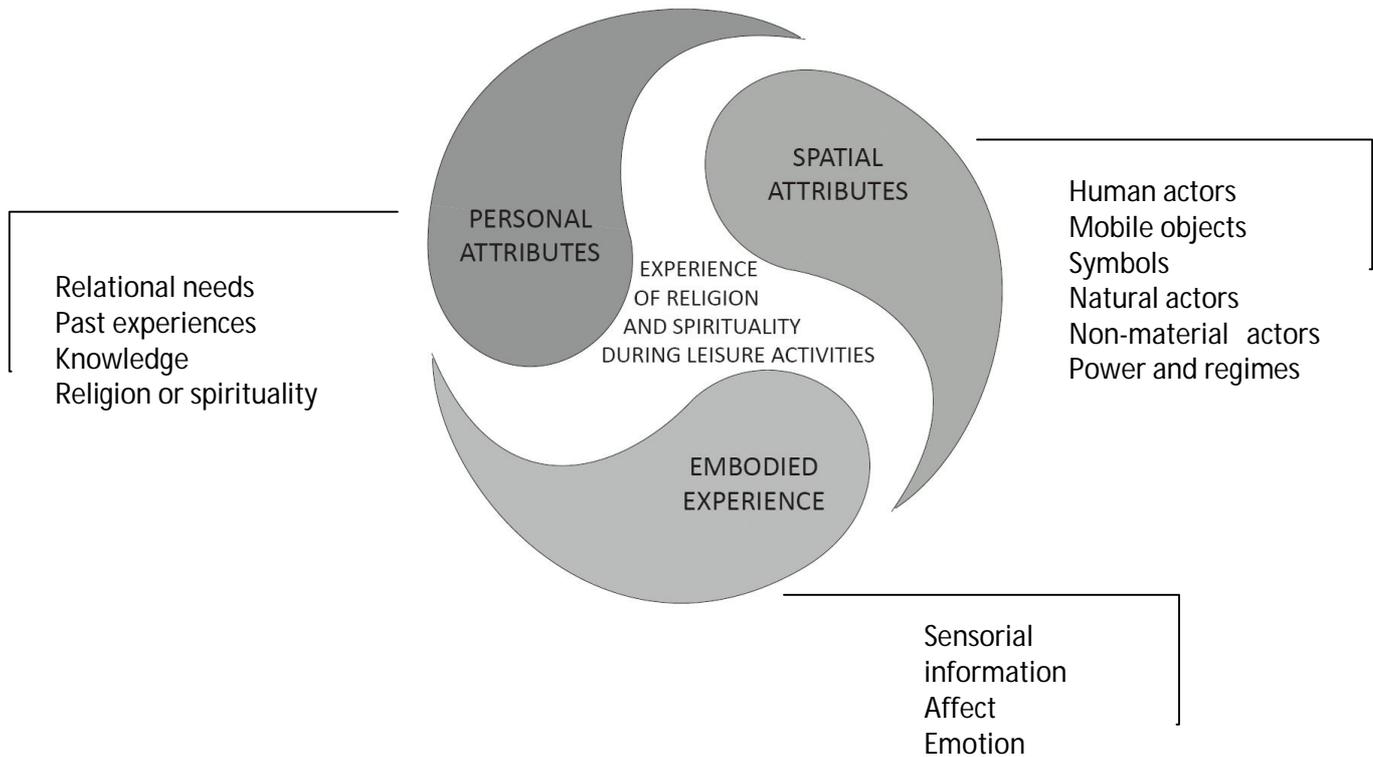
New Spirituals are expected to more solitary experience their spirituality. They do not want to belong to an institute: they experience belonging in the relationships they have with the larger reality they are part of. New Spirituals are expected to have spiritual experiences during activities in nature, because the affectual relations they have with natural attributes provide them with a sense of the larger reality, from which they derive their sense of belonging.

Which perceived attributes embodied and evoking a certain emotion is very subjective: it can be the sensed energy, but also a symbol through the performance of the body space is given meaning. The last section of this chapter has already given a wide range of examples, all taking different personal and situational attributes into account. This study will in the upcoming chapters look for commonalities in a wide range of subjective experiences in different situations.

The complex interplay of personal attributes, situational attributes and the embodied experience of the situation are visualised in the extended conceptual model (figure 2). In this model

we see that a wide range of actors is interrelated, assembling a situation in which a religious or spiritual experience of an individual can be produced.

Figure 2: Extended conceptual model



3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has set forth the theoretical framework in which the empirical part of this research will be situated. This study is situated on the interface between the discipline of religious studies and human geography and therefore specific methodological challenges arise in terms of researching the intangible aspect of everyday life. Specific considerations about the study of religion and spirituality will therefore be put forward in the first section of this chapter. The second section will discuss the methods used in the empirical part of this study. This research will apply a qualitative methods design to study the relation between leisure, religion and spirituality and space more in-depth. The last section of this chapter will describe the recruitment of the respondents that participated in this research.

3.2 How to study religion?

It became clear in the previous chapter that religion, spirituality and the secular are complicated issues to work with. Once these concepts are used discursively, the terms are never to be called neutral. When used in research they evoke meanings in the researcher, the readers and the respondents. It is therefore very important to think about the concept of *reflexivity*, a concept used to refer to one's own position as a researcher, to overcome false notions of neutrality (Knott, 2005, pp. 126). It is the ability to be self-aware about one's own standpoint in relation to the subject we write about (Knott, 2009; Hufford, 1995). In this research we talk about experience of religion and spirituality, which is very personal, something that is for some people very real, whereas others would state that it is total nonsense because it cannot be explained (think of Richard Dawkins, the God Delusion, 2006). We should therefore write and research religion consciously from within our own context and standpoint (Knott, 2005c, p. 245). Personally I am not a believer which might have implications for the interpretation of the results in terms of the outsider/insider perspective. Scholars question if you can become an insider to the experience when you do not have the experience yourself. This is an issue to be conscious about, as well as the influence you as a researcher have on your respondents. When they know you do not believe the same as they do, it might have implications for the reactions of the respondents; they might not open up to someone who they think does not believe the same as they do.

To overcome this, efforts were made to inspire the respondents to explore their own experiencing. As a result, rapport was built during the interviews. To achieve this, the goal of this study was clarified, just as the expectations of the respondents. They were told that they could speak freely since they are the experts of their experience and that there are no wrong answers. Furthermore I purposefully did not mention my own beliefs. However, regularly I was asked if I was a believer myself. On these occasions I tried to stay as neutral as possible in order to make them explain as much about their ideas as possible, without making them feel misunderstood by me. Additionally, to talk casually, the interviews were conducted at the homes of the respondents.

Given that this study set out to examine experiences of leisure that are spiritual and religious, it seemed appropriate and useful to use a phenomenological approach, since this allows for the conscious, lived, individual experiences of respondents to be the central source of information. More specifically, phenomenology, with its focus on understanding the world from the perspective of the respondent, allowed the researcher to examine spiritual, leisure experiences from a complexity of viewpoints (Schmidt & Little, 2007).

3.2.1 Ethical principles

Generally in social research, some ethic issues that might arise during the research process are important to be aware of. People might be reluctant to talk about their own religion and spirituality, since it is highly personal. It is therefore important to think of some responsibilities I as a researcher have towards my research participants (Bryman, 2008, p.131-132).

First of all the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. In the qualitative data collection the respondents were not anonymous, since in-depth interviews were conducted with them, but their identities and research records were treated confidentially whether or not explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given. Participants were able to reject the use of data-gathering devices and the transcripts will be stored in a password protected environment. Furthermore their identities were not used by giving them fictive names. When participants have made photographs in which people are visible they were either not used as material in the writing up of the analysis, or make sure the people were made non-recognisable after having asked permission to use the photograph.

Secondly the issue of informed consent: participants were informed about the research they are participating in. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, who is undertaking it and what will be done with the results. Therefore the participants were told that their participation is voluntary, that they can refuse to answer any of the questions that they can withdraw from the research at any time. Furthermore the participants were told that the interviews are recorded, but that the information is confidential, however, that parts of the interview will be used in the thesis and publications (Bryman, 2008, p.123).

3.3 Data collection: qualitative analysis

This research aims at investigating the performance and experience of religion and spirituality in daily life activities and the embodiment of the situation. Because people's religion and spirituality is very elusive and subjective there is a need for qualitative research methods. Conventional methods, such as interviews or surveys can abstract people's beliefs, because these often represent religion and spirituality as a fixed and coherent set of statements, instead of a variable, possibly inconsistent part of everyday life. To grasp onto this inconsistent part of everyday life of individuals, participants should be involved in the research process (Religion & Society, 2010).

The qualitative method that is chosen is based on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method, proposed by Latham (2004a). Latham (2004a) argues that studying cognitive and affective aspects of relationships in space by recognising and discussing the routinely, emotional and embodied aspects of everyday spatial practices raises particular methodological challenges. Respondents might not be aware of the routines they undertake and often find it hard to recall the specific features of the objects and processes in space they encountered and how this situation was embodied. With the study of religion some specific challenges will be faced when only using interviews: asking directly about the influence of their religious and spiritual background on activities can give respondents a feeling of oppression, because it asks about very personal aspects of your worldviews. Asking to identify their activity pattern by means of indicating the frequency of leisure activities makes people more aware of what they do in their daily lives and gives a detailed account of these activities, feelings, emotions and other aspects that are present at the situation. This provides insight into taken-for-granted activities and are able to show the ways in which individuals perceive and interpret situations (Alaszewski, 2006, p.36-37).

3.3.1 Activity tables and questionnaire

Often out-of-home leisure activities, such as hiking or going to the cinema, are not performed on a daily basis and due to the limited time available for data collection diaries were not suitable to get a grasp of the leisure activities people undertake. Instead, activity tables were chosen to collect data on leisure activities. They are asked to indicate which leisure activities they undertake in different seasons of the year. To make sure this is written down systematically the respondents were given two tables with a whole range of leisure activities and different spaces, one for autumn and winter and one for spring and summer. The tables include a possibility where participants can name activities that they could not find in the table. They were given guidelines to what type of behaviour to include, namely activities outdoors. As we are looking at the importance of space in this research, we will not ask for leisure activities at home. When you look at the home as a space for religious and spiritual practice you do not exactly have the interaction with others and space that we are specifically interested in the negotiations are at the level of the individual.

In addition, to get some basic information about their socio-demographic background the respondents were asked to fill out a small questionnaire. In this questionnaire they have indicated their age, place of residence, if they have a partner, whether or not there are children below the age of 12 in the household, if they work and how many hours and if their partner works. In addition a few questions were asked about the religion or spirituality of the respondent, namely to which denomination he or she feels a connection with and if he or she felt a connection, or belonged to a different denomination in the past. This information was effective for getting insight into the discourse in which the respondent is located. This knowledge was used to prepare the interview in terms of the background and therewith the narrative of the respondent to understand where the respondent is founding his or her practices on and to be able to discuss certain religion specific aspects.

3.3.2 Photographs

Besides this questionnaire the respondents were asked to provide me with three to five photographs of spaces that they find meaningful, spaces that they like to visit during leisure time. Asking specifically to capture significant spaces on camera starts a process of meaning-making. Whincup (2004) argues that photographs are useful for imaging the intangible, even though this seems a *contradictio in terminis*, because photographs are largely formed by reflections of tangible things. Because objectifications of experience can be captured by photography, the intangible, and the enchanted, dimensions of human activity can be visualised. Memory is extremely important for this, because memory is a trace of our experiences in our brain, used for the construction of human social life. These photographs can capture things, spaces, objects or people that may be related to something that has happened before, a place they have visited earlier, something written in religious scriptures, or something historically significant, which means it refers to something in people's memory or imagination (Whincup, 2004, p.79-80; Latham, 2004a).

The visual images provoke a myriad of questions (Grady, 2004). This has given a structured context for an in-depth interview. Not only did the activity tables and the photographs provide a neat summary of the respondent's leisure activities, they also offered a narrative structure around which the subsequent interview were organised, because they gave a strong sense of the context of the individual (Latham, 2004b, p.126). The activity tables provided the basis for questions why the respondents performed a certain activity and the photographs were used to ask specific questions about space, the people that were encountered, if there were certain memories or reference attached and which object where of religious or spiritual significance. Photographs can contain different elements that can be used for the analysis. Looking at these elements different questions can be asked, such as:

-
- What is the activity performed in this space, do you go here with a specific goal?
 - Who, where and what are the people, places and objects identified in the photographs?
 - How do these elements relate to the context they are located in?
 - How do the elements in the picture and the physical context relate to the activity performed?
 - Do these people, objects and place recall any memories of other objects or situations?
 - Do you attach a specific meaning to the elements in the picture, or are certain emotions triggered?
 - How can they be related to your feeling of religion or spirituality?

The Dutch instructions for making the photographs can be found in appendix 1. It translates that people are asked to think about the places that are meaningful to them: *"They may be special because of what you do there, how you feel there, what you experience or remember there, or who you are with or think of when you are in that place. This might be as space of historical importance, but also a favourite park or forest, a memorial or statue, your own garden, the golf course where you play, almost anywhere. Because often places are important because of the people in them, so feel free to include people in your pictures."*

3.3.3 Interviews

The activity tables and photographs served as a framework for the semi-structured interviews that followed. The activities were used to approach leisure as a state-of-mind, as something you do with a certain purpose and strive for well-being, of which living up to the standards that are framed by religion and spirituality are key. The focus was therefore placed on the experiential dimension: why do you undertake these activities, which aspects in space are you attracted to or give you a certain feeling. Are these material aspects, or non-material, or is it because of the people that are present in this space? This does imply that it was hard to predict how these interviews would be structured, but the main topics that were the same in each interview.

First of all the respondents were given a short introduction of the research in which they participated. In a test interview it showed to be important to approach the topic from the perspective of activities and spaces and not take the religion or spirituality of the respondent as a starting point to make sure not too much emphasis is placed directly on religion and spirituality for reasons that have been argued before.

To start with the leisure activities were discussed that the respondents undertake most frequently. We wanted to get a picture of the activity: with whom they undertake the activity, and if there are specific reasons for doing this. When we know the reasons we can already discuss if the activity has something to do with their beliefs, if the practice has a deeper meaning, because it is based on certain lifestyle principles or because they can make a connection to something that is divine or extra-mundane. The same can be done for activities that were indicated never to be performed. We have read that the church used to determine the inappropriate forms of leisure but also that individuals can mark some leisure activities as inappropriate or meaningless.

The reasons behind certain performances led to the second main topic, namely the embodied experiences of activities and spaces. The reasons might relate to certain experiences or emotions and it was vital to find out what it is that causes these experiences and emotions. Therefore we tried to deconstruct the situation in which the activity takes place and ask about all different aspects of the situation. This was done by asking about the objects that are present in the space of the activity. Maybe there are religious symbols that relate to their background which reminds them of their religion. It might be that the space is historically significant which feeds into the imagination of the respondent. It can also be the case that it is a very silent space, which stimulates thinking about the essence of human being, stimulating an inner experience. These

aspects all have an impact on the sensory reception of the situation. Furthermore the space can remind of an emotional happening that has been important in the respondent's life, causing the urge to stand still and affecting spiritual experiences. Besides these material aspects and non-material processes and associations it was also important to ask about the social aspect of the activity that might cause a specific feeling, or emotion. We asked if activities that cause different experiences are undertaken with specific people and if these combinations of people evoke specific conversations. The presence of other people can either stimulate or obstruct the religious experience, so it is important to find out which other people are present.

During the build-up of this conversation the photographs were brought in. It could be that the respondent mentioned a space that was also represented on a photograph, so it functioned as a tool to show the specific aspects of space. The photographs were also used to compare a space that they have indicated as meaningful to a space where they do not have special feelings about. Which are the aspects of space that cause this difference? Besides the photographs of the respondents, other photographs were also discussed during the interviews to compare different spaces with each other. When a respondent indicates to experience his or her religion in nature we could for instance compare photographs of an English garden and a garden à la Française, which are totally different in terms of the material aspects of space and might therefore invoke a totally different meaning.

This leads to the last points that were discussed in the interview, namely the normative aspect of religion and policy about public space. We have seen that religion and spirituality can mean a certain lifestyle based on religious principles and the belief in a higher power beyond human control which at this stage of the interview should have already been discussed. But religion also encompasses a certain idea of how life should be lived. When people indicate to undertake certain activities that fit in their religious or spiritual lifestyle with specific people it is interesting to find out if they would like to see that they could have the same experience with other people as well and if it is specifically the religious belief that is decisive in the choice of people. Furthermore we can try to find out if the respondent finds it necessary to be able to experience his or her religion at more spaces, or during more activities than the ones that came out of the interview and how this can be facilitated by aspects of space. This relates to the policy aspect of the design and use of public space. How would for instance the removal of certain religious symbols in a city change the experience of that space? Or how would the implementation of water in a park change the embodied experience of that and therewith the reference to something religious? These possible changes will be discussed with the respondents to find out how the respondents think the performance of their religious practices in public space can be facilitated.

A final thing that flagged up during the interviews was the practice of religion and spirituality at home. We did specifically ask for out-of-home activities, but it was the case for a few times that people clearly stated to practice their religion at home. This was discussed by asking for reasons behind this, if there are specific objects they use, such as a little altar and by comparing it to the spaces that they do not find meaningful. This can lead to interesting aspects of space that maybe obstruct some form of religious practice, or factors that make it inappropriate to actively practice religion or spirituality, such as the presence of people with a different religious background or ideology.

As a result, the focus of the interviews was both on why an experience emerged as it did, as well as on seeking rich description of specific instances of leisure that were spiritual or religious and the actions and contexts in which these emerged.

To sum up, these are the main topics that were addressed during the interviews:

- Which factors influence the choice for activities?
- How does religion and spirituality influence the activity and the interpretation of the situation?

-
- What is the experience, it is the accomplishment of a certain lifestyle based, or is it the encounter with some sort of higher power?
 - Which material aspect of space, such as objects, natural environment, water, religious symbols influence this?
 - Are any non-material aspects of space important, such as weather conditions, histories, associations, power relations?
 - Are there also aspects of the situation that can obstruct your experience, such as noise, or people with a different background?
 - Do you find it important to meet people that have the same religion?
 - Are there specific spaces you visit with these people and are there specific things you talk about?
 - Are there any changes that can be made to certain spaces that would stimulate religious experience?
 - Would you like these changes to be made to facilitate your own religious experience, but also that of other people?

The interviews took up to 2 hours per respondent and have been recorded. Most of the interviews took place at the respondents home, because this is where the respondents possibly feels most comfortable talking about religion, which can be seen as a very personal topic.

3.3.4 Coding

Whereas the interviews have been recorded, notes were also taken during the interviews. Not only was it then possible to scribble down some body language or facial expressions that do not reveal in the spoken answers, but can be significant for the interpretation of the answers, it was also possible to identify the major themes in the interview that were be used for the initial coding process. Consequently the main codes were already identified before the interviews are transcribed, which was a time-consuming process. When the interviews were fully transcribed, other, more specific, codes were added to the text. The list of codes can be found in appendix 2. This detailed coding process was performed by using a qualitative data analysis program, MaxQDA.

3.4 Selection of respondents

Based on the literature and trends in the Dutch religious the choice was made to focus on two groups. The first group are New Christians, the members of Evangelical, Pentecostal or non-denominational churches. The second group consists of people that are called New Spirituals. The focus is placed specifically on these groups, because the literature has shown that these groups are growing and in transition compared to the older Dutch religion such as Roman-Catholics and the Dutch Reformed. With an eye on the future these groups are most interesting, because they will probably become increasingly important and visible in the public realm.

The New Christians were approached by getting in touch with the predecessor of the church or another person that could function as a gatekeeper. By gaining trust of the person who is well respected in the church it became easier to get access to the situation and the people in this situation. In addition, respondents have been recruited by using snowball sampling via the personal network. The New Spirituals were somewhat more difficult to approach, since they are characterised by the fact that they do not belong to a certain denomination or other institution. Research shows however that almost three quarters of these new spirituals has followed a course on a spiritual topic, which means they regularly visit spiritual centres (Bernts et al, 2006, p.163-172).

To get some feeling with the subject I have attended several meetings and participated in a few activities that revolved around the topic of this study. I attended a few church services of an evangelical and a non-denominational church, I visited an ecumenical living community, walked along with a 'meaning-making route' in Utrecht, organised by Bloomingpeople, a network of people who focus on meaning-making, and I walked along with a short pilgrimage, organised by the Graalbeweging, a women's movement in the Christian tradition. During these activities I spoke with several people that served as input for this thesis.

3.4.1 The respondents

Sixteen people have participated in this research. In this section the respondents will be introduced shortly to give an idea of their socio-demographic background, their religious affiliation and their residential environment. In order to secure anonymity the respondents have been given fictive names.

Table 1: New Christian respondents

Name	Age	Place of residence	Church
Dave	36	Rotterdam	He converted to Christianity when he was in his twenties. He now attends a Pentecostal church, the Church of God Prophecy.
Alyssia	31	Rotterdam	When Alyssia moved from Aruba to Rotterdam she went through a very difficult period in life and found God in a Pentecostal church. She was raised Catholic, but now attends the Church of God Prophecy
Julia	26	Amsterdam	In Mexico she attended an evangelical church and found a similar church in Amstelveen, Crossroads international church, which is non-denominational.
Robert	55	Utrecht	He was raised in a Reformed tradition, but changed to an evangelical church, Christian congregation 'de Schuilplaats'.
Michelle	34	Amsterdam	She was raised in a Reformed church, but decided to leave her congregation after a very difficult period in her life. She now attends Crossroads international church in Amstelveen, which is non-denominational.
Barbara	63	Zwolle	The only respondent still visiting a traditional Dutch protestant. Besides the traditional church she attends a new church, the Basisgemeente, a more ecumenical church.
Philip	57	Utrecht	He attended different churches during the lifecourse, but has found his place now in the evangelical church, Christian congregation 'de Schuilplaats'.

Table 2: New Spiritual respondents

Name	Age	Place of residence	
Marjanne	51	Utrecht	She gives readings and workshops on different spiritual themes and is interested in Shamanism.
Gemma	68	Leersum	Gemma has the disposal of a large spiritual centre in which different courses are taught, about meditation, reiki and consciousness.
Simon		Leersum	Simon is the only respondent who indicated he is Roman-Catholic, because he is raised this way. He is however also interested in spiritual ideas of life, follows workshops and meditates.
Rosalie	59	Utrecht	She was raised in a Dutch reformed tradition, but does not have fond memories of this. Now she is mainly interested in spirituality and creativity, gives workshops about these subjects and provides healing practices, in relation to angels.
Rob	59	Utrecht	Just as a few other respondents Rob has done a lot of different workshops on spiritual themes. He is reikimaster, can communicate with flowers and is blossom therapists
Evert	51	Ede	Evert has done a lot of different things in the field of spirituality, knows a lot of techniques, but now focuses mainly on the free will of individuals in healings and readings.
Luc	50	Doorn	Of all the respondents Luc has perhaps immersed himself the most in the offer of spiritual workshops, books, courses and objects. He told that he has done everything on the spiritual spectrum, but now follows the ideas of Munay-Ki.
Ans	78	Utrecht	The oldest respondent of this research is Ans, she refers to herself as sympathiser of Buddhism and practices yoga.
Carola	48	Doorn	Carola was never interested in the more-than-human world, but started to attend spiritual workshops after her partner left her.

4 Religion, spirituality and relational needs

4.1 Introduction

To understand the interplay between people's personal attributes, the spatial situation and experience of the activities they undertake, we must first get insight into the respondents' ideas of religion and spirituality, what this means in their daily lives and how this relates to their other personal attributes, such as important life events, perceived societal context and relational needs they strive to be accomplished for.

Based on the results presented here the following research question will be answered:

To what extent are the personal attributes of the individual in interplay with his or her experience of religion and spirituality?

In the first paragraph the important life events of individuals will be discussed that attributed to the conversion to spirituality or Christianity or the change in conviction and belief. Since a lot of respondents also reported their beliefs as being a reaction to the societal context this will be presented here as well. The second paragraph will present a conceptualisation of the different ideas and viewpoints people have on religion and spirituality. How does it affect their relations and the course of their everyday lives? It will become clear that there is a strong focus on relations and the relational needs that are fulfilled: Relations between people, but also with other actors, human and non-human, even extra-mundane actors as well as the relationship with oneself. Two groups have been investigated: New Christians and New Spirituals. These two will constantly presented separately, a comparison will be made in the conclusion of this chapter.

4.2 Important life events and societal context

This section presents results that introduce the religious background of the respondents, important life events and their ideas about society, taken into account the fact that for both groups it was argued that they respond to changes in the broader societal context they are present of (Wilford, 2010; Roeland et al, 2010).

New Christians

The majority of the New Christian respondents reported to have changed church during their life course or was not Christian and has converted to Christianity. They all have different reasons for this, but it shows that for the majority this was related to a difficult period in life, incited by the experience of disappointment in their lives. These were disappointments in the relationships they had with others. They found the fulfilment of their relational needs in the personal connection with God and the community of believers. This either resulted in joining a church, or changing church, often from traditional (Reformed or Protestant) to a newer church (evangelical). Michelle who was brought up in a Reformed church explains what made her decide to change church:

VB: So at a certain moment you decided you wanted attend a different church?

Michelle Yes, I wanted to go to a different church. I don't know if that was exactly where it started, but well, you grow up with a church, with stories and with a way of life but at a certain moment the image I had of God changed so dramatically that it didn't fit in the church that I attended anymore.

VB: How do you mean?

Michelle: Well that is a very long story. Belief is so part of who I am, in my life, that it is very difficult to summarise in two sentences. But if I try to make a long story short it was the case that I was a little bit stuck in faith and in life in general. I was very depressed when I was 19 and I was also very angry, with my upbringing, with my church and God. It actually comes down to that after a while I said: if this is what God is and what the Bible is and what faith is, then I don't care anymore, and if this is what life is, than I don't care about life anymore either.

[.....]

Michelle: [S]o I said to God, or actually to 'if there is a God': when there is a God, please, and with that, when You are there I would like to hear what the purpose is of my life and if You are who they say You are. That is what I have communicated and that is what I got a response to. And that response was so obvious, but also so obviously different that the God I was taught existed, that I couldn't communicate, it just didn't match so to say.

This quote makes very clear that while Michelle was suffering from a depression she experienced no help from God by giving her a sense of a purpose in life. This made her feel very disappointed in the God she got to know during her childhood, but also angry with her family and the church. When we look at the relations that serve as the basis of her existence according to literature (Slife & Wiggins, 2009) we can say that the relational needs were not met, she did not feel meaningful. The God she met during this difficult time did gave her an answer on the question what the purpose of her life was and therefore lived up to these relational needs. She broke up the relationship with her old church and joined another, non-denominational church. In this church she finds the God who loves her for who she is. She finds love in the connection with this God and acceptance and experiences similarity with the other members of the church. There is a clear sense of belonging to a community.

Alyssia had a similar experience. She was brought up going to a Catholic church, but she was not convinced about the existence of God. She describes:

Alyssia: I was thinking, it is easy to believe it, but I don't see God and I don't think about it. I can manage. But at a certain moment I became conscious, about the fact that everything doesn't revolve around me and that there is much more and that you become really small and that. I just had the feeling that everything turned dark and well, that's just really strange.

VB: Was that a specific moment?

Alyssia: Yes I lived in Utrecht, worked at the central station, at C'est du Pain, the sandwiches and I was working in one of those mobile units, you know, detached from the big store. So I stood there and I saw people busybusybusy and I thought: where are you going? So busy and so real and I thought to myself: Why? Why do I have to get up in the morning, why do I have to go to school, why do I want this, I might die tomorrow and all I have been doing is worry. This turned into a very dark period of my life. Everything is useless at a certain moment. You do the things you have to, you go to work, to school, you participate, but at a certain moment you become isolated, you cannot connect to anything. It makes you feel like I don't care, everything can be over tomorrow. And that it when I asked questions: God when you're there you have to intervene now, because otherwise it is useless for me. Then I let go, after I asked that question, crying, inside, I didn't tell anyone. Eventually I let go and continued my life and I went to Groningen, for my sister's birthday and my cousin said: you have never attended my church, in Groningen. And I thought, no I have never been there and when I went there it felt logical to me, it was like... yes this is what I want. Suddenly it was very clear.

Again you see the need to experience being meaningful in life, which she did not feel in the life she was living and the relationships she had. Alyssia also asked God what the purpose of her life was and just as Michelle she was affirmed as significant by God. She also indicates that the church she went to, a Pentecostal church, gave her the feeling that this was the place she belonged, where she could meet God and define herself as a Christian. Before, both Michelle and Alyssia were taught about God, but they did not feel this personal connection.

What it is exactly that people find in these churches is described by Robert, who was also raised in a Reformed tradition, but decided in his twenties to join an evangelical church. He met someone who showed him another side of the Christian faith than he was taught, which made him realise that the words of God during the sermons and in the Bible are not just pretty words, they are

lessons, applicable to your own life. He describes what he felt when he went to an evangelical church:

Robert: I always had the idea that there must be a way of being Christian in which you have the idea that people really want to live for God. That they are not just practicing a ritual, that it is not just culture, but there is a real desire for God, a real desire to worship Him.

The personal connection with God and the applicability in the daily lives of these people is described as most important. This is indeed what the New Christian churches are about, the personal relationship with God, and the subjective experience of Him in your life (Vellenga, 1991; Wilford 2010). The applicability is described by Julia:

Julia: I see it as a set of tools. We have to potential to develop ourselves emotionally and spiritually, but we need tools to do it. We are so distracted. And the religion I consider as just tools. The goal for humans is to develop ourselves. And if you analyse any religion, they all will provide you something good, apply it in your life for well-being. That is the goal, to find happiness.

[...]

We need examples to apply in our lives. For me that is Christianity.

In this quote we read clearly that she uses Christianity as a toolbox for personal well-being. This toolbox was also agreed on by Robert: when he was introduced to the evangelical church he found that the writings in the Bible meant something in his everyday life, that he could relate to the words and live up to these in his daily life.

The last thing that should be mentioned in this context is the broader relational context of which everyone is part of: society. Julia explains:

Julia: My personal opinion is we live in a world that is of course globalised, we have access to so many things, sometimes we forget the main reason to live. Sometimes we forget that, I conceive that we also consist of a spirit, or the soul, it is not only the body, not only the matter but also the energy that we also have. We need water to survive, we need food that are the sources for us to keep alive but it is also necessary to develop there is something else in humans that we need to develop and that is something abstract, that is something we cannot see. So as humans if there is something we don't see, we don't believe in it. And that is why so many people say we don't believe in god. It doesn't mean that something you don't see doesn't exist. The same with oxygen. You don't see oxygen, just stop breathing and you will die. And this is how I conceive God, it is everything, very difficult to describe because we are so limited in the way we perceive.

The access we have to so many things, and therewith the enormous amount of relationship we have with others, human, but also non-human actors, makes us forget the most important relationship, that which gives up a purpose in life.

In terms of relational needs it becomes clear that the needs were not met in the relation with God, church and also the broader context. In the relationships people entered when joining a new church the needs were better accomplished for: they experience being meaningful in their lives. With this we see a complex web of relations and individual characteristics that work out on the individuals decision to adhere to a church and the experience of their religion in daily life situations.

New spirituals

Just as the New Christians, the New Spirituals started to immerse themselves in the spiritual world, not just because they were interested, they also had the idea they were missing something in their life, that the relationships they had were not the ones that nourished them completely. Firstly, when we look back at the lives of the New Spirituals respondents we see that the majority had some form of religious upbringing during childhood. However, they were on the one hand discontent with the idea that was presented in these churches and on the other hand did not agree with the interference

of the institute church. Secondly, they refer to the relationships that make up society, which are very demanding.

Firstly their religious upbringing: the ideas presented in church did not match their experience of God, or the larger reality. In the questionnaire Simon defined himself as being Roman-Catholic even though he never goes to church and is interested in all other kinds of spirituality. When he was asked about this he responded:

Simon: You see, Catholicism is the idea of my upbringing, of my parents, which in my opinion is the first foundation. And at a certain age you are capable of thinking about it and you start searching, and reading and then I find things about Catholicism that do not appeal to me and then I think, what does? And then you come across Buddhism, or something. Well, then you think there is something more, but the idea of God being a person in heaven, the idea that I got very much from my church, apart from the question if that is what they meant, it could be that my interpretation as a child was not completely right, now I have the idea that a part of God is in you. That makes it just as easy, or difficult, what you like, it is more about how do you experience it, how conscientious are you and what do you carry out to people in front of you, or the larger community, or the bigger picture.

Simon describes that when he grew older the idea he received in Catholic Church did not match his own ideas about God anymore and therefore refrained from going to church. Now he still believes there is something more, or greater than life here on earth.

Similar stories were reported by others. Marjanne was raised Dutch Reformed, because her father was Anglican enforced her mother to do so, Rosalie had to go to church every week and to Sunday School and so did Ans, who told that she was so rebellious that she got suspended from her Bible class. She was being rebellious because she already knew she believed in something that was occult in the eyes of the Christian religion. She also emphasised the importance of an individual connection with the divine without interference of an institute:

Ans: I have the idea that churches, either catholic, Islamic, protestant, or whatever, arose from human convictions. There have been people that have thought: this is what I am going to tell, because that will hold people together. That goes against the grain with me. It is better to search for that higher power yourself and connect with that, or get a better understanding of, or listen to, than getting served what you can or cannot do by a pastor or minister.

For others the propensity to search for the spiritual was provoked by disappointments in life, but also of life itself. An example of this is Carola whose partner was unfaithful to her after which she got introduced to spiritual ideas and she went to attend a workshop in Gemma's centre. Gemma owns a spiritual centre in which she meets a lot of different persons who are attending her workshops, or spiritual sessions and courses. She mentioned how a large number of her students entered her courses because of a large variety of problems such as depression or non-functioning relationships. She states that when people experience a crisis in their life they start searching for something more in life.

These problems are often related to the second idea presented here: the changes that are going on in our society, responding highly to the focus on consumption that is common in the western society. This focus on consumption, materiality, and worldly demands has made us forget the focus on the spiritual. Gemma sees that her students are often high educated, with a good income, can buy everything they want, but are not satisfied with the life they are living. They have the idea that there must be more to life than the material; a state of being that is pure and related to that 'something' bigger. This cannot be found in money and materiality. Luc is a perfect example of this. He and his ex-wife had a double income and no kids. They owned a nice house in Utrecht and could go on holiday three times a year. But he was not happy, felt as if he was missing something in life, a goal, or a purpose. He gave up this 'perfect' life to walk the spiritual path. He now lives alone in a small rented house, with hardly any possessions, except for his spiritual objects. CDs, gemstones, candles, ankh signs, paintings of Mother Mary, Jesus, Krishna and more are placed on his home altar.

This feeling of discontent with contemporary society can be related to the relational needs described in chapter two. Luc was missing a purpose in life, which can be interpreted as a lack of

feeling meaningful in the relationships he has with others but also with society. Society can be seen as a complex set of relations that comes with different expectations and obligations. Evert describes this very well:

Evert: Spirituality has to do with balance: more balance and finding yourself. However, the society is focused on getting you out of balance by making you do the things they want. The government wants you to do things, your family wants you to do things, your friend wants, the church wants, the police wants, tax service wants, the neighbours want, the children want, but what is it you want?

In this quote by Evert you clearly see that your whole life consists of relationships. You have relationships with your family and friends, for society is also a set of relations: the police, the government et cetera. In this quote you sense that he has the idea that he has to give too much and therewith loses out of sight the relationship he has with himself. It is therefore very difficult to find a balance between the different relations and the relational needs that come with this.

What is more, the New Spirituals are convinced of the idea that the society is changing and that spirituality is also for other humans becoming more and more important and even inevitable. Simon relates to the 'speed of society'. He says:

Simon: The world accelerates quicker than the evolution of mankind to adapt to these changes.

We as humans cannot keep up with the speed of changes in society. He refers to smart phones that we use in order to make this more and more efficient, meaning we can do more things in one day, but we do not spend more time on ourselves, we do not take more free time to do nothing even though this is extremely important.

The most extreme idea is represented in 2012 theories. A common conception within different 2012 theories is that there will be a major change in society. There will be a change of the solar system and our psyche, a change for the planet and for us human beings. The theories differ from a total apocalypse; the world is going to split in half, to a kind of quantum shift in human awareness and consciousness. This can mean that people are going to experience difficulties in keep up, especially those who have not developed their spiritual self (Boot et al, 2010).

Rob: They are taken along with a flow that no one can escape, everyone takes part in this and more people starting so search for well-being, not in the established order that is collapsing. The society, everything with rules, established orders, everything collapses and humans get out of control.

He states that the society and other institutes will collapse, because people will not feel the need to attach to these anymore. However, according to him people need some sort of guidance, otherwise they will get out of control, in his eyes the exploration of the spiritual side of life. The idea of Rob represents perfectly why the society makes it important for individuals to start exploring their own spirituality and with that, experience personal growth. What this is exactly will be presented in the next section.

4.3 Relationship with God, self and others

The previous paragraph showed that the relational needs are very important in decision to join a church, or immerse oneself in the spiritual aspects of life. The relationships of religion and spirituality in which relational needs are fulfilled will be elaborately discussed here in terms of relationship with God, with oneself and with other human actors.

New Christians

The idea about religion by New Christians is largely institutionalised in terms of the Christian faith, the Bible and the church people adhere to. The ideas about Christian religion are all captured in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament of the Bible. This does not imply however, that religion, or God, is experienced the same by everyone. Just as with the New Spirituals, the focus is on the individual experience. What became very clear in all the interviews is that religion, or belief, is not something that can be explained easily, because it is so integrated in the lives of individuals and because of this people find it hard to clearly define in what respect it is related to the things they do and their relationships. Michelle states that:

Michelle: Belief is such a large part of my life, of who I am, so it is very difficult to summarise it in 2 sentences.

Barbara shares this view, she says she cannot imagine herself without religious experience, which makes the choices about leisure, work, friends, everything in daily very natural, and therefore very taken-for-granted. However, there are two main themes that allegedly were described as most important: the role of and individual connection with God and the community of Christians.

Firstly the role of God: people explained that for them Christianity revolves around God: God is a very important, maybe even the most important actor in the lives of the respondents. They stated very clearly that when you are a Christian you give your life to God and you believe that Jesus gave his life for the people on earth, a huge sacrifice that we, as humans, should be thankful for. Not only is God a leader that they follow, God and Jesus are supporting actors in the lives of individuals. Unconditional love is one of the feelings that the respondents described as deriving from the relationship they have with God. Besides unconditional love they endorse the feeling of acceptance of who they are. Michelle said she had the idea she can act in a way that she really is with full support from God. In her opinion this is a huge difference with the traditional church she was raised in where she felt a lot of pressure to live according to rules.

The acceptance and the feeling of belonging give some a feeling of security. For Barbara it is a secure feeling that there is more after this life:

Barbara: I don't have the feeling that everything ends after death, but how, no one will answer and I am not going to fantasise about it. I think it is a reassuring thought that it is not immediately over, but how it works, we'll just leave in the middle.

Alyssia also referred to a sense of security in her daily life. She explained that she is more conscious now she has converted to Christianity; she lives her life more aware and has the power to continue in difficult situations. Before she found it a challenge to deal with difficult situations, but now she has the idea that Gods helps her through and that she can put these things in the larger perspective.

Alyssia: I find a lot of peace in the fact that everything has happened before. When something happens you are not the first to deal with it and that puts it into perspective, it makes the problems less bad. Of course you are human when you heard that terrible things have happened, but I can let go more easily now.

Robert described that he already knew that God existed, but by making a confession of faith in the evangelical church he attends now he really felt that God became the most important actor in his life. God determines what you can or cannot do. This connection is very personal, he states:

Robert: For me it about the personal. Me and God and us and me and you: meeting and indulging that together is what being a church is.

In the quote of Robert you also see that besides the personal connection with God, there is also a 'me and you' connection which implies that even though the relation people have with God is very

personal, there is a large communal factor in Christianity, which implies that there is a large sense of belonging to a group of people. The respondents have indicated different reasons for the importance of the community. Firstly they find it very important that they meet with others who understand them. This common understanding, they deem, allows people to get closer to who you really are and strengthens your beliefs.

Julia: The main reason I go to church is to interact with other people. Not just to stand there for an hour. If I am not learning I cannot apply it in my real life. [...] You need others so you are constantly interacting and talking about it and are involved.

Not only is this a personal relational need, secondly the building of a community is also something that they refer to as a task that is written down in the Bible. Meeting with other Christians to worship God is a clear task that according to them is one of the foundations of Christianity. Alyssia referred to this as fellowship.

However, meeting with other Christians is not obligatory, it is recommended. As mentioned before, God is leading and knows what is best, individuals still have free will and can therefore make their own decisions. Both reasons are represented by this piece of text by Michelle:

Michelle: God knows what is best for us and I listen to that. And when he says it is good, getting together, you are all brothers and sisters even though you would normally not choose each other, because I am the one who brings you together and at a certain moment in time you start recognising each other. You can build on each other, support the widows and the orphans. There is a community and you support the people who need it. That is faith, that is contact. So, I don't know, that is the main motivation to say what it offers me. Faith, that is where I meet people who say: I see you are Christian and I see something has changed in your life.

In this the fulfilment of relational needs is clearly visible. By saying: 'faith is contact', she emphasises that faith revolves around relationships. This was also concluded by Versteeg (2010) from researching a Pentecostal church in Utrecht, the Netherlands: Religion is about relation. In the relationships New Christians have with other Christians they can be who they are, they can define themselves as being a believer of God. While being with other Christians they experience the feeling of mutuality. And the importance of these relationships is coherent with the expectations of other relationships that are not met. Michelle explains this with an example of the EO youth day (festival for Christian youth).

Michelle: The idea that so many come together for God, while we live in a country where churches empty and it sometimes seems if you're the only one. It is very pleasant to see people lifting up God together.

She feels the need to strengthen the relationships with the Christian community since the needs for mutuality and possibly also self-definition are not met in the relationships with other people who are not Christian. In this quote she raises the idea that the need for community gets even stronger now the number of Christians is decreasing. Others also referred to this, especially related to the expansion of the Islam. Churches are being demolished, but mosques shoot up like mushrooms, according to Dave. This can be seen as reason for the growth of these New Christian churches: in these churches the sense of community is very strong.

What is more, it was already argued that relational needs were experienced not be met and this was presented as a reason to intentionally enter into relationship with God and a Christian community. It should however also be noted that this personal relationship with God is also embedded in the relations people have with others. The actual activities are described in the next chapter, but in the light of relationship with others one pregnant example should be given. Robert regularly attends different activities related to his belief. He specifically mentioned a conference he attended in Toronto, Canada. In 1994 there was a religious revival in the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship: when people were praying, it seemed as if lightning struck, people started laughing and crying, they

fell on the floor and started shaking (Poloma, 2003). According to him and others this is something that God did himself, God showed his presence. After this happening a lot of people came to Toronto to attend a sermon, because the presence of God could still be felt there. Robert explained to me that visiting that place and experiencing this made a deep impression on him which made him love God and long for God even more. This is something that changes people. Apparently a lot of people changed, affecting their relations, marriages, health and more. He explains his experience:

Robert: People fall on the floor and.., you experience a kind of warmth, tingling, I started crying, other people laughed, but something happens inside you. The first time I was alone, I went with a friend and my wife stayed at home. After I came back she wanted to talk and everything, you have problems with intimacy, you know, those things. But the funny thing was, something had happened to me, I changed, softer, or... After a few weeks she said: I think I have problems with intimacy. Somehow I came very close to her. Something had changed inside of me, very special. After that I went there again, with her.

He explains that he changed and that with his personal change the relationship he has with his wife changes as well. For others this is also felt in the relation with others:

Michelle: For me it means also how I look at people for instance, that is how God has changed me concretely, how I look at people. In the past, I would constantly like, I couldn't get along with that person, or I didn't like him, or working together was difficult because I thought my boss is stupid. And now I pray for that, can You please bless him and her so that we can work together, actually with all people. Before I met you I also prayed, I say can You please bless Vera, bless her with a good interview.

In this we can see that the imaginative connection with God is continuous and is therefore an actor in her social network: it is a connection that is in interplay with the relationship she has with others.

In the quote of Alyssia earlier in this chapter she mentioned the feeling that she could not connect to anything anymore when she went through a difficult period in life. She felt very isolated. This changed after she felt the connection with God. She describes that these other relations are not important anymore, everything revolves around her relationship with God. In this relation she finds everything she needs: love, acceptance, security and the feeling of being meaningful. She even states she does not need contact anymore. The experience of the imaginary relationship with the divine power, God, has an effect on people's thoughts and emotions and therewith on their behaviour towards others.

Earlier in this chapter the task of building a community of believers was mentioned. The Bible also contains messages that are of influence on relations Christians have with others. In this the normativity, or how life should be lived, that was described in chapter two flags up. The Bible is therefore an important actor in the networks of the New Christian respondents for the Bible mediates between God and the individual. Barbara referred to the fruit of the Holy Spirit as a guideline of her life. This a nine point list of Christ-like attributes of a true Christian life. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. She reminds herself of these attributes every now and then to assure herself that she lives up to them and is therefore living the life that God has determined for her.

New Spirituals

Spirituality is probably one of the most complicated and indefinite term that is used in this research, since it is highly diverse and diffuse. Chapter two has put forward that there is a focus on well-being, a path that should be followed and the existence of something beyond human beings. During the interviews the same elements were put forward. One of the most heard ideas about spirituality is that it is intended to develop one's inner life and that this is based around the idea that there is a larger reality of which individuals are part of. To live life fully it is argued that one needs to be aware

of this larger reality and act towards being part of this, sometimes referred to as: 'walking the spiritual path'. Importance in this respect is that according to the New Spirituals there is not one path; there are multiple spiritual paths to one's own spirituality. The eventual goal is the same: finding your inner spirituality.

For this spiritual path different tools are used derived from a wide range of ideas and techniques that are based on different spiritual movements. To give a few examples: Rob is a reiki master and a blossom therapist, which means he uses energy derived from flowers in healing practices. Luc practices the initiations of the Munay-ki, a spiritual wisdom from the Inca's, which aims for reaching higher consciousness and change in the evolution of mankind. Carola and Simon mainly practice meditation to feel a connection to the larger reality they are part of and develop their spiritual self. In the next chapter the actual activities that are connected to these ideas are elaborately discussed. What can be seen is that there is a clear influence of Eastern philosophy. People have reported sympathising with Buddhism or using ayurveda, the traditional Hindu science of medicine and read the Vedas, texts that are believed to be of non-human agency and used in Hinduism. But essentially, all these people had very similar ideas of what of what spirituality means for them. The different practices can therefore best be seen as a toolbox, as Luc mentioned.

Important to realise is that:

Marjanne: For me every creature is not just a physical creature, but also a spiritual creature. That means that spirituality is in essence found in ourselves, on the condition that you know yourself well and willing to express that spiritual aspect of yourself.

In this quote it is not only read that according to Marjanne everyone is spiritual, but also that spirituality is in essence found in ourselves, which means that the individual, the self has a very important role in the understanding, but also in the enactment of spirituality. To get to your inner spirituality, one must first of all accept oneself the way one. This means you have to feel free of other people's opinions, not feel the competition with others. Respondents described how they always felt the pressure to compete with others and being aware of the things others do better. Instead of doing this you should focus on your own talent, in your own pace. Especially Carola noticed a change in herself after accepting this. She felt less stressed in unexpected situations. Everyone has something that he or she can do very well, your own talent and this is the talent and the dream you have to pursue, without looking at others constantly. Evert describes:

Evert: Free will is the most important. It is about respect, which means you should also respect choices of others.

You should have respect for others, but this also means that they expect that others have respect for them. This relates to the statement of Evert earlier in this chapter in which he describes how hard it is to stay balanced. This indicates that the search for your inner experience, for spirituality is embedded in a large network of relations that might not be compatible with the relation you have, or want with yourself and your inner spirituality. The statement of Evert therefore also shows frustration, frustration about the expectations from other that are different from the expectations, or desires you have about your own life. That these differences are so manifest for the respondents gives them the idea that the relationships that make up the conditioning of this earthly plane of existence, such as traditional religion and the desires of materialism has led to disregard of our spirituality.

Yet, the majority stated to be convinced that everything and everyone is inherently spiritual but in this world the spiritual role has been ignored for worldly demands (previous section). Respondents who are working professionally with spirituality, such as Gemma, who is a spiritual teacher, and Rosalie and Evert, who are engaged in healing explained that people are often not aware of this, of their own spirituality, which can make them ill, not only mentally, sometimes even physically and therefore the true spiritual, higher self must be revealed and to this end a variety of

healing practices are taken up. In other words: the New Spirituals are seeking to rid themselves of the ills of society and the environment. These healing practices will be described in detail in the next chapter.

On the other hand, there is more than these notions of inner spirit, respect, free will and the path you have to walk, there is a sense of something outer-mundane, that something greater of which we as humans are part of. So besides the connections with others, and yourself, horizontal, worldly connections, a vertical connection is often believed and therefore searched for. What this extra-mundane, or greater something is, is no absolute consensus about. It is referred to as something that is greater than ourselves, but that we are part of as well. This can be named God according to some, but according to others this is about different layers of consciousness. Gemma describes these different layers of consciousness:

Gemma: See, I believe human exists of a higher and a lower self. The higher chooses the good and the lower knows seduction. That is how I see it and the task for humans is to move towards the higher self as much as possible to be there and let the lower self go as much as possible.

Simon speaks of something bigger than himself:

Simon: It is something bigger because it goes beyond humans, or it goes beyond the globe. The earth we live on the larger reality I think and you can think a layer around that and you end up with words like cosmos or something, or the universe. That gets so abstract that you can't visualize it, or believe in it, but let's just limit it to something really concrete, the globe we live on. We can say, we manage, or control everything, but I think we should have a bit more respect [for the earth].

What is important in this respect is that according to many of the respondents the individual has free will. There is some guidance from the extra-mundane, but the free will is very important to be aware of. Important to note is that it is never something that is completely outside of yourself and there is no such thing as an external power that you have to obey or that has control over you. This guidance can be derived from your higher consciousness, which has overview, according to Carola and Ans. An entity from the outer-mundane can be a guide, or guardian angel. Just as there are different ideas of the larger reality, here is a diverse range of ideas about this guide. Some say it is an entity that used to be a human being, while others suggest this guide to be you. You are your own guardian angel, it is the part of you who has a complete overview on your life, it is your higher self. It is that little voice in your head that is you in a different layer of consciousness.

Luc spoke about the way we notice this guidance:

Luc: Everyone has those moments that you feel really good. That can be with alcohol, or a nice and sunny day, but it only lasts for a minute. It can last for two minutes, or a little longer, but those are moments that.. Let me say there is a bigger spirit, a garden gnome if you like, and he guides you. So those blissful moments you receive at moment are to remember: this is actually not what you want. Sitting behind a computer all the time.

It is these blissful moments that he aims at working towards, because these moments are shown to you what life is really about: a connection to this larger reality and these different kinds of consciousness. In this quote we can read a strong sense of belonging of what Game (2001) referred to. You have those moments in which you just feel this is right and this is in a connection to something, in this situation the larger reality. Game referred to belonging as an in-between state of being within and without ourselves. This is exactly what is happening here, he has an embodied experience of a connection with this larger reality.

All these ideas about different consciousness and other entities are pretty difficult to understand when not experienced personally. What these ideas have in common is that they were related to the concept of energy. Humans are energy, our higher consciousness is energy and the entities some

perceive are also energy. Difference is the density of this energy. Luc explained that our body is a very low density of energy and therefore perceptible. Our mind on the other hand has a higher density and when we develop our spirituality we can develop higher levels of consciousness that have an even higher density.

We will not go in to anymore detail about explaining what this energy exactly is, because it is not something that we can prove exists. Important to acknowledge however, is that for the respondents the energy is embodied in situations and in the next chapter it will shown to be an important non-material actor left in the situation by people or previous events, or it will be present as an attribute of the human actors present in the situation. Rob explains the importance:

Rob: We often talk about God, he is not on a cloud, but I am convinced there is energy that we all work with. We are energy as well, you must understand that. The energy is moving and we can steer it by thinking and by doing.

The last set of relationships discussed in this section is the relationship with other actors. When we see spirituality as a search for the inner self, we can imagine that the relationship with the self is the most important relationship. However, as the literature puts forward, everyone wants to belong to someone or something and everyone is always in interaction with others. During the interviews it almost sounded that some respondents implied they could live in isolation from others, that interacting, or even relations were not necessary anymore. Nonetheless, they also indicated that interaction with others is very important. Both ideas will be discussed here.

Luc spoke about the time that he started to 'walk the spiritual path', as already mentioned before and reported that you have to let go and disconnect first before you find who you really are. Even though all other relations were broken, and there was nothing left in terms of material things, he now feels really rich, fortunate.

Luc: had a new relation, I got divorced two years ago, straight into a new relationship, but we broke up two weeks ago and now I am left with nothing. But I feel 100% satisfied.

He is certain that one should not be afraid to break up relationships, relationships that do not satisfy your needs, in order to experience personal growth in terms of spirituality. Rob described a similar feeling and idea:

Rob: When you get deeper to yourself, you get calmer, more peaceful, others irritate you less, it does not upset you and when others feel the same it would be a bit more peaceful. But it is most important that you feel comfortable. It is not about if someone else feels comfortable. Eventually it is just about you. When you ask people: who are the most important persons in your life, my husband, my wife, my kids.. Then I ask: and where are you? You should be always number one. I call that healthy egoism. When you are not number one, you will always be serving others, which means you are never yourself. Try to be your number one, but that is not always easy.

This again shows that the individual (and the relationships with your inner spirituality) are most important according to the majority of New Spirituals. Carola also mentioned that she needs less people, less contact now she has found the spiritual lifestyle. In this we see that the relationships with others do not feed her, she says she does not need to go out anymore and meet up with a lot of people. These relationships do not make her feel meaningful. This shows she is disappointment in relations and is now more focussed on the relation with herself and other relations that do feed her. Rob continues his argument by saying:

Rob: And in relationships you shall always see when someone starts working on himself, he becomes poor company. When that person is always making coffee and suddenly says: do it yourself, others say: what's wrong, you always make coffee? So the stronger you are, the more unsociable you are to others. And when you are strong enough to accept that, the other has to change, go with you, or disappear. That leads to divorces and so on and that is good. That person just not suits you at that moment.

What Rob describes here is that one should not be afraid to be rejected by others and the fear not to belong because you are unsociable, as he says it. If you want to develop your spirituality, develop a relationship with your inner self you have to pull up a border towards these others.

Of course the idea of living in isolation is not completely true. A lot of the respondents, including Rob, stated that the interaction with other human actors is very important, first of all because talking to others and having discussions is an important learning process. By talking to other people you can find out what if you think is really what you feel and act towards. It stimulates you to think about what you say and respond to critical questions.

Another concept that has often been mentioned is mirroring. It is mirroring that is affecting with who you have a relation with and is related, of course, to energy. Several respondents mentioned this concept whilst speaking about their family, friends and acquaintances. Briefly speaking mirroring means that if you change, the people you have a relationship with change too. Rob explains:

Rob: When you will change in situations, the outside world will join you automatically, that is energetically determined, we call that mirroring. Miraculous things can happen. One of the things I noticed is that when you start to control yourself, you will change and others will also change.

He continues by giving an example:

Rob: No, you don't influence the people. If I would influence them I wouldn't learn anything. I change myself, go to myself and other people change with me. That's one of those things. I used to have a friend, we were friends for almost 20 year, and people sometimes said: how do you keep up with that guy? And I sometimes thought: what do I do with that guy? Afterwards I realized that I needed him, he complemented things that I needed and the other way around. At the time I started working with myself and started seeing things I didn't need his energy anymore, and very slowly this friendship flows away. And those are in fact the mirrors, positive, negative, all mirrors, the outside world is one big mirror so to speak. A positive mirror are the things you admire in people and the negative are the things you still need to work on. So all the people you hang around with, are you mirrors, they are your learning processes.

This resembles the idea that relationships change when an individual changes as well. This also means you attract the people you need at that moment.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has put forward the ideas of the New Christian and New Spiritual respondents in terms of religion and spirituality and how these relate to other personal attributes such as important life events, the perceived societal context and their personal relational needs. It was shown that for both groups their beliefs and path they walk according to these beliefs are used to apply meaning to their lives: they are life-affirming, life-fulfilling and even live-giving for a large number of people. When this is related to the literature on relational needs we can conclude that the relationships on which religion and spirituality are based, such as the relationship with God, the community and the inner self, or higher consciousness, redeem for the inadequacies they perceive in worldly relationships.

Moreover, the results have presented that these relationships are in interplay with the other inter-human relations individuals have. New Christians feel they have changed by the relationships with God and therefore need less social contacts, they feel fulfilled in the relationship they have with God and they give this more meaning by participating in the community of Christians. New Spirituals indicated to notice the change in inter-human relationships. When they change because they are coming closer to their inner self, to who they really are and their place in the larger reality, their relations change as well, related to the idea of energy.

These results convey that both groups are having a specific orientation towards themselves with others and their place in this world. The difference seems however that New Christians very much shape their existence from the relation and experience they have with God and the larger

community, that serve as a basis to enter other inter-human relationships. The New Spirituals on the other hand are more focused on themselves and their relation to everything, which is their experience of spirituality, from which they approach their relation to others.

Now we understand these beliefs and relations as part of a person's personal attributes we can take a closer look at the physical movement of these individuals in terms of leisure activities and therewith the interaction with different sets of actors.

5 Leisure activities in multidimensional situations

5.1 Introduction

The introduction of this thesis started with the idea that religion and spirituality are performed and experienced in day to day activities, such as a leisure activity. This chapter explores the different leisure activities undertaken and investigates how the encountered spatial attributes of these activities are related to an individual's experience of his or her religion and spirituality. This chapter will be structured around different spatial situations in which these activities take place. By doing this the embeddedness of the activity and the individual in the multidimensional material and immaterial context will be presented. The following research question will be answered:

How is the experience and performance of religion and spirituality related to the embodiment of the spatial situation in which leisure activities take place?

To understand this we need to provide an overview of the broader situations in which these performances and experiences occur. Therefore all the activities set forth are situated in the assemblages of relationships between the individual, other human actors, the material and non-material spatial attributes. The focus will be on the continuous interaction with the different actors involved and the affordances of these actors, whether people, objects or natural elements. Key in this chapter is the human body: the body encounters the situations and is being encountered, inciting affective relations between the different actors involved. Understanding this created affect requires examining what happened from a physical and sensory perspective and exploring the thoughts, feelings and emotions that are evoked. We will see that in these activities different relational needs, as described in chapter 4, are given attention that underlie the relationships people have with themselves, others and God. This embodiment creates situations in the everyday of the spiritual or religious body with nominally profane actors. The perceived spiritual and religious experience is therefore very subjective and might not always be shared with others.

This chapter will be structured as follows: first of all the differences and similarities of the concrete leisure activities and presented meaningful spaces of the two groups will be analysed. After this, three sections will present different interactions that took place during the leisure activities: Interaction with human actors, interaction with the built environment and interaction with the natural environment. The distinctions might seem arbitrary, because according to Actor network theory everything is interrelated and therefore in situations in which human actors are encountered, there is also an interaction with the material environment. However, to structure the results it was chosen to look at the most explicit encounter during the activity that was mentioned by the respondent. This chapter will conclude with a section in which the New Christians and New Spirituals are compared and with a brief conclusion of the main findings.

5.2 Leisure activities and meaningful spaces

In chapter two it was hypothesised that New Spirituals find their spirituality in more day to day mundane leisure activities and that New Christians are also expected to ascribe a high amount of attention to their beliefs in their daily lives, since their beliefs revolve around their personal relationship with God. Both groups have indicated which leisure activities they undertake and provided a few photographs of meaningful space to catch a first glimpse of the actual activities.

Even though church attendance is declining amongst Christians, this is not the case for this particular group, the New Christians. When looking at their activity pattern we see that all of the

Christian respondents go to church every week. Obviously, the spiritual respondents attend churches not as often as them, but they have indicated to visit a church every now and then. In the upcoming sections it will become clear that these visits take place usually when there is no service. New Spirituals going to church while there is no service implies that they do not visit a church for the people in the church, but for the actual building. Apparently they are interested in the space as being some kind of sacred space. This is confirmed by the result that the majority of the spiritual respondents has indicated to visit monuments and religious objects every now and then, in contrast to the New Christians. Besides this, it seems as if the New Spirituals are more interested in other cultural activities, such as theatre and going to a museum.

The other thing that stands out is the wide range of visits New Spirituals pay to natural environments. The majority has indicated to visit a forest, meadows, dunes or the beach at least weekly. One of the practices performed is walking, an activity that nearly all the spiritual respondents have indicated to perform at least weekly. Walking is also performed very often amongst the New Christians, but considering the fact that they not indicated to visit nature that often and that the majority lives in urban areas, these walks can be casual strolls through the neighbourhood as well. Besides the difference of nature visit, there is also a difference visible in the number of social activities, in this case visiting friends and family. It seems that New Christians visit their friends and family more often than the spiritual group. Both groups hardly ever go out to bars and cafés, apart from a few exceptions.

Figures 3 and 4 on the next pages show the presented photographs in order to have a quick glance at all the spaces people have indicated to be meaningful (some respondents did not present any, others showed photographs from a photo album, these are therefore represented by a short description). When looking at these photo's it is indisputably visible at first glance that New Christians have mainly put forward photographs in which persons are captured whereas the photographs of the New Spirituals have a focus on material attributes of situations: either nature or a building.

Some examples: in the Christian group we see a picture of Dave's daughter. He mentioned that she is being raised with the Christian faith, something he finds very important. Barbara showed a picture of her choir, her brothers and sisters and of her husband and children. New Spirituals show very different photographs: Gemma and Simon showed pictures of their practice in which they give workshops on personal growth, Marjanne showed a handful of photographs of natural environments she visited during spiritual retreats, among which Yosemite National Park and Grand Tetons National Park in the United States. This appears to be consistent with the results from the activity table which showed that New Spirituals undertake more activities in nature, whereas New Christians find their family and friends more important to pay a visit during their free time.

Julia's family



Barbara's family



Figure 3: Photographs New Christians

Choir



Holiday Surinam with husband

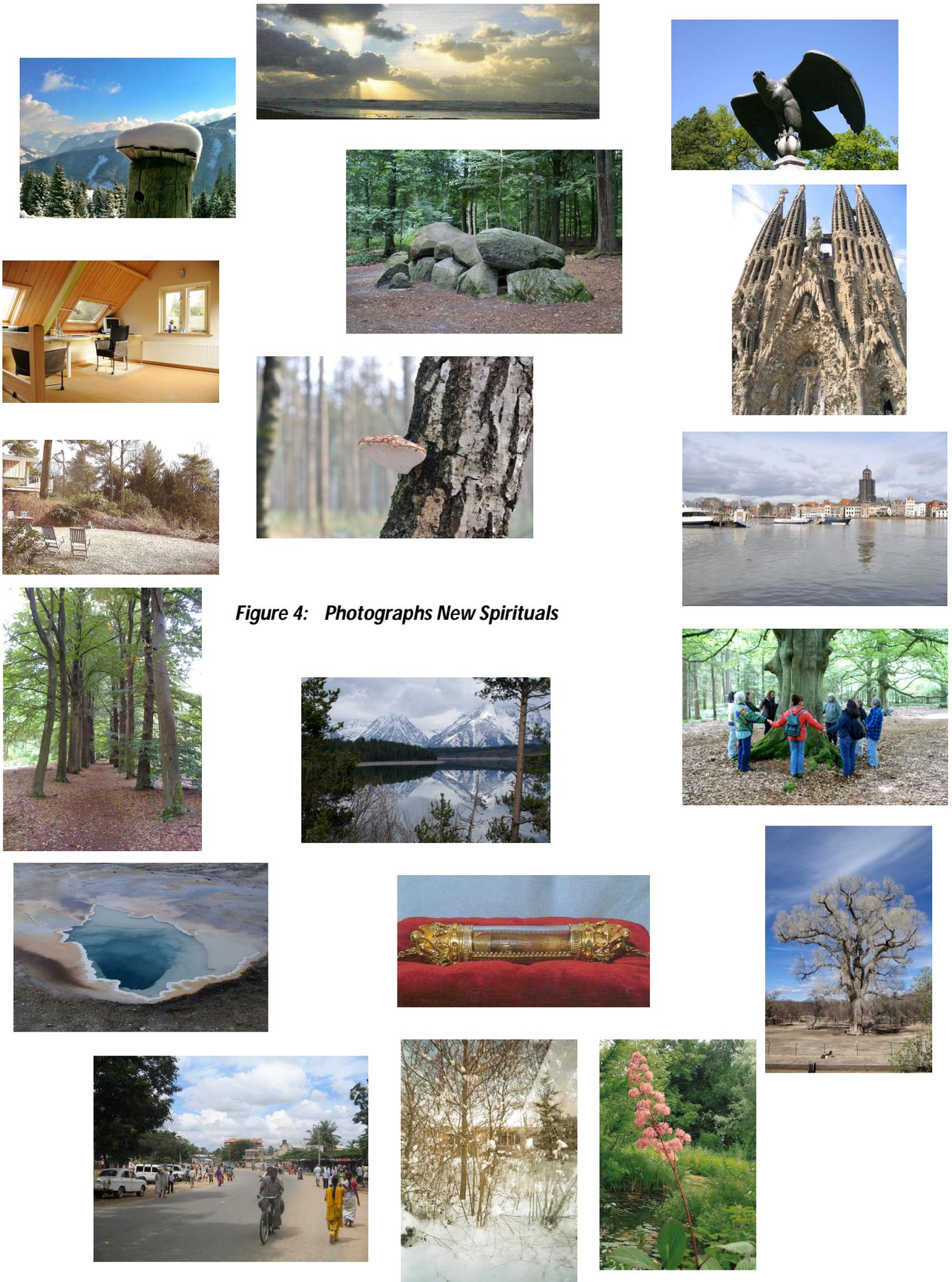


Figure 4: Photographs New Spirituals

5.3 Interaction with human actors

We recall from the previous chapter that both groups had clear ideas about the interactions with other human actors. How these ideas are shaped in the leisure activities they undertake or how these ideas attribute to religious or spiritual experience will be analysed in this section.

5.3.1 Community

New Christians

One of the most fundamental religious practices for the New Christians in which they interact with Christian community is church attendance. All of the Christian respondents reported to go to church at least once a week. Dave and Alyssia attend a service twice a week and also go to Bible study. Barbara, Michelle, Philip and Robert go to similar activities organised by their churches weekly as an addition to the regular church service. Just as in more traditional churches, adherents of more modern Christian congregations see visiting church service as the most important act of faith: a religious practice which gives meaning to their belief system (Digance, 2006). Alyssia, who converted to Christianity in her adulthood, explained the importance of community:

Alyssia: That is ideal, because, well it is not desirable to live alone, without contact.

VB: So that is part of it?

Alyssia: Yes, some people think, I can do it alone, there are enough people who just do their things at home. But still, in practice, it is not just for yourself, you are busy with others and that supports. You support people who need it, they support you. It is a community.

VB: of like-minded people?

Alyssia: Yes

VB: I have also heard people saying that the meeting of people is very important; it is even mentioned in the Bible.

Alyssia: that's right, getting together is an assignment, but you can also say I meet with my husband, we do our things at home, or when you have children, with your family. You don't have to go to church, there are multiple options.

This fragment of the interview with Alyssia demonstrates the main argument to go to church: the inclination to build a community of believers that is assigned to New Christians in the Bible. This is important for personal reasons, to fulfil relational needs, as described in the previous chapter. The willingness to go to church expresses the personal relationship these people have with God. They admire God and want to be accepted by Him and they aim to accomplish this by defining themselves as a good Christian. Other activities reported that have the same reason and experiences are gatherings related to Bible study. By getting together with other New Christians, people feel acceptance of other Christians and they experience that they are being meaningful, in the quote of Alyssia represented by the idea of supporting others and being supported. Due to the tight-knit nature of the group people feel connected to each other, they experience similarity and recognise each other. As Robert jokingly said: *'when I like someone he must be Christian'*. That this feeling is very strong is represented by a meaningful story he described:

Robert: The meeting does add something. Of course you can, alone.. when I am on holiday I always take my Bible with me, so I can read some and pray while I am sitting in my chair. But the meeting with other New Christians is definitely adding something that can be very beautiful. I remember when I was at Curacao, my sister lives there, she is married to an Aruban man and at a certain moment, we were there, and she never goes to church, but she said there is a new church here, New Song or something. Well I am always interested to have a look, so I went there. Everything was in Papiamentu, so I couldn't understand a word, but it did touch me. People started singing towards each other, something that we sometimes do as well, but not that often. They sing a song which means something like: the Lord has put words in my mouth, on my tongue to bless you, or something. You turn towards people and look at them happily. Tears were running down my face, because I felt related to these people. They have the same spirit as I have. I really felt one with these people, even though I could not understand them.

The encounter with other New Christians Robert depicted here visualises how the feeling, or idea of mutuality in the relationship with other New Christians creates affect in a church in a country that is unfamiliar to him. Meeting other New Christians abroad and feeling so strongly related to them, because they know God, without even understanding them and without having any emotional connection or memory to the material environment, brings about very strong emotions. This implies that the imaginary connection between New Christians all over the world is very strong. The bodily reaction of crying, presumably of joy, is elicited by the situation in which he feels a connection with like-minded and hears music of which the lyrics have meaning to him.

New Spirituals

Just as New Christians go to church every week, the majority of the New Spirituals have indicated to participate in workshops related to spirituality weekly. It should be noted however that a large number of the respondents was sampled via spiritual centres, resulting in a slightly biased picture of the importance of these workshops and community.

Results show different motivations to attend, or even organise spiritual workshops: they want to facilitate the need to get together, others want to learn about spirituality.

Amongst others Gemma organises workshops and believes she facilitates for the need of New Spirituals to get together.

Gemma: Back in the days you would go and sit in church and the imam, or pastor would say what was true. Now you see that people reflect much more. And the people who thought about it saw so many contradictions in the whole happenings of the church and that was the reason they stepped out of it. Look, and I show them, with all the knowledge I have what the truth is and you see a change in them. I believe man consists of a higher and a lower self. The higher chooses for the good and the lower knows temptation. That is how I see it and it is the task for people to move themselves to their higher selves as much as possible and to let lower self go.

VB: And can I say that you are helping them with that?

Gemma: Yes, I am a, in India they call it a guru, but in the Netherlands I am just a teacher, I help them with it. I have the possibilities because I have had 30 years of training by studying and by different teachers.

VB: can't people do that alone?

Gemma: that is hard, because people often don't have enough knowledge.

In this explanation you can read that interacting with other New Spirituals is very important in order to learn about spirituality. Even though it was argued in chapter 4 that spirituality is about yourself and your inner journey towards this that one can learn by interacting with other, some also argue that one should learn basic skills and ideas from a teacher. Rob, who has participated in a wide array of workshops and studies to find his personal spiritual road, agrees with Gemma that people need a teacher. He takes this even a step further by saying:

Rob: People are aware that there is something, they are searching, they feel the tension, they feel the agitation and want to have rest. There must be something to make people aware and able to deal with in. So you could almost say that we need a spiritual leader, almost like Jesus. Someone who tells people in a very honest way how they can find their way to work with energy.

Societal changes are the basis for this statement. In the previous chapter it was described how Rob believed in a major change in 2012, related to our consciousness and changes in relationships. This change is inevitable and he recommends to everyone to work with their personal spirituality and to do this we need a leader, or a teacher. However, there are no dogmas in this perspective. In Gemma's workshops she shows the possibilities and opportunities, but every individual can decide what he or she does or does not do. She says:

Gemma: There is one way, but in designing this way people can choose from thousands possibilities. We only say: there is one way, and that is the way to your divine being.

By participating in these workshops one can connect with like-minded people. According to the respondents this is important to them, because they are looking for confirmation of their spiritual experiences and they want to know how they can grow spiritually and have a more meaningful relation with themselves and the world. On the one hand this connectedness is short and transient: the workshops often consists of no more than a few days, stimulating relationships between the participants, and breaking these up again when the workshop is over. These relational needs and the change of fulfilment of these needs is represented by Rob:

Rob: At first you need it, to collect people around you to share that feeling. There is nothing more enjoyable than being able to talk with others about the same subject. So when you search for a spiritual direction and that touches you, than there is nothing more fulfilling than talking about this. The biggest danger is however that you only talk, without doing anything. I experienced that process, I felt like a sponge, willing to try everything. I have tried a lot of things until I finally found a moment of rest. Certain things stay, things that make you feel good and then there is a moment of rest. Like now I have a period in which I say, ok it has been enough, I don't want anymore. And that is when it hits you. At the moment you find your rest and don't need others, incidentally, you will have the biggest confrontation with yourself and that is the most difficult thing there is.

What this quote represents is the idea that everyone wants to belong and in these relationships experience similarity. The importance of talking with others about your spiritual direction stresses the importance of relationships and the needs people have. How these needs are fulfilled changes however. Once they are personally confirmed of their ideas people do not need these workshops and other gatherings anymore, they fulfil these needs individually. Since spirituality is largely aimed at the relationship you have with yourself, with your inner spirit, people have the view that they have less needs for relationships with others. On the other hand, people are still mentally or spiritually connected to each other in terms of their mutual ideas and convictions. By their common ideas, that they have learned during these workshops and meetings, which they apply to their own experiences, they are embedded in a relational network that incites the embodied experiences they have in other situations.

5.3.2 Interaction with others

Both groups indicated that they have friends that are like-minded in terms of their belief, but also friends that have very other ideas about these themes. In addition they undertake activities in their everyday lives in which non like-minded people are encountered. In this section a brief look is taken into situations in which other human actors are encountered who are not Christian or spiritual and the embodied experiences these encounters evoke.

New Christians

The context in which New Christians undertake above mentioned activities (church attendance) are very secure in terms of the other actors involved. The actors have similar ideas and accept each other in terms of religious beliefs. A less secure environment is the context people experience while preaching the gospel, or evangelisation, another assignment described in the Bible, and during encounters with non-New Christians in everyday situations, such as non-Christian friends and colleagues. Even though according to the respondents God crosses the boundaries of churches and the private realm, the Christian beliefs and ideas are not the prevailing ideas outside the churches and the private spheres, creating encounters with different, inconsistent ideas and regimes that are carried by other human bodies.

Robert describes three situations, two about evangelisation and one casual talk with a colleague:

Robert: In Lunetten [a neighbourhood in Utrecht], at the start of the new season there is a kind of market, with things from the municipality, all kinds of things. At this market our church also has a little stall where we invite people for an introductory service in the new season. This makes you pretty vulnerable because you.. by inviting people you can get ehm, you notice people having aversion. Other people don't care, but there are people with whom you feel a sense of aversion. Those can be people who have experienced something. I had the same when I was working at Capgemini. I was talking to a colleague and we touched upon the subject church. He said: oh no, oh no. He left his church because he was treated really negatively. Well, that is very sad. Another colleague heard us talking and entered the room: oh Faith, I am anti this and anti that. That I don't mind because I am interested in why that is, but eventually..

VB: No, but at that moment, at the market you are speaking up.

Robert: Yes and that makes you vulnerable.

VB: and that can of course evoke very strong reactions.

Robert: In the neighbourhood we also have, a special newspaper was printed with Easter or something. I ordered 200 items and handed them out to people, door to door. So not through the mailbox, but ring the door and hand them over personally. And yes you see a lot of people: oh no I don't want. However, most of them want to have it, but there is a group of people who are unfavourably disposed. And that does not feel good, it feels as if you are rejected. But I can accept it, because it is reality. Jesus has said, this is what people are going to do and even worse, they will put you in prison and so on.

This situation represents feelings of vulnerability and rejection emerging through the interaction of the body of Robert and the other entities in the situation, in particular to the other human actors around him. These emotions, deriving from the embodied experience are evoked by a person's body language, or even verbal expression. These expressions of the other are in their turn a bodily reaction to seeing Robert and his church. This shows that all the actors in the situation are in constant interplay and create situations that evoke certain experiences. This embodied exposure however and the experience deriving from this do not refrain Robert and other from preaching the gospel, because they feel it is a task imposed by God. In terms of relational needs we could say that he wants to be found meaningful and accepted by God which makes him accept the feeling of insecurity and rejection in his relationship to others.

On the contrary people are sometimes hesitant to talk about belief, because they experience the situation unsuitable to do so. They restrained themselves from talking to others about their belief because negative responses could follow from this. Dave and his church used to be very active in evangelising, but he decided not to do this anymore. Now he speaks to people individually when he feel the time is ripe to do this. Interestingly he spoke about the norms that are present in public space: one cannot start praying in the middle of the streets or someone thinks you are insane, instead of enlightened. These norms are also present in other situations: Philip spoke for instance about evangelisation being prohibited at his work.

Encounters with non-Christians also take place in friendships: all the respondents have both Christian and non-Christian friends and do not select their friends based on their religious beliefs. Alyssia mentioned that being a Christian is not a necessary condition for social contacts. In the context of going out for dinner with her colleagues she said: *'I don't have to feel better because I know God'*. This does however imply that she does experience a certain boundary between herself, a believer, and others who do not believe in God. Even though she states that she does not feel better than non-believers, the fact that others do not believe is present in the situation and is in interplay with her feelings. Michelle referred to similar feelings: she does have friends and acquaintances that are non-believers however the persons who are closest to her are the persons with who she can talk about God. Again you see that for New Christians mutuality is very important in a relationship.

Others have indicated that it is not just the idea of believing in God that is interacting in the situation via the individual, it is also God that is present as an actor in the situation in which others are encountered:

Michelle: There is a text in the Bible, I believe it's in Paul, praying continuously is what he calls it. When I was younger I thought: how is that possible, you pray for dinner, you pray before going to sleep, but you cannot pray all day long, you have to go to school, you can't...? But now I think: yes indeed. I'm constantly aware of the fact that He is here. Just as if I am saying things to you, I say things to him in between and sometimes I get response. With Him I want to spend my life.

This statement by Michelle stresses the idea of God not being bound to the walls of a church building. Also other respondents explained that they are in constant interaction with God in their everyday lives. Just as Michelle, Philip explained that he is in constant interaction with God. He said that even though he lives alone he never feels lonely because he knows God is always with him.

Philip: It provides me with security, it is a very personal relationship I have with God. Just as I am talking to you at the moment, this is how I speak with him as well. And I do get answers from Him, in a way I can never predict. But he is there and that is a security.

This interaction with God is clearly presented in the practice of prayer. Prayer is a practice performed during church service, but all the respondents also pray at other moments of the day. Michelle exemplifies this that not only did she talk to me during the interview, but also with God. Likewise, in other situations this is also happening, not only is she in relation with the people she encounters, also with God. Her relationship with God is embedded in the situations she participates in:

Michelle: I often walk on the streets with a lot of other people around and I think: a lot of these people don't even know God, and even if I am not in a church I think: gosh.

VB: What does that make you think?

Michelle: Well it makes me feel really bad.

VB: Yeah do you care?

Michelle: Of course.

VB: And you come across that everywhere of course?

Michelle: I don't just think, I also pray for the people, I give them a blessing.

VB: at that specific moment?

Michelle: Yes, not that I stop them or something. I say God, you love these people so much, bless them and bring them, show them the path and bring them to their path. Can you show them to bring them closer to you.

In this very mundane situation, an everyday street, it becomes clear that her relationship with God is of influence on the relationship she has with others. Because she 'knows God', she believes she can have an impact on others. She and others described that God is present everywhere, others, such as Robert, have the idea that they mediate the messages from God with their body and therewith has an effect on the situation. Robert feels the presence of God because he receives pictures in his head. These pictures have something to do with the situation he is in or will be in. Robert also feels he has to pass these messages on to the people they belong to. By doing this Robert has a meaningful relationship with God and with others. Being in touch with this source of power points to the centrality of the body.

New Spirituals

We recall from the previous chapter that the interaction with others is important for the learning process, but can also be experienced as different because of the different energies embodied. In this section some specific situations will be described in which these interactions were considerable.

Even though talking about God, referred to as evangelisation, or preaching the gospel, is mostly related to Christianity, some New Spirituals have indicated also experiencing the need to convince others of their ideas. Evert said that when he just started to engross himself in the spiritual world he wanted to persuade his friends and family into spiritual practices. This resulted first and foremost in negative responses by people who were not interested in his ideas. In order to protect himself from this harsh rejection by others he closes himself off to others, hence he set a boundary around himself

to be protected against relationships with others that were fearful. Based on the literature it can be said that he avoids closeness or intimacy in order not to be rejected (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). This boundary means that he is not open to others about his true self and his spiritual ideas. He does this because he wants to be accepted by these others. However, it is difficult to find a balance between being accepted and defining yourself, something that is already mentioned to be very important for this group of people. He said that he had to be open to come to his true self.

Rob and Rosalie had similar experiences in the interaction with others and are therefore also reluctant to be very open about their ideas. However, this hesitation is not only felt because they want to protect themselves for the reaction of others; they also have the idea that the idea to walk the spiritual path has to be an individual decision, or as Rob said: *'I am not a messiah'*. Hence, they are not consciously concentrated on having an impact on someone else in the interaction they have with other people, but they do share the idea they do have an effect on these people in the situations they encounter and vice versa. The interaction with others is crucial for their sense of spirituality, because the situations with others and your personal reaction to that bring you a bit closer to who you really are. This was elaborately discussed in Chapter 4. Carola describes how situations with others are important for her personal spiritual development:

Carola: And as I already said, it does change, your own truth changes, because you don't know the truth, you only own a small part of the truth. Sometimes you think this is it and then you proceed, encounter certain situations and you think: ohh this is how it works.

VB: so you are constantly collecting pieces of the truth by the different situations you come across?

Carola: Everytime you think: hey this gets me out of balance, but why? It is something inside you that causes that, but that is triggered by something outside you. Why does this affect me?

VB: what kind of things could that be?

Carola: well, last week for example, I had an assignment for school and we had to be a little early, to talk things over and I was clearly on time, but there were people way too late. And then I think: him again, always too late. Oh why do I think this? Of course he is late, that is not right, but why do I care? I know why, it's a new situation and I prefer to discuss things beforehand, that makes me feel more secure. That has to do with me, that I feel affected, but that doesn't alter the fact that he should be on time, that was the deal. But I shouldn't be bothered. And that is what I'm dealing with: why do I feel like this? Sometimes I don't know, but next time there is a similar situation and I might know it.

VB: So how important is the interaction with others?

Carola: well, if there were no others you wouldn't learn, there wouldn't be situations. That is extremely important.

In this situation she clearly represents the need for self-definition and the importance of the interaction with others for the personal development process.

Others would argue that you attract these situations because you attract the situations and interactions that you need at that moment. This is a clear connection to the larger reality: the synchronicity of the everyday which can be seen as a true lived experience of the divine in everyday life, referring to the idea that nothing happens without a reason and everything is meant to be. Ans explained this when she was asked about her leisure activities:

VB: and you also do yoga?

Ans: yes and because that was cancelled and I have a funeral tomorrow..

VB: I can be here today?

Ans: Yes and that is how it should be, the cosmos is with you and that is 'Transition Energy'. Do you understand this case? I received a mourning card, exactly at the time you should come here for the interview, which was planned for tomorrow, so I thought gosh I have to cancel that. And today's yoga was cancelled and you wanted to come a little bit earlier, so..

VB: it worked out perfectly.

Ans: indeed.

[...]

I: And there is a reason for that?

R: Yes, that is also Buddhist, trusting that everything first. And if it never fits you are doing something wrong, you have to have more faith in changing your patterns.

In these examples you see that she attributes these situations to a certain intuition or guidance. It is this guidance that allows things to happen, as long as you listen to it.

On the other hand, there are also people who are different, have a low energy as the respondents mentioned. It is exactly these low energies that people want to be closed off from and therefore the avoidance of situations is also a common theme amongst the New Spirituals. Just as New Christians are consciously avoiding certain activities and situations, spiritual people have little interest in social activities such as going out to pubs and bars. This has mainly to do with the perceived energy of drunken people, aggression. According to Gemma their lifestyle is different and therefore she does not feel good at these places.

Gemma: They tell me they don't need to go out anymore, to go to a club, or a café.

VB: And why is that?

Gemma: because they don't feel good, because of the people that drink a lot, aggression, they just don't feel good. [...] And it is not a judgment to others, but it is more a kind of realisation. Not that all those people are less worthy, it is not like that, but it is a whole different flow of energy, a whole different lifestyle.

She emphasises that she is not judgemental to others; it is the embodied experience of the energy present. Carola gives a few reasons why she does not go out much anymore. She hardly ever goes out for dinner, because she has different friends now that do not go out and she has changed her diet, which makes it difficult to go out for dinner. The conscious lifestyle she has restrains her from going out to bars and other nightlife places, because drunken people do not appeal to her. She explained that she rather meets with people to talk about subjects that nourish her.

This choice for meeting like-mindedness is therefore an inevitable aspect of people's leisure activities. Gemma explained that when she was younger and went on holiday with her children she would choose a holiday home in a holiday park of Landal Greenparks instead of another park because the visitors of Landal are interested in nature and calm family activities whereas visitors of another park, such as Centre Parcs, have not developed their higher self, they have very low energy, according to Gemma.

5.4 Interaction with the built environment

Leisure activities, such as going shopping, or attending a theatre play, but also going to church take place in the built environment. This section is divided into churches and other spaces for contemplation and other types of urban environments. In the built environment other human actors are encountered, as was already elaborately discussed, but also material objects, such as objects and symbols. These are all actors in the situation that is embodied by the respondents.

5.4.1 Churches and other spaces for contemplation

New Christians

When we think about leisure activities we not necessarily think about going to church. However, there is an argument for including religious practice in the analysis as a leisure activity. In the literature we have read that leisure and religion are often linked, because in the twenty-first, individualised society both are related to freedom. This entails that religious practice is nowadays more a choice, rather than a somewhat obligatory activity, pressured by your family and community, especially for New Christians who have consciously chosen for the church they adhere to.

The most pregnant built environment in which Christian respondents participate is the building in which their church service is being held. In all described cases this building is not a typical, traditional, church building, but a school, or a gym. When asking about the spatial attributes of the church it became clear that none of the respondents attached any specific meaning to a traditional

church building. Michelle even argues that a being in a traditional church incites a feeling of aversion, because she, amongst many others, was raised in a traditional church. She explains:

Michelle: Yeah I don't know, I don't know the value of a church building, I am not sure what that can add, I even think it hinders me because of my background. It is kind of liberating actually, that you can return to the core of what you are doing instead of being caught up in a formality of which you think it is normal.

The core of which she speaks is your personal relationship with God for which you do not need all kinds of material aspects and rituals (that are present in the more traditional churches which she attended before). The New Christian churches are very sober in terms of symbols, objects and rituals. When there is no meaning attached to the actual building, it also implies that during the week these buildings have no specific meaning for them, but at Sunday morning, and other days when service is held, turn into an assemblage of attributes that is sacred, where people come together to meet God and worship Him. This is an interesting phenomenon, especially when you have seen the impact these gatherings have on people, felt the atmosphere in one of the megachurches and seen how people embody what is happening there during service. While visiting these churches you see that people respond to this music, they embody the music and practice: hands are being raised, eyes are closed, people sing along.

Robert described how he feels the presence of God during service:

Robert: When there is a service I feel I am going to meet God, worship God and I do everything that comes to mind: I put my hands in the air, I kneel, I even lie down on the floor and when I am really happy I might dance or jump up and down. And when I feel that God wants to say something I go up to the microphone and pass it on.

In this quote you Robert described the embodied experience and the embodied behaviour deriving from this. Thus, the affective quality of the space in which these bodies perform is never only personal, it is a product of a complete mix between music, light, sounds, other bodies, gestures (McCormack, 2008). People embody the situation in which all these elements are embedded. These ideas relate to the literature about evangelical churches that stated that church services of these new churches aim to stir up affect and emotions by music, light and visuals (Sengers, 2006). The presence of other people is one of the elements. Getting together to worship God is one of the most important things in life according to the New Christians. Julia mentioned:

Julia: When more than one are gathering for prayer, that is when I will be there.

Another element is the music played. Worshipping is usually performed by singing Christian songs that are directed to God. In the majority of these churches music is inextricably bound up with the services held weekly. There is usually a band playing worshipping songs and all the visitors sing along. The lyrics are presented on big screens. On the question why this music is so important people responded differently, cognitive and affective elements were mentioned. Alyssia answered that it is prescribed in the Bible to use musical instruments to worship God. This can be seen as prayer, performed by using music. Robert sees the music as an aid to meet with God. By listening to the music you are being put in a listening position, making you more open and therewith sensitive to the meeting with God. Barbara agrees with this; she sings in a choir that often sing religious music. She told how she loves the combination of the beautiful classical music and the lyrics.

VB: That brings about a certain experience, by the music you are hearing?

Barbara: Yes it is very close to my emotions. Two years ago for instance, when we went to France I had the recordings of the choir of Haydn, I am not sure what it was anymore. It is about the creation of the earth. That gets applauded, the first day, the second day, it is not exactly as the Bible describes it, but well, the writer has made his variety and that has been energetically composed by Haydn, so beautiful, that touches me. You drive through beautiful nature and you hear the cheering of the Creation, that brings about a lot of emotion.

The assemblage of the music and the visual perception of the nature she is driving through is embodied by her, creating an emotion that incites a religious experience: it reminds her that God has created the world.

The situation described by Barbara indicates there are more situations in life in which people experience their religion, besides the usual church services. God is everywhere, but they every now and then need silence to take a moment for God. These are moments of contemplation in their often very busy and hectic lives. Not only silence around them, but silence in their heads and bodies. Therefore the services are so important, because the music and the lyrics bring the body in a listening position, accordingly. However, some referred to taking a moment for God when they are at home. At the question if she has a special space for that, Michelle answered that she used the silence and comfort of her own house, especially at night in bed.

The most well-known spaces for contemplation are traditional church building. Even though the respondents do not visit these churches they are encountered during activities in the built environment. Whilst talking about the importance of traditional churches it became clear that these churches have different meanings in the situations the respondents encounter. When asking what they thought of the transformation of traditional churches (such as a Catholic church) into apartments, bars and shops, the answers were slightly hesitant. It was not the idea of having fewer churches to go to, because the majority of the respondents does not have service in a traditional church building, but the idea of Christianity becoming less visible in urban and also rural areas. They often related this to the erection of mosques on the contrary: they see a part of Christian history being demolished and another religion, that even suppresses Christianity, said Robert, gaining ground in the Netherlands. What we see in this is a fear of rejection. It is the fear of not being able to carry out and emanate what they want and belief in.

Dave had an interesting viewpoint on the demolition of churches: even though he never visits a traditional church, the idea of seeing a church gave him a sense of security.

Dave: Yes, it is a good feeling when you know there is a church. You never know, I might need help one day and I go to the church and it turned into a gym. So concerning that I do mind.., but on the other hand, the building is not the church, that's how I see it.

If something would go wrong, a traditional church would always be a good place to go to. When there are no churches anymore, where do you go to as a Christian? The buildings where their churches have service are not open when there is no service, or the building has a different function, such as a school. The traditional buildings represent the feeling of security that is felt in the relationship people have with God and their fellow believers, the larger Christian community.

Figure 5: Catholic church in the Kalverstraat, Amsterdam



The visual perception of a traditional church incites a range of emotions, Dave experiences security and Michelle feels the love of God during a stroll in the Kalverstraat, the main shopping street in Amsterdam. Whilst walking there you encounter a small Catholic Church with a sign outside that says: 'just 15 minutes for God' (fig. 5). Michelle explained that she hardly ever visits that church, but she embraces the idea that the people that go shopping in that street, whether they believe or not, are pointed to the idea that God exists. She feels the love of God when she sees this, but is therewith also disappointed that other people cannot feel this love, even though she knows that God willing to embrace these people. By seeing this sign in the main shopping street of Amsterdam she embodies the idea of presence of God in relation to the other human actors that have their own relational networks. This gives her a strong experience of her own religion.

New Spirituals

It was already mentioned at the start of this chapter that New Spirituals also visit churches every now and then. This section will present reasons for this. Furthermore they have their own spaces of contemplation in which certain spatial attributes are experiences, or even brought into the situation.

Interestingly, New Spirituals seem to value the traditional church buildings more than New Christians and indicated to visit church every now and then. That is, when there is no service. There are two main reasons for this: the first being their religious past that they are being remembered of when they visit a church and the second being the atmosphere of a church in terms of atmosphere that attracts them.

The majority of the respondents have a religious background and because of this they have strong associations by seeing and visiting churches. Simon states that our society has deep roots in

Christianity and we should therefore maintain these buildings, otherwise we try to break with a tradition that is so unutterably important to us. Rosalie was also raised religious, but a long time she was hesitant to visit churches, because it was so value-laden due to her past. In the following passage she describes that she is now able to go to churches and enjoy this, feeling the connection with something universal:

VB: Can I say that you still have a certain spiritual experience there?

Rosalie: Yes, you know I think that both spirituality and religion have to do with connection and I think that music, something so intangible, you tune in to something, something universal. With Easter I think about suffering, pain and the hope we all know. And in the church you see very happy events which I find also very beautiful. So I think that I recognise it, mainly the music, now I am getting older. I had to learn all those songs by heart of course and I really enjoyed it when I was a child. I went to Sunday school and as a child I was praying for everyone.

Here you see that it refers to her religious past, but also that music is inherently spiritual that make you create a connection to the divine. Luc agrees with this and explains it in more detail:

Luc: I found out that symbols are important for activating yourself. That is what art is pointed towards, religious art. It is of course very beautiful, but painters are also masters, spiritual masters. They get their inspiration from above, very simple. Bach was a great master, he could see through very complex things, his work is very complicated. And at a sudden moment, I was listening to his music [...] and suddenly I had a clear moment: o this is it! It is about bringing things together. And that is what paintings do, sculptures, they are because of the whole, everything there is, they send impulses to the artists. And look at religious art, it is full of compasses, triangles, Freemasons, skulls, it is symbolism. And it is only readable for insiders. At first you are no insider, but when you start looking at it you feel something happening, but you don't know what.

By seeing and embodying these sculptures, paintings and music he can establish a connection to the larger reality.

Energy is a concept that already flagged up earlier in both chapters. For the choice of practices and the visit of space, energy is particularly important. Energy is described by the respondents as something that attracts your attention, that you can feel and that is intrinsic to people. Marjanne amongst others described that churches have very strong energy, because for centuries people got together with the same goal: worshipping God. As a consequence of this a perspicuous energy is sensed in these churches, an energy that is focussed on this connection with the larger reality. Nevertheless, the energy can also be experienced as very negative. Luc and Evert mentioned that churches of very strict Reformed congregations are not at all pleasant to be. According to them you can feel here that there is a focus on rules and obeying these rules, without respecting the free will of the individual.

Important in this respect is that according to the New Spirituals the energy grows when people make use of it. Changing the function of a building therefore also changes the energy there, because of the different people that make use of the space and the energy they attract by their performance. She exemplifies this by talking about modern churches that are used as a school. According to her there cannot be a good energy for worship on a Sunday, because during the week negative energy is built up due to conflicts between students and teachers. Therefore the feelings you get in an old church are not the same as in a new church.

Besides this idea of sacredness and energetical balance in this space there is an extra feature that New Spirituals appreciate about churches, that is the auditory stillness. Due to this stillness, energetical and auditory, people can contemplate and think about the meaning in life and can get a connection with their inner self. Meditation is the most important contemplative practices for New Spirituals and this is vital to the pursuit of mental clarity and self-knowledge. You will become aware of yourself and your being-in-the-world (Lea, 2008) and therewith work on the relationship you have with your inner self and the larger reality you are part of, as discussed in chapter 4. The body is central to these experiences: all such experiences are grounded in an embodied self that is in a

continuous process of development and idealisation. During meditation people can enter a state of reflection on themselves and get to their inner core. Gemma described the importance of meditation in daily life of people:

Gemma: it is more like a manner to balance your spirit. I wouldn't see it as a ritual. It is a way to find a pause, to get your mind together, to recharge your energy in order to continue. We advise our students to meditate three times a day, but usually they do it twice a day: when they start their day and when they come home, but they should do it three times a day, to reload.

For this, concentration is needed. Amongst others, she mentioned that you can have a lot of control on the level of concentration and attention you give to other actors around you. This level of focus, or concentration during meditation is something that you can practice and therefore it is for some possible to create a sort of sacred space in profane space outside the house, even when there is a lot of sensorial information that for others might be extremely distractive.

VB: can you do that everywhere? Can people do that everywhere?

Gemma: Yes one can sit in a park, you can learn to do it with your eyes open, there is no need to be completely disconnected, no.

VB: but I can imagine there are factors that interfere with this?

Gemma: Yes, when your mind is restless and you hear a lot of noise you can be bothered by it.

VB: So you can practice to be able to do that with the noise?

Gemma: Yeah sure, I have meditated once while a large mowing-machine was mowing the grass. At a certain moment you are able to shut it out. At a certain moment your mind does not get disturbed anymore. You won't let the influence from outside get to you. And you can learn this, you are able to control your own mind. It is difficult, but it is possible. It is a process of years.

Whereas for some this is something that can be done anytime, anywhere, for most finding stillness in yourself can be very difficult, especially in a busy society where people always have a lot on their minds and, as mentioned before, they experience a lot of demanding relationships. For them it is most effective when performed in a situation that they have specifically customised, a place where it is peaceful and quiet. This room that can be used for other activities as well, but preferably for slow and quiet activities, such as writing in order to make sure the energy is calm and positive. Gemma therefore recommends her students to equip a separate room as a meditation room.

Carola meditates in her own bedroom where she has a special pillow and lights incense. These aids stimulate the senses: the pillow creates comfort, a very desirable corporeal sensibility (Bissell, 2009) and the incense purifies the room and opens up the mind, according to Gemma, Carola's teacher. One of the bodied actions is a certain necessary tempo of breathing: by listening to your heart beat and getting a certain breathing tempo you reach a meditative state, as discussed by Simon. Certain objects are used to do this: he uses a computer programme to reach this. Simon is also fortunate to have his own room that he uses to meditate, his practice in which he coaches people (figure 6). He describes:

Simon: Yeah this is the place for tranquillity. Besides the fact that this is my practice, it is also a place away from the family. And that doesn't mean we live in unease or something, our family is just very lively and sometimes it is just nice to take some time for yourself. And this has the effect of being in nature. Only here it is easier to meditate, or create a certain tranquillity with certain equipment. For me that is a way to explore myself and that is what you could call spirituality. Getting more outside yourself, into the larger whole.

Figure 6: Simon's practice



He says it has the effect of being in nature. This is not just because of the stillness and quietness; he has customised it to make it as enjoyable and relaxing as possible by using the colour green and a lot of wood. These material elements make it for him a suitable space to meditate.

There are also objects that can disturb, or distract during meditation, this is related to the high level of concentration that is needed for the performance of meditation. An example can be an annoying buzzing sound, or a phone that is ringing. In the spiritual centre Gemma (figure 7) runs it is not allowed to use mobile phones, because they interrupt the concentration that is needed for the workshop or meditation. Based on this she also advises people while on a weekend course not to call to their families all the time. These are synchronous developments at a physical distance that are suddenly brought into the situation you are in at that moment of which you have the idea you have to give attention to even though you are in the workshop for the relationship with yourself.

Gemma calls this different energy; you are being pulled out the energy that is present in the situation. This indicates how people constantly negotiate the different relations and the situations they are in, they try to balance these in order to fulfil their own relational needs. In terms of the spatial situation we see that people engage in larger networks that bring in multiple geographies in the situation. Even though people will always be part of these networks, by memory or imaginations, they should try to disconnect from these, by for instance switching of their mobile phones through which these relations are mediated.

Figure 7: Outside Gemma's practice



In this example you see that it takes time and practice to be able to try to wrest yourself of from the busy everyday in order to enter a situation that can engender a spiritual connection. When we relate this to what has been said about the goal of meditation we can argue that in order to enter different spaces of consciousness we must eliminate these expectations we have about others and ourselves and search for your own uniqueness and a connection to the larger reality. These expectations of ourselves and others and the interaction with our surroundings have an effect on our mind. Because your mind is constantly in relation to the relations you have. Your thoughts incorporate others, other people, your surroundings and the relations you have with these. You give attention to all these thought about these relations.

Embodied action is thus inescapable in meditative practice that seeks to achieve spiritual growth. However, it is not just the embodied practice that is determining the spiritual experience, profane objects such as incense and candles are also configured in the enframing of spiritual spaces. The energy can be purified by doing prayers and cleanse it with incense. Hence this situation is the relational outcome of an embodied practice with the nominally profane.

5.4.2 Urban environment

New Christians

When compared to New Spirituals it appears that New Christians are less cognitively and even affectively aware of their environment they interact with. In the previous section about church attendance it was already put forward that they hardly attach any value to the material attributes of the service. Nor do they have the idea they are affected by the urban environment in which they participate in other religious activities. These results are reinforced by the examples of Dave and his choir. Dave sings in a gospel choir and performs at different locations. Hence, music is an external stimulus that can evoke that feeling of connectedness and belonging. Other contextual factors are hardly important according to Dave. Together with his choir he has performed at ostensibly secular

places, such as restaurants or bars. Because he performs with a group of believers he feels they are making God great and that it strengthens him in his belief. This again indicates that the community is the most important for the New Christians.

New Spirituals

The specific atmosphere, the embodied experience of the unique spatialities at hand is perceived by the New Spirituals in different spatial situations. They have indicated that the energy at a place, which they perceive, is brought into that space because of the people that use it and the people that have used it, so historical events leave a very specific energy. To explain a few people provided me with a simple example of a house in which people recently have had a fight. When you enter you embody the negative energy of the environment.

Alternatively there are other places in the urban environment where people enjoy being, that are referred to as having a strong, pleasant energy. Rob has a special place in the city of Utrecht:

Rob: there are in any case places where you like to be. There is one place where I like to be, where I used to go a lot when I was younger, the cloister garden of the Dom [church in the centre of Utrecht]. That is because my father used to be a sculptor and they restored it. I used to come there quite often and I already thought it was so peaceful. I would go and sit there and sketch a bit. That is the only place in a city where I could become calm.

Rob refers to the stillness in that situation which he embodies and therefore finds calm in himself and is therefore a good place for contemplation. Marjanne referred to the same space in Utrecht in addition to other courtyards. Not only did she enjoy being there because of the stillness, the energy received by her senses was energy of respect that people have for that space. Due to this sense of respect, the energy there is univocal, something she senses and embodies there. In contrast to spaces used for shopping, going to theatre et cetera. The focus on materiality, on shopping, negative energy, rush, so need these spaces to recharge. Just as there are situations that stimulate pleasant feelings, feelings of calm and quietness, there are also situations that incite the opposite. The atmosphere can be a very legitimate reason for the New Spirituals not to go to urban environments, shopping centres or inner cities in particular.

Rosalie explained the same feeling in inner city areas:

Rosalie: I don't like to go to Hoog Catharijne [indoor shopping centre in Utrecht], there is a very heavy energy. I feel ahh [sighs] when I leave there.

VB: What causes that?

Rosalie: That has to do with energy, it is very busy. I'd rather not go grocery shopping, I find it way too busy and that has to do with a lot of things, with heaviness and with materiality.

VB: also with other people?

Rosalie: Yeah it is so worldly, I just don't find it pleasant to be there.

She continues by giving a concrete example:

Rosalie: When I go shopping with the boys [her sons] I always say: you have a look first. Like the Sting [shop], that is such a warehouse, it tires me immediately when I walk in, I avoid it.

VB: why is that?

Rosalie: loud music fills the space energetically and the people who enter bring energy with them.

Gemma particularly spoke about the sensorial busyness of inner cities that she finds highly unpleasant. This focus on consumption and materiality is not suitable for people with a refined spirit according to her. In shops there is a lot of loud music and shop assistants can have very negative energy that she perceives and has an effect on how she feels. She even speaks of sensorial pollution that is happening in inner cities: loud music, busy visuals. However, she also said that it is not just for New Spirituals, it is also the other way around: people with low consciousness do not value the

incense and here music:

Gemma: That is very personal, right? We can burn incense here, but if you walk in here and you think oh what a horrible scent, because it influences your mind, your mood. Your mood is influenced by the scent and your mood is also influenced by the music we play.

The sensorial impulses were discussed intensively by Evert: he mentioned that he is very sensitive and therefore feels everything around him very strongly. Not only does he perceive the presence of other people very strongly, he also referred to other entities, such as the souls of dead people. Just as we people, they exist of energy, but in a different density and therefore not perceived by anyone. For Evert this largely affects his choice for activities and the situations he participates in. He hardly undertakes any leisure activities in his daily life, since his strong embodied response to all the sensorial impulses do not make him feel comfortable, this unsettles him:

VB: When you have a day off, what do you like to do?

Evert: What I like to do, briefly summarised, is being at places where it feels good. And for people who are sensitive there are not many. It is very place-specific, but also people-specific. When you are a sensitive type and you have to stay in a room with 30 people and one has energy that is totally out of balance, than it is very difficult to shield yourself of from that, while staying open to other. That is the most difficult. You can close yourself off, but then you close yourself off completely.

To overcome these feelings by exposure to undesired stimuli he carries crystals with him that he calls blockbusters. By carrying these he can close himself off from the negative energies he encounters. This closing off from everything in the situation he performs in can be seen as putting up boundaries as already discussed in chapter 4 in terms of relational need. Spaces can also be cleansed by using meditation, incense, prayers, or even the use of angels, as Rosalie explained.

Luc has the same experience, in gatherings with different people he feels the energy of other people very strongly and therefore wants to bring his own objects:

Luc: sometimes you're in a group and you feel, this is not working. There are always a few buggers, you just feel they want to irritate you, they are looking for a fight. Well to make a long story short, there are energy bolls; this is small one that fits in my hand, that neutralises the negative energy that dominates a group. That is very practical in group gatherings, in my case a spiritual meeting. Everyone has different goals and everyone is at different level. And people always think: pfff stupid bitch, what a stupid bloke, there are always these negative things. You notice immediately that the energy goes down. But when you are without any judgement, like she looks weird, but so what. That leaves only good energy to use for which you came there. So concerning that. There are also larger bolls, a white and a blue one that immediately suppress wifi, electricity, power pylons and radiation

VB: So when you have a meeting you could take one of those bolls?

Luc: Yeah that is my plan. I am going to buy a big one. Even when I go to private meetings, sometimes with acquaintances it can be very necessary. I just put that boll somewhere and it gets calm immediately. And as I said, energy follows your attention, so when you are calm, the surroundings becomes calm automatically.

VB: So it is a kind of aiding device?

Luc: yes and you will always need them. When you don't need them anymore you're perfect and when you're perfect you go to the unity and are not here anymore.

In this you see that the very nature of these objects signify or stand in for a force, that is greater than themselves, embodying a conception, relationship or action (Knott, 2009). These objects can be used to customise and therewith negotiate a spatial situation. Marjanne introduced the example of bringing an object from a traditional church into a newer to church to give the church a sacred atmosphere; it is the energy from the object that is brought into the situation.

The embodied experience of a situation is of influence on how people position themselves. Evert might be an extreme example, but he represents very well how the perceived atmosphere can be very determinative for the choice of activities and environment to undertake these activities in. Another type of active positioning is the designing of a special meditation room or the customising of

space by bringing in objects. This is another example of how some people modify their sensory reception as a way of negotiating with the feeling of discomfort experienced in daily activities.

5.5 Interaction with the natural environment

Not only is silence, auditory, visual but also energetical, found in churches and other historical urban spaces, silence can be found in the natural environment. While the previously described practices were in constant interaction with human actors and built environment, with objects and buildings, this section is predominantly focused on practices without people, in nature, about meeting the extra-mundane through mundane everyday life practices in nature.

5.5.1 Open and closed nature

Open nature is a concept borrowed from Marjanne (New Spiritual). When she talked about spiritual experiences she said this was possible in open nature, nature that you can walk through, that is not limited, such as a meadow or a park. This section therefore makes a distinction between open nature and closed nature, nature that is cultivated and has physical boundaries, such as a park or a garden.

New Christians

Even though the New Christians did not indicate to visit nature as often as the New Spirituals, some did mention nature as something in which they see God; they refer to nature as a sign of God's power. Robert goes out for a walk at least once a week to enjoy nature and by seeing the beauty and complexity of nature he experiences God:

Robert: Look when I walk through the woods, I like to walk, in nature, outside, often I start praying, even when I am walking alone. That starts completely natural. I lock my bike, start walking and I am talking already. Also just about that tree, incredible that tree. I can highly appreciate beauty, things that are beautiful I link to God. I see him, eventually, the creation, evolution, you know, eventually he is the creator of everything, everything that is alive and he maintains it. I still find it a miracle, when for instance a walnut tree, well, it sucks up water with its roots and in that water there are some dissolved substances with which it makes wood, bark, leaves, walnuts and everything. I find that a miracle. You have a nut that is feather light, rock hard and you can stick that in the ground and before you know it there is another tree!

In this quote we see two important things that induce this experience. Firstly, he says he immediately start praying. Based on the literature it can be imagined that the rhythmic effect of the walking practice is that you enter a certain meditative state (Wunderlich, 2008; Slavin, 2003), which automatically stimulates the respondent to start praying, since this is a very habitual practice. Secondly it is the material environment that stimulates the senses. The silence and beauty of nature are internalised by his body and incite a connection to God: he sees God in the material actors he encounters. At that moment, the relation he feels with the nature he perceives is mediated by God: the imaginative presence of God gives the nature he perceives a special meaning.

The silence and beauty of nature was also reported by Barbara, who enjoys walking long-distance routes every weekend. She visualised how in nature the different senses are exposed to a wide range of external stimuli:

VB: Why do you enjoy walking so much?

Barbara: Well, it is addictive, you can talk to each other, you can be silent, you can talk in a very natural way and exchange things. Very long, you can continue talking for a very long time and if you want you can be silent and enjoy the nature, I enjoy that so much. You come across such beautiful place in the Netherlands, of which you have no idea and you often don't encounter anyone, it is as silent as it can be

VB: Is that an advantage?

Barbara: Yeah I love it. You get to such surprising places, you see birds, you smell the soil, you feel the wind and every weather is fine.

Michelle lives in the city centre of Amsterdam and therefore might go to nature less frequently than others. However, she does indicate that she relates seeing nature, or in broader terms to God. Michelle also mentioned that she might have a different view towards nature than non-New Christians, that she sees the Creation in the blue sky and the trees. However, she clearly indicates that because God is everywhere and she is therefore not inspired to visit nature to experience this. When she feels the need to create a connection with God, she rather creates a situation of silence in her own house, in her bed for instance, just before going to sleep.

Michelle: Let's just say that when I just met God I could suddenly be astonished by nature, as if I saw it differently. That I saw God instead of a tree or instead of the air. And still, when I sing a psalm, or pray and I am outside, not necessarily in a forest, that I look up, knowing he is everywhere.

Also for Julia seeing nature has a special meaning that she relates to her relationship with God. She spoke about a very special space where she experiences the presence of God. This space is a little corner at the rooftop of her parent's house in Mexico that they use to dry laundry. When she visits them she goes upstairs and sits there, even though it is not even designed to sit. From there she has a beautiful view (figure 8) over the city and the mountains in the far distance.

Julia: When I am everywhere I try to find the time. In Mexico, we have a roof, where you put the clothes to dry. So we have a roof and there are the stairs. It is at the top, where we are living, we live on a hill, so you have a nice view. So in the afternoon I used to go there to relax, think, pray. So that is why I took this picture, it reminds me of when I was there, these moments of peacefulness. It might be not so much, but for me the feeling of when I was there and what I felt, it gives me the memory of those moments. So when I am here I want to keep reminding that place, that scenario.

[...]

Julia: The more I learn the more I see in nature, the complexity, wow.

VB: Does that also mean you see, or experience God in nature?

Julia: Yeah. I perceive God like that. If I sometimes want to get rid of so many distractions and get insight of myself, what I do I try to go into a quiet place, or if I cannot go outside I put on some relaxing music, the sound of water or something and I start thinking about that place. And most of the time that is a place where I can see nature and I can feel the peacefulness.

Not only is actually being on that rooftop stimulating the experience of God, also creating a silent and relaxing situation at home by using music and imagining that 'special space' in Mexico can make her experience the presence and connection with God.

Figure 8: *The view Julia sees from the rooftop in Mexico*



When we look at closed nature, the experience is somewhat different. Robert, who enjoys walking in the forest, also visits the botanical gardens regularly, because he is very interested in nature and different plants. He indicated to start praying in the forest immediately, but the situation in the botanical gardens is different, this can be seen as closed nature:

VB: you just said that when you walk in nature you start praying?

Robert: Yes, but not in the botanical gardens. No, I think I don't manage to do that there, because almost everything, the plants have information signs, so you are busy with the information provided, leaving less space in your head. You see the forest is more open so you have more space to let it go, or let it come so to say.

This example, together with the examples of Michelle and Julia, signify that just as the New Spirituals the New Christians need calmness in their head to make a connection to God. They know he is always there, but making a conscious connection is not always established. In the example of the botanical gardens we can imagine he relates the beauty of all the plants to God, just as he felt in the forest, but the different sensorial impulses in the botanical gardens, in the shape of information signs obstruct him from making this imaginary connection.

New Spirituals

For the New Spirituals interaction with nature was very important in their lifestyle and in which they experience spirituality. The main reason for this is that nature just 'feels good,' because in nature there is no influence of people, nature is harmony because it is energetically balanced and they feel a connection to the larger reality or a sense of belonging.

Luc has an explanation for this. His understanding of spirituality encompasses the idea that we humans know about the different levels of consciousness, but we have forgotten. We now what is best for us, but we have forgotten due to demanding relationships we have with all different actors that make up society. In nature we remember how life should be because nature is the purest form of our earth, without any human influences. This is exactly why he argues nature is so good for

people there are no relationships that you want to give attention to, just the relationship with your inner self and nature, the larger reality we are part of. In nature you therefore get the idea that it is good, it feels right. This is exactly that sense of belonging deriving from the connection with nature that Game (2001) spoke about, as discussed in the literature review. In chapter 4 this was also discussed that you sometimes experience those moments when it just feels right, these are the moments in which you feel connected to the larger reality. Rob discussed a similar idea, he sometimes gets an overwhelming feeling when seeing that *'it is simply right'*, and this embodied experience can evoke very strong emotions.

In order to totally feel free from these worldly demands and be disconnected from your social networks, Simon even switches off his phone when he walks in the forest. By doing this he does not feel expected to pick up when someone is calling. What is more, in nature there is not only less social impulses, there are also less other sensorial impulses. Evert stated that, because he is so sensitive, he finds it difficult to be at places where there is a lot of radiation. This means near power pylons or places where there are a lot of wifi networks and with a lot of people, because they all have mobile phones that emit radiation. Because of this radiation people receive impulses continuously, provoking agitation accordingly. He experiences this nuisance regularly and told me that going to nature is a healing practice, because the energy is balanced here and there is hardly any radiation. Nature is therefore regarded as being therapeutic, it can be used to heal and cleanse your body. Rosalie endorses this by saying that it is wise to visit nature every now and then, when you feel low in energy. It helps you to clear all the energy of the everyday. She has a special Sunday ritual for that:

Rosalie: Yes, I walk a lot with [her husband], every Sunday we walk along the canal and there is a tree, just before we turn to get coffee and I have a conversation with my tree. I was thinking, do I have place, but there is a tree that I stand against, I place my back against it, just pffff and I have a conversation.

According to Rosalie, trees have a very balanced energy and can therefore help you heal your own energy and make you feel connected.

In this connection it should also be mentioned that besides the balanced energy, stillness is also found in nature. The stillness that is missed in urban environments, in busy work lives, is found in nature (and the spaces in the city, described in the previous section). Luc explains:

VB: You are talking about nature, how important is nature for you? I see you have mentioned walking on the list?

Luc: Yes every day. At the moment that is very important to me. I have always lived in Utrecht and look at me now: everything around us is green, green is the colour of rest. I was very restless, I wanted to be everywhere, that's what most people want by the way. And I loved, love, going out. So I was in Utrecht and there are always so many reasons to do a lot of things, people come round, you visit others, to the city centre, to 'Le Journal, such a life is so restless. And rest is not just sleep, but also as at the moment, I just sit here days by myself, I go for a walk, I look at the horses and the cows, I read, listen to beautiful music. So nature gives me rest."

Because of these characteristics of nature it is a particularly suitable place for spiritual workshops, such as Marjanne every now and then gives with her partner. Figure 9 shows one of these workshops. During meditation in nature they are interacting with nature and the other actors that are also present at the place they are at. They, on the contrary felt they could disconnect themselves from their environment by turning their full attention inwards.

Marjanne: You know what, when you are somewhere with a very strong intention, especially with a group with the intention to meditate and you need quietness, it seems as if less people come by and when they walk passed they keep distance.

Figure 9: Spiritual workshop in nature by Marjanne



Besides the meditative atmosphere nature might have for some, there are also other feelings that are evoked while walking in nature. Carola described how nature fills her with awe due to the miraculousness of everything she sees in the beauty of nature. This is similar to what Christian Robert mentioned earlier, that he finds nature a miracle of God. Carola also believes in something that is beyond human understanding, but does not call this God. Simon, who is also spiritual reports similar feelings: the overwhelming essence of nature evokes respect towards the bigger whole that we are part of, making him feel humble:

Simon: I think that, for me nature is something, nature is of course an abstract word, but the forest is one kilometre further down, which is nature for me. That is something that gives me a certain sensation, of which I get a certain feeling. Most people know the feeling of humility: when you're there the feeling that you are only a part of the bigger whole, that is normal and I think you should adopt that attitude. It is easy to say we have big chainsaws, so saw it into pieces, but I think we shouldn't do it. Try to look at the bigger whole. When I walk in nature I feel one with that nature. It is not that I become smaller, but, well, it comes down to words now, but it has something overwhelming, the feeling of being part of the bigger whole, of evolution. And this causes you to experience a certain rest, and a certain, how do I say this, power of perception. It gives you a particular clarity in your head.

The previous chapter spoke about the relational needs of experiencing being meaningful. It can be argued that this need is experienced in the relationship with nature. Nature is embodied and internalised and affect is created of feeling part of something bigger and therewith the feeling of being meaningful and belonging.

The last point that can be made regarding to nature is that the outer-mundane aspect of spirituality for some is also particularly found in nature. We have seen that it the balanced energy and the stillness are creating an embodied experience of inner stillness, necessary for spiritual development. In addition the feeling of connectedness with the larger whole is also stimulated in nature because of the perceived connection some can make with the outer-mundane. Luc explained this:

VB: so nature is very important?

Luc: yeah definitely, here it is very important. No effort and you are in nature.

VB: Does that really have to do with stillness?

Luc: Yes, there are different forms of consciousness in nature. You can be sceptical, but elves and gnomes. It is kinda funny, but they do exist. So yesterday, I had a very busy weekend, energetically, which exhausted me completely, but I walked in the woods for three hours and then ahhhh [sighs deeply], I just felt earthed.

Apparently the connection with these different forms of consciousness are adding to this experience. Marjanne referred to the Hunebed in Drenthe, the Netherlands, a type of single-chamber megalithic tomb, that are for some interrelated to the outer-mundane world:

Marjanne: The hunebed is very special for me because in itself it seems to have a connection to the unseen world. It therefore gives me the similar feeling as when I walk into an old church. The funny thing is that I don't have to sit on, or under a hunebed, or even touch it, sitting somewhere in the forest where I can see the hunebed is enough for me to enjoy the higher energy.

Nature is very much a source of inspiration, connection and maybe even an escape from the everyday world. For the New Spirituals, the embeddedness in nature is undeniable. Yet, the majority of the respondents lives in urban areas and therefore might have limited time to visit nature areas, such as a forest or the beach. Marjanne amongst others, indicated that if she had more time she would go to the beach and the hunebeds in Drenthe more often. However, since this usually takes the whole day, she only goes there every now and then. Therefore she also enjoys walking in inner city parks, small cultivated nature spots in the city, especially in the Wilhelminapark in Utrecht. Not only does she go there because it is very close to her house, she feels good there because it is an old park and full of old trees.

She, amongst others, has the opinion that just as with the built environment, energy grows in trees. A park therefore needs some time to grow and have that power of attraction. This not only account for parks, she argues that for a univocal energy at a place it is important that the function of the place remains stable, that like-minded people make use of it. This argument is reinforced by the comparison of two different parks, the Wilhelminapark in Utrecht, which is an English landscape park and the park of Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, a French garden. Since these parks are designed for a totally different purpose, she does feel a spiritual connection in the Wilhelminapark, but not in Schonbrunn.

Marjanne: I see that there is much more happening here [Wilhelminapark]. This [Schonbrunn] can be bigger and there are a lot of people, it is totally designed to end up at that building. So that is where I would want to go and have a look. [...] Because those big ponds at such a building, often close to the building to mirror it and make it even look building. And that makes that it has a specific function. You also have that here [Wilhelminapark], but that function is closer.

With that last sentence she means that the function is closer to yourself, it is designed as a green, natural, silent area in the city, in which you can relax and take a moment of calmness and it is possible that it instigates a spiritual experience because a connection can be made with your inner self and the larger reality.

Even smaller patches of nature in which this calmness and spiritual experience is found are people's own gardens. Gardening, or being in the garden was reported as being a relaxing activity in which people are aware of their embeddedness in the larger whole, they feel connected to everything around them: the birds, the flowers, the wind that blows in your face. Simon and Rob describe:

Simon: Somehow I find my garden very interesting, that used to be different, it had to be reasonably convenient, now I can watch it for hours and treat it with a lot of care. That is again the respect for the earth to feel a connection to it. See how it works and grow something. Make something out of nothing.

VB: Is that related to a certain calmness you have now?

Simon: Yeah I try to get rid of the fanaticism for efficiency, of the idea that everything must go quick, you know.

Rob: I sat in that garden for two weeks and just watched. Then I decided what he meant. It was so quiet and that impressed me, you start seeing and hearing a lot of different things. I heard the wind, saw the birds, saw what was happening around me. Just by getting rest. I didn't have it back then, I was busy making money. I am passed that stage now and I am on a scheme for seeing that now. It is great just to sit. To sit, to watch and listen.

5.5.2 Water

New Spirituals

A contextual element specifically mentioned by New Spirituals a couple of times is water. There were different situations described in which water was embedded, ranging from taking a shower to rinse off the negative energy from the whole day to sitting on the beach to experience a sense of calm. Central to the experience of water are the ideas of the purifying element, the spatial characteristics and the calming sound. Gemma lives at the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and enjoys the nature there, but she also goes to the coast every now and then to enjoy the sea. She explained why she likes to sit on the beach and watch the sea:

Gemma: somehow water is calming.

VB: Do you link that to something?

Gemma: Water is a purifying element. The element water we see as purifying. It purifies the mind somehow when you are in touch with water.

The effect of water that is experienced while sitting at the sea is calmness and stillness. This is related to the symbolic meaning of water. Rosalie agrees with this, she enjoys going to the sea as well, because this gives her a sense of freedom. The sound of the sea and the sight of the grandness of the sea provides her with a sense of calm. For her, this, amongst other places is a charging spot, a place where she feels she can recharge from the hustle from the everyday. What we see here is that these respondents have the idea they have to give a lot in the everyday relationships they have with the people they encounter.

Marjanne, links the sound of the sea and the movement of the water incites a spiritual experience:

Marjanne: The sea is for me not just something, it is the ultimate water. I think that is because the waves and the tide have a movement just as our breath. I can almost feel the sea with my body via that rhythm. [...] When you can connect yourself with for instance the sea, it for me strengthens the higher, but also the lower. By feeling the sea I feel part of something that is bigger than me. And even though that is not necessarily God, it is a spiritual experience for me.

This quote shows that for Marjanne the encounter with the sea is inherently a bodily process. Besides the sound of water, others mentioned a cleansing, or 'healing power' of water. Water is healing and can therefore be used in rituals, to cleanse yourself and the space. Rosalie also mentioned this, she said that if you feel as if you are low in energy, because you have dealt with people who have negative energy and have therefore pulled a lot of your energy, you can cleanse yourself by taking a shower. Luc explains this healing power of water by the idea that water is the most important bearer of energy:

Luc: Water makes you calm. Not just by the water you see and hear, also by the undercurrent water under your house.

This all indicates that for New Spirituals, besides watching the sea, water is used for different healing and purifying purposes. Gemma makes use of this at home by having a small pond in her backyard. She describes:

*VB: So water is an important element? Does that mean you have a little place for water here [spiritual centre] as well?
Gemma: No, we do have some small water basin outside and there is a big pond but that is private, belongs to the house. I have a pond as well, that is place for calmness, look at the fish, the plants, and look for stillness. You see, people who develop themselves further are in desperate need of stillness.*

Again we see the stillness in this quote, a very important element for New Spirituals. In this we see that in their thoughts, experiences and actions the New Spirituals are very much embedded into the very local situation they find themselves.

5.6 Conclusion

Illustrated by examples from frequently visited spatialities of nature and the built environment has shown that the experience of situations is materially embedded in the spatial situation. This chapter has put forward a wide range of activities of which New Christians and New Spirituals have indicated to experience a relationship with their religion or spirituality. It became immediately clear that there is a difference in activity patterns between the two groups. New Spirituals enjoy visiting natural environments, whereas New Christians undertake more visits to friends and family.

For New Christians the imaginary connection with God and the Christian community is the most important in their life. They enact upon this connection by practicing activities strengthening this connection with God. Interaction with like-minded is very much an embodied experience: being aware of the relational network of the encountered human actor can evoke an emotion. This is therefore considered a mindful, cognitive phenomenon.

The New Spirituals are more focused on how a space feels, very much related to the energy present, brought in by persons and historical events. Therefore you do not know beforehand which situation will feel good, because people are constantly on the move. However there are some commonalities that can be distinguished. Energetical stillness is found in nature where there is limited presence of other human actors, leaving out complicated social networks of demanding interpersonal relations. Furthermore there is no radiation and other sensorial impulses that ask for attention: there is also auditory stillness. Embodied experiences affect the performance of leisure activities. Sensorial information such as loud music can be highly distractive, but on the other hand music can stimulate the internalisation of the words during a service. Leisure activities and spiritual experiences have therefore to be understood as a relational process embedded in the interplay of different events, objects, humans and other actors present in the environmental setting.

New Spirituals have very direct, unmediated relation with the material and non-material environment, they feel a direct connection to the material environment in terms of energy and silence. By doing this they internalise their environment of which they are part of. What Christians see is external to them, the world is part of God's creation, and so are they. They embody the metaphorical sense of nature because for them this is mediated by God.

Several mechanisms were put forward that negotiate or customise the spatial situation, especially by the New Spirituals, because they are sensitive to the affectual dimension of a situation. One of these tactics is excluding themselves from the situations by simply not going somewhere where it does not feel good. For both groups we see that their religion or spirituality is affecting how they position themselves in relation to other human and non-human actors. They think about finding acceptance in relationships with others without losing who they really are and they avoid situations that do not match their lifestyle. New Spirituals retire to their designed meditation rooms to disconnect themselves from the busy everyday life. In this we see active positioning and customising of space. Some even negotiate situations and relationships by bringing in certain objects you create moments in which you recover from other situations.

To conclude it can be agreed on that meaningful space in terms of religion and spirituality is the relational outcome of an embodied practice with the nominally profane. All these results show that situations are highly dynamic. A situation can induce a spiritual experience, whereas when someone walks in the room certain affect is created that can disturb this experience.

6 Conclusion and discussion

6.1 Research aim and approach

This study began with the premise that religion and spirituality continue to show up in very mundane everyday situations even though it has been argued that religion largely disappeared from the public realm after secularisation processes set in (Bell, 1977; Williams, 2010). Several studies (Bernts et. al. 2006; De Hart, 2011; Baerveldt, 1996) have proven that even though church attendance has declined rapidly, a large number of individuals believe there is something more than life on earth. Since these ideas are largely not institutionalised they are argued to be less visible in the public and are therefore not taken into account to research people's daily activities and experiences. However since the start of the 21st century scholars have come to realise that it is necessary to examine not just the overly, official sacred spaces, but also spaces of everyday life that may occasionally take on religious functions and meanings or be infused and shaped by religious values (Kong, 2010; Ivakhiv, 2006).

One of the everyday life moments in which religion and spirituality seem to be present is leisure. Leisure is time after work and household activities that can be used by the individual to perform those activities that are aimed at self-fulfilment or personal well-being. Since religion and spirituality are similarly focused on a certain state-of-mind and well-being, leisure settings have the potential to let the individual explore his or her religion and spirituality; one can seek or create events and conditions in which spiritual growth is most likely to occur or he or she can be motivated to undertake those activities that give meaning to a belief system. This study has chosen to mainly focus on leisure practices that take place outside the private, outside the house in order to explore the interaction with other human and non-human actors.

Research on religion, spirituality and leisure is not new. The majority of existing studies on leisure practices and religion and spirituality have however mainly discussed the spiritual experiences of the activity, without placing too much emphasis on the context in which these experiences take place (Schmidt & Little, 2007; Livengood, 2009). Scholars have argued that geographers can make a difference by integrating the body of the individual and the situational attributes he or she performs in and therewith investigating the role of religion and spirituality in ostensibly secular spaces (Kong, 2010). This performativity in space is approached as being relational because the actor is located in a wider network of actors, both human and non-human. The situational attributes of the activity include human actors, material actors, but also non-material actors, such as sound, the weather, ideas, power relations and in the case of this study the presence of an outer-mundane actor. This research has engaged in the embodied perspective of respondents to gain understanding of how the individual perceives his or her environment and the actors present during the activities he or she performs. Moreover, the individual is also an actor in the situation and his or her bodily presence interacts with the other actors present.

These bodily practices and encounters induce embodied experiences: affect and emotions are created that can be related to the experience of religion and spirituality: the unconsciously perceived shiver when observing the perfectness of nature or the feeling of connection with God when religious texts are sung. In this study however, these experiences are given an extra dimension. Our connectedness to others is given meaning by universal relational needs such as the need for being meaningful and feeling security (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). On the one hand the motivation for being religious or spiritual can be placed in the context of relational needs and on the other hand the embodied experiences of religion and spirituality can be given substantive meaning by these relational needs.

Here this study aims to formulate an integrated approach which permits a richer understanding of the geographical context of leisure activities and the performance and experience of religion and spirituality, incorporating more of the dynamic interplay between the context and the

individual. Taking all these elements into account, this thesis has introduced a rich picture of the multidimensionality of the situations people encounter during their leisure practices and the induced emotions and affect. Two groups were chosen that are growing in the Netherlands that at first sight have a very different activity pattern for performing their beliefs: New Christians going to church and New Spirituals being less institutionalised with a stronger focus on the individual. The key strength of this approach and contribution to existing literature is to capture how the experience of religion and spirituality emerge uniquely for individuals in concrete situations in daily life through the interrelatedness between personal attributes, the spatial situation and embodied experience of leisure activities.

To discuss this in detail the following research questions were posed:

During leisure activities, what is the importance of personal and situational attributes for the embodied experiences of religion and spirituality of Dutch New Christians and New Spirituals?

- a) *To what extent are the personal attributes of the individual in interplay with his or her experience of religion and spirituality?*
- b) *How is the experience and performance of religion and spirituality related to the embodiment of the spatial situation in which leisure activities take place?*

The Netherlands was the research location for this study. Based on the literature two study groups were chosen, New Christians going to relatively new churches, such as an evangelical, Pentecostal or non-denominational church, and people who see themselves as spiritual, New Spirituals. Both groups are growing. The 16 respondents were sampled by snowball sampling. Each respondent completed a small questionnaire that included activity tables that they could fill out to give the researcher an idea which leisure activities the respondents usually undertakes that served as a basis for the in-depth interviews. In addition, allowing them to give a more detailed account of their leisure practices that they might be very taken-for-granted and otherwise would not flag up during the interviews. Besides that they were asked to provide the researcher with a few photographs of places that had a special meaning to them. The interviews took place at the respondent's home and revolved around a list of themes, the activities they performed and the photographs they provided. Since the interviews were semi-structured they were very diverse in nature, but all discussed themes related to social contacts, and material and non-material actors. The interview content was analysed by using MAXQDA.

6.2 Conclusion and discussion

This study has uncovered several important results that are associated with religion, spirituality, activity behaviour and embodied experiences. The results first of all show that the religious and spiritual experience of space is far more complex than the simple visit of a location that opens up a connection to the divine, as argued in traditional studies on sacred space (Eliade, 1959). The experience of religion and spirituality should be understood as a relational process encouraged by the interplay of the personal and situations attributes and the embodied experience of the activity. Looking at the leisure activities of New Christians and New Spirituals and the embodiment of these activities from a relational approach on space proved prolific in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences religious or spiritual people have during these activities. Combining this with a focus on relational needs has provided a rich elaboration of the interplay between individual ideas and needs and multidimensional spatial attributes of the undertaken activities.

For both groups it is these relational needs that seem to be at least partly accounting for the need for religion and spirituality. Since relationships were argued to be the most fundamental in human life, there is a general need to belong to something that is greater than ourselves and therefore we can only be understood in the relation to our context (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). This study has taken a relational approach on space, focusing on the interrelatedness of human and non-human actors and has first of all shown that this sense of belongingness is found in religion and spirituality that showed to be based around relationships. The underlying relational needs that are fulfilled in these relationships seem to be similar between and within the groups: everyone wants to feel meaningful in life.

For New Christians a personal relationship with God is very important; they want to be accepted and admired by Him and receive His love. Their life is given meaning by the relationship they have with Him. The importance of this relationship was for the majority a response to earlier life events in which they experienced disappointment of relational needs not being fulfilled: they did not feel significant. The evangelical and Pentecostal churches with a focus on the individual connection with God and the construction of a Christian community proved to redeem for the inadequacies they perceive in worldly relationships. This feeling of belonging found in religion is extended into the community. The community of Christian believers is on the one hand a task described in the Bible and by coming together God is experienced, but on the other hand also provided for the relations that people find most meaningful. Since the community exists of like-minded people, people feel comfortable: the need for mutuality and acceptance are fulfilled within this group. In addition this group is again important for the relationship they have with God: together they can make Him great.

Likewise, New Spirituals are looking for meaningful relationships and belonging, but find these in the relationship with their inner spirit and the larger reality they are part of. The ideas of spirituality are highly diverse: the things they believe are diffuse and the ways these beliefs are shaped in their daily lives is for everyone different, or as said, everyone has their own toolbox. For the majority spirituality is related to something outside ourselves, the 'larger reality' was often mentioned. This can be the earth and everything around it, but also something related to a world with different dimensions and different levels of consciousness.

For them this is in some way a response to the modern society which is predominantly rational and focused on efficiency, without leaving room for self-definition and personal growth. They are conscious of the fact that they have a very prosperous life in terms of materiality, but they search for profundity or meaning in life to make them more aware of their situation, of the world they live in. In terms of relational needs we can say that their needs are not accomplished for in the profane world, they do not experience being meaningful, or have the idea they can define themselves in having a large house and a nice car for instance. The dominant relationships society is assembled by do not nourish them and get them out of balance; the balance between doing what is expected and doing what you really want, who you really are. By relating to the larger reality and themselves they come to feel what their purpose in life is and are affirmed to be significant.

The results convey that both groups are very conscious about the relationship they have with other, human and non-human actors. The difference seems however that New Christians very much shape their existence from the relation and experience they have with God and the larger community, that serve as a basis to enter other personal relationships. The New Spirituals on the other hand are more focused on themselves and their place in the larger reality in which they have a relation with everything that it is involved in this larger reality. This idea of being in the world interplays with the inter-human relations they have. New Spirituals see the interaction with others (like-minded and not like-minded) as important for their learning process and necessary for spiritual growth. By immersing themselves in spiritual ideas during workshops, but also by reading books they are affirmed in their beliefs and establish an imaginative connection with a community of like-minded people.

For the New Christians these relational needs are not only shaped by imagination, by the idea of belonging to others. These relationships and relational needs are contextualised in the activities people undertake in their daily lives and with situations they perform in, with which actors. A strong focus on the need for acceptance by God and motivated by the idea that they want to be meaningful serves as a basis for the feeling they have to build a community for God and therefore come together in church services and other gatherings. By doing this they actively position themselves in situations with other Christians. This confirms earlier ideas from studies that have put forward that experience of religion and spirituality is found in activities with human actors to talk about God and also to make God great (Heintzmann, 2002; Livengood, 2009). The interaction with these like-minded people is very much an embodied experience: being aware of the relational network of the encountered human actor can evoke certain emotions.

What is more, Joblin (2009) also concluded that a religious experience could be found in the natural environment, by experiencing being in God's creation. This study has presented however, that besides the focus on human actors, New Christians have presented themselves as being less sensitive than the New Spirituals to the situation and the sensorial impulses they cognitively receive from the situations they perform in. For them their connection with God is continuous; He is therefore a constant actor in the situations their encounter. In leisure situations such as going for a walk in nature, the spatial attributes are often related to God. We can say that the relationships they have with the encountered spatial attributes are mediated by God, it is given meaning because for them God is clearly an actor in the situations they participate in. The relation Christians have with natural actors for example appears to be mediated by God: They enjoy experiencing nature, because in their imagination the complexity they see, such as flowers in bloom, is related to God, or are embodied representations of God: the complexities of situations encountered are related to God's greatness. Internalising these conceptions incites a wide range of emotions that for them strengthen their belief.

Due to this continuous interaction with God, they have the feeling they do not need to visit a specific space in order to give meaning to what they believe. They have regular moments in which they make God great collectively. Even though their churches are simple buildings which have a mundane function at weekdays and little symbols and objects are used, the services of these New Christian churches aim to evoke affect and emotions by using music, light and visual images. Literature (Livengood, 2009; Sengers, 2006) has put forward that this is exactly why these churches are so popular, they concur with the life worlds of young, modern people. The results from the study presented here can add to this that by stimulating the senses the believers experience they can make a connection with God better, focussing on the music and the worshipping lyrics, disconnecting themselves from the rest of their network; not thinking about other worldly relations that are not meaningful at that moment. The embodied experience of the spatial situation in which God is also an actor is for them the true lived experience of God's presence, this goes beyond the rituals and doctrine that were prevalent in traditional Christian churches.

What is more, these results imply that in a wide range of activities they actively position themselves in situations with other Christians. On the other hand some of them avoid situations in which other human actors are present. The way these people position themselves in relation to others drives from the interpretation they have of others and themselves and of the world. This is also the case for New Spirituals: both groups reported to avoid certain situations, such as going to bars where people are guided by desires, such as alcohol and sex. These encounters do not fulfil their relational needs. Or they decide whether or not to talk about their religious and spiritual beliefs dependent on the actors present. When they know that others feel different about their ideas concerning the spiritual, or more-than-human side of life, they consciously make the decision not to discuss these ideas, sometimes due to the fear to be rejected.

Besides these cognitive processes in the choice for activities there is also an affective side of the decision of performance of leisure activities. Affect is in literature approached as a state before

emotion, a sensorial sensation that is derived from a complete mix of all the elements in space and that is experienced before it can be registered in cognitive conscious thinking (Latham & McCormack, 2004; McCormack, 2008). This affective dimension of an assemblage of actors seems to be very prevalent for the New Spirituals: they choose the places they visit during leisure time based on how it feels or in their terms. They refer to this in terms of the energy present that they internalise with bodies. Situations that have a particularly good affective quality are those in which they feel: this is right. In this a sense of belonging felt through the body, because a connection with the larger reality is established (Game, 2001). This atmosphere emanates from the actors that are present or have been present there. This is particularly the case in the built environment, where a lot of people make use of the same space. For them the movement of these human bodies alters the space physically, but certainly also affectively and imaginative (McCormack, 2008). Therefore you do not know beforehand which situation will feel good, because people are constantly on the move. However there are some commonalities that can be distinguished.

Situations that generally feel good are those in which nature is involved. Spirituals experience harmony in nature and can therefore connect with the larger reality they are part of. This confirms earlier studies on leisure and spirituality that have concluded that spiritual experiences can be found in activities in the natural environment, such as hiking (Schmidt & Little, 2007). Because for the New Spirituals spirituality means connection to their inner self and the larger reality they look for spaces in which they can make this connection. This is often the case in situations with limited sensorial impulses that can distract them. This stillness is also embodied in the interaction with nature. In the natural environment first of all auditory stillness is perceived and the sounds that are heard are natural sounds, such as the birds and the wind. Secondly there is energetical stillness, which makes them able to focus on their own energy. There are little sensorial impulses that refrain individuals from listening to themselves, to what they really want. Nature is harmony and balance and some even argue that in nature you see what life really is, how it should be. By embodying this they strengthen the relationship with themselves and the larger reality: they feel a sense of belonging to nature and everything that is larger than themselves. This in addition gives meaning to their own self: as was discussed by Conradson (2005), people internalise the environment, making themselves felt through the relational encounter.

Since these situations feel good they try to undertake as much activities in nature as possible. These situations they position themselves in can be seen as everyday retreats from the expected and experienced demands of the everyday practices and relations at work, home and public life. This relates to earlier studies on therapeutic retreats (Conradson, 2005; Lea, 2008; Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005). Practices such as gardening, walking in nature and yoga make people retreat inwards, away from the demanding relationships of everyday life. This implies that people are searching for balance: there are situations that ask energy and situations that give you energy. The situations that ask for energy are often difficult to avoid, because they are related to work, but also places that are visited during leisure, such as shopping malls. When we look back at the question of Thrift put forward in the introduction we can argue that it is exactly the '*ferocious jumble of signals, journeys and screens*' that stimulate the need for practices of slowness and in this case stillness in particular. Moreover, the processes that were argued to stimulate secularisation, such as diversification and individualisation are exactly those that for nowadays for people enhance the need to explore the spiritual side of life.

However, these moments of stillness are hard to find outside nature (where it was argued to become difficult as well, in the Netherlands there are not a lot of quiet places) and the individually created stillness in people's own homes. Especially for solitary activities, such as meditation New Spirituals prefer, or even need energetical and auditory stillness. It was put forward that spirituality goes beyond materiality; the focus is on the individual, on his or her inner self, materiality and consumption are not needed for this. However for solitary activities, such as active contemplation, some material aspects are valued highly, or even brought into the situation in terms of mobile

objects. People customise space to create a situation that is suitable for contemplation; they need objects to stimulate their senses: they want to hear stimulating music, smell incense and see an object that reminds them of who they were in an earlier life for instance. These objects are brought in to negotiate with the multiple geographies that are present in a situation. People feel a direct relation with these objects. People who are very sensitive perceive the different energies present and would therefore bring in objects, such as incense and gemstones to cleanse the space.

These objects are of course also material, but have very different associations: having an expensive jaguar emits a different idea than having a little altar at home. What is interesting in this respect is that this focus on the material world seems to be aimed at bridging a relation with their inner essence and the larger reality. Sensorial information such as loud music can be highly distractive, but on the other hand music can refer to earlier activities, assembling the relation with a memory and a particular spatial situation. The materiality they connect with is the materiality they are part of themselves, according to them. We humans are in relation to other humans, but also with nature, our material and non-material environment. So this materiality is shared, collective materiality and not the individual materiality, arguably superficial materiality that is focused on consumption, which they oppose themselves to.

It has become clear that the environment is embodied by the sensorial perception of the material and the non-material elements in the situations people cognitively and affectively encounter. The embodiment of the situation incites interpretation and feelings, embedded in the individual's ideas and beliefs and also relational needs, derived from previous experiences. The experiences are inherently bodily: the five senses, hear, see, smell, touch and taste are stimulated by the other actors present in the situation and an overall way of feeling is also referred to by the New Spirituals, something that happens in the body, that cannot be named, maybe a shiver, or a tingling feeling, something that by some was named a sixth sense. The affect experienced here can be referred to as true lived experience, the feelings derived from the presence of the body in the environment.

Whereas the New Christians did not experience a direct relation to spatial attributes, the New Spirituals presented themselves as very sensitive to sensorial information perceived during activities. For the New Christians their God is continuous, He is everywhere and everything they encounter is mediated by the relationship with God. For the New Spirituals their idea of spirituality is in the lived experience of everyday situations. They are therefore very much embedded in the situations they interact in. Their direct and unmediated relationship with their context is part of their spirituality and actively engaging in the material context fosters the connection with the larger reality they believe in. Because this relationship is so direct, negative affect is also experienced. Situations are therefore avoided or negotiated. In reacting to emergent or anticipated affect and emotions they prevent unpleasant contact by using several mechanisms. First of all people avoid situations. Secondly, individuals develop emotional boundaries between themselves and others order to increase bodily disengagement from the situation. Thirdly, they use physical boundaries, such as coming together between the bound walls of a church, or use different objects to heal or cleanse the energy perceived.

What this study has shown is that leisure activities and spiritual experiences have to be understood as a relational process embedded in the interplay of different events, objects, humans and other actors present in the environmental setting. The approach presented was useful in exposing not only the multidimensionality of situations in the daily lives of individuals, but also in showing how relational and personal the experiences in space are. There is more to space than just the material environment. Being in particular places involves not only the visibly tangible, but also the invisible, the intangible, that which often cannot be named. Some spatial situations are therefore picked up purposefully, to give meaning to a belief system, such as going to a church, whereas others are chosen because they feel good, spiritually. Both groups however, aim at finding the connection with

that which shapes their belief system, because it can be argued that these connections fulfil certain relational needs, the most important one the need of being meaningful. For New Christians this is found in the relationship with God, whereas for the New Spirituals this is found in the relationship with themselves and the larger reality which is experienced in encountering other human actors and other entities in the built and natural environment.

6.3 Policy implications and recommendations

The results presented here are significant to such an extent that they should not be neglected in policy on urban and natural environment. For some these ideas seem slightly controversial, because we are talking about phenomena that cannot be explained and might therefore not be understood by everyone. However, as this research has shown, these ideas are part of the lived experience of the everyday of a large number of people and should therefore not be neglected.

In their design of the natural environment and built environments, policy makers, spatial planners and designers should acknowledge and make use of the richness of situations in which multiple actors are present. The design of public and private spaces could be inspired by insights into how spiritual and religious individuals move and experience, especially because the strong focus on well-being. To stress the importance of these results I would like to place them in three broader perspectives: on collectivisation, the need for therapeutic retreats and ideas on understanding environmental attitudes, derived from the feeling of connectedness with nature.

In a publication by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning agency (Becker & De Hart, 2006) it was stated that people are looking for new form of collectivisation, for instance public events, such as the death of a public figure or a national holiday, such as Queen's day in the Netherlands. This is also argued by the theory on relational needs, everybody wants to belong, we do not exist without relationships to others (Slife & Wiggins, 2009). The results presented in this study imply that collective experiences are also found in the everyday by connecting to a group and everyday experiencing this belonging. The New Christians are a small group but they are very active. They make themselves visible in the public by the organisation or large events in which they collectively make God great, such as the EO youth day. Furthermore we see the erection of more megachurches in the Netherlands in which these New Christians come together. Understanding the importance of these gatherings and the embodied experience of the situation can facilitate for the needs of this growing group.

Both groups want to experience meaning in their life and for that search for moments in which they can contemplate on this. Especially for the New Spirituals the activities in nature can be seen as therapeutic activities, or even retreats and this sheds a new light on the importance of nature in the daily lives of individuals. This relates to the stillness in nature. Stillness is an attribute of a natural process and can relate to all the senses. Not only is there stillness in terms of sound, but also visual stillness and olfactory stillness, and from the perspective of the New Spirituals, energetical stillness.

Stillness can also be created in cities. The respondents mentioned churches and other historical, still spaces in the city spaces they could recharge for the day; these are spaces with a very different atmosphere than the busyness in the cities, which are situations in which consumption is central. In a lot of Dutch cities churches get demolished because there is not enough social support, so one should think how new spaces for contemplation and stillness can be created in cities. Respondents spoke about spaces for stillness, or ecumenical 'churches' in which people can get together. Research should be carried out if there is actually support for these spaces. How else can stillness be created? Nowadays parks and other spaces in cities are packed full with planned activities that have loud music and attract a lot of people. Could we also plan for situations of silence?

Situations where non-activity is planned, because it seems as if this is what people need, to recharge from their busy and hectic lives. Urban planning can facilitate for stillness in urban space. Initiatives are already put forward such as the 'Zinroute' in Utrecht (Bloomingpeople), where a group of people search for contemplative spaces in the city.

There are obviously critical thinkers who might not be convinced of the need to facilitate for this group of people. They might find these ideas about religion and spirituality woolly or even total nonsense and a completely private affair. However, especially the ideas of the New Spirituals can be broadened to more general trends in western society. As discussed previously for the New Spirituals their ideas about spirituality are often contradictory to the general way of living and the society they perceive. What these results show is that there is a growing tendency for a very conscious and concerned way of living. People are often no longer satisfied with a purely material focus in their everyday lives; they are looking for a way of living that is more meaningful, in terms of their being in the world. This implies thinking about the bigger plan they are part of and the importance of taking care of the world they live in.

In this we also see a strong focus on personal well-being. Their lifestyle is much more than the belief a higher power. Two authors who have described this elaborately are Ray and Anderson (2000). They have come up with the concept Cultural Creatives: a growing group of people who shape a new lifestyle that revolves around ecological principles, relations, peace but also self-realisation and expression with a strong passion for social activism. This group includes many writers, artists, musicians, psychotherapists, feminists, alternative health care providers and other professionals. According to them, already 25% of the American population can be considered a Cultural Creative. Although for a large group this is combined with a strong focus on spirituality, there is also a more secular wing of the cultural creative that has no link with religion and spirituality. Both the spiritual and the secular wing agree it is about consciousness, meaning-making and harmony with the natural world. They feel deep love of nature and deep caring about its preservation, and its natural balance (Ray & Anderson, 2001).

These ideas are also gaining ground in the Netherlands. Also de Hart (2011, p. 221) determined that ideas and beliefs are becoming more popular amongst the population and this is visible in education, large companies, politics, media, health and more. Wijffels (2011) also speaks of a quarter of the population who are dealing with the idea that all life is a connected and interdependent system, all life is a unity. In this we see a focus on relationships: between humans, but also between humans and their environment, that has also been discussed in this research. According to him this introduces a new ethics based on relationality. Responsibility takes central stage: people will think about the effect their decisions have on others and nature. The group that has been dealing with these ideas for a long time have been operating in the margins, but now this group is growing they start to become more visible: this idea of how the world works is starting to become more common.

What he sees is a change in looking at and handling nature which relates to trends of sustainability. Wijffels (2011) states sustainability is about the aim for better relations between people, but also between humans and nature, or humans and the earth. The aim for sustainability is gaining ground amongst people because they feel they have come to a standstill in their current life and lifestyle. They feel that the common lifestyle in the western world, which is characterised by consumption, is doing harm to nature, to the earth and because we are part of one interdependent system, we do harm to ourselves (Wijffels, 2011). According to him our consciousness is changing and we are starting to become more aware of this. When we look back at the results we can argue that in broader terms this is what the New Spirituals meant with a change in consciousness in 2012: we are not only starting to become more focused on our own spirituality, but also our relationship we have with the world, with the larger reality.

In broader literature on sustainability we also found progressive attention on multiple perspectives on human-environment relationships that according to O'Brien (2011) human geographers can add into research on the environment. One implication from the case study presented here is that it can shed a new light on research on sustainability and the natural environment. The type of concerns a person develops about environmental issues is associated with the extent to which the individual believes that he or she is part of nature (Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). O'Brien argues that human geographers can add to the environmental discussions the insights from social science on global change. O'Brien writes: *"Although human geographers have stressed the social construction of environmental problems [...], there is now a need to better understand how different cognitive, emotional, spiritual or ethical factors subjectively influence these constructions, and in turn responses to environmental change."*

Understanding these relations people have with nature based is interesting for urban planners, because it relates to how people use nature, but also how they consume and want to make use of the sources this earth provides of with. To give an example: in the Netherlands the first earthship project is going to be built in 2012 (Vereniging Aardehuis). In this project sustainability is very important: they build houses from recycled materials and make their houses climate neutral. Their mission is: *"building, working and living in harmony with nature, in connection with each other as an inspiration for the world around us."*

6.4 Scientific relevance and limitations

The findings of this study have to be considered with respect of methodological choices made and can not be regarded as conclusive. Nevertheless, it has provided some interesting theoretical views that will be discussed here. Some limitations should also be mentioned that can in their turn serve as a basis for further study.

When we look at the literature presented we can say that this study has given a more in-depth account of the experience of religion and spirituality during leisure activities. First of all by presenting the broader situational configuration in which leisure activities take place it became clear that the experience of religion and spirituality is more complex than the simple connection with the divine by seeing the creation of God, contemplation about the meaning of life or experiencing a connection with the divine, as was presented in literature on religious experience during leisure (Joblin, 2009; Schulz, 2001). Multiple geographies are present at the same time by the movement of human actors that all have their own networks of human actors, ideas, beliefs and memories that can induce a religious or spiritual experience, or even obstruct people from this. This research has literally taken the more-than-human into account: for the New Christians God is presented as an actor in the situation and for the New Spirituals other extra-mundane entities as well as the imagination of a larger reality were integrated in the broader configuration of the situation.

Secondly, taking relational needs into perspective in these broader situations, as part of personal attributes adds to this approach, for it places embodied practices and experiences into the broader context of the person's (earlier) beliefs, experiences and actions. It provides a better understanding of how relationships between humans and different actors in the environment are experienced and negotiated. These presented ideas can be used in other studies on therapeutic retreats for example, in which the individual searches for spaces in which he or she can retreat. Taking these relational needs into account can provide for a better understanding of the human-environment interaction: the experience of the situation and the experience of the activity can be related to a person's other and earlier beliefs and actions (Conradson, 2005; Ouellette et al, 2005).

Thirdly, so far research on leisure and spiritual experiences have not taken into account the differences between spirituality, and religion, which is more institutionalised. This study has put forward that there are differences in beliefs between these groups that have different spatial implications. Taking into account that it is especially the group of New Spirituals that is growing, this study adds to existing literature that with them a group of people with a specific orientation towards themselves, others and the world is becoming more prevalent. This idea was already put forward elaborately earlier in this section.

However, some comments have to be made in this respect. In this research two groups have been investigated, New Christians and New Spirituals. These New Christians are only a small part of the total number of Christians in the Netherlands and therefore we cannot generalise these findings to the whole Christian population. By looking at the Christian group more in depth differences and similarities within and between denominations can be found. In addition to this, the Islam is also becoming a more prominent religion in the Western world that has not received any attention here. The same approach can be used for investigating Muslims, taking into account other elements of their personal attributes, such as cultural and ethnic background.

What is more, New Spirituals have been sampled by approaching spiritual centres. The results about workshops and getting together with like-minded people can therefore be slightly biased, since these are all people that are very actively involved in the world of spiritual workshops and very active forms of spirituality. Bernts et al (2006), who used the term New Spirituals, stated that this group is highly diverse, some only engaging in practical activities, without relating to any form of experiencing something higher, whereas there is also a group of people that do consider themselves as being spiritual, but does not actively engage in these kinds of activities. By using a larger sample the difference within this group would also become visible to see how much of these discussed ideas are common amongst the larger population.

Secondly there might be a slight bias because of the place of residence of the respondents. One can see in chapter three that all of the New Christian respondents live in cities, whereas some of the New Spirituals live in smaller villages, in very natural areas. This information can cause a bias in the activity pattern, since nature is closer by for the New Spirituals than for the New Christians.

Another point I want to make here is that this research is specifically looking at space. However, time also intersects with space in situational analysis. A full account of the spatial analysis of religion would look at the spatiotemporal context of activities and interactions that take place in space. Space does not just exist of multiple spatialities; it exists of geographies, which also include time. However, this research is already taking a very broad view on the concept of space and due to time limitations the influence and the variety of time is not taken into account. For future research it is therefore interesting to place leisure in the context of daily life movements in the path of sequential situations to look at space-time paths, in order to also visualise constraints because of gender, parenting young children and urban opportunities. These space-time paths can be mapped to expand the relational situation of the activity and the space and produce a truly relational account of the relation of religiosity on leisure activities and the visit of space by placing it more in the context of everyday activities. By doing this a better view can be given on the negotiations, constraints and opportunities in the performance and experience of religion and spirituality.

Lastly, what should be mentioned in the light of this study is that the concepts of religion and spirituality are difficult to understand when not experienced personally. Especially spirituality, with ideas regarding energy, consciousness and the larger reality could probably not been understood in the greatest detail based on solely the interviews. By taking a phenomenological approach the

subjective experiences of the individuals were taken as a lived reality as much as possible. Any misinterpretations are therefore of the responsibility of the author.

To conclude, this thesis has used a relational approach in understanding experience of religion and spirituality during leisure activities, taking the case of a group of New Christians and New Spirituals in the Netherlands. The approach was useful in exposing the multidimensionality of the situations and presented the experiences of individuals as interrelated, personal and certainly situationally specific. The individual and situations are in constant, dynamic, interaction, producing and re-producing each other. Taking all these different activities in the daily life into account resulted in a wide range of situations that recognise the moments in life in which the individuals' ideas about God or the larger reality are encouraging an embodied experience in the profundity and mystery of mundane everyday life, providing a sense of being in and out of this world.

7 Literature

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Beste meneer/mevrouw,

Allereerst hartelijk bedankt dat u wil meewerken aan mijn afstudeeronderzoek voor de onderzoeksmaster Human Geography and Planning. Ik stel dit zeer op prijs. In dit document vindt u een korte vragenlijst over persoonskenmerken en twee tabellen over uw vrijetijdsbesteding. Ik wil u vragen deze zo gedetailleerd mogelijk in te vullen.

Op basis van deze gegevens wil ik u uitnodigen voor een interview. Ik wil u daarom ook vragen om op de laatste pagina van dit document uw contactgegevens in te vullen zodat ik contact met u kan opnemen om een afspraak te maken.

Voorafgaand aan het interview zou ik graag een aantal (3-5) foto's willen ontvangen van plekken die uzelf betekenisvol vindt. Dit kunnen plekken zijn die speciaal zijn voor u zijn vanwege de activiteit die u op deze plek onderneemt, of omdat u er bepaalde gevoelens bij heeft door een bepaalde beleving of een herinnering die dit oproept. Het kan ook een speciale betekenis hebben door de mensen die u ontmoet op deze plek, of het tijdstip dat u op deze plek bent, of bent geweest. U kunt hierbij denken aan een plek waar u ooit iets bijzonders hebt meegemaakt, waar u zich bijzonder voelt, of een bepaalde rust ervaart. Dit kan alles zijn, uw favoriete park, de kerk waar u naartoe gaat, een bos, een plein, maar ook uw eigen tuin, of een bepaalde plek in huis. Deze betekenisgeving kan beïnvloed zijn door de mensen met wie u daar bent of andere die aanwezig zijn, u mag daarom gerust foto's te kiezen waar mensen op staan. De foto's maakt u bij voorkeur zelf, of komen uit uw eigen archief, maar als u geen geschikte foto's heeft mag u ze ook op uit tijdschriften halen of op internet zoeken.

Belangrijk om te weten is dat alle informatie die u in de vragenlijst opgeeft en dat alles wat in de interviews wordt besproken vertrouwelijk wordt behandeld: uw naam wordt niet vermeld in mijn rapport en als er citaten uit de interviews worden gebruikt dan wordt er een fictieve naam gebruikt. Om de resultaten te illustreren zou ik enkele foto's willen gebruiken die naar voren zijn gekomen tijdens de interviews, maar dit gebeurt alleen met uw toestemming. Als er mensen op de foto's staan worden deze onherkenbaar gemaakt.

U kunt de foto's meenemen naar het interview, of vooraf sturen met de vragenlijst naar v.berkers@students.uu.nl. Mocht u vragen hebben kunt u mij ook bereiken op 06-30307483.

Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking!

Met vriendelijke groet,

Vera Berkers, BSc.

Persoonskenmerken

Geslacht: man vrouw

Leeftijd: jaar

Woonplaats:

Hoogst voltooide opleiding:

- Basisonderwijs/lagere school
- LBO/VBO//MBO/VMBO
- HAVO/VWO
- MBO
- HBO/WO (bachelor of kandidaats)
- WO doctoraal of master

Uw huidige werksituatie:

- Niet werkzaam
- Parttime: uur
- Fulltime

Heeft u een partner: ja nee

Werksituatie van uw partner:

- Niet werkzaam
- Parttime: uur
- Fulltime

Zijn er kinderen onder de 12 in uw huishouden aanwezig: ja nee

Tot welk kerkgenootschap of spirituele stroming behoort u volgens u zelf? (Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Nederlands Hervormd
- Gereformeerd
- Anders Christelijk, nl
- Boeddhisme
- Spirituele stroming, nl.....
- Geen

Als u regelmatig naar de kerk gaat, naar welke kerk gaat u dan?

.....

Ging u in het verleden naar een andere kerk, of was u bezig met een andere vorm van spiritualiteit? Zo ja, welke? (Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Nederlands Hervormd
- Gereformeerd

-
- Anders Christelijk, nl
 - Boeddhisme
 - Spirituele stroming, nl.....
 - Geen

**Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, hoe sterk voelt u zich verbonden met het religieuze of spirituele leven?
(Omcirkelen) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Hoevaak gaat u op vakantie?

- Minder dan 1 keer per jaar
- 1 keer per jaar
- 2 keer per jaar
- Vaker dan 2 keer per jaar

Wat is uw favoriete vakantie land?

.....

Wat is uw favoriete type vakantie?

- Natuur
- Cultuur
- Avontuurlijk
- Ontspanning
- Anders nl.....

Vrijtijdsactiviteiten buitenshuis in de lente en de zomer

In deze tabel kunt u door middel van een kruisje aangeven hoe vaak u de genoemde activiteiten in de lente en de zomer onderneemt. Als u activiteiten buitenshuis onderneemt die niet in het rijtje staan vermeld dan kunt u ze onderaan zelf invullen bij 'anders, nl:..'. Natuurlijk kan het zijn dat er overlap tussen de activiteiten en plekken zit, bijvoorbeeld omdat u een wandeling maakt in het bos. Deze mag u als verschillende activiteiten meetellen.

Activiteit/bezoek plekken	1 of meerdere keren per week	1 keer per 2 weken	1 keer per maand	1 keer per lente en zomer	Nooit
Theater					
Bioscoop					
Museum					
Concert					
Café					
Discotheek					
Uit eten					
Attractiepark/dierentuin					
Zwembad					
Sauna					
Sporten individueel					
Sporten met anderen					
Bij vrienden op bezoek					
Bij familie op bezoek					
Wandeling					
Lange afstand lopen					
Fietstocht					
Park					
Bos/duinen/heide					
Weidelandschap					
Strand					
Water gebied (meer, rivier)					
Vissen/jagen					
Monumenten					
Kerk of ander gebedshuis					
Bezoek religieuze objecten (kapel, beeld, monument)					
Historische stad					
Winkelen					
Hobbyclub					
Cursus					
Vrijwilligerswerk					
Anders, nl.:					
Anders, nl.:					
Anders, nl.:					

Vrijtijdsactiviteiten buitenshuis in de herfst en de winter

In deze tabel kunt u door middel van een kruisje aangeven hoe vaak u de genoemde activiteiten in de herfst en de winter onderneemt. Als u activiteiten buitenshuis onderneemt die niet in het rijtje staan vermeld dan kunt u ze onderaan zelf invullen bij 'anders, nl:..'. Natuurlijk kan het zijn dat er overlap tussen de activiteiten en plekken zit, bijvoorbeeld omdat u een wandeling maakt in het bos. Deze mag u als verschillende activiteiten meetellen.

Activiteit/bezoek plekken	1 of meerdere keren per week	1 keer per 2 weken	1 keer per maand	1 keer per herfst en winter	Nooit
Theater					
Bioscoop					
Museum					
Concert					
Café					
Discotheek					
Uit eten					
Attractiepark/dierentuin					
Zwembad					
Sauna					
Sporten individueel					
Sporten met anderen					
Bij vrienden op bezoek					
Bij familie op bezoek					
Wandeling maken					
Lange afstand lopen					
Fietstocht					
Park					
Bos/duinen/heide					
Weidelandschap					
Strand					
Water gebied (meer, rivier)					
Vissen/jagen					
Monumenten					
Kerk of ander gebedshuis					
Bezoek religieuze objecten (kapel, beeld, monument)					
Historische stad					
Winkelen					
Hobbyclub					
Cursus					
Vrijwilligerswerk					
Anders, nl.:					
Anders, nl.:					
Anders, nl.:					

Appendix 2: List of codes MAXQDA

Spirituality and the life course

Societal context

Understanding of spirituality

- inner self
- higher something

Relations

- mirroring
- connection
- Relational needs

Decision making activities

- growing in spirituality
- constraints
- well-being
- normativity

Dctivities/practices

- daily routine
- active/nature
- spiritual
- social

Multidimensional context of space

- People
 - respondent
 - others
- material aspects of space
 - objects/symbols
 - nature
 - built environment
- non-material aspects of space
 - sound
 - God or other extra-mundane entities
 - natural processes
 - norms and values
 - energy

Embodiment activity and space

- associations/memory
- feelings/emotions
 - Tranquility
 - respect
 - attraction
 - connection

humility
harmony (balance)
sensorial information
taste
see
smell
hear
touch

