

## Comparing the public debates on religious slaughter in Germany, UK, France and Norway

The DIALREL ([www.dialrel.eu](http://www.dialrel.eu)) project was undertaken to gather information about issues relating to the practice of religious slaughter, the market and the consumers. One principle aim of the project has been to explore *the conditions for promoting dialogue* between interested parties and stakeholders. An important part of exploring the conditions for promoting dialogue has been to monitor and address potential conflicts in public debates on religious slaughter practices.

Our comparative report refers to media debates in Germany, UK, France and Norway and compares the media representations of religious slaughter. We discuss how and why different public debates appear in the different national contexts. We have given an overview of discourses on religious slaughter in the various countries, based on data from the country reports, and identified the extent of media attention given to issues related to religious slaughter, and the level of controversy.

### Background

Religious slaughter has always been a controversial and emotive subject. Animal welfare considerations, human rights, freedom of religion, consumer rights and market power are some of the issues involved. There are considerable variations in current practises and the current public debates related to religious slaughter are quite diverse in the contexts we are investigating. We have to emphasize that our report gives an overview and looks at some tendencies, the data material is incomplete, and therefore we have to make reservations regarding the extent to which we can generalize or make in-depth comparisons.

### The investigation

Our comparative report draws its material from a systematic empirical analysis of the media discourses and public debates on religious slaughter in four European countries, France, UK, Germany and Norway over the past two years (2006-08). Analysis of media texts has been conducted by partners in the respective countries. We have considered the different actors who are taking part in, or are having a voice in the media debates in the different contexts. And in the Comparative report we have asked: *Who are the players on the media arena? What are their positions? And what are the main conflict alignments in the different contexts?*

### Results

#### Similarities:

- Questions and issues concerning integration are part of the debate in all countries involved. Arguments that involve a framing in terms of “us” versus “them” are not uncommon.
- The market for halal (and kosher) is reported on by the media in every participating country and is a very prominent theme especially in the UK.
- Debates on kosher are, for various reasons, largely left out in all the four countries’ media debates.

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## Differences:

- Muslim and Jewish inhabitants in each country differ significantly, whereas France, Germany and the UK have a considerable Muslim and also Jewish population, Norway has only 2000 Jewish inhabitants. This makes the markets for halal and kosher food quite different from the beginning in each country.
- Different historical contexts in each country, especially in terms of immigration and political history. Different reasons for immigration in each national context. Particularly the German history in relation to Jews stands out as an exceptional context.
- Different discourses in each country and different issues make the main conflict alignments differ; German media debate is very much centred on the issue of pre-stunning, with animal welfare concerns on the one side and religious viewpoints on the other side. The British media debate surround mostly around questions of identity and multiculturalism. The Norwegian media debate is characterised by a high consensus among actors within the food and agricultural authority's concerning religious slaughter, referring to scientific evidence that slaughter without previous stunning increases the suffering of the animal. In the Norwegian media debate, issues of identity or multiculturalism is lacking while the debate is more centred on integration and animal welfare concerns. In France there are no sign of major conflict alignments in terms of religious slaughter that shows in the general press. In UK animal welfare arguments are not very visible in the media debate, while the market for halal, availability etc is a main discourse and issue in the UK debate related to questions of identity and multiculturalism. The British media debate on religious slaughter show no specific conflict alignments.
- Different voices are dominant in each public debate; In Norway market actors in halal have to a certain extent put on an informative voice in the media debate. In France the meat industry has kept a low profile. In France NGOs are key players, but are not deemed important in the general press. In Germany the key players in the debate have been animal welfare defendants on the one side and defenders of freedom of religion on the other. Animal rights organisations have not played a central role in the recent debate on religious slaughter in the Norwegian context, while actors within the food and agricultural authorities are defending a status quo by referring to scientific evidence that slaughter without previous stunning increases the suffering of the animal.
- Different channels for information: In France, blogs and several online news sources have provided consumer and market oriented information regarding halal food. In UK particularly market oriented debates and information reach the public through the general press.



The DIALREL project is funded by the European Commission and involves partners from 11 countries. It addresses issues relating to religious slaughter in order to encourage dialogue between stakeholders and interested parties. Religious slaughter has always been a controversial and emotive subject, caught between animal welfare considerations and cultural and human rights issues. There is considerable variation in current practices and the rules regarding religious requirements are confusing. Consumer demands and concerns also need to be addressed and the project is collecting and collating information relating to slaughter techniques, product ranges, consumer expectations, market share and socio-economic issues. The project is multidisciplinary and based on close cooperation between veterinarians, food scientists, sociologists, and jurists and other interested parties.

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