

## **Fact Sheet:**

*Cascadian Spirituality: Religion, Nature, and Social Inclusion in the Pacific Northwest*

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Innovation Funding Project, 2015-2016

## **Project Description and Goals:**

Support was sought for a small project that addressed matters of interest to the Religion and Diversity Project, particularly the goals of Stands One and Four. In this project, various sources of empirical and theoretical data were collected and assessed in order to initiate a thorough account of Cascadian religion and its relationship with the social and political realities of the region.

The questions this smaller project addressed were as follows:

- 1) How inclusive is Cascadia: with a special focus on how newcomers from non-European and non-Christian societies experience Cascadian religious and cultural sensibilities;
- 2) What difference does the border make: the differential impact of U.S. and Canadian national (or provincial/state) policies and norms (with respect to ethnic, religious, and racial diversity) on the emerging Cascadian style of religion; and
- 3) What are the public implications of this form of religion/spirituality: if conventional forms of religion are being eclipsed by Cascadian modes, what are the implications for the public sphere (e.g., the effect of declining church-based volunteer labour on the provision of social services; the disjuncture between this emerging form of religion and the existing laws related to religious freedom and discrimination).

## **Methodology:**

- a) Identify and collect existing data sources (e.g., surveys, historical accounts, sociological and ethnographic work, dissertations, court cases)
- b) Determine and report on provisional answers to the above three questions
- c) Identify remaining work to be performed in Canada and the US in order to answer these questions fully
- d) Create a team of scholars to collaborate on a major international research project in the following year
- e) Draft a proposal to SSHRC to support this research

## **Student Involvement:**

- Rachel Brown, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Samantha Bahan, University of Victoria

## **Results:**

- Research has shown that many individuals who do not identify with traditional religion do cultivate spirituality or something akin to spirituality in their lives, and may even encounter “the sacred” in secular forms
- There is a general laissez-faire attitude in Cascadia, a “you do you” philosophy that may make the region particularly comfortable for members of religious minorities who would like to continue to live out their traditions in the region, or alternatively to loosen their attachment to those traditions
- One of the strongest forces binding Cascadia together is the value and desire to protect the environment; this is indeed a perspective that characterizes communities on both sides of the border.

- Almost all religious communities and organizations, from parishes to synagogues, have struggled to overcome tensions and work together to create a religious presence and retain adherents in their respective denominations
- Earth-based spirituality is the central cultural form of alternative spirituality practiced by religious “nones” in Cascadia (also known as “nature religion”)
- If research findings support the possibility that Cascadia is a more inclusive environment for religious “nones” and religious minorities alike, this may support the idea that Cascadia signifies a potential role model for other societies in the world undergoing, on the one hand, complex forms of secularization, and on the other hand, still very much home to spiritual practices and convictions.

**Dissemination:**

In addition to giving a presentation in religion/spirituality in Cascadia at the RDP meeting in Montreal (May 2016), and producing the three attached documents, this endeavour has enabled the research team to write a grant application to be submitted to SSHRC’s Insight program.