Religion seems to be back again after never having been gone. In the last century, political ideologies (fascism, communism, conservatism, liberalism) strongly affected the spread of religion, but nowadays religion regains ground in many parts of the world. There is the striking revival of religion in former socialist countries in Eastern Europe (Russia), not in the last place among the younger generation. In the Catholic south of the continent, religion appears to erode far less than in the Protestant regions. However, while in North Western Europe the mainline churches may have become more grey and empty, at the same time evangelical movements are flourishing (also in comparatively highly secularized countries like France and the Netherlands), and smaller, conservative religious communities show a very stable picture.

The panel focuses on religious changes in Europe since the 1980s and their relationships with developments in civil society and civic engagement. We are interested in religion as source of civic morality and social and political engagement of individuals; as a foundation of organized altruism and social services (faith based organizations), but also as a cause of social and political tensions and distrust. What is the evidence for civic morality and social involvement effects of religious beliefs and religious practices? What happens do faith-based organizations in a secularized society? What are the mechanisms at work? Are they similar in various countries, for various beliefs, or are there typical patterns?

These questions are dealt with in five papers, written from different angles and disciplinary backgrounds and referring to various national experiences. The main data source for comparative analysis are the population surveys of the European Values Study conducted in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008.

This panel proposal originates from Cinefogo wp 49 ‘Religion and Civil Society’
1. European trends in religion and civic morality

Panel ‘Religion and civil society in Europe’

A major characteristic of the trajectories of societal changes is individualization, which refers to the idea that individuals have gained autonomy and are able to develop their own values and norms that do not necessarily correspond to the traditional, institutional (religious) ones (see e.g., Ester et al. 1994, 1). More and more people turn away from traditions, the established institutions, and the prescribed values and norms and increasingly they want to decide for themselves and determine how to live their own lives. Such a process of individualization is said to be ‘the most pertinent characterization of ongoing social dynamics’ (SCP 2001, 185) in contemporary society.

This seems to be a universal process that is assumed to bring about not only more modern views, but also more diversity. Individualization is triggered and strongly pushed by increasing levels of education of the population. Rising levels of education increases people’s ‘breath of perspective’ (Gabennesch 1972, 183), their abilities and cognitive skills, which makes them more critical of the traditional suppliers of values, norms, and beliefs, and more open to new ideas and arguments, other providers of meanings, values and norms, and less dependent on traditional institutions and their prescriptions and rules of behavior and conduct.

Another common development that is regarded as conducive to societal changes is the process of globalization. The contemporary world is regarded a ‘global village,’ in which people encounter a great variety of alternative cultural habits and a broad range of lifestyles and modes of behavior. Being free and liberated from the constraints imposed by traditional institutions (e.g., church and religion), people in contemporary globalizing era, in theory, can pick and choose what they want from an expanding global cultural marketplace. Consequently, the likelihood that they select the same options and make the similar choices diminishes and therefore the degree of diversity or pluralism in society increases.

In this paper, we describe the trends in values in Europe, using the survey data from the European Values Study (EVS) from 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008. We elaborate on processes such as de-institutionalization, de-traditionalization and heterogenization and we explore whether values have changed in the direction of more individualistic and less traditional and collectivistic preferences and whether this trend affected the domains of religion, religion and civil participation.

Since value changes in society are taking place gradually and, as argued, among others, by Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997), are the result of generation replacement, we expect to find differences between age groups. Younger people are generally more sensitive to new trends and developments in society and they usually respond more rapidly in terms of value changes and value adaptations than older people. Apart from this trendsetter idea there are other reasons to assume that younger people will be more individualized than older people. The social integration theory provides some clues here: the stronger one has been exposed to social forces with traditional or conventional views and strict norms and restrictions of individual freedom, the stronger one will subscribe to the norms prevalent in the groups acting as socializing forces (Ultee et al. 1992, 86). Older people were raised and socialized in times when traditional norms and values were still quite dominant in society and they were exposed more strongly to these traditional norms, while younger people were raised and socialized in more modern, individualized, secular, globalized and secure settings. Thus, we may expect that younger people will display higher levels of modern secular and individualistic values than older people and also will be less homogeneous than the older people.
2. Religiosity and trust

Panel ‘Religion and civil society in Europe’

The relation between religion and trust is a much-debated issue, both at the aggregate and individual level. Some researchers, such as Robert Putnam and Robert Wuthnow, have suggested that trust correlates positively with religiosity, whereas others have worried that the trust that is associated with religion is of an introverted, bonding type, not the extroverted, bridging variety that many deem more beneficial to society at large. Theoretically, the issue can be seen from both a secularization theory and a trust theory perspective. Even if the issue is an important one, it has hardly been object of systematic studies. Our paper intends to take a first step in this direction. Thus, we intend to investigate theoretically as well as empirically the relationship between horizontal social trust (bridging, bonding, moral and strategic) and religion in different socio-cultural and religious contexts (e.g. high and low trusting Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim societies) with regard to different kind of religious involvement (extrinsic, intrinsic, this-worldly, other-worldly). As empirical data we will rely on WVS, EVS (if possible including the latest round), ESS, and ISSP together with a brand new Swedish survey in some 33 different municipalities (n = 8,000). By these comparisons, we will try answer the question of what kind of religion is related in which ways to what kinds of trust in which socio-cultural contexts. In our analysis we will also engage with the theoretical and empirical literature that has sought to investigate the connections between trust and religiosity.
3. Gendered religion and civil society

Panel ‘Religion and civil society in Europe’

Do people who analyse civil society developments, pay enough attention to the gender dimensions linked with this topic, in particular when the area of attention is ‘religion and civil society’? When it comes to religion in Europe, Grace Davie talks about a “disproportionate presence of women”. Indeed, the EVS-data leave us in little doubt on that score: in virtually all European countries, women are more religious than men and more women participate in religious practices than men. However, empirical research reveals that gender, education, degree of religiosity and religious practice are significant variables, influencing peoples dedication to civil society organisations. Less women are active members and devote themselves to civil society organisations. Participation and dedication are highest among people in the active life phase and who go to church regularly. Researchers who investigate mainly the work of volunteers in institutionalised civil society organisations, risk to overlook women’s dedication in the broad, less structured and less visible field of voluntary work as caregiver (in the informal sector). On the other hand, in diverse European countries, organised christian women’s movements are active civil society organisations who motivate their female members to participate in social life as active citizens.

This paper aims to

1) analyse from a gender perspective some basic theoretical studies investigating (religion and) civil society (e.g. D. Herbert, Religion and Civil Society, 2003) and analyse specific gender literature investigating citizenship and civil society (e.g. R. Lister, Citizenship. Feminist Perspectives, 1997; J.Howell & D. Mulligan, Gender and Civil Society, 2004). The last mentioned analysis will pay special attention to the significance of religion in ‘gender and civil society’ publications.

2) analyse figures about (active) membership of men and women in civil society organisations today,

3) analyse European Values Study data about membership in civil society organisations and voluntary work, in correlation to gender, religiosity, age and professional situation,

4) illustrate by means of one example how a Christian inspired women’s movement encourages their members to become active and critical citizens. The case of the Belgian Christian Women’s Labour Movement will be analysed. This catholic civil society organisation, for women only, was founded in 1921 and became a strong organisation with local departments in a lot of Flemish communities, up to 300,000 members in 1985. The political influence may not be underestimated, e.g. concerning law of succession and matrimonial law, combination professional life-private life, equal opportunity policy in church and society, but as well as the influence on the personal emancipation process of the individual members, who were stimulated towards more active (critical) citizenship.
4. Religion and social and political involvement

Panel ‘Religion and civil society in Europe’

Research in various European countries (and the USA) has shown that church participation is related to participation in civil society and that churchgoers are unusually active social capitalists. Opinions differ, however, as to how this relationship should be interpreted. Several authors have stressed universal social networks and community involvement effects: people get to know other people and are asked to join activities, to volunteer etc. Others believe that it is not membership or participation per se, but that the culture and beliefs in the networks of church members which are decisive: without the content of religious beliefs and altruistic messages that are delivered from the pulpit there would be no positive involvement effects.

In this paper we want to go further into the relationship between religion and social and political involvement. How universal are positive relationships? Why are they strong in some countries and weak or nonexistent in other? How and why do denominations / churches differ? What are the social mechanisms between church involvement and involvement in secular voluntary activities? And what about new religious / spiritual alternatives for church communities and traditional religions?

We want to concentrate on three kinds of comparisons. First we want to compare European countries. At least for North West Europe, we expect to find strong connections between church participation and various indicators of civic engagement (donations to charitable causes, membership of idealistic organizations, volunteering and political activities). Does this also apply to South and Eastern Europe?

Secondly, after presenting the broad picture we zoom in on differences between religious groups: Catholics, various Protestant denominations (liberal and conservative), Muslims. What elements of religion count most when it comes to its social impact: church participation or religious beliefs, religious networks or religious norms? We will also analyse the impact of nonreligious aspects (e.g. ethnic background, age, education, political views). We have suitable data for the Netherlands, whether comparable data have been collected in (some) other countries, remains to be seen.

Finally, we intend to compare church life with New Age ideas / ‘spiritualities of life’ (Heelas) in their impact on social commitment and civil participation. Are new religious groups also a source for civil engagement, or are the ideas and practices they promote too individualistic and detached for that? This comparison will be conducted for the Netherlands and maybe for some other European countries.
5. Religious-based welfare arrangements in a social democratic welfare state – continuity against all odds

Panel ‘Religion and civil society in Europe’

This paper will start with a critical theoretical approach to the so called welfare state regimes theories, specifically the social democratic welfare state per see – Sweden and the role of (or the absent role of) religious organisations in such a model; but also a critical theoretical approach to civil society regimes; what role does religion and religious organisations has, if any, in such models?

Thereafter we present three hypothesis, applying a historical perspective: “the crowding-out hypothesis, “the niche-function hypothesis” and “the flourishing in late-modernity hypothesis.

In the paper the three hypotheses will be applied to case studies of particular interest for the theoretical approach.

The three case studies are interesting each in its own capacity as well as from a comparative onset. The data presented in the case studies focus on three organizations within Swedish civil society and their role as providers of social services and support to particularly vulnerable groups. Two of the organizations are faith based, one has a faith based roots but is often considered secular.

At the turn of the Millennium the affiliation between the state and the Church of Sweden if not totally ended, radically changed the role of the former state church to a new role as one religious communion beside others. The new role as well as the fact that the Church of Sweden in recent decades has come to experience increasing marginalisation, has currently ascribed the Church’s provision of welfare through its diaconal work a growing importance.

The second organization is a Moslem congregation. The case study will present data on the apprehended role of the congregation concerning social and welfare issues.

The third organisation is the YMCA foundation Fryshuset. Fryshuset is probably the most obvious expression of the new position of civil society organizations in Sweden. The creation of Fryshuset was very much a response to a perceived failure of public sector as well as civil society organizations to reach and work with certain groups of socially marginalized young people.

The case studies will be the starting point for a developed theoretical discussion. Based on the empirical data the assumed roles of the organisations as welfare providers will be discussed and compared in the light of the welfare state regimes theories presented and the three hypotheses given initially. Finally we draw a few conclusions.