

# Does everybody believe in his/her ,own god'?

## Findings from an empirical account to the sociological theory of individualization of religion

By: Lukas Gernand, cand. rer. pol. at the chair of Prof. Norman Braun, Ph.D.  
Institut für Soziologie – Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

### Abstract

In recent religion sociology there's the unreflected assumption that religion and religiosity in most western societies over time did not tend to be secularized but individualized. This has two main implications:

(1) The institutionalized and therefore traditional religions – mainly the protestant and the catholic churches – face an increasing decline of members.

(2) Religiosity itself had not vanished, just the mode of living it has changed in accordance to an individualization process that affects all democratic wealthy nation-state-societies 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 manners showed growing evidence that the postulations of Beck and Luckmann might not be correct – their findings suggest for a still processing secularization. But the number of studies providing a quantitative account is still low and the whole topic was discussed mostly in theoretical ways for too long. The actual poster shows further findings 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 Pickel had concluded in one of their studies before – is that the change of religious vitality can be better explained by assuming a superordinated secularization process that partially contains individualizational tendencies.

### Theoretical Basement

#### (1a) Individualization in general

(see Beck 1986, Beck-Gernsheim 1994)

-Process of social change that affects the entire society (and basically all welfare-nation-state societies that also include mass democracies) and started intensifying since the 1960s

-Implications & Consequences:

- Omission of traditional dependable securities (e.g. a secure workplace, a life-long marriage etc.)
- Increase of options and hence life choices (e.g. the choice of education or the job)
- Increase of biographical risks – the attribution of guilt is being changed towards the individual (e.g. legislative norms)

-Individualism successively becomes a normative expectation, and – in Ulrich Beck's perspective on society – the (first-) modern basic principle of the autonomous individual is being radicalized

→ *Institutionalized, radicalized Individualization*

#### (1b) Individualization of religion – ,classical'

(see Luckmann 1991)

-Modernization provokes the differentiation of the ,Holy Cosmos' of a social reality; the ,Holy Cosmos' is the sphere of ,last' meanings (e.g. questions about the purpose of human existence) → *Institutional specialization as a specific social form of religion*

-Religious norms lose their subjectively perceptible sense, but religion is considered an anthropological constant by Luckmann → *Privatization of Religion*

-Privatized Religion (≅ individualized; ≠ non-public) implies the syncretic, individual fusion of parts of either traditional or new, spiritualistic or esoteric forms of religion (e.g. LSD-cults, taoism) and the simultaneous decline of church (= traditional religion) attendance

#### (1c) Individualization of religion – ,present'

(see Beck 2008)

-The same process that affects the entire society (as described above) also affects the societal subsphere of religion

-The implications are nearly identically equal to the statements mentioned by Luckman (above)

#### (2) Empiricism strikes back: Secularization is vital

(see Pollack/Pickel 1999, 2000, 2003)

-Most empirical analyses regarding individualization (in general as well as concerning religion) have been done qualitatively by biographical analyses, although the individualization process is postulated to be a process affecting society as a whole over time → *Requirement of empirical findings that (i) are macro-oriented and (ii) imply generalizable indications*

-Preliminary findings suggest that...

- ...kinds of 'alternative' religiosities can neither be seen as a relevant alternative for ecclesiastical religiosity nor as a compensation for it
- ...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 level of church attendance

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

### RESULTS

Predictors [EVS-Survey-Year 1981] [Maximum-Likelihood-Estimation]	Alternative Religiosity [1;2] [Level-2-Variable: Countries]		Church attendance [1;9]	
Individualization – Familial change [1;2]	0,167***	0,150***	1,212***	1,022***
Individualization – Attribution mode (1=High)	0,183***	0,152***	1,571***	1,288***
Sex (1=Male)		-0,106***		-0,704***
Age (years)		0,003***		0,026**
Income of household		0,004		0,025*
$\sigma_u$ (Between-Variance)	0,126	0,126	1,169	1,216
$\sigma_e$ (Within-Variance)	0,332	0,333	2,284	2,233
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$ ( $\sigma_u = 0$ )	386,96***	246,94***	1111,23***	756,71***
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$	295,06***	362,52***	568,30***	735,46***
$\rho$ (Intra-Class-Variation-Coefficient)	0,126	0,124	0,208	0,229
McFadden-Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0,1	0,14	0,021	0,033
Number of groups	8	8	8	8
N	4258	3423	6030	4878

\*\*\*p<0,001, \*\*p<0,01, \*p<0,1

Predictors [EVS-Survey-Year 1990] [Maximum-Likelihood-Estimation]	Alternative Religiosity [1;2] [Level-2-Variable: Countries]		Church attendance [1;9]	
Individualization – Familial change [1;2]	-0,360***	-0,323***	-2,276***	-1,828***
Individualization – Attribution mode (1=High)	-0,086***	-0,084***	-0,441***	-0,450***
Sex (1=Male)		-0,112***		-0,723***
Age (years)		0,003***		0,031***
Income of household		0,018**		0,116***
$\sigma_u$ (Between-Variance)	0,169	0,158	1,230	1,221
$\sigma_e$ (Within-Variance)	0,363	0,355	2,273	2,224
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$ ( $\sigma_u = 0$ )	707,09***	582,16***	1345,78***	1224,36***
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$	343,56***	532,51***	416,57***	827,58***
$\rho$ (Intra-Class-Variation-Coefficient)	0,178	0,165	0,227	0,231
McFadden-Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0,072	0,127	0,013	0,03
Number of groups	8	7	8	7
N	5453	4743	7052	6138

\*\*\*p<0,001, \*\*p<0,01,

Predictors [EVS-Survey-Year 1999] [Maximum-Likelihood-Estimation]	Alternative Religiosity [1;2] [Level-2-Variable: Countries]		Church attendance [1;9]	
Individualization – Familial change [1;2]	-1,468***	-0,167***	-2,254***	-2,439***
Individualization – Attribution mode (1=High)	-0,0002	0,084	-0,083	0,022
Sex (1=Male)		-0,091***		-0,630***
Age (years)		-0,001***		0,021***
Income of household		-0,002		0,022
$\sigma_u$ (Between-Variance)	0,058	0,06	0,456	0,422
$\sigma_e$ (Within-Variance)	0,314	0,311	2,245	2,2
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$ ( $\sigma_u = 0$ )	157,76***	136,54***	209,85***	137,05***
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$	51,64***	133,57***	487,41***	597,50***
$\rho$ (Intra-Class-Variation-Coefficient)	0,033	0,036	0,04	0,036
McFadden-Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0,02	0,06	0,02	0,03
Number of groups	6	6	6	6
N	4987	4177	6305	5226

\*\*\*p<0,001

Predictors [EVS-Survey-Year 2008] [Maximum-Likelihood-Estimation]	Alternative Religiosity [1;2] [Level-2-Variable: Countries]		Church attendance [1;9]	
Individualization – Familial change [1;2]	-0,257***	-0,289***	-2,883***	-2,573***
Individualization – Attribution mode (1=High)	-0,011	-0,016	-0,139	-0,169*
Sex (1=Male)		-0,105***		-0,397***
Age (years)		-0,0001		0,016***
Income of household		-0,005*		0,013
$\sigma_u$ (Between-Variance)	0,125	0,12	0,826	0,778
$\sigma_e$ (Within-Variance)	0,312	0,31	1,781	1,739
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$ ( $\sigma_u = 0$ )	507,33***	356,58***	951,76***	633,68***
Likelihood-Ratio- $\chi^2$	149,99***	305,73***	691,88***	817,13***
$\rho$ (Intra-Class-Variation-Coefficient)	0,138	0,130	0,177	0,169
McFadden-Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0,04	0,09	0,02	0,03
Number of groups	8	8	8	8
N	7111	5987	8625	5226

\*\*\*p<0,001, \*p<0,05, \*p<0,1

-The estimators of the first indicator of individualization (,familial change') doesn't influence ,alternative religiosity', in the proclaimed way, while it negatively influences church attendance – but not in the model estimations of 1981 – maybe there was intensifying individualization? The estimated value itself is rising in every model

-The estimators of the second indicator of individualization (,Attribution mode') is neither significant nor consistent in any influences

-Control variable have also potential of explaining (especially sex and age), but they never noteworthy interrupt the estimated influences of the indicators of individualization

#### Evaluation of the hypotheses:

H1: Completely falsified

H2: Incompletely falsified

→ All findings *rather coincide with the secularization thesis*, they rather contradict the thesis of an individualization of religion

→ But the *decline church attendance can partially be explained through one of the used indicators of individualization*; maybe there is – according to a previous statement of Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel (see Pollack/Pickel 2003) – a *superordinated secularization process that includes some tendencies of individualization* – but the speech of a total change of religiosity though individualization processes cannot be maintained

### Operationalisation

#### 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 by constructing indices through change of family structures (Dimension 1) (see Brüderl 2004, Burkart 1993) and positive attitudes toward self-determination (Pickel, Pollack 2000) (Dimension 2).

#### Dependent Variables:

,Alternative Religiosity' can be operationalised by affirmation to questions whether one believes in ,angels', ,telepathy' or the like (see Pollack/Pickel 1999).

,Church attendance' was measured directly in many categories (ranging from ,more than once per week' to ,never') and is therefore treated as continuous.

### Method

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

$$y_{ij} = [\beta_0 + \beta_{0j}z_j + \beta_1x_{1ij}] + [u_{0j} + u_{1j}x_{1ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}]$$

Fixed Part Random Part

with:

$y_{ij}$ : Response value of individual i included in group j

$\beta_0$ : ,Overall' intercept

$\beta_{0j}$ : Group-specific intercept

$z_j$ : Group variable

$\beta_1x_{1ij}$ : Estimator of the influence of a covariable  $x_1$

$u_{0j}$ : Group-specific variation of the intercept

$u_{1j}x_{1ij}$ : Group-specific variation of  $\beta_1x_{1ij}$

$\varepsilon_{ij}$ : Residual of individual i included in group j

→ *Random-Intercept-Random-Slope-Model (RI-RS)*

(see Hans 2001, Snijders/Bosker 1999)

-All effects are assumed to be random so that the postulated homogenous effects of individualization in all wealthy nation-state-societies can be proved – the state-specific deviance should be low.

-Considered countries: France, (West)Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Northern Ireland

-Hence the group variable considered in the analyses are european countries that can be denoted as ,western" (i.e. influence of capitalistic economy and democratic polity on individual lives)

-The consideration of the four survey dates (1981, 1990, 1999, 2008) allows a certain ,historical comparison" and hence an approximate identification of a process in time

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

### References

Beck, Ulrich (1986): Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Beck, Ulrich (2008): Der eigene Gott. Friedensfähigkeit und Gewaltpotential der Religionen. Frankfurt a.M., Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen.

Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth (1994): Individualisierungstheorie. Veränderungen des Lebenslaufs in der Moderne. In: Keupp, Heiner (Hrsg.): Zugänge zum Subjekt, p. 125-146.

Brüderl, Josef (2004): Die Pluralisierung partnerschaftlicher Lebensformen in Westdeutschland und Europa. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B 19, p. 3-10.

Burkart, Günter (1993): Individualisierung und Elternschaft. Das Beispiel USA. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 22/3, p. 159-177.

Hans, Silke (2006): Die Analyse gepoolter Daten mit Mehrebenenmodellen – Einstellungen zu Zuwanderern im europäischen Vergleich. In: Berliner Studien zur Soziologie Europas 6.

Luckmann, Thomas (1991): Die unsichtbare Religion. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Pollack, Detlef & Pickel, Gert (1999): Individualisierung und religiöser Wandel in Deutschland. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 28/6, p. 465-483.

Pollack, Detlef & Pickel, Gert (2000): Religiöse Individualisierung oder Säkularisierung? Eine falsche Alternative. Antwort auf die Replik von Wohlrab-Sahr und Krüggeler. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 29/3, p. 244-248.

Pollack, Detlef & Pickel, Gert (2003): Deinstitutionalisierung des Religiösen und religiöse Individualisierung in Ost- und Westdeutschland. In: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 55/3, p. 447-474.

Snijders, Tom A.B. & Bosker, Roel J. (1999): Multilevel analysis. An introduction to basic and advanced multilevel modeling. London u.a.: Sage Publishing.