Congregations in Switzerland and the USA
A quantitative and comparative study

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Summary

Religion is to an important degree a *social* phenomenon. Individuals interact in order to worship, meditate, teach and learn, socialize and engage in a host of other activities. While these interactions may take different social forms, the most important form - at least in Western societies - may well be the *congregation* (or local community). While there has been a great deal of quantitative research on individual religiosity in Switzerland, there has been no representative study on religious congregations or local communities to this date. One of the main strengths of the proposed project is therefore its *descriptive potential*. It will give us answers to very basic - and very important - questions that remain unanswered. How large are the communities and how much staff do they employ? How many congregations are led by women and do we find any differences to congregations led by men? What do congregations offer to their members and with how much success? How do Muslim or Jewish con-gregations differ in these respects from Reformed or Catholic communities? On the other hand, the present study will also answer *important theoretical questions*. For a long time researchers have wondered just why religion seems to be more important in the USA than in European countries like Switzerland. Some have argued that the reason lies in a different "market structure", leading US congregations to be more "competitive". This theory has, however, never been addressed with an empirical study comparing congregations on both sides of the Atlantic with a similar methodology. With the present project, we set out to do just this. Congregational religion in Switzerland is a largely uncharted field, because the metho-dological tools and a comprehensive list of congregations have been hitherto unavailable. With a new me-thodology and a comprehensive list of communities, we will conduct the first such study in Switzerland (and, to the best of our knowledge, in Europe), thereby drawing on experiences of and largely replicating a similar study in the USA by one of the applicants (Mark Chaves).

Central question

The central question of our research is as follows: What do congregations in Switzerland offer concerning worship, social, political and cultural activities; what are the structural and cultural determinants of congregations' activity focus and vitality and how do activities and determinants differ between congregations in Switzerland and the USA?

Method

Concerning methods, this project carries out a representative survey on religious congregations in Switzerland and compares findings systematically with those that have been produced with a similar methodology in the USA. A complete list of religious congregations in Switzerland will be produced, building on existing lists and our own research. A stratified, representative sample of approximately 1,000 Swiss congregations will be drawn and one key informant for every congregation will be interviewed by telephone (CATI) with a standardized questionnaire on structure, activities, social composition, cultural focus and other attributes of the congregation. Utmost importance will be given to quality of the data and our goal is to reach an 80% response rate, as was the case in the first such study by Mark Chaves in the US. Data analysis will be done with common statistical packages (e.g. SPSS, STATA).

Expected results

The study will produce a wealth of vital and unprecedented information on religion and religious plurality in Switzerland. It will enable us for the first time to compare, for example, various Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other communities in Switzerland, as well as between Switzerland and the USA. Furthermore, this new type of comparative data (we will be able to compare across cantons, countries, religious traditions) will be used to revisit important theoretical questions, e.g. 1. the famous theory of the religious market, which argues that state regulation dampens religious congregations' activities, 2. the long-standing theoretical enigma of the large difference in religiosity between European countries and the US.

Scientific and societal importance

The project is highly significant for the scientific community in that it produces new and interesting data on congregations in Switzerland which was hitherto lacking and in that it addresses important theoretical debates with an original comparative design (CH - US) and a new type of data. The project is also important for Swiss society, as its results will be highly interesting for the state, the media, information centers**,** and last but not least the religious communities themselves.

2. Research plan

2.1 Research question, theoretical framework, general state of research

2.1.1 An uncharted field, a new approach

An uncharted field
Religion is to an important degree a *social* phenomenon. Individuals interact in order to worship, meditate, teach and learn, socialize and engage in a host of other activities. While these interactions may take different social forms, the most important form - at least in Western societies - may well be the *congregation* (or local community). While there has been an important amount of quantitative research on individual religiosity in Switzerland, there has been no representative study on religious congregations or local communities to this date. One of the main strengths of the proposed project is therefore its *descriptive potential*. It will give us answers to very basic - and very important - questions to which answers have been lacking to date. This lack of research is regrettable, as an important amount of information concerning religious communities is simply not known. How large are the communities and how much staff do they employ? How many congregations do women lead and do we find any differences to congregations led by men? What do congregations offer to their members and with how much success? How do Muslim or Jewish congregations differ in these respects from Reformed or Catholic communities? On the other hand, the present study will also be able to answer *important theoretical questions*. Researchers have long wondered just why religion seems to be more important in the USA than in European countries like Switzerland. Some have argued that the reason lies in a different "market structure", leading US congregations to be more "competitive". This theory has, however, never been addressed with an empirical study comparing congregations on both sides of the Atlantic with a similar methodology. With the present project, we set out to do just this. Congregational religion in Switzerland is a largely uncharted field, because the methodological tools and a comprehensive list of congregations have been unavailable to this day.

A new approach
Using a new methodology and a comprehensive list of communities, we will conduct the first such study in Switzerland (and, to the best of our knowledge, in Europe), thereby drawing on the experience of and largely replicating a similar study in the USA by one of the applicants (Mark Chaves). With the help of this study, we will know, for the first time, exactly what congregations do in different social arenas and how these activities are influenced by both cultural and structural factors. We will also be able to compare religious congregations or communities of different religious traditions. This information is important for Swiss society in a number of ways (see below). Furthermore, we will be able to address prominent theories in the sociology of religion in a new and original way. Thus, on an intra-national level, we will test the famous theory of "religious markets" (Stark/Finke 2000, Pollack 2003) by investigating if religious congregations of different religious traditions in unregulated Swiss cantons are really more competitive than those in cantons with a strong state regulation. Since Swiss cantons differ radically concerning their state-church relations, Switzerland is an ideal candidate for such theory testing. Furthermore, on an international level, we will address a long-standing theoretical enigma in the sociology of religion, namely, the difference in religious fervor in the US and Europe, by creating a new kind of comparative data. While it is well known that individual religiosity in the US is much higher than in any of the European countries (with the exception of Ireland), the explanation of this fact is very much in debate (Warner 1993, Bruce 1999). One of the main

explanations concerns the importance of the different structure and behavior of congregations in the US and Europe (Iannaccone 1992). While much has been written on this subject, to date no one has tried to investigate empirically just what the differences between US American and European congregations really are. Are they so radically different? If yes, in what ways? Is it true that US congregations are so much more entrepreneurial, as some would claim (Stark/Iannaccone 1994)? Could these differences also be used to explain differences in overall religiosity? Given the fact that the main trends in the religious field in Switzerland are very similar to those in almost all its European counterparts (Norris/Inglehart 2004), we can well take Switzerland as a test case for European religiosity and address this wider theoretical question.

2.1.2 Central question and specific questions

On the most general level, the central question of our research is as follows: *What do congregations in Switzerland offer concerning worship, social, political and cultural activities; what are the structural and cultural determinants of congregations' activity focus and vitality and how do activities and determinants differ between congregations in Switzerland and the USA?*
This question can be split up into several sub-questions:

1.   What are the main *activities* of congregations in Switzerland concerning worship, social, political, cultural and other activities? What are the activity foci of different congregations, i.e. what relative importance do they give to different arenas? How do they finance these activities? How, if at all, do they market their activities?
2.   How much *success* do congregations have in terms of membership growth and attractiveness of their collective activities, services and individual positions (= vitality)?
3.   What is the *structure* of congregations in Switzerland concerning size, number of members and staff, type of organization and hierarchy?
4.   How are activity foci, vitality and structure shaped by *structural and cultural determinants* (e.g., regulation, officially recognized or free congregation, rural or urban area, median social class, religious tradition)?
5.   What differences do we find between what congregations do in *Switzerland and the USA*? How do the activity focus, vitality, and structure of congregations differ? In addition, what differences do we find concerning the determinants of activity foci, vitality and structure? Could these differences on the level of congregations account for the large differences in individual religiosity found between the two countries?

Why a comparison Switzerland - United States?
Experts commenting on our pre-proposal asked us to elaborate on why we focus on a comparison Switzerland - US rather than on a comparison CH - other European countries. There are three main reasons for this. *First,* a comparison between Switzerland and the US of the type we propose will have a very special potential in giving insight into one of the main enigmas of sociology of religion, which is the great difference in religiosity between Europe and the US. While comparisons between European States may be interesting, it is generally acknowledged that the overall secularizing trends in almost all European countries are astonishingly similar (e.g. Norris-Inglehart 2004, Bruce 1999) - in spite of very different levels of religiosity and different confessional traditions of the various countries. Important differences concerning both level of religiosity and trends may be found, however, between European countries on the one hand and the US on the other hand. The US seems to show a relatively stable religious membership rate and religiosity on a very high level (Greeley 1989, Chaves/Stephens 2003, Chaves, 2004: 30f., Iannaccone 1991).[1] *Second*, there is a practical advantage. One of the applicants (Mark Chaves) has started this kind of research in the USA and has already important experience and expertise

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[1] *Some commentators, however, think that the first signs of a secularization do show also in the US. See Chaves 2004: 31.*

that can be used in our study. *Third*, the comparison with the US has great financial advantages: the US-American survey that will be compared to the Swiss one is financed by other sources. In fact, a comparative survey conducted in two countries could simply not be financed by FNRS means alone in the framework of this NPR 58.

2.1.3 Theoretical framework

Congregations
A Congregation - or a local religious group - may be defined as

> *"(...) a social institution in which individuals who are not all religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled intervals, for activities and events with explicitly religious content and purpose, and in which there is continuity over time in the individuals who gather, the location of the gathering, and the nature of the activities and events at each gathering." (Chaves 2004: 1f.)"*

This carefully worded definition allows distinguishing congregations from other social forms of religion. The distinction becomes clear by looking at a few examples. Not to be counted as congregations are monasteries (since they only gather religious specialists), religious movements and religious radio and television productions (since the members do not all gather in physical proximity), camp meetings and religious rock-concerts (since they lack continuity across gatherings in participants, location, or content of activities) seasonal celebrations, holiday gatherings, and other religious assemblies (since they may occur at regular but infrequent intervals). In practice, we do encounter borderline cases, as is true of any definition applied to real cases. Yet research has shown that in the vast majority of cases it is rather easy to decide whether we are faced with a congregation in the sense of our definition or not.[2]

Congregations differ tremendously across religious traditions (and not all religions take on the social form of congregations). They differ as to size, age, involvement of participants, social status, types of activities, etc. Two types of congregation may be distinguished (Stolz 1998), e.g.: a. *the territorial congregation* which offers religious activities to individuals living in a certain area, and b. *the voluntary congregation* which is made up of individuals who have explicitly joined the group and who do not have to live in a defined area. Recent research concerning the Christian context shows that, in Switzerland, the most important predictor of individual religiosity is the closeness to a congregation, either just as a "formal member" in a territorial congregation, or as a member of a voluntary congregation (Stolz 2004). Congregations are not the only way religion may be organized. It may show itself in the form of "guilds of religious specialists, schools, state agencies, free-for-service religious treatments for illness or other worldly ills, keepers of sacred sites to which individuals occasionally come to achieve religious goals or to achieve worldly goals by religious means, and so on (...)" (Chaves 2004: 2). Most importantly, religious traditions may change in their use of the congregational form and different religious traditions vary to the extent that they rely on local communities.

Congregations in different religions
Experts who evaluated our pre-proposal asked us to comment in more detail on the applicability of the "congregations" concept to non-Christian religions. Here, it is important to bear in mind the exact definition given above. In our view, Christianity, Judaism and Islam may clearly be seen as congregational in modern society, but even religious traditions that elsewhere are not organized congregationally such as Hindu traditions or Buddhism tend to take this form when they try to survive in the diaspora of modern host countries like the USA or Switzerland. "This is

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[2] *One of the most important decisions is not to count as congregations subgroups of congregations with religious purposes. A prayer group of a congregation is, in our sense, not itself a congregation. However, if 10 adepts of a new religion meet and pray regularly (without there being an enclosing congregation), then they may be seen as a congregation.*

particularly evident among immigrants to modern societies, whose efforts to perpetuate cultural traditions, raise money for religious and community buildings, meet the diverse social and economic needs of immigrants, compete with other organizations for individuals' time and donations, and materially support religious specialists all push religious expression in a congregational direction, not least because these efforts must be wholly supported with voluntary donations of time and money" (Chaves 2004:3).[3] Researchers in Europe, for example concerning Buddhist (Baumann 1998) and Hindu (Baumann 2004) communities, have identified the same tendency towards a "congregationalization" as an effect of the diasporas? Thus, we argue that we find in many religious traditions "local communities" or "congregations" as we have defined them above, and that it is feasible to include them in our comprehensive list, if (but only if) they conform to the definition.

Congregations in Switzerland and the USA
Lack of space prevents us from giving detailed descriptions of the different attributes and contexts of congregations in Switzerland and the USA. While both countries are highly developed and industrialized, the political, legal and societal contexts for congregations are very different (Bovay 2004, Stolz 2006a, b, Ammerman 1997, Chaves 2004). In *Switzerland*, we probably have about 4000-4500 congregations; in each of the 26 cantons, religion is differently regulated. In some cantons we have separation of state and church; in others we have very strong bonds between the state and some officially recognized churches; the two large religious groups (Roman Catholics and Reformed) make up 75% of all citizens and the overall society is highly secularized. In the *US,* we find more than 300,000 congregations; state and religious groups are strictly separated; the situation is extremely pluralized with the largest denomination (Roman Catholic) only amounting to 29%, and the overall society is, in comparison to Europe, highly religious (Gallup/Lindsay 1999). It is these - and other - very salient differences of context that are expected to influence congregations in very different ways on both sides of the Atlantic.

Activity focus - what do congregations do?
Religious congregations engage in a wide range of different types of activity. They may provide:

a.   worship or some kind of relationship with "transcendent" factors;
b.   specific religious services or rituals that go with the life cycle (e.g. in the case of Christian congregations: baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals);
c.   religious education or training;
d.   social services and social help for members and the needy;
e.   cultural, social and political activities, often organized by special groups;
f.   norms and values for members and society.

While most congregations offer at least something in every one of these categories, they vary greatly concerning the importance they give to one or the other. Some may give primary importance to worship and education; others to religious services and norms and values for society; yet others to social services. Congregations, therefore, differ concerning their activity focus and their activity mix.

One of the basic insights from the US American National Congregation Survey has been that American congregations use their resources largely in order to provide worship, religious education, and cultural events (e.g. in connection with the arts). Social services and political activities, on the other hand, are much less prominent than previous scholarly discussion has led us to believe. A comparison of the Swiss and US congregations will show how congregations in the two countries differ concerning the importance they give to different types of arenas.

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[3] *See also Bankston III/Zhou (2000) on "De facto congregationalism".*

Determinants of activity focus

While there exists no integrated theory of the determinants of activity foci of religious congregations in the literature, different authors point to various concepts and mechanisms that should influence activity focus.

1. *Size*. It seems plausible that larger congregations are able to offer a much larger range of activities in general and are able to engage more fully in cultural, social and political activities than smaller congregations (Chaves 2004: 52; Farnsley 2000). The reason for this lies probably in economies of scale: with increasing size of the congregation, the "average production cost" of each unit of these activities decreases.

2. *Link to the state*. Regulation theory leads us to expect a co-variation between the level of state regulation and the type of preferred activity of a congregation (Iannaccone 1991). According to this approach, congregations linked to and thus controlled by the state will soften their religious message and put less emphasis on religious ritual as well as political action; they will, however, engage more in social and cultural services, while playing down the religious aspect of these services. Congregations that are not linked to the state may then be expected to have stronger religious claims, put more emphasis on religious ritual, infuse services with more religious meaning, and engage more often in political action.[4]

4. *Conservative vs. liberal/progressive*. Distinctions between conservative and liberal/progressive communities can be found in many religious traditions (Chaves 2004: 27). Some theorists argue that there is a link between overall value-stance of a congregation and its typical activity focus. According to these authors, conservative congregations put more emphasis on the religious message and on religious services spreading or enacting this message. Liberal or progressive congregations, on the other hand, put more importance on cultural, social and political activities (Kelley 1986(1972)). In the US, the NCS has shown that liberal or theologically moderate congregations participate more in all kinds of civic activity, while conservative congregations put more emphasis on political action (Chaves 2004: 94f.).

5. *Social class and needs of congregations' members*. A different view sees congregation activities as a result of social class and needs of congregations' members. For example, congregations which include many immigrants (in Switzerland for example Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian Orthodox communities) will offer special social activities, such as help with adapting to the host country; they will also engage in many cultural activities that help members to keep their language and culture in the immigration context. Congregations, to take another example, which include many older members, will engage in special activities attractive to the elderly, such us visits in hospitals, coffee-meetings or trips to places with special healing opportunities (such as Lourdes). However, the social class of members may also influence the number of services provided to *non-members*. For example, the US NCS showed that "Congregations with more college-educated members perform more social services", but that "congregations with particularly high income constituents do *fewer* social services." (Chaves 2004: 52f.)

6. *Welfare needs of members*. Yet other theorists state that congregations will offer a lot of welfare and social activities when there is no "free" and/or compulsory welfare offer by the state. (Gill/Lundsgaarde 2004). According to this view, the state is "crowding out" religious congregations, once it goes into the welfare business. Thus, we should find that in countries, cantons or states with low state welfare, religious congregations engage in more

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[4]*A related point may be formulated with the difference between* territorial vs. voluntary congregations. *Territorial congregations should focus more strongly on social activities and religious services linked to rites of passages like marriages, funerals, and confirmation. Voluntary congregations should put more emphasis on religious services in a narrower sense.*

social services and welfare activities, since there is now a "market" for these kinds of goods.

Vitality - when do congregations have "success"?
It is clear that congregations themselves will measure "success" not just with socio-economic, but also (and perhaps primarily) with "theological" criteria. Unlike economic enterprises, they do not maximize profit by responding only to customer's needs. Instead, they normally have a "mission", and they could not just completely change their message, even if they found that they would attract more followers by doing so (Famos 2004). Nevertheless, in our project, we take a socio-economic view on the vitality and success of congregations in order to describe their factual situation in the competition that implicates them concerning members, volunteers, members' time and resources, public recognition etc. (Stolz 2006b). From this point of view, congregations may be said to be successful if

- they are able to grow in *size* concerning *membership* (or if they at least manage to stabilize the number of members over time). This means that they have (at least) to compensate for loss of members due to death or disaffiliation through new converts or recruitment of children of current members.
- their *individual positions* (both professional and voluntary) are attractive to members and outsiders and if the number of these positions is rising over time.
- a rising number of individuals attend *their religious and nonreligious collective activities* (worship, various groups).
- a rising number of individuals take advantage of their *services*, both religious and social (such as religious marriage, funeral, welfare activities, etc.)

Determinants of vitality
Again, we give a non-exhaustive list of important theoretical mechanisms that are mentioned in the literature concerning determinants of congregations' vitality or success. Interestingly, some of the "independent" variables that are said to determine vitality are the same as for the explanation of activity focus.

1. *Link to the state*. According to regulation theory, regulation of the religious market will dampen religious competition and performance of regulated and unregulated religions (denominations and congregations) (Iannaccone 1992; Stark/Iannaccone 1994). Congregations that are linked to the state are expected to become "lazy monopolists", not trying hard enough to meet the real religious needs of their "customers". Congregations without help from the state, but who live under regulated conditions, are restricted in their possibilities of action in the market; they face, for example, competitors who are favored by the state. Congregations in an unregulated environment, however, should feel the pressure of the free market, "try harder", produce better religious products at a better price and in the long run be more successful.

2. *Conservative vs. liberal/progressive*. A second theory expects a link between the overall value stance in terms of "conservative and liberal" to affect congregations' vitality. Following Kelley (1986(1972)), what individuals really expect from congregations is worship and religious guidance[5] - not so much social, cultural and political activities. Since conservative congregations normally put more emphasis on religious message and ritual, they should in general be more successful than are liberal/progressive congregations, which put more emphasis on social and cultural activities. A somewhat similar argument could be made following Iannaccone (1994) who states that conservative and strict churches are more successful because they put an extra cost on membership, thus "weeding out" free

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[5] *Kelley formulated this theory only for Christian congregations, but the theory may be generalized also to congregations of other religions.*

riders and therefore raising the overall quality of the congregation in terms of commitment, enthusiasm etc.

3.   *Compensatory and welfare needs of members.* Another theory explains congregations' success mainly by socio-economic needs of individuals. Congregations in regions with lower median income, lower quality of life, and less state welfare should have more success than congregations in regions with higher scores on these dimensions. Already Max Weber (1985 (1922): 285ff.) theorized that religion could have a distinctly compensatory function of individuals in need. Other theorists like Glock (1967) have followed, and while compensation theories have been out of fashion for quite some time, new evidence presented by Norris/Inglehart (2004) suggests that religious congregations may indeed serve compensatory functions and are especially attractive to individuals with unmet socio-economic or welfare needs.

4.   *Urban-rural.* A fourth theory argues that congregations should be more successful in rural than in urban areas. The reason lies - according to this theory - in the fact that modernizing and secularizing tendencies are more important in an urban context (Wilson 1966, 1982; Voll 1993, Stolz 2004). This should at least hold for mainline congregations. Congregations made up largely of immigrants and New Religious Movement congregations, on the other hand, should prosper in urban contexts more than in rural areas, since they find more economic and networking opportunities and often more tolerance (Baumann/Stolz 2007).

Explaining differences between Switzerland and the US
Already a brief review of the literature shows that our project will be able to describe very important differences between congregations in the US and Switzerland concerning activity focus and vitality. Our study will not be content, however, simply to describe these differences; rather, we will try to *explain* the differences and this explanation will have to look for other than the "country" variable. Thus, if the religious vitality of congregations is higher in the US, it will not do to merely to state that this is "an American phenomenon", since "country" is not in itself a theoretical concept linked with a causal mechanism to religious vitality. Rather, the ultimate aim is to be able to explain differences between the two countries by including other theoretical concepts and variables such as the determinants given above. It is hoped that it will then be possible to explain differences between the two countries by showing that since different numbers of these determinants are at work in the two countries (e.g. different levels of regulation or absence/presence of welfare state), the outcomes of the phenomena to be explained are different. In so doing our approach is an example of variable-oriented comparative macro-sociology (Goldthorpe 1997).

Supply-side vs. demand-side theories on differences between US and Europe
In the literature, recent decades have seen a broad debate between "supply-side"-theories and "demand-side"-theories of religious vitality in Europe and the US. In brief, supply-siders, normally advocates of a rational-choice approach, argue that factors like regulation and plurality are the most important determinants of religious vitality in a given country or region (Iannaccone 1991, Stark/Iannaccone 1994). According to these authors, religious demand is stable; therefore, differences in supply account for any dissimilarities concerning religiosity between countries. Differences between Europe and the US are then explained in the following way: since religious regulation in Europe is strong, the religious market does not work satisfactorily, religious congregations do not work properly, religious products are of low quality or too expensive and, consequently, religious demand declines. In the US, on the other hand, religion is not regulated, congregations have to compete, the religious market works well, religious products are of high quality and religious demand is consequently high.

Demand-side-theories, on the other hand, argue that religious demand cannot be expected to be stable across time and space. Most times, demand-siders are proponents of some sort of modernization or secularization theory. According to these authors, modernization (including

differentiation, rationalization, the development of a welfare state etc.) leads to declining religious needs of the individuals. This leads to a declining religious offer from religious congregations. Proponents of this view are, for example, Wilson (1966), Bruce (1999, 2002), Pollack (2003), Voas (2003), and Norris/Inglehart (2004). One recent demand-side explanation for the differences between the US and Europe argues that "economic inequality" is the decisive factor (Norris/Inglehart 2004:108). According to these authors, economic inequality is greater in the US, which leads to more anxiety and more religiosity.[6]

One of the advantages of our project is that we will be able to test some propositions concerning this debate in a way that has not yet been possible. Specifically, whereas all previous studies have focused on *individuals*, we will investigate how *congregations* in the US and Switzerland react to various contextual factors. Since we focus directly on the congregations, we are in a much better position to test the propositions of supply-side theories concerning the effects of state regulation on congregations' religious vitality.

2.1.4 Research on congregations

Before the 1998 NCS, research on congregations had mostly used case studies or surveys within one or a few congregations (for an overview, see Chaves et al 1999, Chaves 2004). In Europe, research on congregations was strong in the 1950s and 1960s. Then Thomas Luckmann (1967) argued forcefully that researchers should not concentrate on institutional forms of religion (negatively labeled as "Kirchensoziologie") but rather on personal, privatized, "invisible" religion. While some of his arguments were valid, the result for sociology of religion has been unfortunate, as, since then, congregations have been very much neglected. In Switzerland, research on congregations is rather rare.

Congregations linked to various religions in the US and to a certain extent also in Switzerland have been the object of ethnographic and case-study research. An overview for the US can be found in Chaves 2004. In Switzerland we can point to Baumann/Stolz 2007 which gives an overview of the development of and the relevant literature for the Reformed, Roman-Catholic, Evangelical, Christian-Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, New Religious Communities and Esoteric traditions in Switzerland (written by experts on the respective traditions).[7] However, while in the US some studies have already looked at congregations quantitatively, in Switzerland there has not yet been any quantitative study that looks at the congregation as the basic unit of analysis and compares congregations across religions. Notable exceptions are the SPI (1987), a study on Catholic parishes without priests, Campiche et al (1990), a study on parish councilors in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and Lüthi (1994), a study on Evangelical free churches.

The National Congregation Study (NCS) that was conducted in 1998 and 2006 in the USA has been a major step forward in congregational studies and sociology of religion in general. Focusing on congregations instead of individuals, it has produced representative data on a host of topics that were never available before. The central idea of the present proposal is to use this kind of study for the first time in Switzerland and thus to engage in cross-national comparison.

2.2 Account of one's own research in the field

2.2.1 Jörg Stolz

Jörg Stolz is a full professor of sociology of religion at the University of Lausanne and a specialist in quantitative methods. He is also the director of the Observatory of Religions in

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[6] "*Americans face greater anxieties than citizens in other advanced industrialized countries about whether they will be covered by medical insurance, whether they will be fired arbitrarily, or whether they will be forced to choose between losing their job and devoting themselves to their newborn child.*" (Norris/Inglehart 2004: 108).

[7] *We plan to involve these experts in our research, asking them for feed-back on our questionnaire and questions of interpretation. See below 2.3.1.*

Switzerland (ORS), a research institute that specializes on empirical research on the religious landscape in Switzerland, with a strong emphasis on international comparison. Jörg Stolz has directed various larger research projects using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. He is the author of "*Soziologie der Fremdenfeindlichkeit*" (Campus, 2000) and co-author of "*Les deux visages de la religion. Fascination et désenchantement*" (with Roland C. Campiche and Alfred Dubach (Labor et Fides, 2004)). He has published various theoretical and empirical papers on the link between state regulation and religious vitality of religious groups (Stolz 2004a, 2005, 2006c, 2007,) as well as on the religious situation in Switzerland in general (Stolz 2006a, 2006d). Currently, he is editing the first comprehensive book on religious plurality and its effects on society in Switzerland (Baumann/Stolz 2007). Jörg Stolz is a member of the council of the ISSR and coordinator of the research committee "Religion et société" of the SGR and the SSS.

2.2.2 Mark Chaves

Mark Chaves is Professor and Head of the Sociology Department at the University of Arizona. He specializes in the sociology of religion and is the author of Congregations in America (Harvard University Press, 2004), Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in a Religious Organization (Harvard University Press, 1997), and dozens of articles and chapters on various topics in the sociology of religion. He was Principal Investigator for the National Congregations Study (NCS), a 1998 survey of a nationally representative sample of religious congregations in the United States. The NCS gathered data on a wide range of congregations' characteristics and activities. A second wave of the NCS is underway. He was a founding member of the American Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion Section Council (1995), he served on the Board of the Religious Research Association (1997-99), and he was Program Chair for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion's 2001 meetings. He currently serves on the SSSR Council and is Chair of the American Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion Section.

2.3 Detailed research plan

2.3.1 Design

We use a quantitative, representative, cross-sectional and comparative research design.
- Quantitative: Questions and possibilities of response are almost completely standardized.
- Representative: We draw a representative sample of congregations in Switzerland.
- Cross-sectional: We look at congregations in Switzerland at a certain point in time.
- Comparative: We use and adapt a questionnaire previously employed in the USA in 1998 and 2006. In this way many of our results can be compared to the US results.

In order to obtain maximum comparability of the Swiss and US data, we will follow the US research design as closely as possible (concerning measurement, question wording etc.). One exception is our sampling (see next point), which, however, will still allow comparison when weighting the data appropriately. Extensive pretesting will indicate just where procedures and/or questions have nevertheless to be adapted due to the radically different context.

We will use the help of experts on different religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam and New Religious Movements when creating the questionnaire. The editing and writing of the book *"Eine Schweiz - viele Religionen. Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens"* (Baumann/Stolz 2007) on religious plurality in Switzerland has brought Jörg Stolz into very close contact with experts on these religions in Switzerland. This network of experts will be used in order to obtain advice and feedback on the wording of questions, problems to observe, etc.

2.3.2 Questionnaire and measurement issues

Our *questionnaire* will take the US - questionnaire as a model and replicate as many questions as possible - given limited space. The questionnaire will have the following structure:
Questions on

1. Contact Information
2. Basic Information / Size
3. Staff
4. Worship
5. Religious education and youth
6. Groups
7. Social services
8. Finances
9. Social Composition
10. Expectations of members and leaders
11. Religious Marketing

The questionnaire will be adapted from the US American version and then translated into the three national languages German, French, and Italian.

Since only one informant for every congregation is interviewed, a *measurement issue* arises. One may ask if this one person will give an unbiased account of the characteristics of his or her congregation. Methodological research has shown that experts are biased informants when it comes to average opinions or goals of their organizations, but very reliable concerning directly observable facts. The questions in our survey thus mainly address the latter (Chaves 2004).

2.3.3 Adaptation to Swiss context and pretests

The questionnaire will have to be adapted to the Swiss context. A lot of effort will be put into understanding just when and how questions will have to be left out, adapted or added. As a rule, we will adapt the questionnaire by leaving out some questions and adding others but *not by adapting* questions.[8] This is because by adapting questions, one changes the measurement instrument. As a result, differences found between the US and CH could be either due to different objective realities or to the different measurement instruments. An interpretation becomes impossible.[9] We will put a lot of effort into an exploratory phase, where we will go to different Swiss congregations, talk with officials about the theme of our research and about specific questions of the questionnaire. Also in this phase we will conduct at least 15-20 pretests in different congregations of different religions. We will also closely collaborate with a board of experts on different religious traditions in order to discuss the questionnaire. All of this will show us how to adapt the questionnaire to the Swiss context and the various types of religious communities. In order to get a feel of the questionnaire and of what these adaptations might look like, we have already conducted two pilot-interviews with leaders of two congregations. We have found that the questionnaire is indeed influenced by and tuned to US American conditions and that some questions are felt not to "apply" to Swiss congregations. On the other hand, some

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[8] *There are exceptions. There is no problem in adapting the question of "Does your congregation display an American flag in your main sanctuary or worship space", by changing American flag to Swiss flag.*

[9] *The question of omitting questions is also very sensitive. One might be tempted to omit questions such as: "Within the past 12 months, have there been any groups or meetings or classes or events specifically focused on the following purposes: (i) An effort to get people registered to vote (ii) to travel to another part of the United States (Switzerland) to provide assistance to people in need". Likewise, one might want to leave out the question of whether there is "an American (Swiss) flag in your main sanctuary or worship space", because we know (or think we know) that these practices are very rare indeed in Swiss congregations. However, if we omit these questions, our data would then be inadequate to show these interesting differences between US and CH congregations.*

activities of Swiss congregations were not touched upon by the questions. The differences between congregations on both sides of the Atlantic do indeed seem to be important - which make this research methodologically demanding, but also immensely interesting. Concerning adaptation of the questionnaire to context, we make one additional point. Since we will probably be forced to drop questions for the Swiss questionnaire where the differences are too great (because the questions would not be understood or would be felt to be completely inappropriate), we will make a point of examining these specific issues, attempting to analyze at least in theory and with other data why these particular points are so different in the two contexts.

2.3.4 Sampling 1: Creating a comprehensive list of congregations

In a first step we will construct a comprehensive list of all religious congregations in Switzerland. We will use a variety of combined methods and an important amount of (time- & monetary) resources in order to make sure that the list of congregations will be as complete as possible, including also small, new and not very well-known groups. We will combine and cross-check the following sources of information, canton- and religious-tradition-wise: a. Existing encyclopedias of religions and religious congregations in different cantons, b. lists from mapping studies of religious congregations in different cantons, c. lists of religious congregations from information centers on religions, d. lists of denominations, e. telephone directories, f. snowball technique. Some regions and cantons are very well researched (Zurich, Basel, Berne, Lucerne, Geneva, Ticino, and Vaud). Others will have to be researched more extensively by ourselves. Until now, we have already gathered all known lists of a. b. and c. We have also created two pilot lists of congregations in the Cantons of Lucerne and Vaud in order to be able to evaluate possible strategies and problems as well as estimate the time needed to create the overall list. Furthermore, we have interviewed several creators of the different lists in order to learn viable techniques and possible problems. Creating the lists has already made us aware of important methodological issues. For example, it is essential to apply our definition of religious congregations rigorously (see above), since many existing lists also include religious movements, intra-congregational groups, religious orders or organizations. Applying the definition strictly, these problems are, however, surmountable.[10] Our experiences have led us to believe that it is possible to draw up a complete list of religious congregations of very high quality in a reasonable time-frame. It has also taught us that the drawing up of the list is itself a very interesting and important task that will already produce an important amount of information for science and society.

In a second step, we will draw a stratified random sample directly from this list. This sampling procedure is different from the one used in the USA, where a two-step sampling procedure was used. While our data will be constructed differently to those in the US, results will be comparable with appropriate weighting.[11] The direct sampling from an overall list of congregations has two major advantages. First, it is much less expensive. Second, we will be able to stratify the sampling in order to give a certain probability to smaller religious traditions.

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[10] *It is important to note that this problem did not arise in this form in the US survey. Since a two-step sampling was used, in a first step individuals were asked the following question: "Please tell me how you would look up the place where you attend religious services in the telephone book." In this way, the individuals decide what their "congregation" is and problems of definition "vanish". In our way of proceeding, the researchers draw up a list of congregations. Now we have to decide what a congregation is and what is not.*

[11] *This was not possible in the US study. The study in the US focused on congregations in general, thus including in principle Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish congregations, etc. However, non-Christian religions in the US are small, leading to the fact that only Jewish congregations could reasonably be investigated statistically (all other smaller, non-Christian traditions appearing in the sample in numbers too low to be investigated with statistical means). Our sample, however, will remedy this situation by giving smaller religious traditions a higher and known probability of appearing in the sample, thus allowing us to investigate and compare more religious traditions.*

2.3.5 Sampling 2: Stratified sampling

Starting out with a comprehensive list of all congregations enables us to stratify our sample. A stratified random sample is a sample in which units are randomly sampled from a population that has been divided into categories (strata) (Bryman 2004: 544). We will stratify using linguistic area and religious tradition as stratifying criteria. We will sample proportionally concerning linguistic area and disproportionately concerning religious tradition. Especially the latter point is important. The use of a simple random sample would have the effect that we could make no qualified statements about congregations of smaller religious traditions (Evangelicals, Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish). There would be so few congregations belonging to these traditions in our sample that parameters concerning only these traditions could not be estimated in a satisfactory way. This is why we will use a disproportional stratified sample, oversampling these smaller religious traditions.[12] The exact choice of groups oversampled and size of sub-samples will be determined once the comprehensive list of congregations exists.

2.3.6 Data collection

Interviewing is done by the professional survey institute LINK. Addresses will be sampled by the ORS and given to LINK. A contact letter will be sent to respondents, explaining the goal of the research and announcing a telephone call by an interviewer in the near future. For interviews specially trained interviewers will be used. Interviews will be done with CATI (computer aided telephone interview) and will take about 40 minutes. Respondents have to be experts concerning their congregation. Very often, this will be a representative or religious leader of the congregation. Interviews will normally be conducted in one of the three national languages. If no expert speaking one of these languages can be found, interviewers with other language skills will be used (provided by LINK). We will strive to reach a response rate as high as that of the US-survey (80% in the first one, probably around 75% in the second one) which is the model for this research. If telephone numbers for a congregation's respondent cannot be found by the ORS, LINK will send an information letter asking the respondent to inform LINK of the telephone number. If there is no answer to this letter, LINK will search for the telephone number by various means (Twixtel, Tel-Info). If this meets with no success, LINK will send an interviewer to the address in order to determine the telephone number. The US surveys show that additional efforts such as these are extremely important in order to raise the response rate. Especially small and unusual congregations have to be given a special effort in order to establish the relevant telephone number. While these additional measures have an additional cost, we are very much convinced that these costs are justified in order to reach a very high standard concerning the quality of the data.[13]

Data sources have already been described in the paragraph on "methods". We put the highest priority on the privacy of the individuals and congregations involved and results will only be released to the public in summary form.

2.3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis will use common statistical methods (descriptive and inferential) with the help of current statistics programs (e.g. SPSS, STATA, and AMOS). An integrated file of US and Swiss data will be produced in order to compare congregations in the two countries using multivariate methods.

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[12] *We would like to add that - after reflection - we have removed the monetary incentive for reluctant respondents and have readjusted the budget accordingly. The monetary incentive method that was used in the US seems to be less appropriate for the Swiss context. However, this means that we have to work all the harder to reach a high response rate with the other additional measures.*

[13] *Unofficially, a number of denomination leaders have already been informed. It is clear that denominations should be very interested in this research and we do not expect problems in getting their formal approval.*

2.3.8 A note on the budget

Because the survey in the USA is already financed by other sources, the costs for this project are comparatively low. Additional costs for the comparative component can be reduced to travel and hosting expenses for project leaders and to the cost of a graduate student working on comparative issues in the USA. We are aware that in the present proposal we have not met the "cost ceiling" in that our project amounts to 475'915. However, we would like to point out that we have already cut down on costs very decisively. The comparable survey in the US cost about twice as much, that is $750'000 (= 936'300 SFR). We were able to cut down costs since we use a one-step sampling only (which is possible since Switzerland is small), by reducing interview-time to 45 minutes (instead of 60 minutes in the US) and by the fact that surveying in Switzerland is less expensive in Switzerland (especially concerning the part of finding the "hard-to-reach" congregations). We just do not see where we could cut costs anymore without seriously damaging the quality of the project. Already now, the project is very tightly calculated concerning work force and we would not like to make any compromise on the quality of the data.

2.3.9 A note on collaboration

This project will be planned and conducted jointly by Professor Jörg Stolz (Observatoire des Religions en Suisse, University of Lausanne, Switzerland) and Professor Mark Chaves (Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, USA). We will stay in close contact through e-mail but will also have personal meetings in either Switzerland or the USA during the course of this project. During the project, we will contact officials of the various larger denominations in order to inform them of the research and use their approval in the information letters sent to respondents.[14] We will also stay in close contact with information centers in Switzerland which help us draw up the comprehensive list of congregations and with external experts on the different religious movements. Integrating these different types of actors in efficient ways into our project will at the same time guarantee efficient knowledge transfer (see for the details of collaboration and knowledge transfer below 3.2.2)

2.4 Research timetable and milestones

Table 2 gives the major steps and milestones for our research.

Table 2   *Timeframe for the project "Religiosity in the modern world"*

2007 (June)	2008	2009	2010 (September)
Create list of congregations Construct questionnaire Pretest	Sampling Interviews Data control Data analysis	Data analysis Comparison CH-USA Research report	Research report Scientific publications

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[14] *Informally, a number of denomination leaders have already been informed. It is clear that denominations should be very interested by this research and we do not expect problems with getting their formal approval.*

3. Implementation plan

We understand knowledge transfer to be the distribution of new data, new skills, new expertise, new ways of thinking, and new solutions for scientific and societal problems. We distinguish between *scientific* and *societal knowledge transfer*. The goal of *scientific knowledge transfer* is to pass on the results of our research to the leading scientific centers and institutions working on religious congregation research and related subjects. The goal of *societal knowledge transfer* is to pass on the results of our research to different types of actors in society that may be affected by or interested in the development of religious congregations in Switzerland.

3.1 Previous attainments in the field of knowledge and technology transfer

Both applicants as well as their institutions have extensive experience concerning both scientific and societal knowledge transfer.
Jörg Stolz is the director of the ORS, an institution that works extensively on scientific knowledge transfer through publications, conferences and workshops. The ORS works very closely together with the CIC, a public information center on religious movements based in Geneva, which routinely uses and transmits results from ORS studies to a wider public. The ORS works also closely together with EUREL, a website that presents information on religious communities and society in various European countries. Jörg Stolz takes also part and co-organizes the continuing education "Religions cultures et communication" in Geneva and is very often interviewed by the media on various questions of religion and society. He has taken part in various specific knowledge transfer activities (such as films, exhibitions, educational material on religions in Switzerland) and is currently editing, together with Prof. Martin Baumann (Lucerne), the first comprehensive book addressing a large and non-specialist public on religious diversity and its effects on Swiss society ("Eine Schweiz - viele Religionen. Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens").
Mark Chaves's most significant achievements in the field of knowledge and technology transfer are related to dissemination of data and results from the 1998 National Congregations Study (NCS). Scholars, policy makers, journalists, religious leaders, and others have used the NCS as a source of valuable information about American religious practices. In the next paragraph we will look in depth at just how the knowledge transfer functioned in the US study.

Knowledge transfer from the US - National Congregations Study
Six significant kinds of US - NCS-related knowledge and technology transfer can be identified:

1. Publications and presentations by Professor Chaves and others aimed at non-scholarly audiences, including religious leaders, journalists, and policy makers.
2. NCS results and reports have been directly used by congregations and other religious organizations in staff meetings and adult education classes.
3. NCS results have been reported in a variety of mass media outlets.[15] The mass media use the NCS to provide national context for various kinds of national and local stories about American religion.
4. NCS results also have been used in publications and presentations aimed at policy makers and leaders of nonprofit organizations.[16] NCS results directly and explictly have informed public policy debate and formulation.

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[15] *These include* The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, US News & World Report, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, The Economist, The Nation, The New Republic, American Prospect, Weekend Edition *(National Public Radio),* Morning Edition *(National Public Radio),* The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, *and many other less prominent outlets.*

5. A public version of the NCS data set is available in three archives and is very frequently used.[17] Presentations and articles using NCS data and written by people other than Professor Chaves or his students now appear regularly in the scholarly literature.
6. In collaboration with the University of Arizona library, Professor Chaves developed an NCS web site (//s6.library.arizona.edu/natcong/), which allows journalists, religious leaders, and others without training in survey research or data analysis to work directly with NCS data.[18]

We have cited these US transfer activities at length since we believe that a similar knowledge transfer impact will be possible in Switzerland.

3.2 Planned activities

3.2.1 Goals of knowledge transfer

The US American experience has shown that a National Congregation Study can and will be highly interesting and useful for a multitude of actors, both in science and society. A better understanding of congregations activities, activity focus and vitality as well as the determinants of these phenomena will be useful not only to specialists in the field of sociology and study of religions, but also to information centers, politicians, journalists and educators. Finally yet importantly, religious congregations and denominations themselves will be interested in better understanding the way they function. The goal of knowledge transfer is to convey the results of the project in a way that is accessible and attractive to these different groups of actors.

3.2.2 Planned knowledge transfer activities

Based on US-American experiences, we will focus knowledge transfer on the following:

1. *Publications and presentations to scholarly audiences (international congresses, own congress).* A presentation will take place at a congress we will organize in Switzerland in 2010, but also on different international congresses (ISSR, ASR, SSSR)
2. *Publications and presentations to non-scholarly audiences.* The 2010 congress will already have a panel with presentations aimed especially at non-scholarly audiences (e.g. journalists, politicians and religious community leaders). Jörg Stolz and his collaborators will give various presentations to non-scholarly audiences upon invitation.
3. *NCS results used by congregations.* We will build a NCS - Switzerland website following the US model, in order to let an interested public use the data independently. Especially congregation leaders seem to be interested in using this kind of information.
4. *Mass Media.* We will use our numerous contacts with journalists who report on religious matters in order to transfer results. Journalists will also be informed of the existence of the new comprehensive list of religious congregations and will be invited to the international congress.

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[16] *The NCS was mentioned in at least two congressional hearings, in the first major report issued by the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, and is invoked both by critics of government policy and by government officials when they announce new initiatives concerning churches,*

[17] *The three data archives are: the American Religion Data Archive (ARDA), based at Pennsylvania State University (www.thearda.com), the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), based at the University of Michigan (www.icpsr.umich.edu), and the Cultural Policy & the Arts National Data Archive, based at Princeton University (www.cpanda.org). As of October 2006, the NCS data set has been downloaded more than 1,000 times from ARDA alone and is the fifth most downloaded data set of the more than 350 data sets archived in ARDA.*

[18] *This site currently receives more than 3,000 hits per month, and it receives visits from more than 300 different individuals per month. Of the hundreds of users who have responded to our survey question asking what they do, 53% identify themselves as religious or congregational leaders, and more than one quarter are clergy. As intended, this web site is reaching the non-scholarly audience.*

5. *Information Centers and mapping studies*. Already now, collaboration with researchers conducting mapping studies in Switzerland and information centers has begun while we have assembled all existing lists. This collaboration will be intensified during the project. Information center officials and mapping study researchers will be invited to our international conference. Information centers may use our comprehensive list and findings in order to better inform the public about religious communities in Switzerland. Mapping study researchers may use our comprehensive list and results in order to better contextualize their own findings.

6. *Policy makers and leaders of non-profit organizations*. Findings from the Swiss NCS may well interest Swiss policy makers and leaders of non-profit organizations. This is especially the case since the question of public recognition of religious communities other than the Reformed, Catholic and Christ-Catholic church is coming increasingly to the attention to the Swiss public.[19]

7. Data will be archived by SIDOS.

Bearing these points in mind, two special occasions for knowledge transfer are planned. In *2008* we will organize a workshop uniting experts and representatives of all information centers and mapping studies in Switzerland in order to discuss and evaluate the comprehensive list of congregations in Switzerland. After possible revisions, we will then present the complete list to the media and make summary results publicly available through EUREL. In this way, information centers who have already given their partial lists to us are integrated into the project and will both use our lists and be more interested in the final results. In *2010*, we will organize an international congress inviting scholars from Switzerland, the US and other countries in order to present and discuss results of this and other congregation studies. On this occasion we will also organize special panels for the media, politics, information centers, and religious communities.

3.3 Implementation timetable and milestones

Major knowledge transfer measures are presented in table 2. Costs for knowledge transfer will be covered by the ORS.

Table 2   *Implementation timeframe for the project "Religiosity in the modern world"*

2007 (June)	2008	2009	2010/2011
	Small workshop with information centers Presentation and discussion of list of congregations. Information to the media.		International conference on results with European/US-Scholars Information measures for Information-centers, journalists, group representatives. Summary results on EUREL

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[19] *As is true of almost any topic in Switzerland, the question of public recognition of religious communities is treated differently in every one of the 26 Swiss cantons (including 4 half-cantons). Recently, religious pluralization has led policy makers in many cantons to think increasingly about extending public recognition to more religious groups - if they meet certain criteria. An example is the canton of Vaud, where the new constitution allows for such recognition of religious communities other than the Reformed, Catholic, and Jewish communities, which are already recognized. See also Pahud de Mortanges 2003; Cattacin 2003.*

4. Significance of the planned work

4.1 Scientific significance

The present study will lead to concrete and reliable knowledge not only on the activities, structure, social composition, cultural focus and vitality of religious congregations in Switzerland but also on the determinants of these phenomena. It thus addresses point 6.1. "Religious groups in change - Structures, identities, inter-religious relations" of the implementation plan of the NRP 58. This knowledge will be especially valuable since the topic is treated in a representative manner for both non-Christian and Christian groups in Switzerland and in an internationally comparative way. The study is original, since, to our knowledge, there has been neither such a study in Switzerland or Europe, nor such a cross-cultural study to date.

We identify five ways in which this study may become important for the scientific community:

- in a Swiss scientific context the Swiss NCS will provide data of a very different order concerning arguably the most important social form of religion: congregations (local religious communities). Since this kind of study has never been done before in Switzerland, already the purely *descriptive* value of results will be highly interesting. This is the case both for the first comprehensive list of religious congregations in Switzerland and for the descriptive results comparing congregations of different religious traditions concerning structure, size, activity focus, vitality, etc. Since almost all representative studies on religion in Switzerland have been focusing on individuals, this study complements the received knowledge by adding a new perspective.
- the results of the study will have an *important value for other, more locally oriented studies on congregations*, such as case studies or mapping studies, in that it helps these researchers to contextualize their findings and to compare them to the Swiss case in general.
- the study will also have an important *explanatory* value. The results of this study will shed light on some of the most salient theories explaining religious vitality and activity focus of religious congregations.
- Moreover, we expect high scientific interest in our *cross-cultural results*, since for the first time we will be able to make reliable statements about the differences between US-American and Swiss congregations**.** We can therefore address the long-standing enigma regarding the difference between overall religiosity in Europe and in the US in a new way.
- Concerning methodology and research design, this is the first European quantitative congregation study and it might start a tradition of similar studies in Europe - as has been the case for the NCS in the USA.

Furthermore, we think that the results of this study might produce a kind of "framework" for better interpreting the results of many other studies in the NRP 58.

4.2 Social and economic significance

We have sketched possible beneficiaries of this study already at length in the section on knowledge transfer (3. implementation plan) and will therefore only summarize our arguments briefly at this point. We may distinguish different types of actors for whom the results of this study may become important:

- *Society* in general and the *mass media* may be interested in having more reliable basic facts about the most important social form of religion in Switzerland, i.e. local religious groups or congregations.
- *Information centers* may use both the comprehensive list of religious congregations and the results of the study in order to be able to inform more reliably and comprehensively about the religious situation in Switzerland.

- *Policy makers and leaders of non-governmental organizations* should be interested in these results - especially in the context of new religious pluralization and increasing interest in extending public recognition to different religious groups.
- Last but not least, *congregations* themselves will have a high interest in the results of this study. Information from the NCS Switzerland will help people in these organizations to contextualize their own experience, situation, and practices. The context provided by the NCS helps them to better understand and assess where they are, and that understanding can and does influence their judgments about how they are doing, and what they might do better.

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