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Religiousness Inside and Outside the Church in Selected Post-Communist Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

In Western Europe more and more sociologists of religion are talking about religious individualization instead of secularization to describe the religious change in modern societies. Institutional forms of religion, especially traditional Christian Churches, are increasingly losing their social significance; new forms of religion, which are not so highly institutionalized and more syncretistic, are, however, emerging. The author raises the question whether this theoretical model conceptualized for Western Europe can be applied to the analysis of religious developments in Eastern Europe. The result of the analysis carried out on the basis of a representative survey in 11 Eastern and Central European countries is that new forms of religiousness outside the Church are emerging in Eastern and Central Europe. In predominantly Catholic countries, these forms stand in contrast to the traditional forms of religion, in more secularized countries, they are not an alternative to institutionalized forms of religion.

En Europe occidentale, de plus en plus de sociologues de la religion parlent d'individualisation religieuse plutôt que de sécularisation pour décrire l'évolution religieuse des sociétés modernes. Si l'importance sociale des formes institutionnalisées de la religion, et des Eglises chrétiennes en particulier, perd de plus en plus de terrain, de nouvelles formes de religion, moins institutionnalisées et plus syncrétiques, sont, au contraire, en train d'émerger. L'auteur pose la question de savoir si ce modèle théorique, conceptualisé pour l'Europe occidentale, peut être utilisé pour analyser les développements religieux en Europe orientale. Sur base d'une étude menée dans 11 pays d'Europe centrale et orientale, il apparaît que de nouvelles formes de religiosité y émergent effectivement en marge de l'Eglise. Dans les pays à prédominance catholique, ces formes contrastent singulièrement avec les cultes traditionnels, tandis que dans les pays davantage sécularisés, elles ne constituent pas une alternative aux formes institutionnalisées de la religion.

The thesis of the “invisible religion” criticizes the secularization thesis by using the distinction between institutional and non-institutional forms of religion (Luckmann, 1967). Whereas in modern societies institutional forms of religion, especially traditional Christian Churches, are more and more losing their social significance, new forms of religion are emerging which are not highly institutionalized and thus far more invisible. Religion in general

has not lost its social importance but has changed its content and form. Now it has become difficult to define religion. The new forms of religion take on a more diffuse shape including such different phenomena as individualism, familism, occultism, esoteric, psychology, New Age cults, Zen meditation, and so on. Sometimes these invisible forms of religion merge with the traditional religious forms, sometimes they replace them. In every case, however, they have become a more private concern and are highly individualistic, chosen by the individual, not given by religious institutions.

In this article I would like to raise the question whether this theoretical model conceptualized for Western Europe (Hervieu-Léger, 1990; Gabriel, 1992; Krüggeler, 1993; Davie, 1994) can be applied to the analysis of religious developments in Eastern Europe. With this aim in mind we have to deal with three questions:

1. Is a process of secularization in Eastern Europe taking place?
2. How close is the relationship between traditional and new forms of religion?
3. To what extent are the new forms of religion a manifestation of individualization?

In order to answer these questions, we have to distinguish between two different dimensions of religion: the traditional religious dimension such as church adherence and church-related religiousness and the non-traditional one. I call these two religious dimensions Christian religiousness and religiousness outside the Church. Certainly different indicators can express these dimensions. Usually church attendance and belief in God are taken as indicators for traditional, church-related Christian religiousness. It is, however, difficult to grasp the diffuse forms of religion that exist outside the Church. I use astrology, belief in faith healers and in reincarnation as indicators of older forms of religiousness outside the Church, and belief in the effects of Zen meditation and yoga, in the effects of magic, spiritualism and occultism, mysticism and belief in the message of New Age cults as indicators of new forms of religiousness outside the Church. Most of the data I refer to are based on the project "Political Culture in Central and Eastern Europe" (PCE)—a representative opinion survey carried out by me and my collaborators in 11 Central and Eastern European countries in autumn 2000: Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Eastern Germany, Hungary, and Albania.

The data presented here (see Table 1) give some first insights into the religious situation in Eastern Europe compared with the West. I would like to mention four features:

1. Compared with Western Europe, there are some highly secularized countries in Eastern Europe in terms of traditional indicators of religion: church membership, church attendance, belief in God. The Czech Republic, East Germany, Estonia, and Russia belong to these highly secularized countries. Without doubt the high percentage of non-religious people can be attributed, to a considerable extent, to the political repressive measures

TABLE 1
Indicators of church adherence, Christian religiousness, and religiousness outside the Church in Europe

	Church membership 1998/*2000 (%)	Church attendance per year (mean) 1998/*2000	Belief in God (%) 1998/*2000	Astrology 1998 (%)	Faith healers 1998 (%)
Italy	93	21	88		
Portugal	92	22	92	30	36
Spain	86	19	82		
Ireland	94	38	94	19	75
France	54	8	52	41	38
Austria	88	16	81	35	47
The Netherlands	42	10	59	24	28
Switzerland	91	10	73	47	48
West Germany	85	10	62	45	43
Great Britain	50	10	68		
Northern Ireland	86	27	89		
Sweden	72	5.5	46		
Denmark	88	5	57		
Norway	90	5	58		
Poland	82*	33*	95*		
Slovakia	72*	20*	77*	49	78
Slovenia	65*	11*	61*		
Hungary	58*	8*	67*	40	34
East Germany	24*	3*	24*	27	33
Czech Republic	27*	5*	32*	53	62
Latvia	66	7	72	66	81
Estonia	22*	3.5*	47*		
Albania	77*	8*	86*		
Romania	96*	14*	98*		
Bulgaria	44*	6*	66*	65	65
Russia	37*	4*	66*	56	65

Source: PCE (2000); ISSP (1998)

taken against churches and believers by the communist regimes in the period before 1989. In all the countries mentioned above, the share of people belonging to a church and regularly attending Sunday service was considerably higher in the beginning of the communist era than in the end of this era (cf. Pollack, 2001: 138).

2. The denomination that was able to resist political and ideological pressure during communist rule most strongly was the Catholic Church. By contrast, the Lutheran churches were most negatively affected by the political pressure. Consider the originally dominant Lutheran countries East Germany and Estonia, in which church members now constitute only a minority. Church adherence and religiousness are also higher in predominantly Catholic countries of Western Europe like Italy, Portugal, Spain,

- and Ireland than in countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, in which the Lutheran confession prevails.
3. The level of modernization also has a considerable impact on the vitality of church adherence and religiousness. If one looks only at the West European Catholic countries, one can see that the more highly industrialized countries have a lower rate of church attendance and belief in God than the less developed countries. Compare Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland with France and Austria. The same is true for countries which are not predominantly Catholic. This can be seen by comparing Northern Ireland with the rest of the Western countries. We find the same differences in Eastern Europe. Among the Catholic countries Slovenia and Hungary—the most industrialized states—are at the same time the most secularized countries. And in the group of countries which are not predominantly Catholic East Germany, the Czech Republic, and Estonia as the most developed countries show the lowest rate of church attendance and religiousness.
 4. Finally, figures concerning religiousness outside the Church in Eastern Europe are remarkably high. In Western European states, belief in God is always higher than acceptance of astrology or faith healers. In Eastern Europe the acceptance of religiousness outside the Church is in some cases almost as high as belief in God, in others it is equal or even higher (East Germany, Czech Republic).

The religious developments in Western and Eastern Europe are quite different. In Western Europe, we are witnessing a process of secularization as far as traditional indicators of religion are concerned. Regarding the East European countries, many sociologists observed an outstanding religious revival in the past couple of years (Tomka, 1995). If we take into consideration the figures in Table 2, however, we can observe great differences between the individual countries among the post-communist states. In a few countries like Albania and Russia, indeed, we can find a dramatic increase in church membership and belief in God. In Albania, for example, 44 percent of the population agreed with the statement that they now belong to a religious denomination but that they had not previously, and 31 percent agreed that they now believe in God, but that they used not to. In contrast, only 3 percent give up church or belief in God. In some countries there is a minor increase in church participation and religious orientation, for example, in Bulgaria or in Estonia, and in Estonia on a very low level of religiousness and church adherence. In most of the countries investigated in our survey, however, we are faced with a clear decrease in the social relevance of religion and church, at least in the long run. This is the case in Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, East Germany, and the Czech Republic. Even if immediately after the breakdown of communism a certain upswing in the religious field took place in these countries, this religious revival is by no means able to compensate for the losses the churches had to suffer under communist rule. It is no accident that especially highly industrialized countries are concerned with these processes of secularization. If there is a positive correlation between modernization and secularization (Martin, 1978; Bruce, 1999), which many

TABLE 2
Change of church adherence and religiousness

	Change of church membership		Change of belief in God	
	Growth	Decrease	Growth	Decrease
Italy			4	8
Portugal			5	5
Spain			2	9
Ireland			5	6
France			11	21
Austria			6	13
The Netherlands			4	16
Switzerland			13	18
West Germany			11	25
Great Britain			6	15
Northern Ireland			7	6
Sweden			7	13
Denmark			12	15
Norway			6	15
Poland	3	5	2	4
Slovakia	5	14	7	11
Slovenia	3	15	5	14
Hungary	4	11	5	10
East Germany	1	19	3	15
Czech Republic	4	10	5	10
Estonia	6	8	13	5
Albania	44	3	31	3
Romania	4	0.5	3	1
Bulgaria	7	3	11	3
Russia	11	1	25	3

Source: ISSP (1998), PCE (2000)

sociologists, however, question (see, for example, Warner, 1993), then we have to expect an ongoing process of religious decline in these countries. In other countries like Poland or Romania, indicators for religiousness and church adherence are almost stable on a high level.

The statements above refer only to traditional forms of religions. What about religiousness outside the Church, which we use as an indicator of those diffuse forms of religion that the critics of the secularization thesis tell us so much about? Unfortunately, because of the lack of data we are not able to make any comments on the development of religiousness outside the Church recently. A look at Table 3 reveals that forms of religiousness outside the Church are widespread in Central and Eastern Europe. In Estonia, Albania, Hungary, and Slovakia almost one-third, in Russia even more than one-third of the people questioned confess believing in astrology, faith healers, or the effects of Zen meditation. But only a small proportion of the population declared a belief in the message of New Age cults, which are, by the way, unknown to most of the respondents. The same is true concerning

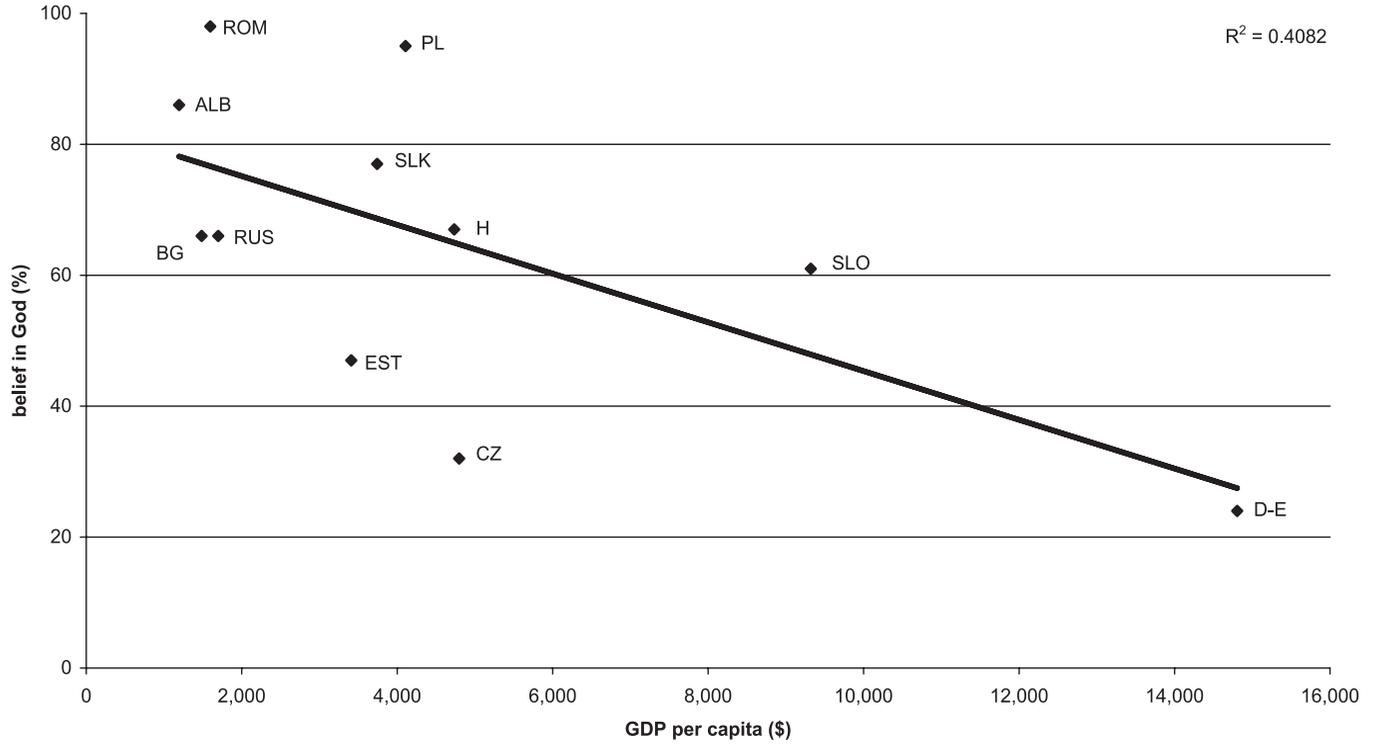


FIGURE 1
Belief in God¹ dependent on GDP per capita²

Notes: ¹ PCE (2000); ² Transition report update, April 2001 (East Germany: Federal Department for Statistical Analysis)

belief in magic, occultism, spiritualism and mysticism. By distinguishing between older and newer forms of religiousness outside the Church, we can detect clear differences between countries. In countries like Albania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, in which the percentages of people with traditional belief systems are high, older forms of religiousness like astrology or belief in faith healers are more broadly accepted. In more secularized countries like the Czech Republic, Estonia, East Germany or Slovenia the number of people believing in the effects of Zen meditation is higher than the number of people believing in astrology or faith healers. At the same time, the Czech Republic, Estonia, East Germany, and Slovenia belong to the most highly developed countries in the East. If one looks at the scatterplots (see Figure 1), one can observe a negative correlation between the degree of modernization measured by GDP per capita in each country and traditional forms of religiousness: for example, belief in God, a negative correlation between modernization and faith healers as an indicator of old forms of religiousness outside the Church (Figure 2) but a slightly positive correlation between modernization and belief in the effects of Zen meditation and yoga as an indicator of new religious forms outside the Church (Figure 3).

Does this mean that we can observe in the former socialist countries a tendency towards pluralization and individualization of religion the more countries are modernized? In order to test this hypothesis it is necessary to correlate the traditional and new forms of religion we have distinguished above. Are the diffuse forms of religion separated from traditional religiosity or is their acceptance supported by traditional forms of religion? As one can see in Table 4, column A, there is a high correlation between church attendance and belief in God as the two indicators of Christian religiousness in almost all Eastern European countries. In columns B1 and B2 we can observe

TABLE 3
Religiousness outside the Church (%)

	Astrology/ Horoscope	Faith healers	Effects of Zen meditation, yoga	Message of New Age
Albania	25.0	34.6	5.4	4.6
Bulgaria	18.2	19.9	8.3	2.3
Czech Republic	17.4	12.4	20.7	2.0
Estonia	25.6	23.6	30.5	3.7
East Germany	10.9	5.6	12.6	1.6
Hungary	24.1	30.7	22.7	8.1
Poland	7.9	26.5	7.6	1.9
Romania	22.9	9.3	11.4	2.2
Russia	46.7	48.7	34.9	7.7
Slovakia	22.1	38.6	19.2	3.2
Slovenia	17.0	16.3	19.5	7.7

Source: PCE (2000)

Note: Percentage of respondents who "believe strongly" or "believe to a certain degree".

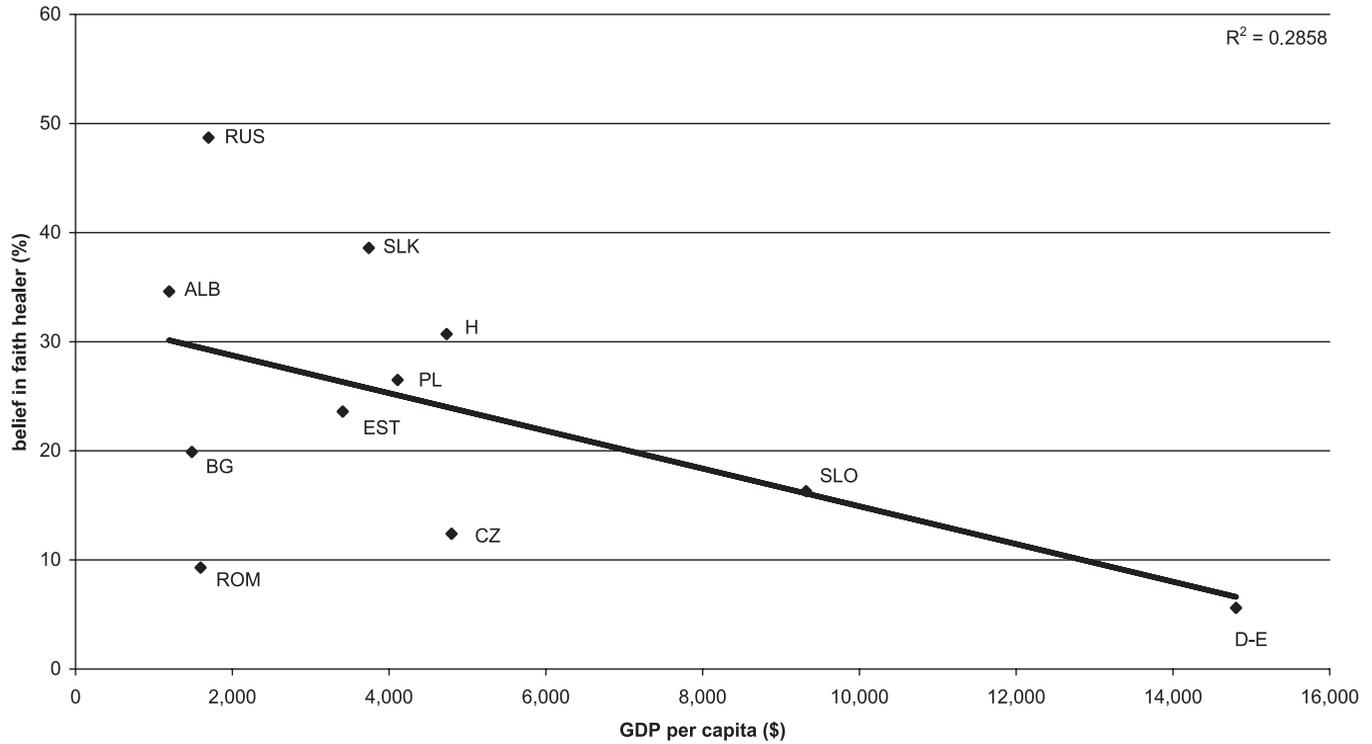


FIGURE 2
Belief in faith healers¹ dependent on GDP per capita²

Notes: ¹ PCE (2000); ² Transition report update, April 2001 (East Germany: Federal Department for Statistical Analysis)

TABLE 4
Intra-religious relations

	A	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	C3	C4
Poland	.31	.12	.11	-.09	n.s.	.16	.21	n.s.	-.10
Slovakia	.47	n.s.	.07	-.15	-.08	.37	.54	n.s.	-.12
Slovenia	.47	.17	.20	n.s.	n.s.	.29	.49	n.s.	-.12
Hungary	.32	.17	.21	-.08	.09	.26	.48	n.s.	-.07
East Germany	.47	.13	.28	n.s.	.07	.34	.58	.13	n.s.
Czech Republic	.55	.08	.26	n.s.	.09	.43	.69	.14	n.s.
Estonia	.31	.08	.21	n.s.	.12	.27	.45	.09	n.s.
Albania	.16	.24	.29	n.s.	n.s.	.19	.26	.25	.15
Romania	.08	n.s.	n.s.	-.12	n.s.	.07	.09	n.s.	n.s.
Bulgaria	.29	.13	.36	n.s.	.12	.21	.50	.19	n.s.
Russia	.28	n.s.	.18	n.s.	.09	.24	.47	n.s.	n.s.

Source: PCE (2000)

Notes:

- A = correlation church attendance and belief in God
- B1 = correlation church attendance and religiousness outside the Church (old)
- B2 = correlation belief in God and religiousness outside the Church (old)
- B3 = correlation church attendance and religiousness outside the Church (new)
- B4 = correlation belief in God and religiousness outside the Church (new)
- C1 = correlation religious socialization and church attendance
- C2 = correlation religious socialization and belief in God
- C3 = correlation religious socialization and religiousness outside the Church (old)
- C4 = correlation religious socialization and religiousness outside the Church (new)

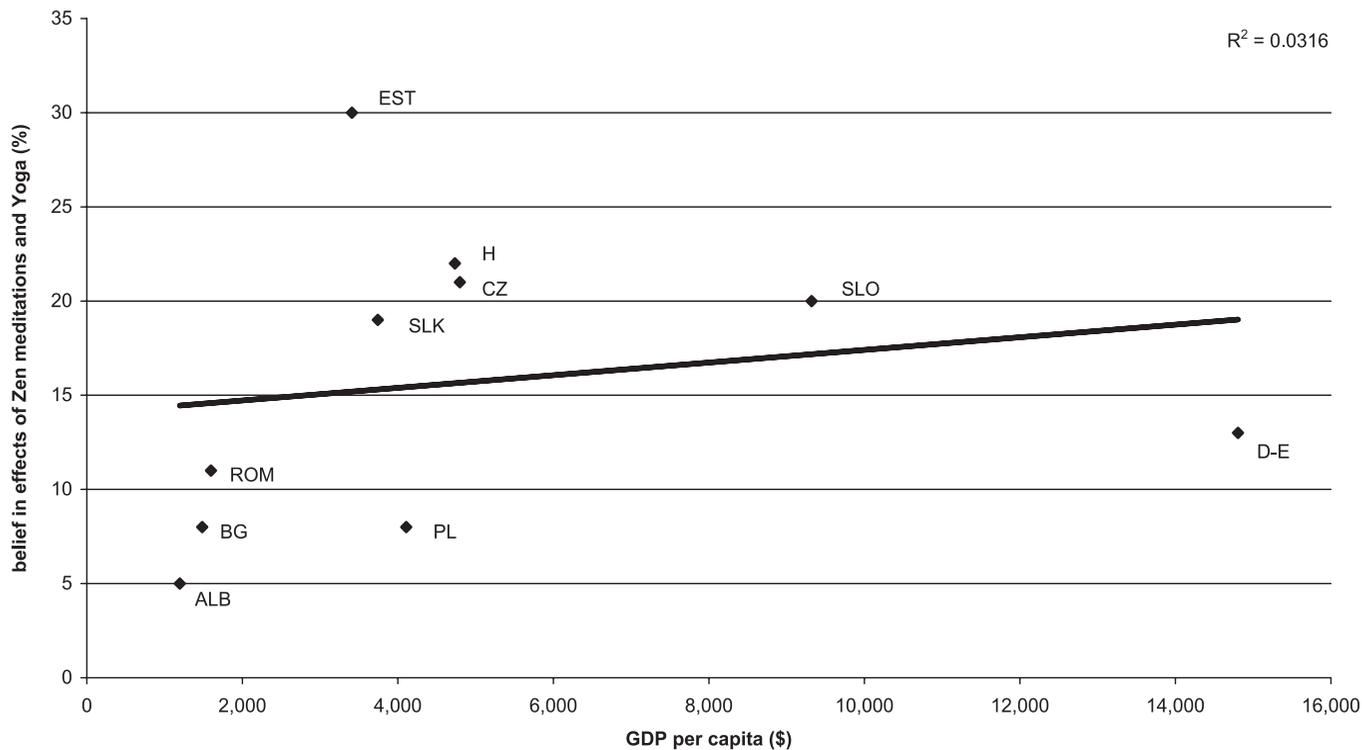


FIGURE 3
Belief in effects of Zen meditation and yoga¹ dependent on GDP per capita² (without RUS)

Notes: ¹ PCE (2000); ² Transition report update, April 2001 (East Germany: Federal Department for Statistical Analysis)

that traditional religiousness (church attendance and belief in God) and old forms of religiousness outside the Church are in most cases also positively correlated. Concerning the relationship between church attendance, respectively belief in God, and new forms of religiousness outside the Church (see columns B3 and B4), the picture is a little bit puzzling. But a closer look again reveals a difference between strongly ecclesiastically influenced and more secularized countries. In countries with predominantly traditional belief systems like Poland, Slovakia, or Romania the correlation between traditional religiousness and new religious forms outside the Church is not significant or even negative. This means that in these countries the emergence of new forms of religion is not supported by traditional and highly institutionalized forms of religion. In other, more secularized countries where the relationship between church-related religiousness and new religiousness outside the Church is not significant or even positive, as in East Germany, the Czech Republic or Estonia, there is a stronger confusion between traditional forms of religion and new, non-institutionalized religiosity.

This result can be confirmed if we look at the impacts of religious socialization during childhood on religiousness in adulthood. We can take church attendance, belief in God or old forms of religiousness outside the Church, in any case, people who are brought up in the faith are more likely to accept these religious attitudes and behaviours than people without religious education in their childhood (see Table 4, columns C1–3). This is quite different if we take into consideration the effects of religious socialization on acceptance of new forms of religiousness outside the Church. In this case the effects are as a rule either negative or not significant (see Table 4, column C4). Again, in predominantly Catholic countries, the effects of religious socialization on the acceptance of new religious forms outside the Church are negative. For these countries, this means that people who are not brought up in the faith tend to believe in the effects of Zen meditation or spiritualism or occultism more than people who were religiously educated. In these countries, new forms of religion have gained a certain independence from traditional belief systems. They are an alternative to the religious traditions and stand in contrast to them. In more secularized countries, acceptance of new forms of religion is neither dependent nor independent of religious socialization and can be found inside the Church and outside it as well. The more secularized countries are, the more the different forms of religion—old and new, inside and outside the Church—build a syncretistic whole.

In the next stage we will investigate the correlation between different forms of religion and individualization. In order to measure individualization, I developed an indicator for individualized orientations. I used the intention to pursue an unusual and extravagant life, the interest in enjoying life and working no more than necessary, and interest in self-determination and post-materialistic value-orientation as indicators for this (see Table 5). As is to be expected, the correlation between traditional religiousness, church attendance, belief in God, and the individualization index is mostly negative or not significant (Table 5, columns A1 and A2). But regarding new forms of religiosity, the indicator of individual orientations reacts positively (Table 5, column A4). The more people are willing to pursue an extravagant life or

TABLE 5
Religiousness and individualization

	A1	A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	B3	B4
Poland	-.09	n.s.	n.s.	.16	n.s.	-.08	n.s.	.11**
Slovakia	-.14	-.18	n.s.	.17	-.12	-.17	n.s.	.14**
Slovenia	-.11	-.10	n.s.	.12	-.08	-.09	n.s.	n.s.
Hungary	-.12	-.12	n.s.	.13	n.s.	-.08	n.s.	.10**
East Germany	-.16	n.s.	n.s.	.17	-.13	n.s.	n.s.	.08*
Czech Republic	-.14	-.22	n.s.	n.s.	-.13	-.22	n.s.	n.s.
Estonia	n.s.	-.11	n.s.	.12	-.06	-.14	n.s.	.07*
Albania	-.14	n.s.	-.08	-.10	-.16	n.s.	n.s.	-.07*
Romania	-.14	n.s.	n.s.	.09	-.12	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Bulgaria	n.s.	n.s.	.14	.15	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.11
Russia	-.06	n.s.	n.s.	.07	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

Source: PCE (2000)

Notes:

A1 = correlation index individualization and church attendance

A2 = correlation index individualization and belief in God

A3 = correlation index individualization and religiousness outside the Church (old)

A4 = correlation index individualization and religiousness outside the Church (new)

B1 = correlation index individualization (without unusual life) and church attendance

B2 = correlation index individualization (without unusual life) and belief in God

B3 = correlation index individualization (without unusual life) and religiousness outside the Church (old)

B4 = correlation index individualization (without unusual life) and religiousness outside the Church (new)

n.s. = not significant; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

follow post-materialistic values, the more they are likely to accept new forms of religiousness. If we change the individualization index by one variable and eliminate the intention to pursue an unusual life, again, our well-known pattern appears (Table 5, columns B1–4). In predominantly Catholic countries, new forms of religion are highly connected to individualistic orientations, and in the more secular and modernized countries like East Germany, the Czech Republic, or Estonia the relationship is weaker or not significant.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can state that new forms of religiousness outside the Church are emerging in Central and Eastern Europe. In predominantly Catholic countries, the rise of these forms seems to follow different patterns from the traditional forms of religion. In these countries, they tend to stand in contrast to the Church. In more secularized countries, they are not an alternative to institutionalized forms of religion or they even merge with institutionalized forms of religion. This means that the more a country becomes unchurched, the more new religiousness outside the Church is mixing with ecclesiastical forms of religion and constituting a syncretistic whole. In countries in which traditional belief systems are predominant, these new forms of religion are not based on the effects of religious socialization processes and can be seen as an expression of processes of individualization. In more secularized countries, new forms of religion are not so independent of religious education, are more closely connected to traditional forms of religion and are to a lesser degree based on the effects of individualization.

In any case, we should not over-estimate these tendencies towards religious individualization. In the traditionally religious countries only a small share of the population is interested in these new forms of religiousness. In the more secularized countries new religiosity does not form an alternative to traditional belief systems and therefore is also negatively concerned by the losses of traditional religious forms. In these countries, new religious forms are not able to compensate for the losses of traditional religiosity, so that processes of secularization and processes of religious individualization go hand in hand. Although we should not exaggerate the processes of religious individualization, the question remains: what are the social causes of this tendency? I would suggest attributing this tendency to the features of the processes of a belated modernization which countries like the Czech Republic, Estonia, East Germany, or Slovenia are facing at this time. In these countries people can more easily afford to attend courses in Zen meditation, yoga, or energy training, and people are more likely to create a culture of the body and well-being in which religion is taking on a non-traditional individual-related function.

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