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The Secularization Theory – not  
disconfirmed, yet rarely tested

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# „Secularization theory has been effectively falsified“, Berger

What did he expect?

- What is secularization?
- What is proposed by secularization theory?

Only if these questions have been answered, one can assess falsification.

1 what is meant by the concept secularization and what secularization theory contends, in order to review

2 how and with what success secularization theory has been examined up to now.

# Overview

## 1 Secularization between concept and theory

*1.1 The concept secularization as a tendency proposition*

*1.2 Three steps form a tendency proposition to a theory*

## 2 Theory of Secularization: Cross-sectional and longitudinal designs in Macro and Multi-level analyses

*2.1 Cross-sectional macro analysis*

*2.2 Cross-sectional Multi-level Analyses*

*2.3 Longitudinal Macro Analyses*

*2.4 Longitudinal Multi-level Analyses*

## 3 Summary and Conclusion

# 1 Secularization

between concept and theory

## *1.1 The concept secularization as a tendency proposition*

Decrease of Christian religiosity *in European societies and their former colonies*, in brief: *in Western countries*

Definition of a tendency proposition refers

- not only to *objects*
- but also to *a starting point and a direction*

Specifically “secularization”

- define *religion and religiosity* and
- identify a *trigger* which has elicited the tendency at a *certain time point*.

# *Religion und religiosity*

*Religions* = world interpretations, as are world views, philosophies or ideologies, answer religious question of wherefrom and whereto of life and world

Religions as against other world interpretations:

- *cognitively*, do not justify their propositions naturally through knowledge and experience, but (1) super-naturally, through *belief*
- *socially*, reinforce their propositions through exchange of arguments, AND (2) through *practice* of rites (3) in *community* of those which share supernatural justifications.

*Religiosity* = subjective appropriation of religion, defined by same specifics:

- (3) *belonging* to a community
- (2) *practice* of its rites, and
- (1) *belief* in its propositions

According to these definitions

- *religion vs. secular, religiosity vs. secularity*
- negative development of religiosity = secularization.

# Secularization opens new form: diffuse religiosity

- moves away from church religion and focuses on the person
- encompasses belonging, practice, belief and without accepting. Contrast to concrete religiosity
- four concepts
  - self-ascribed religiosity
  - self-ascribed spirituality
  - importance of God in one's life
  - importance of religion as a life domain.

# *Trigger of negative tendency: separation between religious and secular justifications of social order*

Population at large – as against elites – free to live without following commandments and using services of church

*Religiosity or secularity* option

- not until modern age only (except Japan, Korea and Taiwan) in countries formed by Christianity
- Secular justification of social order after religious wars of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, replacement of *political theology* of medieval Christianity through a *secular theory* of social life. Separation between religious and secular justifications of social order

Thus: Secularization = proposition of a negative tendency about the development of religiosity in Western, societies not dominated by religion *since the separation of a secular from the religious order.*

*... and starting point: state monopoly for legal notification of life transitions*

Church to state

- Churches lost monopoly for *marriage* ceremonies
- State legalized *divorce* and
- took over *birth* registration

option between planning lives under guidance by or independently from churches, model for

option between belief and unbelief, observance and non-observance

in most European nations not before end of 19<sup>th</sup> century

Starting point not before reformation in Golden Age of Christianity, Middle Ages

- step within the "secularization of law"
- *authority loss of churches over conduct of life.*
- in most European countries after industrialization, urbanization and the introduction of a democratic constitution
- when life without churches became thinkable, and then also feasible for many

*1.2 Three steps form a tendency  
proposition to a theory*

(1) *Goal variable:*

*Subsuming hypothetical trends with a common starting point under a development*

concept and indicators = *development and trends.*

subsume trends under development according to a hypothesis *in advance*

Development secularization

- trends in *all dimensions* of religiosity and their indicators
- since emergence of state monopolies on legal regulation of biographical transitions.

*(2) Independent Variables:  
Differentiation and Pluralization*

Time and place *proper names*, single case

Class of cases defined by *analytical properties*

Replacing proper names by properties

requires explicit hypotheses about causes

# *Social differentiation*

distribution of the tasks necessary for a society's maintenance among its members

The more differentiated a society

- the richer it becomes, such that men are able to plan and govern their lives more easily and the need to explain life through powers beyond decreases
- the more life is split up into different areas

Social differentiation enlarges life chances by

- providing more resources and
- opening up more life domains.

# *Causal sequence*

## *differentiation-pluralization-secularization*

Increasingly richer and broader life through lens of world-view, depends on

- life conditions during formative years of youth, wealth of society resulting from social differentiation
- experiences during life resulting from opportunities and character of a person

Both produce social change; but the latter independent from the former.

Impact of social differentiation upon secularization filtered by world-views which may change in accord with it

- strong when world-views are homogeneous and have no competitors
- weak when they are heterogeneous and have many competitors

*Cultural pluralization* second hypothetical cause

- independent from first cause and more closely related to ultimate effect

*Causal sequence differentiation-pluralization-secularization*

# Differentiation and pluralization: complementary and exhaustive

Medium of differentiation = structure of roles in society.  
Geared to and often grants the natural and economic reproduction of a society.

Medium of pluralization = interpretations of world and life which everybody takes over from tradition or derives from encounters with others

Located on social layers in general, such that secularization theory implicitly contends

- all social developments affecting personal religiosity are facets of differentiation or pluralization and
- both together explain it *exhaustively*.

# Two causal hypotheses

- Differentiation hypothesis: The further *social differentiation* advances, the greater will be cultural pluralization.
  - *For:* The more life domains co-exist in a society and the more finely they are divided within themselves, the more heterogeneous the principles according to which they are regulated must become.
- Pluralization hypothesis: The further *cultural pluralization* advances, the greater the opportunities for everybody to distance oneself from the handed-down religion and the stronger will be the secularization in the society at large.
  - *For:* As one experiences more and more formerly unknown world-views one tends to question and possibly give up the original one.

# Secularization, individualization and market theory

Differentiation and pluralization causes of religiosity in

- secularization theory as well as
- individualization theory and religious market theory.

Yet latter two depart from first insofar as they

- define the ultimate step of causal chain more broadly and
- justify impact of pluralization differently.

# *Individualization theory*

Because pluralization *individualizes* religion, it

- reduces belief in *Christian* dogma and observance of church practices, *negative*
- increases *non-Christian alternative "individualized"* religiosity, *positive*.

*For:* Everybody is motivated by experiences of diversity to question one's handed-down world-view; yet everybody needs some world-view as well such that not all abandon their handed-down world-view, but many mix tradition and novelty according to their own insight.

Negative effect in accordance with,

Positive effect contradicts secularization theory.

# *Religious market theory*

highlights a new mechanism: competition, pluralization strengthens religion. *Vitalization hypothesis*, opposite to pluralization hypothesis

*For:* Diversity incites adherents of all competing supplies to more firmly and openly believe and to more intensely practice.

Remains within causal sequence. But specifies two positive effects:

- Christian church religiosity AND
  - alternative religiosity
- should increase

# Common structure of the three theories

Consent: first two members of the sequence

Dissent: range of third member and impact of second on third

Share macro-social perspective on the religious development

Can be *modified* in same manner:

- first two members of the sequence can be set side by side as causes of equal rank; causal sequence reduced to two levels
- causality from differentiation to pluralization becomes a correlation
- differentiation hypothesis is split up into two hypotheses on
  - positive correlation between differentiation and pluralization and
  - positive impact of differentiation on secularization

Common structure remains:

- three concepts
- two hypotheses, differentiation hypothesis can be split up

### *(3) Multi-level Model: Minimal Program of Independent Micro-variables and Cohort succession hypothesis*

Causal sequence proceeds unevenly on micro and macro level:

- differentiation and pluralization on macro level only
- secularization reflection of micro decisions onto macro level.

*Multi-level model* from macro to micro level and back again  
required

- impact of macro conditions on micro causes
- impact of micro causes on micro effects, and
- aggregation of micro to macro goal variables

Aggregation conditioned by micro causes of religiosity.

Micro theory of religiosity needed, in none of the three theories.

# *Minimal program of micro causes of religiosity*

Two perspectives

- *during socialization* religiosity results *positively* from religious *imprinting* and *negatively* from *reflexivity* of the adolescent
- *life stages* lower or increase natural self-concern of every man and move religious question into foreground or background of consciousness

# Micro-Indicators from socio-demographic survey questions

- *Belonging to a denomination* indicator of imprinting at home and at school. MUST be controlled in order not to over-estimate other causes which correlate with them. Retrospective question about *religious upbringing during youth*

- Antagonist: reflexivity of the adolescent: *educational level*

- Parenthood and – indirectly – partnership reduce self-concern; children transgress life horizon of parents, remind them on their death.

- Being employed challenges achievement motives, stresses self-concern.

Secularization longitudinal concept: birth cohort MUST be controlled

# Cohort succession and cohort aging

*Imprinting* during youth, succession produces  
*change*

Richer societies, decreasing religious imprinting

*Aging* during life cycle, uniformity produces  
*stability*

death approaches, religiosity increases

None of three theories explicate either  
hypothesis, reconstruction of IMPLIED  
hypotheses ex post

# Cohort hypotheses in the three theories

Secularization theory: decrease of religiosity, two propositions:

- (1) religiosity starts on a lower level with each younger cohort
- (2) religiosity remains constant within cohorts. No cohort aging.

*Negative cohort succession hypotheses:*

Individualization theory: decrease of Christian religiosity

*Negative cohort succession hypothesis for Christian religiosity*

Increase of individualized religiosity, inverts sign of pluralization hypothesis. Two consequences:

- (1) if pluralization as a macro tendency increases religiosity, cohort aging no longer excluded, but part of macro tendency of increasing religiosity
- (2) Positive tendency rests on *positive cohort succession*.

*Positive cohort succession hypothesis for individualized religiosity*

Market theory: inverts sign of pluralization hypothesis throughout

*Positive cohort succession hypothesis for any form of religiosity*

# *Summary steps (1)-(3): Common structure of theories*

- (1) definition of secularization restricted substantively to *Western, not religiously dominated national societies*, located in time *after authority loss of churches*, option between religiosity and secularity for population at large
- (2) all social determinants of secularization = *differentiation* and *pluralization*
- (3) *minimal program of independent micro-variables of religiosity* and a hypothesis on the effect of *cohort succession* on religiosity indispensable

Share

- causal sequence differentiation-pluralization-secularization
- hypothesis of a positive impact of differentiation on pluralization

Differ

- extension of object range from Christian church religiosity to alternative religiosity
- sign of pluralization hypothesis
- sign of implied cohort succession hypothesis.

# Summary of each theory

## Secularization theory

- restricts its prediction to the decrease of Christian church religiosity
- assumes a negative effect of pluralization on religiosity and implies a negative cohort succession hypothesis:
  - *Christian church* religiosity *decreases* monotonously with pluralization and with younger cohorts.

## Individualization theory

- treats Christian church *and* alternative religiosity.
- Prediction as in secularization theory for former. For latter sign of pluralization and the cohort succession hypotheses switch:
  - *Alternative* religiosity *increases* monotonously with pluralization and with younger cohorts.

## Market theory

- Treats Christian church *and* alternative religiosity
- switches sign of pluralization and cohort succession hypothesis for both:
  - *Every form* of religiosity monotonously *increases* with pluralization and with younger cohorts.

# *The secularization theory*

encompasses exactly three hypotheses

- *the* differentiation hypothesis
- *a* pluralization hypothesis
- *a* cohort succession hypothesis

presupposes

- a minimal program of micro-determinants of religiosity

## 2 Theory of Secularization:

Cross-sectional and longitudinal  
designs  
in Macro and Multi-level analyses

Tendency of secularization: demonstrated massively. Yet

Explanations of tendency by theory: only a few

- None follows the causal sequence as a temporal one, only two causal levels.
- Individualization theory nowhere examined simultaneously in its positive and negative facet, only secularization and market theory

Review in two dimensions

- *data base*, from cross-sections to longitudinal designs - progress
- *statistical analysis procedures* handling imbalance of secularization theory: From macro-analysis to multi-level analysis - progress

Crossing *data base* and *analysis procedure*, four forms:

- 2.1 Cross-sectional macro analysis
- 2.2 Cross sectional multi-level analysis
- 2.3 Longitudinal macro analysis
- 2.4 Longitudinal multi-level analysis.

Progress in both dimensions = Rank order

## *2.1 Cross-sectional macro analysis*

## Social differentiation:

socio-economic development, negative with religion

70 countries of all continents:

- HDI, degree of alphabetization, level of schooling, access to mass media -.53 to -.45 with average of church attendance and prayer

21 post-industrial societies only:

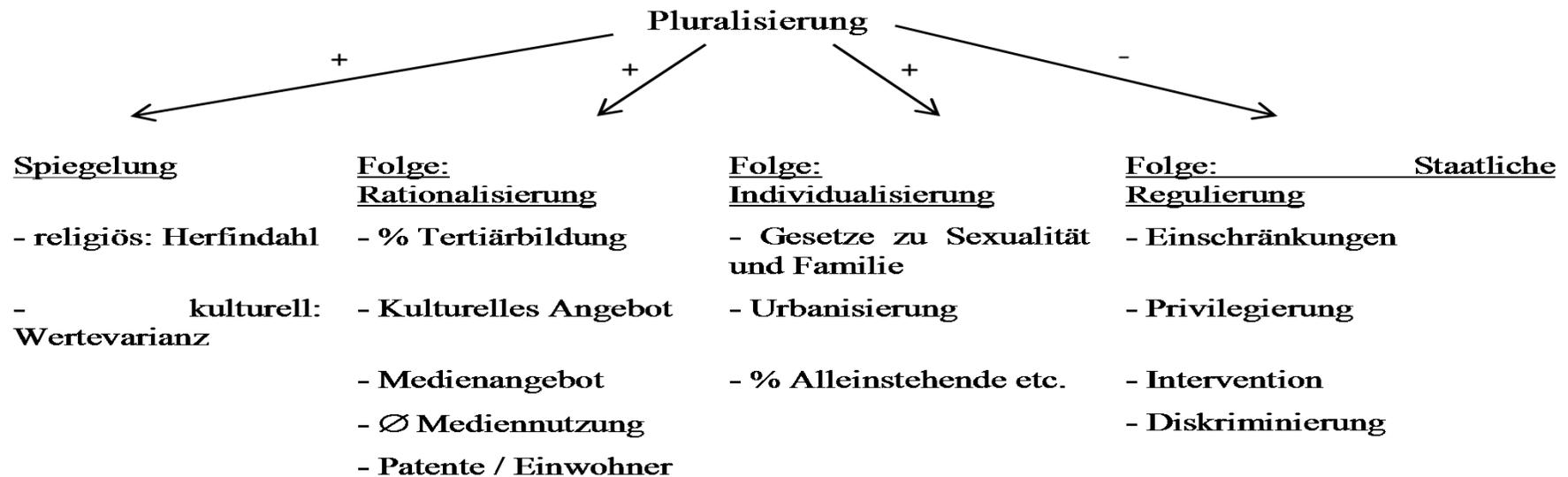
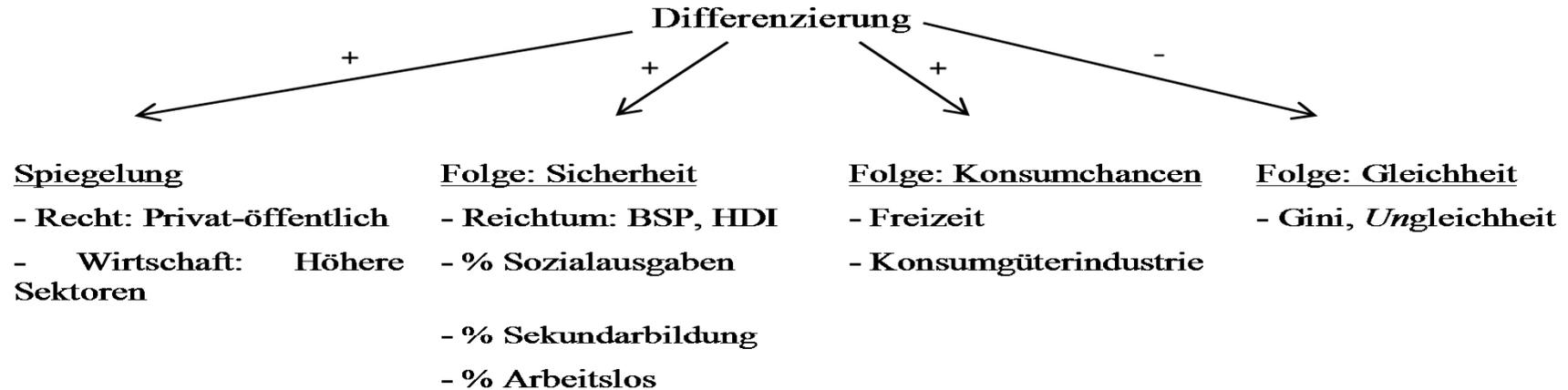
- -.25 to .08, not significant

# *Three Problems*

1. Secularization refers to Western societies, country samples worldwide. Different sampling levels- different results
2. No third variable analysis possible with aggregate independent variable of religiosity, they dominate, fixed-effects regression reduces this problem.
3. Differences between correlations of a given macro variable with different dimensions of religiosity difficult to interpret.  
Example: State regulation of religion in 42 states of Europe does not affect church attendance, but belief in God and self-ascribed religiosity .35 and .25. Actions less than belief?

## *2.2 Cross-sectional Multi-level Analyses*

# Differenzierung und Pluralisierung: Dimensionen und Indikatoren.



# Differentiation (D) AND Pluralisierung (P): Results of 5 Studies

	<i>Goal Variable</i>		<i>Countries</i>		
	<i>Pract Belief</i>		<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>
Pettersson	factor both		-	+	37 Christian
Halman & D	ja	ja	0	-	30 European
R & van T	ja		-	-/+	48 Christian
Huber & K	ja	ja	-	0	14 west, 7 nw
Pollack & R	ja	ja	-	-/+	54 west + nw

# Differentiation (D) only: Results of 2 Studies

	<i>Goal Variable</i>			<i>Countries</i>
	<i>Pract</i>	<i>Belief</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>n</i>
Immerzeel	ja	Ja	-	32 European
Hirschle	ja		-	82 European REGIONS

## *2.3 Longitudinal Macro Analyses*

# Differentiation and Pluralization: 1 Study; Differentiation only: 1 Study

	<i>Goal Variable</i>				<i>Countries*Time</i>
	<i>Pract Belief</i>		<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>
Jagodz.	Ja	ja	-	-	10*2 W Eur
Hirschle	ja		-		13*25 W Eur

## *2.4 Longitudinal Multi-level Analyses*

# D and p and cohort succession: Results of 2 Studies

	<i>Goal Variable</i>				<i>Countries*Time</i>
	<i>Pract</i>	<i>Belief</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>
Reitsma 1981-1998 Typology			-	0	10*2 W European
Reyn. 1991-2008	ja	ja	-	0	13*25 W European

Both studies show negative cohort succession effects

But Reitsma: positive effect of time after controlling D and P and micro variables

# Three Desiderata for Longitudinal multi-level Design

1. Test explanation by analytical properties and by cohort succession against explanations which additionally comprise proper names.
2. Test macro predictors one at a time and together
3. Treat country and time, separately statistically
  - Common procedure: replications of surveys in countries treated as independent samples, although dependent upon each other
  - Standard errors of macro variables underestimated, macro effects too easily proven significant. Furthermore, estimates of effects can be biased (Schmitt-Catran & Fairbrother 2016).

# 3 Summary and Conclusion

# 11 tests of secularization theory

Design, authors, period	Goal variable			Independent variables					
	Prac tice	Belief	Other dimensions, comments	Macro D	P	I	Micro E	Pa	Em
<i>Cross-sectional multi-level analyses</i>									
Pettersson			Factor score for both	-	+	+	-	+	
Halman & Draulans	Y	Y	Factor score for each	0	-	+	0		-
Ruiter & van Tubergen	Y			-	-/+	+	-		-
Huber & Krech	Y	Y	Centrality = practice, Diffuse = belief	-	(0)	(+)	0		
Immerzeel & van Tubergen	Y	Y	Diffuse = belief	-/0			-		
Pollack & Rosta	Y	Y	Diffuse = belief	-	-/+		-		-
Hirschle	Y		Unit of analysis: region	-		+	0		-
<i>Longitudinal macro analyses</i>									
Jagodzinski 1981-1990	Y			-	-				
Hirschle 1970-2009	Y	Y	Diffuse = belief	-					
<i>Longitudinal multi-level analyses</i>									
Reitsma et al. 1981-1998			Typ, diffus = belief	-	0		-		
Reynolds 1981-2008	Y	Y	Factor score for each	-	0		-		-

# Dependent Micro Variables

Practice and belief

- simultaneously in only 6
- No correlations reported
- Sometimes mixed as factor or typology

# Confirmation of Differentiation and Pluralization hypotheses

Simultaneously in 8 of 11 studies. No correlations reported

## *Differentiation*

- in all 11 studies. Confirmed throughout in 7, for practice only in 1, disconfirmed in none
- theoretically backbone, empirically supporting leg of secularization theory.

## *Pluralization*

- in 8 of 11, disconfirmed in 1, confirmed in 2
- Confirmed as *diversity* and disconfirmed as *state regulation* in 2
- *Diversity*: pluralization - *state regulation*: vitalization through market hypothesis. Complementary, not antagonistic. Diversity weakens, non-regulation strengthens religiosity.
- Theoretically and empirically: free leg of secularization theory.

D and P(*diversity*) simultaneously confirmed in 3 studies

D and P(*state regulation*) simultaneously confirmed in 3 studies

# Independent Micro Variables: Only 9 multi-level analyses relevant

- *Imprinting = membership, socialization*: 5, positive, as expected.
- *Education*: 9, always negative, as expected
- *Parenthood*: 1, positive, as expected
- *Female*: 9, always positive, as expected
- *Employment*: 5, always negative, as expected
- *Cohort*: only in 2 longitudinal multi-level, both negative as expected

Only 4 studies control at least 3 of the minimal program, micro blindness

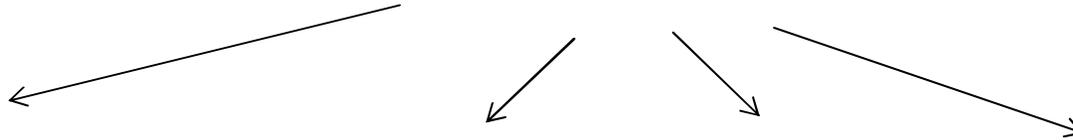
Secularization theory – so far:  
not disconfirmed, but rarely tested

- only a few and sometimes incomplete studies
- in appropriate designs, its three hypotheses (differentiation, pluralization, cohort succession) have been tested and by and large confirmed
- For most appropriate design, longitudinal multi-level regression, compiled data sets available, and confirmation so far

# Thank you

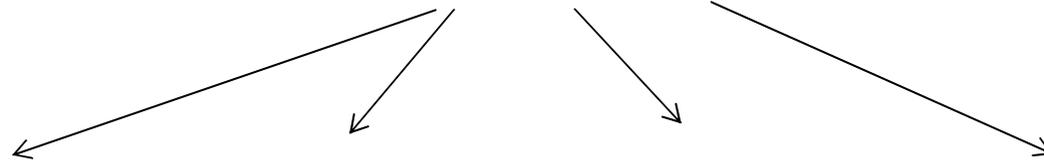
Heiner Meulemann, 2017. Secularization theory  
– not disconfirmed, but rarely tested. *Analyse &  
Kritik* 39(2): 325-355

# + Social Differentiation



<u>Direct</u>	<u>Consequences:</u> <u>Security</u>	<u>Consequence:</u> <u>consumption</u> <u>opportunities</u>	<u>Consequence</u> <u>: Equality</u>
- Law: Private-state	- Wealth: GNP, HDI	- LeisureFreizeit	- Gini, INequality
- Economy: higher Sectors	- % social expentire of GNP	- Consumption industry	
	- % Secondary education		
	- % unemployed		

# Cultural Pluralization



<u>Direct</u>	<u>Consequence: Rationalisation</u>	<u>Consequence: Individualisation</u>	<u>Consequences: State Regulation</u>
- Religious: Herfindahl	- % Tertiary education	- Laws conc. sexuality and family	- Restrictions
- Cultural: value diversity	- Cultural supply	- Urbanisation	- Privilegization
	- Media supply	- % Single etc.	- Intervention
	- ∅ Media use		- Discrimination
	- Patents per inhabitant		

## Synopsis of 11 studies

				Independent variables					
	Goal variable			Macro		Micro			
Design, authors, period	Practice	Belief	Other dimensions, comments	D	P	I	E	Pa	Em
Cross-sectional multi-level analyses									
Pettersson			Factor score for both	-	+	+	-	+	
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Longitudinal macro analyses									
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