

Religious Change in Europe: Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Findings

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While a few decades ago it was still quite common within the social sciences and humanities to term changes in the social significance of religion and church in modern societies as secularization, in recent years increasing numbers of social scientists have come to assume a worldwide upswing in the religious realm. They have coined terms such as de-secularization (Peter L. Berger),¹ re-spiritualization,² de-privatization (José Casanova),³ or the “return of religions” (Martin Riesebrodt).⁴ Likewise, in past decades it was a matter of course to claim that modernization processes such as urbanization, industrialization, rising living standards, individualization, and cultural pluralization would lead to a decline in the social significance of religious institutions, belief systems, and practices. Today, however, it seems to go without saying that religion retains its puissance even under modern conditions, that it is compatible with modernity, and that it can, at times, even serve as a source of modernity.

Thus, the main question of this contribution concerns the degree to which we can indeed assume a stop of the previously assumed process of church decline and secularization, and whether an increase in the significance of religion is indeed taking hold in Europe. In order to investigate this question, it is necessary to begin with a revision of the main arguments of the secularization thesis, which has come under so much criticism in recent years. In the course of this revision, we must also specify what the secularization thesis does not state and offer an overview of alternative explanations dealing with contemporary processes of religious change. These include the economic market model, which has been proposed by North American sociologist of religion, and the thesis of religious individualization, which is more prevalent within European sociology of religion. Both theoretical strands draw a significant amount of legitimacy from their criticisms of the secularization thesis. Following the descriptions of these models, we will subject them to an empirical assessment. This assessment will yield the result that the secularization thesis still possesses a great degree of plausibility.

¹ Berger, Peter L. (ed.): *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999.

² Horx, Matthias: *Trendbuch, Bd. 1: Der erste große deutsche Trendreport*, München: Econ 1993.

³ Casanova, José: *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994.

⁴ Riesebrodt, Martin: *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der „Kampf der Kulturen“*, München: Beck 2000.

1. Three models within the sociology of religion

1.1. The secularization theory

The secularization theory has a long intellectual tradition and is without doubt the most prominent of the three sociological approaches discussed here. Early sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim already argued that religion had forfeited its central position in modern societies. It was no longer able, as it had been in pre-modern societies, to provide a universally acknowledged worldview. However, contemporary critics of the secularization theory are simply mistaken when they allege that its adherents claimed processes of modernization would lead to the demise of religion and faith. Neither Weber and Durkheim, nor contemporary secularization theorists such as Bryan Wilson, Steve Bruce, or Karel Dobbelaere advance such notions.

What they do argue, though, is that the process of modernization, which transforms the entire social structure, cannot remain without consequence for religious traditions and institutions. However one defines modernization in detail, the core thesis of the secularization theory states that processes of modernization will eventually have a negative effect on the stability and vitality of religious communities, practices, and convictions. This thesis does not assert that this development is inevitable,⁵ that it is irreversible,⁶ and least of all that it is desirable.⁷ It simply states that it is probable. If, contrary to better judgment, critics of the secularization theory claim that its proponents suggest such an inevitability and irreversibility, they most likely do so in order to be able to distance themselves from it more easily. However, one searches in vain for substantial evidence supporting these criticisms in their writing.

1.2. The economic market model

⁵ P. Norris und R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 16, would like their argumentation pertaining to the modernization theory to be understood as “probabilistic, not deterministic”.

⁶ “Nothing in the social world is irreversible or inevitable”, two of the main proponents of the secularization theory explain: R. Wallis und St. Bruce, *Secularization: The orthodox model*, in: Wallis/Bruce. (eds.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, Oxford 1992, pp. 8-30, here pp. 27.

⁷ The argument surrounding belief in progress as a characteristic trait of the secularization theory is one of the feeblest criticisms that has been voiced against it. Even if it were justified, it does not suffice to refute the theory’s validity. Whether one greets the process of modernization as positive or dismisses it as negative has little influence on how one regards the relationship between modernization and secularization. This relationship, however, is the secularization theory’s sole object of inquiry. It is more likely that in cases where claims towards such a relationship are denounced as naively progressivist, a feeling of unease about modernity is actually being articulated.

While the various strands within the secularization theory discern a strained relationship between religion and modernity, adherents of the economic market model presume compatibility between the two.⁸ In contrast to the views of Peter L. Berger⁹ and other sociologists of religion such as Steve Bruce and Karel Dobbelaere, who adhere to Berger's positions, proponents of the economic market model do not assume that the processes of religious pluralization unfolding in modern societies have a negative effect on the stability of religious communities, convictions, or practices. On the contrary - the more pluralist the religious market, the greater the competition between the various religious providers. According to this model, competition prompts each religious community and its representatives to improve their services in order to retain their clients and to attract new ones. In contrast, in cases where one religious community occupies a monopoly position, the clergy allegedly tends to become indolent and lazy, and to disregard people's needs. Competition in turn forces religious providers to exercise customer-oriented sensitivity, to optimize services, and to continually strive towards improvement. According to this theory, the diversification of faith options that is to be observed in modern societies serves to stimulate the vitality of religious communities. Thus, it is not surprising that the proponents of the economic market model consider religious vitality to be higher in cities than in rural settings. In an urban surrounding, the number of religious providers is greater than in the countryside, and therefore competition is steeper.

The institutional level must be distinguished from the level of individual consumers here. The religious energy of the latter is also, however, stimulated by a higher degree of religious pluralism. According to market theorists, if various religious offers exist the individual is more likely to find the pair of shoes that fits him or her best. Under conditions of religious monopoly, in contrast, the likelihood of product dissatisfaction rises, as individual needs vary and cannot be satisfied optimally by a single provider. Due to the lack of alternatives, the probability thus increases that dissatisfaction with the one religious offer will prompt the customer to turn his or her back on the religious market altogether.

In this model, the conditions under which religious pluralism can unfold include the strict separation between church and state, which entails that no religious community holds a privileged position over another. The starting costs for smaller religious communities to establish themselves beside the large churches is low enough only if the state does not

⁸ For a discussion of the central arguments of the economic market model, see R. Stark/R. Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley; Los Angeles 2000.

⁹ In particular, see P. L. Berger, *Der Zwang zur Häresie: Religion in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt a. M. 1980.

intervene in religious affairs and does not favor one of the large churches. Once religious pluralism is established, the productivity of the entire religious market rises due to growing competition.

With this line of argumentation, the familiar patterns of the secularization theory are reversed. Religious pluralism does not inhibit religiosity, but rather enhances it. The separation between church and state does not hinder, but rather augments the social capacity of religious communities and churches to retain their members. Cities are not religiously weaker, but more vital than rural areas. If modernity is defined by processes of cultural pluralization, institutional differentiation, and urbanization, then religion does not suffer defeat under conditions of modernity, but rather profits from them.

1.3. The individualization theory

Considering its 'theoretical architecture', the individualization theory inhabits a space somewhere between the secularization theory and the economic market model.¹⁰ It shares with the secularization theory the view that functional differentiation, rationalization, and cultural pluralization pose the point of departure for macro-sociological changes. In contrast to the secularization theory, however, it does not assume that these all-embracing societal changes lead to a decline in the social significance of religion in modern societies. Instead, in concurrence with the economic market model, it asserts that modernity and religion are compatible. Modernization according to this model does not lead to a decline in the societal position of religion, but rather to a change in its forms. While religion was institutionalized in the form of church in premodern societies, the relationship between church and religiosity gradually dissolves in modern societies. Today, religion and religiosity can be encountered in previously unsuspected settings – in psychoanalysis, in body and pastime cultures, in community cults, in tourism, and in sports. The relationship between individual and religion has emancipated itself from the custody of the large religious institutions; religious preferences are increasingly subject to the individual's autonomous choices. Churches no longer define comprehensive belief parameters; individuals instead decide on their own worldviews and spiritual orientations. The individualization theory thus proposes that the

¹⁰ The most prominent proponents of the individualization theory are Th. Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*. Frankfurt a.M. 1991; G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*. Oxford 1994, D. Hervieu-Léger, *Pilger und Konvertiten: Religion in Bewegung*, Würzburg 2004 und M. Krüggeler with P. Voll, *Strukturelle Individualisierung – ein Leitfaden durchs Labyrinth der Empirie*, in: A. Dubach/R. Campiche (eds.), *Jede(r) ein Sonderfall? Religion in der Schweiz*. Zürich; Basel 1993, pp. 17 – 49.

constitution of individual religious convictions and practices is based on a unique selection from various religious traditions, among which Christianity is certainly still an important, but no longer the exclusive point of reference. Even in those cases where individuals retain their church adherence, his or her faith practices take on an independent, individual character. The declining social significance of religious institutions thus does not go hand in hand with a general loss in the meaning of religiosity for the individual - quite the opposite.

Institutionalized religion and individual spirituality, according to individualization theorists such as Grace Davie,¹¹ exhibit a reverse proportional correlation - the Churches' decline leads to an upswing in individual religiosity.

2. Assessment of the three models within the sociology of religion

In order to gauge the significance of religion on the empirical level, we shall distinguish between three dimensions of religiosity: the dimension of religious *membership*, religious *practice*, and religious *conviction*. The following is an attempt to offer an overview of religious commitment, religious practice, and religious belief systems for Europe on the basis of selected variables in a country comparison over time. The dimension of membership is measured by *denomination membership*, the dimension of practice by the frequency of *church attendance*, and the dimension conviction by *belief in God*. Furthermore, questions addressing belief in *astrology* and the *virtue of spiritualism and occultism* are included in order to assess aspects of *extra-church religiosity*. We have included western and eastern European countries in our survey, as well as predominantly Catholic countries (Ireland, Portugal, Poland, Croatia), predominantly Protestant countries (Finland, Estonia), predominantly Christian-Orthodox countries (Russia), and bi-denominational countries (Germany, Hungary).

Table 1: Religiosity and church adherence in selected European countries (2006)

Country	Denomination	Frequency of church attendance (weekly)	Belief in God	Astrology	Occultism
Ireland (n=931)	95.6	54.4	84.4	17.8	19.6

¹¹ G. Davie, Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World, London 2002, p. 8.

Portugal (n=1001)	91.3	19.1	89.7	26.5	24.3
Finland (n=931)	89.0	2.9	74.4	15.8	9.3
Western Germany (n=717)	81.2	8.7	71.3	18.2	12.2
Eastern Germany (n=563)	29.6	3.0	40.0	16.3	8.1
Poland (n=977)	96.7	48.9	88.0	19.6	8.2
Croatia (n=968)	95.7	20.8	84.2	25.6	13.0
Estonia (n=955)	50.0	2.2	52.9	30.9	17.3
Hungary (n=1001)	78.5	15.3	65.7	32.2	12.4
Russia (n=1056)	72.7	2.6	56.9	31.1	15.9

Source: Volkswagen-Project "Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe"¹²

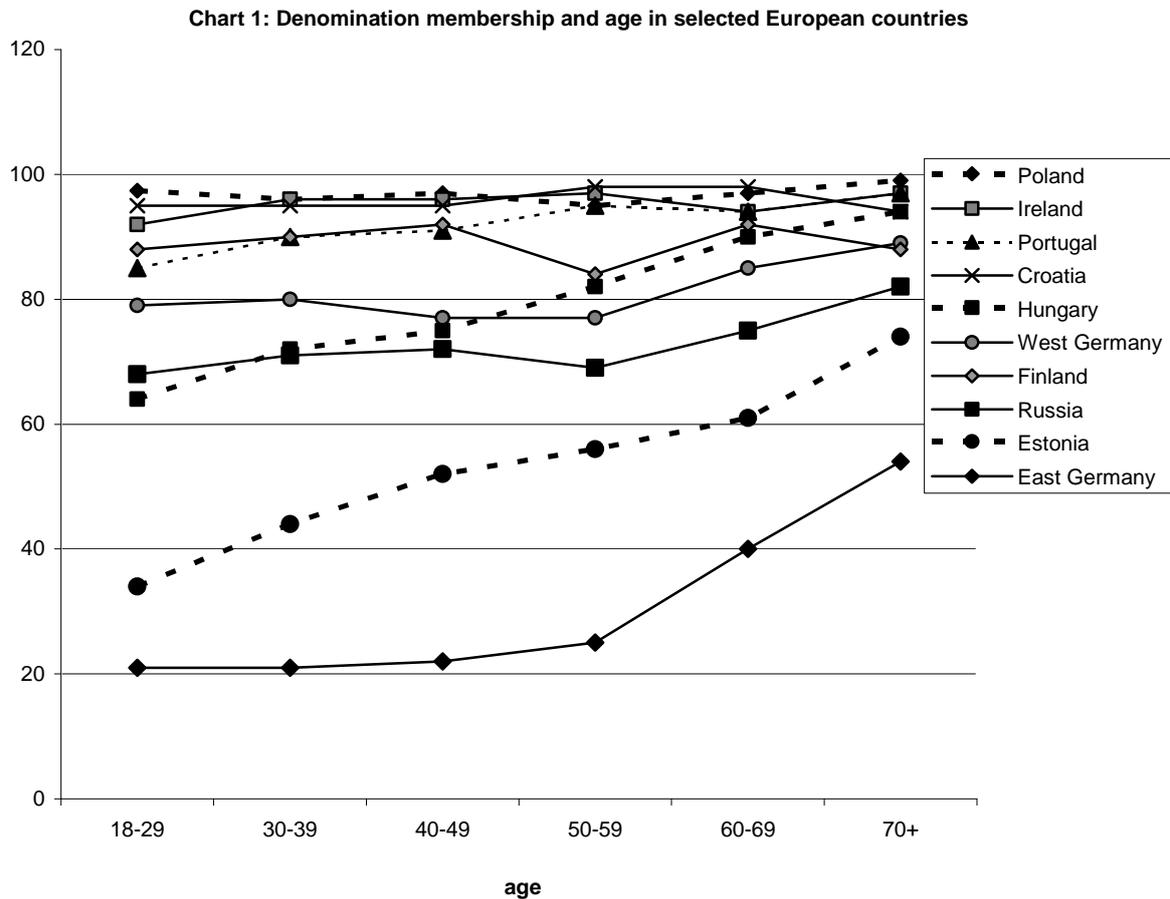
Table 1 offers an overview of the present religious situation in Europe as measured by the selected indicators in a country comparison. At first glance, we see that the level of religiosity, especially frequency of church attendance and belief in God, is above European average in the predominantly Catholic countries Ireland, Portugal, Poland, and Croatia. The figures for these countries stand out clearly when compared to the predominantly Protestant countries. In Finland (partially also in Estonia, but on a lower scale), we encounter the familiar Scandinavian pattern of religiosity, which is characterized by a relatively high level of denominational organization, a relatively low rate of church involvement, and a rather below-average intensity of faith.¹³ In the multi-denominational countries, individual religiosity does not attain higher values than the average for European countries.¹⁴ Orthodox religiosity, as prevails in Russia, is in turn marked by a high degree of church commitment

¹² This project, which is funded by the Volkswagen Stiftung, is currently being carried out by the Chair for Comparative Cultural Sociology at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). I am grateful to Dr. Gert Pickel and Olaf Müller, who are involved in conducting the research, for their support in evaluating the data.

¹³ The values for belief in God are above average for Finland in comparison to other Scandinavian countries.

¹⁴ This contradicts certain assumptions of the so-called economic market model. This model assumes that religious plurality enhances competition between various religious communities and that greater religious vitality ensues from greater competition. See for example R. Stark/R. Finke, *Acts*.

and at the same time a low degree of participation in church life.¹⁵ As far as the acceptance of extra-church forms of religiosity is concerned, we must note that those who believe in astrology or in the virtue of occultism and spiritualism constitute only a minority. Believers in occultism generally account for less than one fourth of believers in God.



¹⁵ Trust in the Church is also exceptionally high in Russia. For a more detailed discussion of this form of high church commitment coupled with a lack of participation, see Pollack, Detlef: Religiöser Wandel in Mittel- und Osteuropa, in: Detlef Pollack, Irena Borowik, Wolfgang Jagodzinski (eds.): *Religiöser Wandel in den postkommunistischen Staaten Mittel- und Osteuropas*, Würzburg: Ergon 1998, pp. 9-54, here pp. 33-35.

Chart 2: Church attendance (weekly) and age in selected European countries

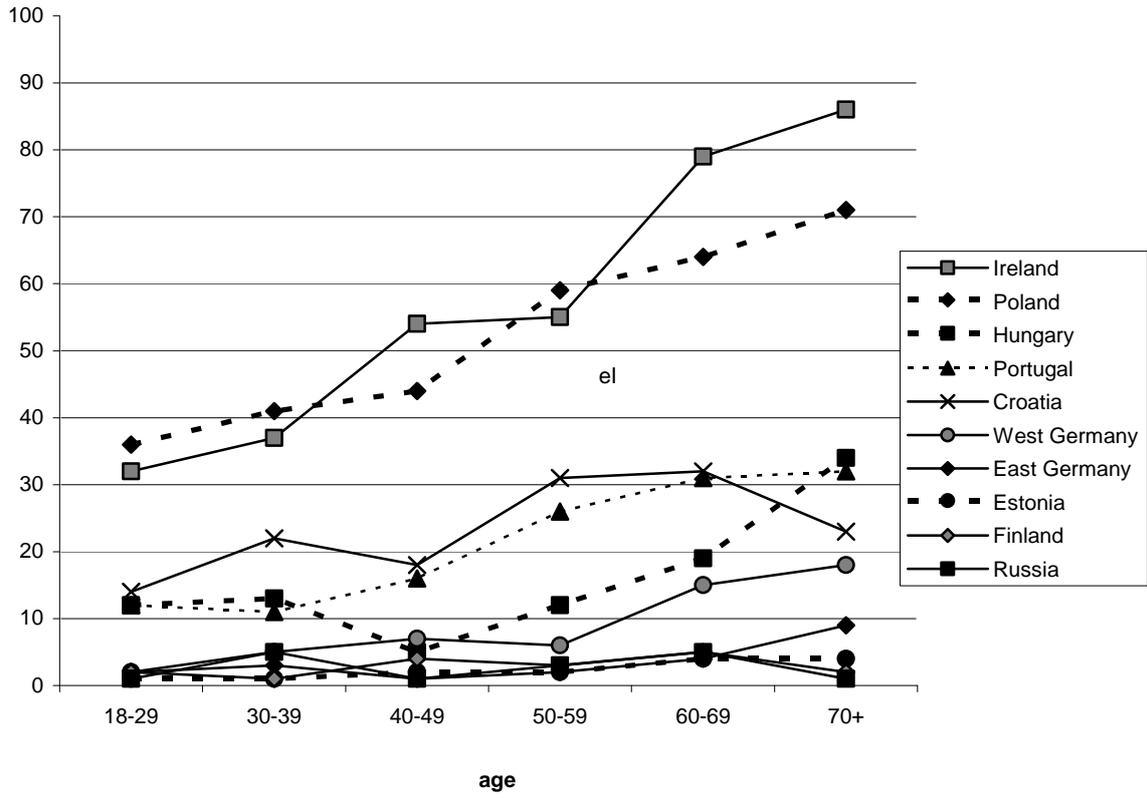


Chart 3: Belief in God and age in selected European countries

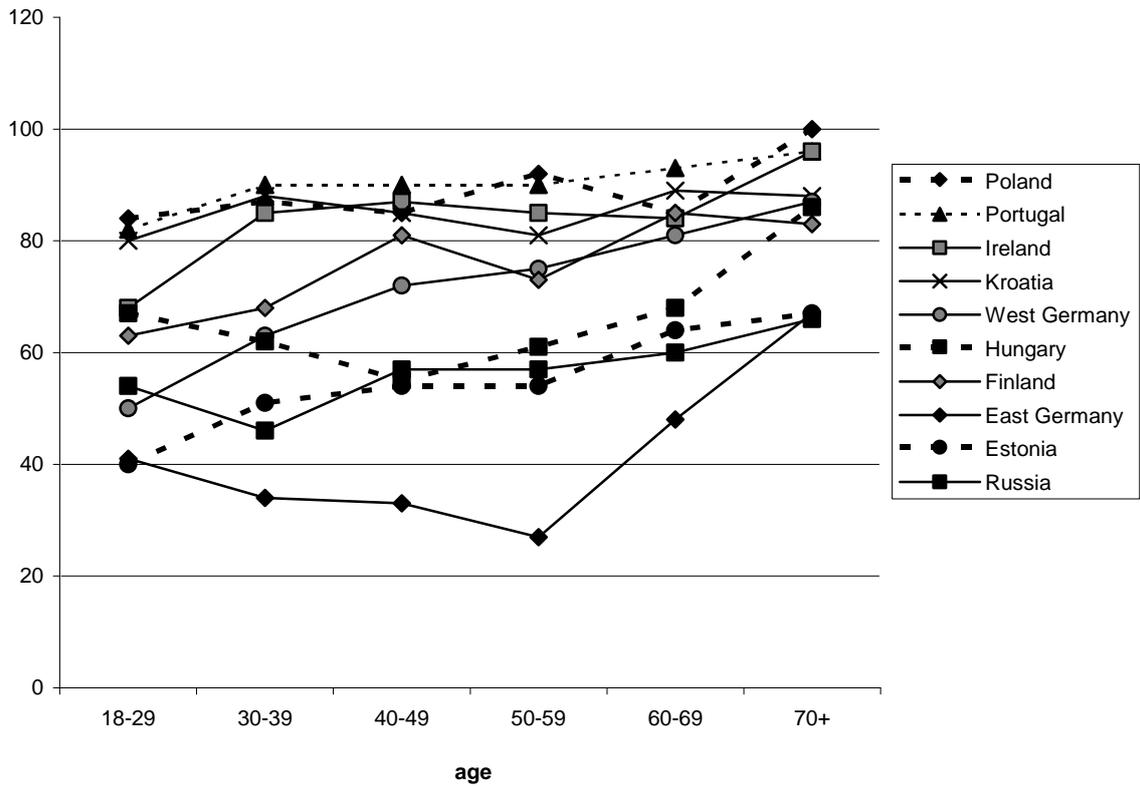
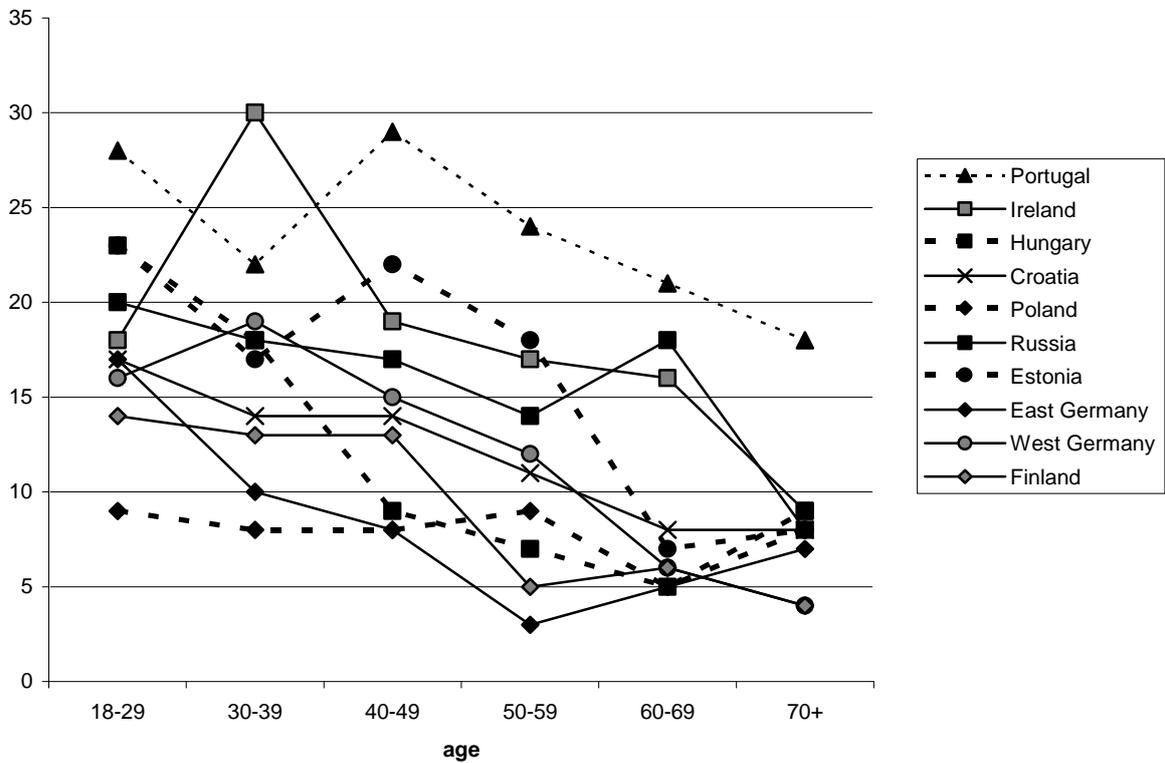


Chart 4: Spiritualism and age in selected European countries



If we consider the employed items in a comparison of various age groups, a differentiated picture emerges. *Denomination membership* (see chart 1) tends to be higher among older birth cohorts than among younger ones. In countries like Poland or Croatia, however, there hardly exist any age differences. In turn, we can note a sharp decline in *frequency of church attendance* (see chart 2) among the younger birth cohorts in all countries, even in highly religious countries like Ireland, Poland, and Portugal. As far as *belief in God* (see chart 3) is concerned, the younger also tend to be less religious than the older. Even if we find throughout that the oldest tend to embrace belief in God more strongly than the youngest, we observe a curve linear relationship for certain eastern European countries such as eastern Germany and Hungary. Accordingly, the oldest believe in God more strongly than the youngest, but belief in God among the youngest is higher when compared to the middle birth cohorts. Correlating *belief in spiritualism* (see chart 4) with age reveals a rather chaotic, jagged picture with many arbitrary up and down amplitudes. This most likely signifies no consistent correlation. Overall, however, in comparison to the other three items we can detect a reverse correlation here: with rising age, affirmation of this belief-form declines.

The decisive question we must pose at this point is, of course, whether we can interpret these age differences as age cohort differences. In other words, do they depict life-cycle changes or trends that persist over many age cohorts? As far as differences in the proportions of *church attenders* and *believers in God* are concerned (see charts 5 and 6), we can give an unambiguous answer to this question, since we can draw on long-term data regarding these two indicators for western Europe. According to these findings, age differences are indeed to be attributed to generational differences in the case of these two items, which means that we are dealing with long-term trends. They express a decline in church attendance and belief in God over the past decades in the European countries under scrutiny, although we must concede a slight reverse tendency in some eastern European countries over the last few years. This reverse tendency does not significantly counter the linear impression of the general trend, however, as a correlation analysis not depicted here reveals.

Chart 5: Frequency of church attendance in selected European countries

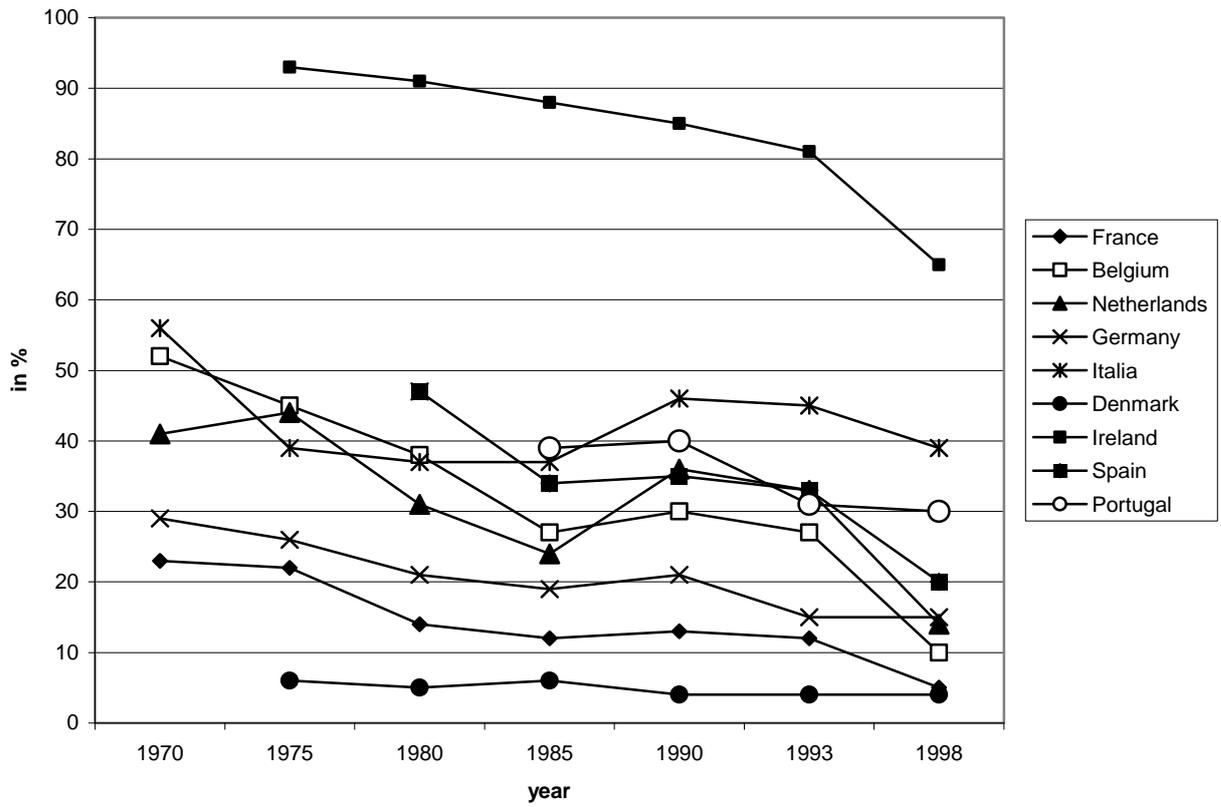
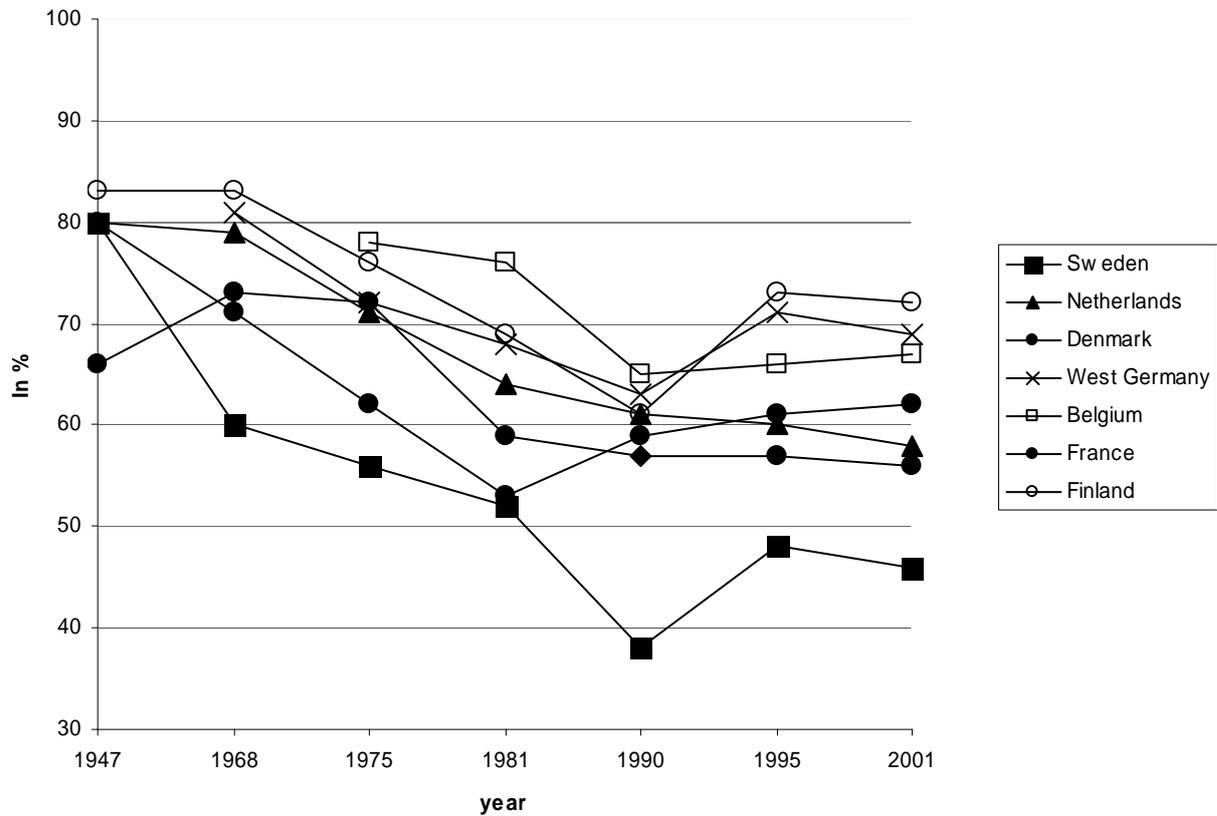


Chart 6: Belief in God in selected European countries



Source: 1947, 1968, 1975 Gallup Opinion Index, 1981-2001 World Value Survey, Mannheimer Eurobarometer Trend File 1970-1999.

We do not have long-term data on *denomination membership* for all countries involved in the survey. From those countries for which we do have these data (such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland) we know that the proportion of denomination members has declined in recent years and decades. It should thus be legitimate to interpret the observed age differences as age cohort differences as well. The data situation concerning the indicator *spiritualism* or *astrology* is even more precarious. The limited data collected over the past few decades¹⁶ show that, as we have already come to assume from the age differences, popular affirmation of extra-church religiosity has indeed risen over the past years, although the overall level of acceptance remains rather low. We could thus interpret the higher acceptance values for occultism and astrology among the younger age cohorts as a Europe-wide rise in these belief forms over the past years.

¹⁶ See Pollack, Detlef: *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003, pp. 166.

Does this mean that we are facing a decline in traditional religiosity in Europe, as expressed by church attendance and belief in God, coupled with an upswing in extra-church religiosity so that, as has been repeatedly proposed,¹⁷ the overall level of individual religiosity remains more or less unaltered? We can clearly negate this question. If this were so, forms of traditional religiosity and forms of extra-church religiosity would have to display a reverse proportional correlation. However, traditional and extra-church forms of religiosity (see table 2) do not display any significant correlation at all. If any, there is a slight positive tendency. To put it differently - where church attendance and belief in God is on the decline, occultism and astrology also do not gain in significance. Rather, they are partially affected by this decline themselves. Thus, although affirmation of extra-church religiosity has increased over the past years, the losses of traditional forms of religiosity are so high that they cannot be compensated by alternative religiosity's gaining in influence. In fact, these gains are partially curtailed by traditional religiosity's losses.

Table 2: Correlation between church attendance, belief in God, and extra-church religiosity in selected European countries (culminated) (2006)

	Church attendance	Belief in God	Astrology	Occultism
Denomination	.30	.45	.03	.04
Church attendance		.34	n.s.	.03
Belief in God			.06	.08
Astrology				.57

Source: Volkswagen-Project "Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe" (2006), n.s. = not significant.

Individualization theorists such as Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Grace Davie, Thomas Luckmann, Michael Krüggeler and others are justified in their repeatedly voiced criticism of the secularization theory, namely that the processes of religious change in Europe do not merely constitute a decline in religiosity and church commitment, but also a change in their dominant forms. However, this change, expressed by a decline in the significance of

¹⁷ The contention of a change in religious forms, coupled with a certain degree of stability in the overall level of religiosity, is a central argument of the so-called individualization thesis described above.

traditional, institution-bound religiosity and a rise in the significance of non-traditional, extra-church religious tendencies is itself part of the process of religious decline. Thus, the thesis of change in religious forms is not a challenge to, but rather a confirmation of the secularization theory.

The intertwining of secularization and transformation processes in the religious field is illustrated by the decline in the social recognition of belief in God and the simultaneous changes in meaning this field is subjected to. As we have already observed (see charts 3 and 6), the social acceptance of belief in God has decreased in Europe over the past years. At the same time, however, the conception of God has changed from a personal image towards that of an impersonal higher being (see table 3).¹⁸ This shift is not to be understood as a sort of compensation for traditional belief in God, it rather signifies a general decline in significance, as belief in a higher being is less behaviorally relevant than belief in God as a person. For example, the former affects child education, political behavior, or moral attitudes to a lesser degree than the latter.¹⁹ The shift from traditional to non-traditional belief contents thus goes hand in hand with a tendency of the individual to attribute less meaning to religion in his or her personal life. The simultaneity of decline in belief in God and changes in the forms of belief in God is therefore anything but coincidental. Religion's declining social significance is manifested in this change of religious forms.

Table 3: Changes in the forms of belief in God 1981 – 1999 in selected European countries (in %)

Country	Belief in God as a person			Belief in God as a higher being		
	1981	1990	1999	1981	1990	1999
France	28	22	22	28	34	32
Great Britain	32	33	31	40	41	40
Netherlands	37	28	24	32	42	49
Belgium	45	32	30	27	22	36
Spain	57	52	43	23	28	28

¹⁸ This shift is mostly taking place in western European countries. Since many eastern European countries experienced a strong upswing in religiosity after 1989, higher acceptance of belief in a higher being goes hand in hand with higher acceptance of belief in God as a person in Hungary and Poland. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, and Slovenia tend to follow the western pattern.

¹⁹ This is the result of various empirical surveys. See Franz Höllinger: *Christliche Religiosität und New Age. Zwei Pole des religiösen Feldes der Gegenwartsgesellschaft*. Manuscript. Graz 2006; Thomas Gensicke: *Jugend und Religiosität*. In: Shell Deutschland Holding (ed.): *Jugend 2006. Eine pragmatische Generation unter Druck*. Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 203-239, here pp. 227-229.

Northern Ireland	72	66	61	19	20	26
Ireland	77	67	64	15	24	25
Denmark	27	21	25	26	33	38
Sweden	20	18	16	41	45	52
Hungary		39	45		9	15
Poland		79	82		6	10
Czech Republic		12	6		38	50
Slovakia		36	38		27	41
Latvia		12	8		54	67
Slovenia		22	24		43	51

Source: European Value Survey 1981-1999

Isolating the causes of this ubiquitous decline in individual religiosity requires complex analyses, which can only be partially achieved here. Since the secularization thesis presumes a relationship between the process of religious decline and modernization, the economic market model between religious pluralization and religious vitality and the individualization thesis between individualism and religious syncretism, we shall briefly scrutinize these alleged correlations more closely.

Table 4: Correlation between religious indicators and structural features as well as attitudes in selected European countries (culminated)

	Denomination membership	Church attendance	Belief in God	Astrology	Spiritualism
Secularization theory					
Income	-.05	-.05	-.04	n.s.	n.s.
Education	-.11	-.10	-.09	-.03	-.02
Age	.08	.12	.10	-.12	-.10
Economic market model					
Agreement with friends		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.08

Individualization thesis					
Exceptional life					
Religious	-.06	-.04	-.06	.09	.09
upbringing	.45	.37	.41	n.s.	n.s.

Source: Volkswagen-Project "Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe" (2006), n.s. = not significant.

The results depicted in table 4 more or less confirm our expectations. Population groups with higher income and higher levels of education exhibit a lower degree of denomination membership, attend church less frequently, and believe in God less frequently. Even higher acceptance of extra-church religious forms such as astrology and spiritualism goes hand in hand with a lower level of education. However, a different picture emerges with respect to income variables. In this case, there is no significant correlation to belief in astrology and spiritualism. This indicates that spiritualism and astrology, despite their positive correlation with traditional forms of religiosity (see table 2), do not correspond to the same characteristics in social structure as these forms. It does not appear that we are more likely to encounter them in modern settings; in this case, their correlation with education and income would have had to be positive. However, they also do not seem to belong to the more traditional milieus of denomination members, church attenders, and believers in God. Their exceptional position is again underlined in our analysis of age structure. As we have already seen, the younger tend to be more attracted by extra-church forms of religiosity than the older (see table 4). However, the exceptional position of these variables becomes apparent when we consider the effects of a religious upbringing on individual religiosity (see table 4). While the probability – and here the effects we observed are highly significant – rises that one adheres to the Church, takes part in church life, and believes in God if one has enjoyed a religious upbringing, religious socialization does not have any influence on affirmation of extra-church religious forms such as astrology and spiritualism. It neither precludes nor promotes these forms. This supports the assumption that we are dealing with a new phenomenon, which is somewhat distanced from traditional Christianity, belongs to the realm of individual responsibility, and depends less on communication and tradition. Thus, while traditional religiosity is more negatively affected by processes of modernization on the level of the individual, extra-church religiosity seems in part to be more compatible with modernity. It would, however, be exaggerated to claim that processes of modernization abet it. Among other factors, the negative correlation between education and astrology (or spiritualism) refutes such a claim. Thus, the result of our analysis of the individual level is somewhat

ambiguous. In general, we can assert a rather negative influence of modernization processes on individual religiosity, although this impact is not very strong. In the case of extra-church religiosity, the influence is decelerated (education), partially non-existent (income), and partially even reversed (age, exceptional life).

For an analysis of the relationship between modernization and religion on the macro level, we lack applicable data to assess forms of extra-church religiosity for many countries. For church attendance and belief in God as the two central indicators for Christian religiosity, clearly negative correlations with the level of modernization can be discerned for western Europe when Gdp per Capita is used as an indicator for modernization (see chart 7). With a higher level of modernization in a country, church attendance and belief in God will decline. In eastern Europe, these correlations - perhaps due to the turbulences and irregularities caused by the processes of belated modernization after 1989 - are to be observed only for belief in God (see chart 8).

Chart 7: Belief in God and Gdp per Capita in the selected western European countries (1998)

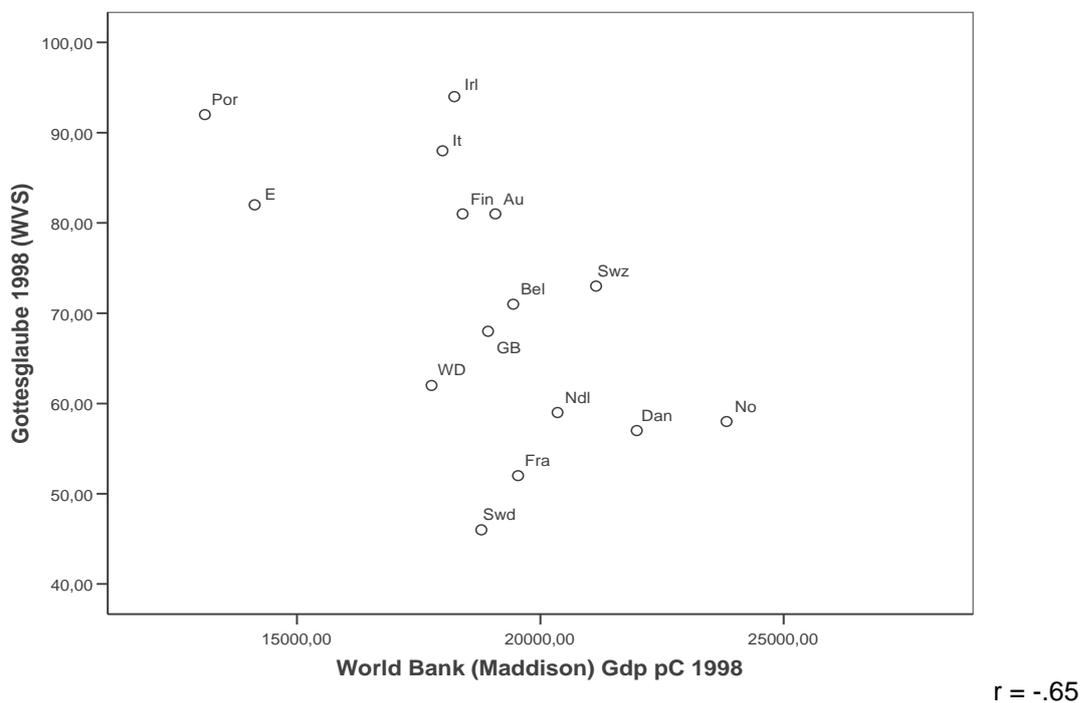
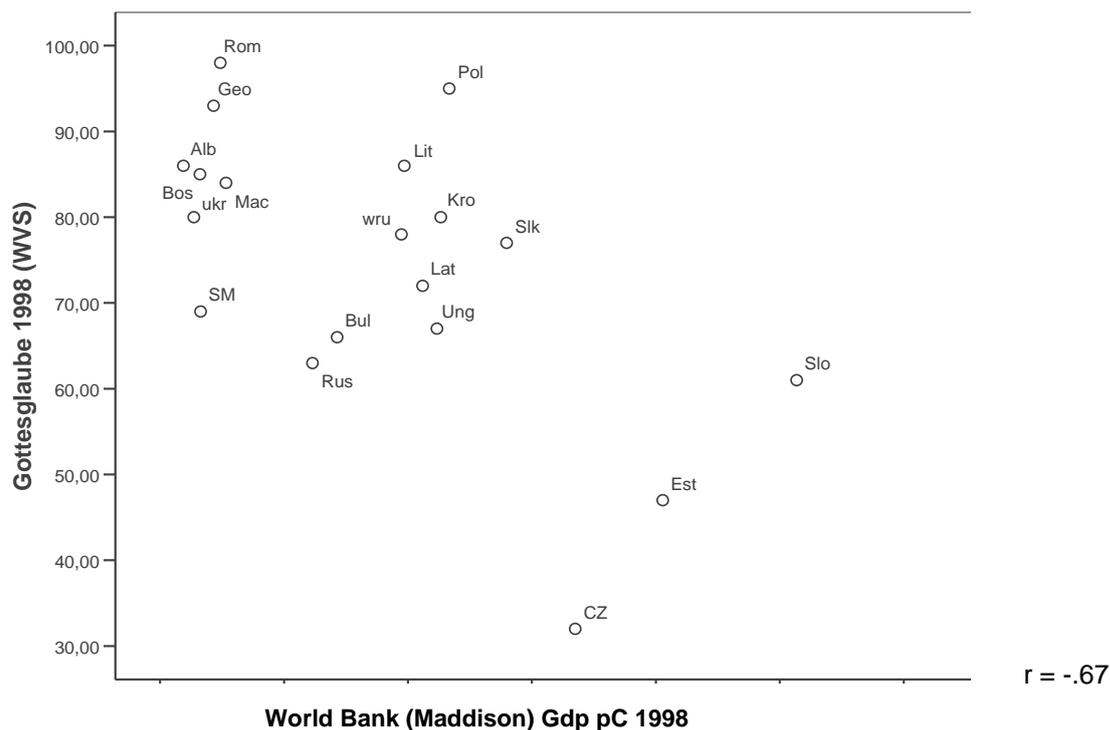
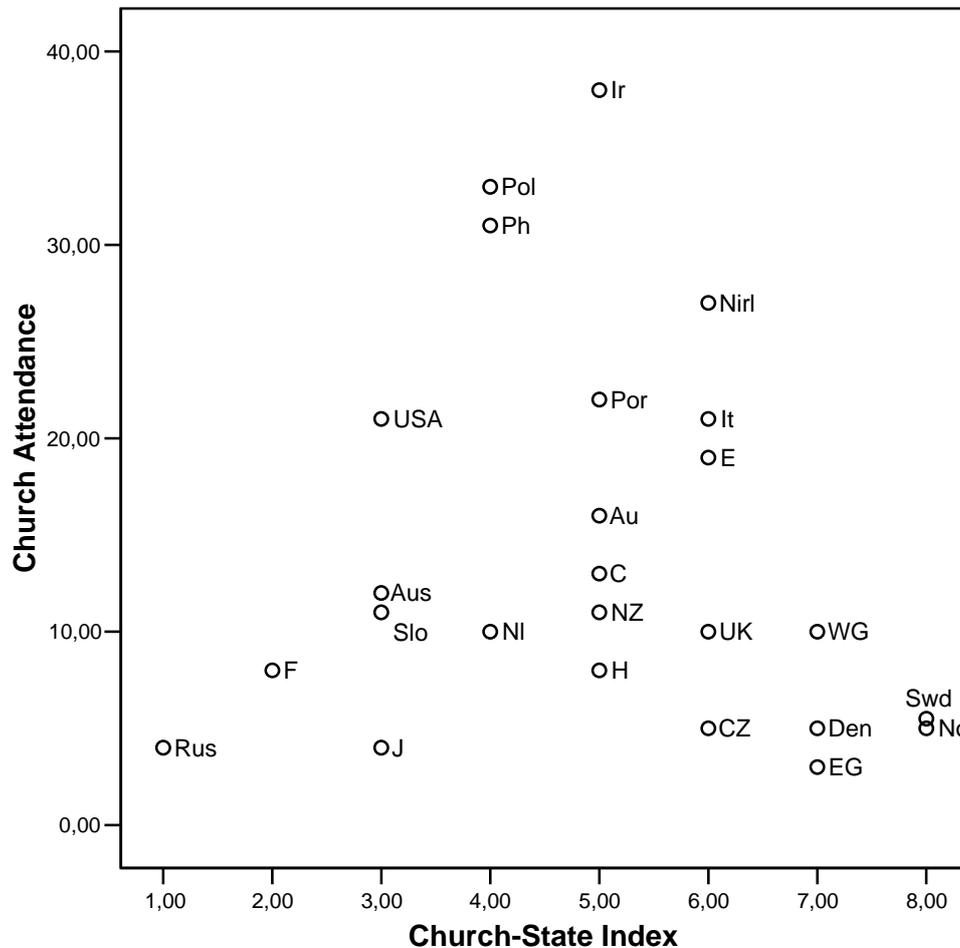


Chart 8: Belief in God and Gdp per Capita in the selected eastern European countries (1998)



These results empirically prove the secularization thesis on the micro- as well as on the macro level. In order to increase the robustness of this result, it would of course be necessary to include alternative explanatory factors such as the relationship between church and state, the degree of religious pluralism, nationalist orientations and practices, the degree to which a welfare state exists, or the financial and personnel resources available to religious communities. Only this would allow us to test whether the correlation we have established remains stable while controlling for other intervening variables. This important task could unfortunately not be achieved in the framework of this contribution. In order to assess the validity of the economic market model, we shall briefly analyze the correlation between the degree of church-state separation and frequency of church attendance. For these purposes, a catalogue of five criteria aimed at capturing the degree of church-state separation was compiled. It includes the existence of a state church (1), whether theological seminaries are part of state universities (2), the existence of religious education at public schools (3), whether there exists spiritual guidance in the military and in prisons (4), and finally whether the Church is granted tax privileges and financial support by the state (5).

Chart 9: Church Attendance and Church-State Relations



Source: Own composition; European Religion Aggregate File; Author's calculations based on ISSP 1998; Church attendance = number of Church attendance per year based on the population's average, church-state index based on five criteria.

Rus = Russia	F = France	Au = Austria	J = Japan
Pol = Poland	It = Italy	E = Spain	USA = United States
Slo = Slovenia	No = Norway	Den = Denmark	Aus = Australia
CZ = Czech Republic	Por = Portugal	Swd = Sweden	NZ = New Zealand
H = Hungary	Ir = Ireland	NI = the Netherlands	Ph = Philippines
EG = East Germany	WG = West Germany	UK = United Kingdom	C = Canada
Nirl = Northern Ireland			

We can see that the degree of church-state separation, as measured using this catalogue, does not exhibit any statistically relevant correlation with frequency of church attendance, neither negative nor positive. The question whether or not this means that the economic market model is simply not applicable to the religious situation in Europe is for future research to decide.

Conclusion: The preceding analysis shows that the secularization theory still possesses a great degree of empirical evidence, and that the individualization thesis also holds a certain degree of plausibility. The religious field is indeed undergoing processes of individualization. However, they do not stand in opposition to the simultaneously unfolding secularization

tendencies, they are rather interwoven with them. We can observe that processes of modernization exert a predominantly negative effect on religious membership, attitudes, and practices. To a certain degree, this is also the case for those highly individualized, syncretistic forms of alternative religiosity that tend to be described as highly compatible with certain facets of modernity. These forms of religiosity are, however, sometimes not affected by modernization at all, and sometimes even profit from it. Thus, the secularization thesis and in part also the individualization thesis are most applicable to the religious field in Europe. The economic market model does not seem to be supported by the empirical data.