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Report of and a few theses from Aufbruch2

- from the perspective of Miklós Tomka

The initial motivation for Aufbruch1 (1997/1998) originated from a discontent with EVS, ISSP and RAMP, all of which were considered as too distanced from practical respects of religious and church-life. Aufbruch intended to offer additional information to existing surveys providing more practice-oriented data. In first instance, the research wanted to offer internationally comparative information lacking in other surveys. The formulation and control of hypotheses remained a secondary task only.

Limited mainly by financial resources Aufbruch1 included 10 countries. The study was based in all of them on representative samples with 1000 or more interviewed persons. Keeping in mind the denominational variety of the region and maintaining the intention of pragmatic usefulness of the project, Aufbruch1 had to accept a severe limitation. It concentrated on one denomination and church, the Catholic one, which represents the majority of the population in most observed countries and was present in others at least with 10 per cent of the population, according to earlier denominational statistics. For the sake of better comparability Aufbruch1 used an overrepresentation in Western Ukraine and studied merely Transylvania in Romania.

The key notion for Aufbruch1 was the wide-spread but similarly widely contested idea of a religious revival in Eastern and Central Europe.

Aufbruch1 started with the conviction, that religion is a multidimensional phenomenon the facets of which should be discovered and measured one by one. The possible inner inconsistency of the religious system had to be taken into consideration. Tensions between church-official and private religiosity had to be detected. Finally, the intended conclusions about religious increase or decrease required attempts for the creation of summarizing indicators.

The second issue of the project consisted in the role of religion and religiosity in the life of individuals, including behavioral consequences as well as socio-economic determinants of religiosity.

A third central focus for Aufbruch1 was the church as a social institution and its space in post-communist socio-cultural universe. A starting point presented the background idea, that communist persecution of religion established a distance between the church and its believers. Public concepts, knowledge and expectations related to the church couldn't be taken for granted but became themes of the research. Similarly, forms and levels of identification with, respectively support for and distancing from the church had to be clarified.

Additionally to usual socio-demographic variables Aufbruch1 used indicators related of religious socialization, of denominational ties, of political reminiscences, of individual contentedness, of national identity, individualism, authoritarianism, solidarity-orientation etc.

Aufbruch1 confirmed

- an expanded weight of religion and of the church in public life and consciousness (as compared to the period before the collapse of communism);
- a general increase in subjective religious identification, as well as
- increases in some dimensions of religiosity;

further on, it documented an influential role of religiosity in

- individual and social solidarity,
- social commitment and national pride,
- limiting individualism.

Notwithstanding these results Aufbruch1 demonstrated a wide-range ideological plurality both internationally and between societies.

Aufbruch1 gave information about the religious situation in 1997-1998, simultaneously with respective waves of EVS, ISSP and RAMP. The

correspondence of study results and even actual distributions of data proceeded by different research teams and institutions supports the validity of the findings.

Aufbruch1, a snap-shot was yet unable to follow socio-religious change, even if memories and age-structure-data indicated directions of development. Especially one doubt remained; whether the results represented a neutral stadium in a continuous social process or rather they were extraordinary reflections of the transitory euphoria produced by the fall of communism. This uncertainty could be overcome only by a next survey. This urge led to Aufbruch2

One purpose of Aufbruch2 was the affirmation of previous conclusions. For the sake of comparability Aufbruch2 repeated a relatively big number of topics and questions studied ten years earlier. As a matter of fact, the first result of Aufbruch2 is the high congruence between both surveys.

A second objective consisted in the ideological and geographic extension of the study including now Orthodox countries and Protestant and Islam minorities. The questionnaire was altered accordingly. (Reflections on denominational differences are object of a separate report.)

A third goal for Aufbruch2 is the detection of socio-religious processes.

The constancy of results over a decade is a relevant finding and a sign of the reliability of the 1997-data. Beyond this confirmation of Aufbruch1 a few results of Aufbruch2 can be now formulated shortly after the final cleaned data incorporating both waves of Aufbruch became available.

1. The general tendency in the region seems to be a slight decrease of religiosity differentiating the overall steadiness of global impression, although
2. in eight out of 14 countries public opinion counts on an invariable stability of the religious field or just on a further religious increase in the coming decade.
3. The decrease stems especially from generational change and to a smaller degree from urbanization and the related loss of tradition.

4. In contrast to the slight decrease in most countries there are a few societies with a spectacular religious growth, - contributing to an ideological and political plurality in the region and to growing differences between countries.
5. Corresponding to international differentiation there are signs of an ideological polarization within individual countries. Undecided and uncertain groups shrink while clear-cut positions, both religious and non-religious get more support.
6. Polarization seems to be a factual tendency of the socio-religious field, at least in some countries. It does not contradict the rather methodological result of Aufbruch II, which stresses the variety within types of religiosity and non-religiosity. First steps in this direction were made in Aufbruch1 already, differentiating levels of atheism. Aufbruch2 offers further subtypes.
7. Aufbruch1 showed indications of a religious revival and emphasized the social weight of the religious group. Regarding tendencies of religious decline and of ideological polarization Aufbruch2 has to examine, once again, the role of secularizing tendencies and forces. A further task is the study of the growing non-believer-subculture.
8. Religiosity's role in influencing individual behaviour in different fields seems to be constant, age differences diminish, however. The generation with a highly over-average influence of religion on personal behaviour is disappearing. The youngest generation displays signs of a somewhat more conscious religiosity with a relatively high role in determining individual life.
9. Finally, religiosity's role in influencing individual behaviour seems to be especially strong among Catholics, less firm among Orthodox' and the least intense among Protestants.