

## *No Religious Affiliation-Dominant*

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# Interreligious Dialogue Activities in East Germany

## *Low Levels of Activities within Official Organizational Structures*

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### Abstract

With regards to the religious situation, Germany still is a highly divided country. This draws our attention to the specific characteristics of IRD-activities in the eastern parts of Germany. Based on literature review and mapping exercises, we will argue, firstly, that the interreligious dialogue scene in East Germany is characterized by a comparatively low density of activities that are primarily embedded into major religious and state-related organizational structures. Secondly, we will discuss potential explanations of this lower dialogue level with regards to present-day socio-cultural differences and asymmetries between East and West Germany. Thirdly, we argue that the case of East Germany gives evidence to pay particular attention to numerically smaller religious groups within IRD as well as religiously unaffiliated parts of society. Consequently, we have to rethink the conceptualization of IRD in view of secularization as the dominant tendency in many European countries.

## Keywords

East Germany – interreligious dialogue – plurality – secularity – meso-level – complexity

### 1 Introduction

The following considerations deal with the emergence of present-day interreligious dialogue (IRD)-activities within the context of those parts of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) that – from 1949 to 1990 – formed the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Today these parts of Germany are – with slight differences in meaning but more or less interchangeably – alluded to as ‘East Germany’ or the East German states/*Länder*.

As far as the discussions within the present thematic issue of JRAT<sup>1</sup> are concerned, these parts of Germany form a unique case of analysis. According to the data of the ‘Swiss Meta-Database of Religious Affiliation in Europe (SMRE)’; Germany is the only European country that can be described as fragmented with no religious group exceeding a proportion of 31% of the population and with ‘non-affiliated’ as the largest group.<sup>2</sup> And this is primarily due to the accession of the East German states in the year 1990. The religious situation in the eastern parts of Germany is characterized by a high degree of non-affiliated while the West is still primarily Catholic with a high percentage of Protestants.

The paper at hand wants to explore the influences of this specific historically grown situation on present-day interreligious dialogue (IRD)-activities. On the basis of literature research, existing mapping exercises and some fieldwork, we will thus present a three-fold argument:

Firstly, we will argue that the IRD-scene in East Germany is characterized by a comparatively low density of activities that are primarily embedded into major religious and state-related organizational structures – triggered by the social developments of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Secondly, we discuss different potential explanations of this low density focusing on the socio-cultural differences and institutional asymmetries between East and West Germany that have shaped quite distinct contexts for IRD-activities to (not) evolve. And thirdly, we argue that the case of East Germany gives evidence to the need of not only including newly formed and numerically smaller religious groups into

1 Lehmann, *Interreligious Dialogue in Context*.

2 According to the SMRE, the non-affiliated form about 33% of the German population. Liedhegener/Odermatt, *Religious Affiliation as a Baseline for Religious Diversity in Contemporary Europe*, p. 59.

the analysis of IRD-activities,<sup>3</sup> but to also include religiously unaffiliated parts of society. This challenges the conceptualization of interreligious dialogue in view of processes of secularization.<sup>4</sup>

To make these points, the paper is divided into four major sections: It will start with a number of conceptual notes and comments on the state of the art (2). In the major sections, we will first describe the IRD-scene in East Germany based on literature review and two recent mapping exercises (3). Finding a comparatively low density of IRD-activities in East Germany, we then present and discuss some hypothetical contextual explanations based on existing empirical studies and statistics as well as fieldwork (4). The paper closes with concluding remarks and a tentative input to the wider discussions of IRD in context (5).

## 2 Conceptual Notes and Comments on the State of the Art

In accordance with the conceptual framework given in the introductory article,<sup>5</sup> the following considerations are embedded into the more recent strand of research on IRD that focuses on the contextualization and systematic comparison of IRD-activities within different socio-cultural contexts across Europe. With our case of East Germany, we explore new research territory and for the first time offer tentative descriptions and hypothetical explanations of how IRD-activities have developed in one of the most secular regions in Europe.

### 2.1 *Conceptual Notes*

Most generally speaking, the paper follows an open, non-normative conception of IRD in a way that starts from the self-descriptions of the actors in the field and captures the wide range of activities that are linked to or affiliated with the semantic field of the interreligious, the interfaith, the multifaith or the interconvictional.<sup>6</sup> More precisely, the following considerations put particular emphasis upon the meso-level of organizations and movements that

3 See e.g. Baumann/Tunger-Zanetti, *Constructing and Representing the New Religious Diversity with Old Classifications*.

4 Pollack/Rosta, *Religion and Modernity*.

5 Lehmann, *Introductory Remarks*.

6 Griera/Nagel, *Interreligious Relations and Governance of Religion in Europe: Introduction*, p. 304. Ippgrave/Knauth/Körs/Vieregge/von der Lippe, *Religion and Dialogue in the City: An Introduction*, pp. 10 et seq.

are explicitly doing IRD within the context of East Germany.<sup>7</sup> They will focus on organizations and movements that have either been established to work within the field of the interreligious, the interfaith, the multifaith or the inter-convictional; or that have specific offices and/or sections devoted to the work in this field.

As a matter of fact, the present state of the art does not yet permit a systematic reconstruction of these developments. Accordingly, the following considerations will focus upon only some significant aspects of the present-day situation as well as the emergence of the respective IRD-activities in time.

## 2.2 *State of the Art on IRD in the Eastern Parts of Germany*

So far, research has identified three entwined historical trends that are forming the basis of the present-day religious situation in Germany: First, there is the long tradition of denominational differentiation dating back to the time of the Reformation. In the case of Germany, this has led to the establishment of two major religious bodies that have long been dominating the religious field – the various regional Protestant churches as well as the Roman-Catholic church with its dioceses.<sup>8</sup>

Second, researchers have repeatedly been underlining that Germany is among those European countries that have seen a continuing growth of the so-called ‘Nones’ or ‘non-affiliated’.<sup>9</sup> As far as the western parts of Germany are concerned, the ‘Nones’ have developed into a third major group that characterizes the religious field since the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> In the eastern parts of Germany, the presence of the ‘Nones’ is even stronger. Referring to two periods of state-sponsored secularization (during the 1930s and 1940s as well as during the 1950s and 1960s), Monika Wohlrab-Sahr et al. use the term ‘forced secularity’ that still constitutes the present religious situation in the East German states.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Germany has also seen an increasing process of religious diversification and pluralization. In the western parts of Germany, the immigration movements that started in the 1960s have triggered the establishment of new

7 For further details in this analytic distinction: Lehmann/Jödicke, *Einheit und Differenz in der Religionswissenschaft*. Lehmann, *Globale Trends politischen Einflusses auf Religionen?*

8 Wallmann, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands seit der Reformation*.

9 For a highly instructive and empirically grounded discussion on the concept of the ‘Nones’: Stolz/Könemann/Schneuwly-Purdie/Engelberger/Krüggele, *Religion und Spiritualität in der Ich-Gesellschaft*.

10 Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?*; Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen?*

11 Wohlrab-Sahr/Karstein/Schmidt-Lux, *Forcierte Säkularität*.

religious traditions.<sup>12</sup> The eastern parts of Germany have also seen extensive immigration. During the 1960s and 1970s the immigrants coming to the GDR were, however, in almost all cases staying for only a few years and were not in the position to establish their own religious infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the present situation is based upon relatively small groups of immigrants in the East German territories that are – however – a highly prominent subject of public discourse.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the available statistics identify significant groups of Protestants, Catholics, non-Christian minorities and ‘Nones’ in Germany – with vast majorities of ‘Nones’ in the East German *Länder* (see section 4).

Despite these significant differences between the eastern and western parts of Germany, no systematic investigation of IRD-activities in East Germany has yet been conducted. So far, the emphasis of empirical research lies upon the West. On the one hand, scholars have begun to analyze IRD-activities at the individual level conducting case studies in terms of dialogue types,<sup>15</sup> underlying motivations,<sup>16</sup> aims, conditions, potentials, limitations,<sup>17</sup> effects on identity formation,<sup>18</sup> or the related boundary work.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, a series of studies at the meso-level has evolved that focuses on institutional forms of IRD-activities. Here, the team around Gritt Klinkhammer has put forward ground-breaking analyses,<sup>20</sup> underlining the ambiguous situation of present-day IRD-organizations and movements as well as their input onto the wider religious scene.<sup>21</sup>

While the analyses of Klinkhammer et al. are among the very few studies at the national level in Germany<sup>22</sup> further studies deal with the regional situation in Baden-Wuerttemberg<sup>23</sup> and Hamburg;<sup>24</sup> local cases of Christian-Muslim

12 Junginger, *Religionsgeschichte Deutschlands in der Moderne*. Kehrer, *Zur Religionsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*.

13 Lehmann, *Migrantenvereine in einer ostdeutschen Industriestadt*.

14 Hakenberg/Klemm, *Muslimen in Sachsen*. Halm, *Islam als Diskursfeld*.

15 Rötting, *Religion in Bewegung*.

16 Nagel/Kalender, *The Many Faces of Dialogue*.

17 Kalender/Ohrt, *Interreligious Practice in Hamburg*.

18 Klinkhammer/Neumeier, *Narrating Stability within Interreligious Dialogue*.

19 Klinkhammer, *Interreligiöser Dialog als Boundary Work*.

20 Klinkhammer/Frese/Satilmis/Seiber, *Interreligiöser und interkultureller Dialog mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland*.

21 This is very much in line with the more general trends among IRD-activities: Lehmann, *Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) in International Politics*.

22 See also Hinterhuber, *Abrahamischer Dialog und Zivilgesellschaft*.

23 Schmid/Akca/Barwig, *Gesellschaft gemeinsam gestalten*.

24 Körs, *How Religious Communities Respond to Religious Diversity*.

dialogue groups<sup>25</sup> and initiatives;<sup>26</sup> and finally with single case studies on the meso-level – e.g. on the ‘Theological Forum Christianity – Islam’.<sup>27</sup> In addition, scholars are highlighting the integration of IRD-activities within the wider context of German society, putting particular emphasis on migrant communities<sup>28</sup> and state-religion collaborations.<sup>29</sup>

Against the background of this increasing academic interest in IRD-activities within the West, IRD-activities within East Germany are, however, still very much *terra incognita*. This is not only because empirical IRD research – given the high level of public interest in IRD and its political significance – must generally be seen as insufficient. The lack of research concerning East Germany also results, as will be shown, from a comparatively low density of IRD-activities.

### 3 On the Emergence of Present-Day IRD-Activities in East Germany

The following section will, for the first time, provide an empirically based overview of institutionalized IRD-activities in the East German states. It will start with some references to the overall IRD-scene in Germany (3.1). On this basis, it will focus on Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in East Germany (3.2.), as well as IRD-activities in the city of Berlin (3.3).

#### 3.1 Overall IRD-Scene in Germany

Generally speaking, there is quite some evidence for a rather strong process of the institutionalization of IRD in Germany – in different actors’ constellations (interreligious, multireligious, state-interfaith, network dialogue) and at different spatial levels (local, regional, national, international). As far as the western parts of Germany are concerned, this emergence of institutionalized forms of IRD is not a new phenomenon. It has, however, gained momentum mainly during the last two decades. This applies to the local level – where e.g. 59% of 270 identified Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Germany have been established since 2001<sup>30</sup> – as well as to the regional level – where e.g. ‘Interreligious Forums’ have been established in several *Länder* since the early

25 Wilke, *Interreligiöses Verstehen*.

26 Schubert, *Die zivilgesellschaftlichen Potentiale von interreligiösen Dialoginitiativen*.

27 Klinkhammer/Spieß, *Dialog als dritter Ort*.

28 Nagel, *Religious Pluralization and Interfaith Activism in Germany*.

29 Körs/Nagel, *Local Formulas of Peace*’.

30 Klinkhammer/Frese/Satilmis/Seibert, *Interreligiöser und interkultureller Dialog mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland*, p. 39.

2000s – and even more so to the (inter-) national level – where e.g. the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) founded the task force ‘Peace Responsibility of Religions’ (*Friedensverantwortung der Religionen*) in 2016 to exchange and cooperate with representatives of religious communities from around the world. Even though such developments need to be compared with other countries for evaluation, it seems fair to say that in general a strong institutionalization of IRD in Germany can be observed that has developed into a quite complex field of interaction.

The above examples already indicate that the institutionalization of IRD often goes hand in hand with an increasing collaboration between religious communities and the state or political stakeholders. Again, one has to distinguish different levels of activities. At the local level, e.g., 48% of the municipalities state that they support interreligious initiatives to foster diversity and tolerance.<sup>31</sup> At the *Länder* level, e.g., the Senate Chancellery for Cultural Affairs (*Senatskanzlei für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten*) in Berlin initiated the ‘Berlin Forum of Religions’ in 2011, or the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration (*Ministerium für Soziales und Integration*) in Baden-Wuerttemberg extended the ‘Round Table of Islam’ (established in 2011) into the ‘Round Table of Religions’ (founded in 2017). At the national level, e.g., early on in 2006, the Federal Ministry of the Interior (*Bundesministerium des Innern*) established the ‘German Islam Conference’ (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*) that is considered to be the most important dialogue forum between the state and Muslim representatives and is also a platform to initiate IRD with other religious communities. In all these cases, IRD has developed beyond a theological endeavor to a political issue and serves as a format for exchange and negotiations between the state and religious communities.

Taken together, these developments set the stage for the interpretation of IRD-activities within East Germany. To better understand this situation, we will at first have a look at two already existing mapping exercises.

### 3.2 *Mapping Exercise: KCID-Map of Christian-Muslim Dialogue*

The first of these mapping exercises was undertaken and published by the ‘*Koordinierungsrat des christlich-islamischen Dialogs (KCID)*’. The KCID is an umbrella-organization of Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Germany, established in 2003 to support the understanding and cooperation among Christians and Muslims.<sup>32</sup> At the moment, its headquarters is situated in Berlin.

31 Gesemann/Roth/Aumüller, *Stand der kommunalen Integrationspolitik in Deutschland*, p. 103.

32 <https://www.kcid.de>.

Inter alia, the *Koordinierungsrat* is in charge of the project '*Aktives Dialogmanagement in Deutschland (PRODIA)*' that has published an interactive map of Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Germany. The entries to this map can be visualized via 'google maps':



FIGURE 1 KCID-Map of the Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Germany  
 SOURCE: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?hl=de&mid=1rNei8tiwF9jFLklMiTOHieH8uAs&ll=51.16600352771898%2C18.634309840217156&z=6>

The information visualized on this map is based upon voluntary entries, made by actors within the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue, and monitored by PRODIA. According to the self-description on the internet, the access to the database is not restricted to KCID-members (KCID-members are, however, marked on the map).



This particular approach is certainly affecting the outcome of the KCID's mapping enterprise: It can be argued that the main actors of the project are based in the western parts of Germany – and that their respective networks are stronger in the West than in the East. In addition, it has to be kept in mind that the KCID is itself an actor in the field. So, it can be expected that some initiatives would not want to be mentioned on a website organized by the KCID.

In any case, the existing map suggests that the density of IRD-activities in the eastern parts of Germany, circled in red, is much lower than in the West. As far as North Rhine-Westphalia is concerned, the map identifies a total of 54 initiatives. In Baden-Wuerttemberg it refers to 38 initiatives and in Bavaria it helps to find 25 initiatives. As far as the East German states are concerned, the map identifies no more than a total of five local initiatives (three of them in the cities of Leipzig, Dresden and Erfurt, one in the medium-sized town Dessau and one in the small town Michendorf). In addition, it displays two regional initiatives that are working in all parts of Germany. And finally, the website includes 10 local initiatives in Berlin, most of them with headquarters in the western parts of the city.<sup>33</sup>

In sum, the KCID-Map helps to present a first set of more general observations: First, the map makes a strong argument that IRD-activities in East Germany are not particularly dense. Compared to the West, there are only a few initiatives of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Second, almost all of the local initiatives that are situated within the eastern parts of Germany can be interpreted as a segment of two strands of IRD-activities: Most of them are directly linked to major religious and/or political institutions. Only two of them (the *'Begegnung – Dialog – Toleranz – BeDiTo'* and the *'Freunde Abrahams'*) can be interpreted as grassroots organizations that are more loosely associated with the religious and/or political field. Third, all these initiatives are founded after 1989 – primarily during the late 1990s and the early 2000s, that are a formative period of the present-day discourse on religion in general, and Islam in particular.

And these overall observations can be further substantiated with regards to a second mapping exercise – the Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin of the *'Berliner Forum der Religionen/Berlin Forum of Religions (BFDR)'*.

### 3.3 Mapping Exercise: BFDR-Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin

The *'Berliner Forum der Religionen (BFDR)'* is an umbrella organization of around 100 religious communities in Berlin that sees itself in the tradition

33 In comparison: For the state of North Rhine-Westphalia the database identifies three regional initiatives and 51 local initiatives.

of early ecumenical initiatives such as the *'Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kirchen und Religionsgesellschaften/Working Group of the Churches and Religious Communities'* as well as the *'Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit in Berlin/Association for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Berlin'*. The *Forum* was initiated in 2011 and started to work in 2014. At the moment, it hosts 10 thematic committees dealing with topics that range from the coordination of the *'Lange Nacht der Religionen/Long Night of Religions'* up to general discussions on 'politics and religion'.

One of these committees is in charge of the interreligious map of Berlin. The map itself is answered for by Dr. Andreas Goetze, a pastor in charge of interreligious dialogue within the context of the *'Berliner Missionswerk/Berlin Mission'* that emerged as a joint venture of the *'Ökumenisch-Missionarisches Zentrum/Ecumenical-Missionary Centre'* (East Berlin) and the *'Berliner Missionswerk/Berlin Missionary Society'* (West Berlin).

Currently, the *Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin* displays 44 organizations within the boundaries of the city of Berlin:

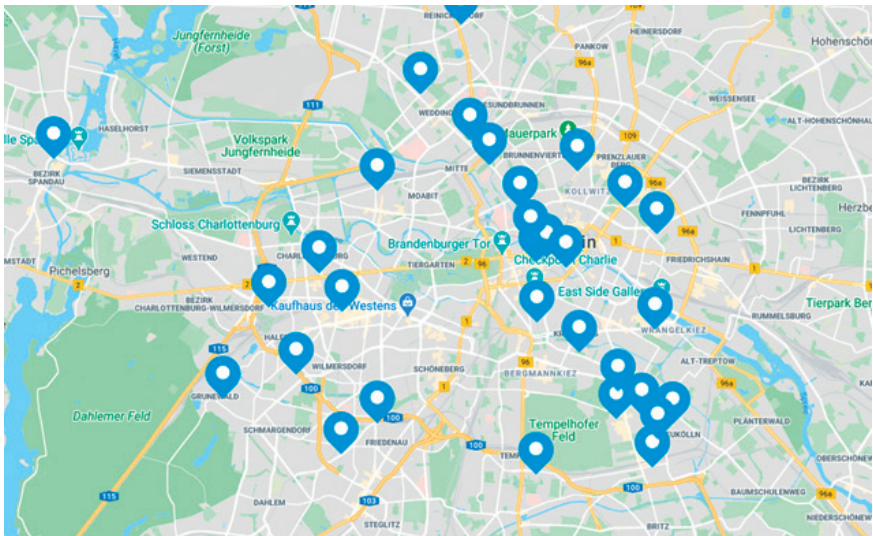


FIGURE 2 BFDR-Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin

SOURCE: <http://www.interreligioeser-stadtplan.de/interreligioeser-stadtplan>

In total, 34 out of these 44 organizations are presented in more detail. In order to adequately interpret these 34 more detailed entries, one has to keep three things in mind: First, as the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin hosts a significant number of headquarters of nationwide organizations.

Second, the city of Berlin is still influenced by the three decades of East-West partition (1961 to 1989). Even today, it is possible to identify socio-cultural differences between eastern and western districts. Third, the district of *Mitte* is of particular interest. Despite its integration into the eastern parts of Berlin it has developed into a district that hosts a large number of the nationwide organizations.

Against this background, a closer look at the *Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin* further substantiates the impression that East Germany is characterized by a low density of IRD-activities: Most of the more detailed entries on the map (15 organizations) actually identify districts in the western parts of Berlin as their main fields of activities. In addition to this, 11 organizations on the map present themselves as being active in the whole city of Berlin. Only seven organizations mention the eastern parts of Berlin as their main field of activities (four among them referring exclusively to the district of *Mitte*). Finally, there is only one organization that distinctively refers to districts in the former West and East as its main fields of activities.

The organizations on the *Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin* that can be situated in the East (with the exception of *Mitte*) are:

- *Gemeinsam für Berlin (Pankow and Mitte)*: This is an ecumenical network with an evangelical grassroots background, founded under the impression of German re-unification. Within this network, IRD is part of a more general portfolio of activities focusing on the public role of religion in the city.<sup>34</sup>
- *Interreligiöser Kräutergarten (Köpenick)*: The *Kräutergarten* (Herb Garden) is primarily an individual initiative by the convert Brigitte Kanacher-Ataya that is highly committed to IRD. She interprets the garden (emerging from 2005 onwards) as a piece of art that tries to substantiate IRD.<sup>35</sup>
- *Muslimisches und Kirchliches Seelsorge Telefon (Prenzlauer Berg)*: These religiously affiliated crisis hotlines are the Berlin-branch of a Germany-wide ecumenical initiative (founded in 1999) as well as an initiative of Islamic Relief Deutschland (founded in 2006). Even though they are displayed on the Interreligious Map, they do not primarily focus on IRD.<sup>36</sup>
- *Kunstplanbau Floating Area für Religion, Kunst und Wissenschaft (Mitte, Kreuzberg, Steglitz, Prenzlauer Berg)*: This project is conceptualized as an interreligious ‘floating room for religion, arts and science’ in Berlin that began in 2012.<sup>37</sup>

34 [www.gfberlin.de](http://www.gfberlin.de).

35 [www.dialog-garten-kanacher-ataya.de](http://www.dialog-garten-kanacher-ataya.de).

36 [www.mutes.de](http://www.mutes.de) and [www.ktsbb.de](http://www.ktsbb.de).

37 [www.kunstbauplanbau.com](http://www.kunstbauplanbau.com).

So, once again, the data on those parts of Berlin that have *de facto* formed the capital of the GDR suggest that IRD in the eastern parts of Germany is a relatively new phenomenon of low density. In comparison with the KCID-Map of Christian-Muslim Dialogue, the Interreligious Map of the City of Berlin adds, however, two points to our discussion: First, it underlines the significance of more personal initiatives – even though the link to formal (religious) organizations and movements is still important. Second, the Interreligious Map highlights the integration of IRD into a wider agenda of the presentation of religion in public space.

Taken together, these descriptive findings raise the question as to how the distinct developments in the eastern parts of Germany can be explained or, more precisely, how the context matters and which specific elements of the East German context might influence the IRD-activities.

#### 4 Explanatory Approaches – or How the ‘Context’ Matters

Present research on the differences between the eastern and western parts of Germany suggests that at least four aspects might be relevant to better understand the situation of IRD-activities in East Germany: Three external aspects (at the micro, meso and macro level) as well as one internal aspect (concerning the development of the churches in East Germany). The following considerations are based on already existing empirical studies and statistics in the East German context as well as on personal observations and informal discussions “in the IRD field”.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, they offer well-founded hypotheses for future research.

Firstly, present-day comparisons between the eastern and western parts of Germany suggest that the level of IRD-activities might be influenced by demography and religious affiliation. There are significant differences between East and West (see table 1). On the one hand, statistical surveys show that the West German states are fairly religiously pluralized and can be divided into two groups: One group of West German states (1–6) is characterized by a high degree of religious diversity with a mixture of Christian denominations plus a high proportion of Muslims and, at the same time, a high proportion of people without religious affiliation. The second group of West German states

38 Here we spoke both with dialogue actors from civil society and with experts from the religious sphere, such as Pastor Dr. Sönke Lorberg-Fehring, representative for the Christian-Islamic Dialogue of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, whom we thank for valuable insights into the IRD-field in East Germany.

TABLE 1 German population shares (in %) by religions and federal states

Federal States ( <i>Länder</i> )	Cath. <sup>1</sup>	Prot. <sup>1</sup>	Free Church <sup>1</sup>	Ortho- dox <sup>1</sup>	Jew. <sup>1</sup>	Other recognized religions <sup>1</sup>	Muslim <sup>2</sup>	Unaffiliated Or other non- recognizes religions <sup>3</sup>	Diversity index <sup>4</sup>
1 Hesse	25.6	40.8	1.1	1.9	0.2	3.3	7.0	20.1	8.24
2 Baden- Wuerttemberg	37.6	34.1	1.1	2.1	0.1	3.3	6.5	15.1	8.15
3 North Rhine Westphalia	42.5	28.5	1.1	1.5	0.1	3.7	7.7	14.8	8.09
4 Bremen	11.8	43.2	1.3	1.4	0.2	3.2	10.0	28.9	8.06
5 Hamburg	10.9	33.9	0.9	1.7	0.1	3.7	8.4	40.5	8.01
6 Rhineland- Palatinate	45.7	31.8	1.0	1.1	0.1	2.3	4.1	14.1	7.64
7 Lower Saxony	18.3	51.5	1.3	0.9	0.1	2.2	3.3	22.5	7.41
8 Berlin	9.6	21.6	0.7	1.5	0.4	3.6	8.6	54.0	7.35
9 Bavaria	55.7	21.1	0.4	1.6	0.1	2.4	4.3	14.5	7.11
10 Schleswig- Holstein	6.4	55.7	0.9	0.7	0.0	1.8	3.1	31.3	6.70
11 Saarland	63.3	20.1	0.3	0.8	0.1	2.3	3.3	9.9	6.26
12 Thuringia	8.0	24.3	0.7	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.4	65.6	5.67
13 Saxony	3.8	21.4	0.9	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.7	71.8	4.99
14 Brandenburg	3.6	18.4	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.8	0.2	76.0	4.42
15 Mecklenburg- Western- Pomerania	3.4	17.7	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.3	77.3	4.23
16 Saxony- Anhalt	3.6	15.2	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.7	0.7	78.9	4.03
Germany total	31.2	30.8	0.9	1.3	0.1	2.7	5.1	27.9	8.30

SOURCES: <sup>1</sup>Zensus 2011 (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2014); <sup>2</sup>Calculations by Yendell (2014, p. 63) on basis of estimates by Haug/Müssig/Stichs (2009, p. 107) and Statistical Yearbook 2011 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2011); <sup>3</sup>calculations on the basis of sources <sup>1, 2</sup>; <sup>4</sup>calculation of Religious Diversity Index (RDI) (Pew Research Centre, 2014, pp. 8–10). The higher the RDI is, the more religiously and ideologically diverse is the population of the respective federal state.

(7–11) consists of states with a moderate diversity that are still dominated by a Protestant or Catholic majority or – as in the case of Berlin – a secular majority. On the other hand, the five East German states are substantively dominated by ‘non-affiliated’ (12–16). These states are characterized by a vast majority of religiously unaffiliated societal groups, a low religious diversity, and the Protestant Church as the largest minority.

In other words, there seems to be a ‘demographic asymmetry’ parallel to the differences in terms of IRD-activities. And this ‘demographic asymmetry’ might have consequences for the individual level of IRD-activities in as far as a lower degree of religious affiliation in the East seems to coincide with a lower degree of IRD-activities.

Secondly, in the case of East Germany, this comparatively lower degree of individual religious affiliation corresponds with a lower density of religiously affiliated institutions – especially with regards to non-Christian minority groups: We find quite a comprehensive Christian congregational landscape in East Germany with more than estimated 4,300 Protestant and almost 300 Catholic congregations.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, only few Jewish and Muslim self-organizations exist in East Germany: Out of 105 Jewish congregations that are members of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*), 15 are located in East Germany and one in Berlin;<sup>40</sup> out of 835 Muslim congregations, 13 are located in East Germany and 36 in Berlin.<sup>41</sup>

This ‘institutional asymmetry’ does also exist at the level of umbrella organizations: The two large Christian churches with 20 regional churches of the Protestant Church and 27 dioceses of the Catholic Church form historically established Germany-wide organizational structures. In contrast, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*DITIB, Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.*), for example, which is by far the largest Muslim umbrella organization in Germany, is represented in 15 regional associations, 14 of which are in West Germany, one in Berlin – and none in the five East German states. Thus, East Germany is characterized also at the meso-level by the structural dominance of the Christian churches, whereas the institutionalization of

39 This is a rough estimate, since the allocation and registration of the congregations is based on the territories of the regional churches or dioceses, which are not identical with the geographical areas of the federal states. Therefore, according to the respective experts within the two churches, exact figures on the number of congregations by federal state are not available.

40 *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*: <https://www.zentralratderjuden.de/vor-ort/gemeinden>.

41 Schmidt/Stichs, *Islamische Religionsbedienstete in Deutschland*.

non-Christian religions (and especially Islam) is centralized in West Germany and Berlin (and hardly in East Germany).

As far as the interpretation of IRD-activities is concerned, one has to keep in mind that these religious umbrella organizations often have regional representatives with financial and human resources for IRD-activities. Correspondingly, this type of IRD-infrastructure is also much more developed in West Germany than in East Germany, and more so among the main churches than among smaller religious communities. Once again, these observations hold parallels to the findings on IRD-activities in that the weaker structural conditions in East Germany correspond with a lower level of IRD activities, which might be more likely to be initiated by the main churches and the Protestant church in particular than by the less represented non-Christian religious minorities.

Thirdly, present-day research underlines differences at the macro-level and especially the role religion plays in social discourse as well as the public perception of religion in East and West Germany. Studies do not only give evidence to stronger resentments towards foreigners and especially Muslims among the East German population but also indicate a stronger demand for a more restrictive and plurality-limiting policy. In East Germany, the conviction that Muslims should be forbidden to immigrate, is for example twice as frequent as in West Germany.<sup>42</sup> This is also reflected in the political climate. The right-wing populist party “Alternative for Germany” (*Alternative für Deutschland*), which represents and promotes a clearly plurality-limiting policy, achieves a far above-average share of votes in the East German states, mainly due to their rejection of immigration, and especially of Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

And once again, it is interesting to see the parallels between these characteristics of East German society and IRD-activities. We need further empirical research to understand the interdependencies between such a cultural climate and the emergence of IRD-activities. At this point, it seems at least plausible that such a cultural climate might lead to interreligious dialogue being conducted all the more consciously and intensively. At the same time, it is also plausible that a context in which religious plurality hardly exists and yet is rather rejected, might make IRD-activities more difficult.

While these are so far external aspects, fourthly, internal aspects such as the very different historical developments in East and West Germany should be taken into account. The frictions of the 20th century have followed a different

42 Pickel, *Weltanschauliche Vielfalt und Demokratie*.

43 Pickel/Yendell, *Religion als konfliktärer Faktor*.

pattern in the GDR than in the West.<sup>44</sup> Generally speaking, the West German state had a positive relationship with religion, and saw the main churches as valuable institutions for societal integration. In contrast, the East German state imposed many restrictions on religion and saw the churches – at least up to the 1960s – as its ideological enemy. East Germany witnessed a strongly accelerated and qualitatively different secular transition in that the state repression in the 1950s and 1960s caused people to actively disaffiliate from the churches and led parents to cease socializing children religiously.<sup>45</sup>

After 1989 this perception changed only marginally; so the church did not recover from the dramatic effects caused by the GDR system. Many of those who left the church had developed a strong distance to religion and the church. In addition, people also lost confidence in the church with the transfer of institutions from West to East. In the East German states, the church – despite many explicit forms of criticism against the state – was frequently perceived as a Western institution and as being close to the newly emerging state-structures.<sup>46</sup> As a result of the experiences and developments during the GDR era, the Protestant Church in East Germany has, on the one hand, a different relationship to the state and, on the other hand, must assert itself against a society that is much more critical of and distant from religion than in West Germany.

Again, these developments can trigger very different results. They might lead to more intensive IRD-activities. In the case of the former GDR, however, it seems more plausible that they have made IRD-activities more difficult. In this regard, it would be interesting to learn more about the relationship between the so-called '*Vertragsarbeitnehmer*/contractual employees' from countries such as Mozambique, Vietnam or Cuba and the German population.<sup>47</sup> It would also be interesting to further investigate the relationship between the dialogue formats of the East German churches vis-à-vis the East German state and present-day interreligious dialogue initiatives. Together with the previous considerations, this suggests the following points of discussion and research questions to further elaborate a contextual perspective on IRD-activities.

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44 Pickel/Hidalgo, *Religion und Politik im vereinten Deutschland*; Pollack/Pickel, *Religiöser und kirchlicher Wandel in Ostdeutschland 1989–1999*.

45 Stolz/Pollack/De Graaf, *Can the State Accelerate the Secular Transition?*

46 Pollack/Rosta, *Religion and Modernity*.

47 Allina, „*Neue Menschen*“ für Mosambik.



## 5 Input for Discussion

First and foremost, the previous analyses have once again underlined the complexity of IRD-activities. Even on the meso-level of organizations and movements, the analyses highlight the multifold aims and structural links that characterize IRD-activities in the eastern parts of Germany.

In addition to this, the case of the East German states highlights that the social context is instrumental to understand IRD-activities. The case of East Germany very strongly suggests that a social context that is decisively dominated by 'Nones' leads to a low density of IRD-activities. IRD seems to require a certain degree of religious affiliation. At the same time, the above considerations suggest that IRD is linked to the significance of religion in public discourse. In the eastern parts of Germany, the emergence of IRD is a phenomenon dating from the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century – that is the period of increasing public debates on religion.

Under these conditions, it is further interesting to see that the IRD-initiatives in East Germany seem to be rather recent in nature while strongly supported by already established institutional actors within the religious and political field. This leads towards two further suggestions:

- First, the analysis of IRD-activities in East Germany supports the idea that IRD is not exclusively embedded within the religious field. It is also an activity embedded in politics.
- Second, the analysis of IRD-activities in East Germany suggests that IRD is – at least under the conditions of a low degree of religious affiliation – also a phenomenon of positioning religion within public space.

Such a very first exploration of East Germany raises a number of questions for further discussion and research: (a) What is the influence of politics on IRD-activities? It seems to be ambivalent yet significant. (b) If there is a 'non-affiliated' approach to IRD – is it also possible to identify a particularly Orthodox or Muslim approach? On the basis of the previous considerations, this seems to be most plausible. (c) Beyond the quantitative differences, are there any specifically East German aims, contents, and impacts of IRD-activities? IRD might be a "hidden player" to negotiate between secular and religious realms in society.

In this respect, the case of East Germany gives evidence to the need of not only including newly formed or numerically smaller religious groups, but to include also 'Nones' as the largest group in East Germany and to theoretically rethink the conceptualization of IRD in view of secularization as the dominant tendency in many European countries.

## Biographies

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