In recent religion sociology there’s the unreflected assumption that religiosity and religious belief in the Western societies over time did not tend to be secularized but increased by the immigration process.

(1) The institutionalized and therefore traditional religions – mainly the Protestant and the Catholic church – face increasing decline tendencies. (2) Religiosity itself had not vanished, just the mode of living it has changed in accordance to an individualization process that affects all democratic wealth-nation-states in the western world.

This thesis of individualized religiosity has mostly been postulated by Ulrich Beck and Thomas Luckmann. But since the early 90s, empirical analyses operating in quantitative manner showed growing evidence that the postulations of Beck and Luckmann might not be correct – their findings suggest for a still persisting religiosity. But the number of studies providing a quantitative account is still low and the whole topic was discussed in many theoretical ways for too long. The actual question is how individuality obtained by multi-level-regression analyses using the survey data of the European Values Study (EVS). The findings cannot validate the implications of the individualization thesis but they also cannot be falsified completely. The conclusion as Detlef Pollack and Gert Pielke had concluded in one of their studies before – that the change of religious vitality can be better explained by assuming a supervariable – is consistent with an individualization process that partially contains individualizational tendencies.

Theoretical Base

(1) Individualization of religion – classical

(see Luckmann 1993)

Modernization provokes the differentiation of the "Holy Cosm" of a social reality; the "Holy Cosm" is the sphere of last institutions that are part of the religious concept (about the purpose of human existence) – Institutional specialization as a specific social form of religion

Religious norms lose their socially accepted perceptible sense, but religiosity is considered an anthropological constant by Luckmann – Private religion

Private Religion (a individual), non-public implies the synthetic, individual fusion of parts of either traditional or new secular sects from the religious field (e.g. LSD-cults, taoism) and the simultaneous decline of church (= traditional religion) attendance.

(1c) Individualization of religion – present

(see Beck 1986)

The same process afflicts the entire society (as described above) also affects the societal subsphere of religiosity

The implications are nearly identical equal to the statements mentioned by Luckmann (above)

(2) Empiricism strikes back: Secularization is vital

(see Pollack/Pielke 1999, 2000, 2003)

Most scholars regarding individuality (in general as well as concerning religion) have been done qualitatively by biographical and qualitative through the individualization process is postulated to be a process affecting society as a whole over time – Requirement of empirical findings that (1) are macro-oriented and (ii) imply generalizability indications

Preliminary findings suggests that:

(a) Kinds of the religious effects can neither be seen as a relevant alternative for ecclesiastical religiosity nor as a conclusion for

(b) secularization processes are still vital and proceeding

Hypotheses

H1: The higher the degree of individualization, the higher the degree of alternative religiosity

H2: The higher the degree of individualization, the lower the degree of traditional religiosity

To convincingly verify an individualization process of religiosity, both hypotheses may not be falsified

Results

Independent Variable: Individualization can be operationalised by two main dimensions:

(1) Pluralization of lifestyles

(2) Changed mode of attribution

Data of the EVS provides the possibility to measure these dimensions and lines through change of family structures (Dimension 1) (see Breiden 2004, Burkart 1993) and positive attitudes toward self-determination (Pielke/Pollack 2000) (Dimension 2)

Dependent Variables: "Alternative Religiosity" can be operationalized by alternative beliefs, i.e. one believes in "angels", "telepathy" or the like (see (Pollack/Pielke 1999)

Church attendance was measured directly in many categories (ranging from none through the week, weekly, to "never") and is therefore treated as continuous.

Method

The dataset of the EVS contains a hierarchical structure that offers the possibility to use multilevel-regression models for the inquiry – the basic linear type is being used here. The model equation is:

\[ y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} x_{ij} + u_{ij} \]

Fixed Part Random Part

with:

- \( y_{ij} \) Response value of individual included in group \( j \)
- \( \beta_{0j} \) Overall intercept
- \( \beta_{1j} \) Group-specific intercept
- \( u_{ij} \) Group-specific estimate of the individual


The measurements are controlled by general socio-demographic variables: sex, age and income.

References


Does everybody believe in his/her own god? Findings from an empirical account to the sociological theory of individualization of religion

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