Value Change in Western European Societies:*
Results from the European Values Study

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Introduction

This paper empirically explores the notion that individualization is a major dimension of societal changes in Europe. It is investigated if there is indeed evidence of the idea that Europeans increasingly emphasize personal autonomy, individual freedom, and the fragmentation of individual pursuits, at the cost of collective standards and the fragmentation of individual pursuits. A rather popular understanding of the process of individualization is that people’s actions and behaviors are increasingly rooted in and legitimized by people’s own personal preferences, convictions and goals. This growing endeavor to pursue private aspirations and individual needs is assumed to ultimately result in assigning the highest priority to personal need fulfillment, self-expression, self-development and personal happiness.

This seems to be a universal (western) process and is triggered and strongly pushed by increasing levels of education of the population and the greater access they have to information through the mass media. Rising levels of education increases people’s ‘breath of perspective’ (Gabennesch 1972: 183), their abilities and cognitive skills, which makes them more critical and independent of the traditional suppliers of values, norms, and beliefs, and more open to new ideas and arguments, other providers of meanings, values and norms, and less dependent on traditional institutions and their prescriptions and rules of behavior and conduct. Rules and prescriptions imposed by authorities and hierarchical institutions are less and less taken for granted for an increasing number of people.

In advanced, post-industrial society, individuals face a multitude of alternatives as a consequence of internationalization, transnationalization, and globalization. Technological developments and rapid innovations in telecommunications, the spread and popularity of computers, the increased mobility of major companies and people, as well as growing exposure to television, radio, video, films, and internet etc., have intensified worldwide social relations and flows of information. The world is regarded to have become a ‘global village,’ in which people encounter a great variety of alternative cultural habits and a broad range of lifestyles and modes of behavior. Being free and liberated from the constraints imposed by traditional institutions (e.g., church and religion), people in contemporary globalizing era, in theory, can pick and choose what they want from an expanding global cultural market and thus, the likelihood that they select the same options and make the same choices diminishes and therefore the degree of diversity or pluralism in society increases.

In this paper, value changes in Western European societies are explored, analyzing the survey data from the European Values Study (EVS) from 1981, 1990, and 1999 (Halman 2001; Inglehart, Basáñez, Díez-Medrano, Halman & Luijkx 2004; Halman, Inglehart, Díez-Medrano, Luijkx, Moreno & Basáñez 2008; see also: www.europeanvalues.nl). We investigate whether or not individualization is indeed revealed in changing values of the Europeans. A first question to be addressed is whether or not a general trend can be revealed in Europe that indicates the ongoing process of individualization. In other words, it will be investigated whether individualization is confined to one particular value domain or if it is a broader process of change that affects all value domains.

Individualization is assumed to not only have pushed values to change in a certain direction, but also

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that it has caused values to become more diverse. It will be argued that increasing diversity or pluralism is also a consequence of ongoing processes of internationalization and globalization.

This paper starts with some theoretical reflections on the process of individualization and the formulation of hypotheses about its consequences for people's basic value orientations. Next, we will describe the survey data, measures and analytical strategy and in the last two sections, the results of our analyses are presented and conclusions drawn.

**Theoretical reflections and hypotheses**

Individualization is a much-debated process of cultural change. There appears little agreement on the definition and interpretation of individualization and there are different appraisals of the implications of individualization in general, and the increase of individualism in particular. Defined in a more neutral, not normative way, individualization denotes ‘the social and historical process in which values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior are based increasingly on personal choice and are less dependent on tradition and social institutions’ (Ester, Halman & de Moor 1994: 7; Ester, Mohler & Vinken 2006). People’s attitudes, ideas, and behaviors, are increasingly dependent upon personal considerations and individual’s convictions, desires, and preferences that are constantly open to debate, reformulation, and change. In other words, a process of privatization has occurred meaning that people’s views and actions and behaviors are rooted increasingly in and legitimized by personal autonomy and individual preferences and ‘relatively free from external constraints’ (Inglehart & Welzel 2005: 47). Particularly with respect to sensitive issues, such as sexual behaviors and bio-ethical concerns, people are less ‘bound by the moral teachings imposed by religion’ (Fukuyama 2000: 48). The moral guidance of religion and the churches have come under strong pressure and rigid moral standards, as imposed by religious leaders, are no longer accepted as taken for granted. Instead, each individual seems to have become his or her own (moral) guide. The ‘grand world views’ have become irrelevant and the significance of traditional structures and ties, such as religion, family, class, has receded, enlarging the individual’s freedom and autonomy in shaping personal life. People have gradually gained autonomy and have grown to be self-decisive and self-reliant, no longer forced to accept the traditional authorities as taken for granted. The absoluteness of any kind of external authority, be it religious or secular, has eroded. Authority becomes internalized and deference to authority pervasively declined (Inglehart 1999).

The diminishing social constraints on the choices that people make seem to delineate a more general process of the decline of authority and a growing anti-institutional mood. The guidelines and rules provided by traditional, hierarchical institutions are conflicting with ideas of personal autonomy and growing individual desires to decide for oneself. Public support for traditional sources of authority, such as government but also other established institutions have gradually declined (Norris 1999: 24). These strongly restrict the individual’s freedom and do not match with the emerging need for self-expression, the increased concern for individual freedom, and self-determination. Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel 2005) has described this important cultural shift in terms of the rising postmaterialist values. Rising levels of postmaterialism indicate that self-esteem, self-expression, and personal choices are gaining in importance whereas materialist goals emphasizing economic and physical security have declined.

Thus, people in modern individualized society are assumed to be basically oriented towards pursuing their own happiness, self-development, and self-determination. The traditional options are less likely to be selected by more individualized persons for they are independent and no longer take for granted the rules and prescriptions imposed by traditional institutions. This process of de-traditionalization is characterized by a decline of traditional views in a variety of life domains, e.g., male and female roles, morality, religion on the one hand, and an increased emphasis on values stressing autonomy, individual rights and personal freedom on the other. In other words, individualization can be regarded as a process of growing autonomy by which human choices have gradually become liberated from structural constraints and personally more independent (Beck 1992; 2002).

Following these arguments, we can formulate concrete expectations about the way individualization
has changed and continues to change European societies and the value orientations of the Europeans. A key notion of individualization is de-traditionalization (see also Peters 1995; Felling, Peters & Scheepers 2000).

The growing emphasis on autonomy, self-actualization, and self-directedness implies that ‘any external, superior being or principle that could impose maxims for action’ (Wagner 1994: 8) is rejected by a growing number of people. Inglehart has argued that the emergence of a sense of security among people in economically more advanced societies has reduced the need for ‘the reassurance that has traditionally been provided by absolute belief systems, which purport to provide certainty and the assurance of salvation, if not in this world at least in the next’ (Inglehart 1997: 80). However, the decline in traditional religious beliefs is ‘linked with a growing concern for the meaning and purpose of life’ (Inglehart 1997: 80). What has happened is that the social significance of religious institutions has declined, but also Bryan Wilson (1982: 150) wrote, it does not mean ‘that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion, even though that may be the case. It maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system’ (see also Dobbelaree 1981, 2002). It is the individual who has become the main point of reference in the shaping of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Increasingly, people believe in whatever they themselves want to believe in, which is not necessarily what the Churches tell them to believe. In other words, traditional dogmatic beliefs have been replaced by a more modern, personalized way of believing. Some analysts have emphasized this development, which they regard ‘as a shift away from the traditional churches (...) with larger numbers of people defining and practicing their religiosity in non—traditional, individualized and institutionally loose ways’ (Berger 2001: 447). Institutional religion is assumed to have become marginalized and, consequently, to have lost much of its influence on people’s lives. As such, it seems that the decline in religiosity is mainly confined to institutional decline and does not indicate a decline in religious beliefs. In many European countries, this has resulted in a situation that Davie characterized as ‘believing without belonging’ (Davie 2000: 3). This would mean that people in contemporary advanced society are no longer in need of a church, but can still be religious. Religion has become privatized, meaning that it has become a matter of individual choice and preferences. Thus, the traditional religion has lost its central position in society (Berger 1967), and has become one among many other meaning systems in society and a market of ‘ultimate’ meaning systems has developed from which the individual can choose freely (Luckmann 1967: 99). Because ‘individuals have liberated themselves from religious authorities and...their experiences are the basis of their faith’ (Dobbelaree 2002: 190), we can propose the hypothesis that traditional religious beliefs are fading away slowly.

The guidance of the churches has decreased tremendously, or has disappeared completely in moral issues. Being free and independent, individuals are no longer accepting as taken for granted the judgments and the rules imposed by the church. The waning of the dominant position of religion in modernizing society fostered the establishment of a ‘new morality’ or ‘permissive morality’ (Wilson 1982: 86). Since the moral guidance of the churches and religion is less self-evident and under heavy pressure, it can be assumed that people’s religious orientations are no longer, or less strongly, linked to their moral views. In traditional societies, individual belief systems and religious practices were strongly dependent on the beliefs of the community and on the prescriptions of the Churches. Cultural and social differentiation resulted in people increasingly participating in different universes of meaning, each governed by its own set of values. Within each institutional sphere, norms and values have become functional, rational, and, above all, autonomous. In this interpretation, secularization can be seen as ‘the repercussion of these changes on the religious subsystem. It denotes a societal process in which an overarching and transcendent religious system is reduced to a subsystem of society alongside other subsystems, the overarching claims of which have a shrinking relevance’ (Dobbelaree 1995: 1; see also Dobbelaree 2002: 166). The processes of differentiation, specialization and professionalization made each social sphere in life increasingly autonomous and a specialized unit in society with its own set of values and rules (Münch 1990: 443). The churches have lost several of their traditional functions such as schools, hospices, social welfare, registry of births, marriages and deaths, culture, and organization of leisure (Dogan 1995: 416).
Institutional domains have become segmented in the sense that within each institutional sphere norms and values have become functional, rational, autonomous, and withdrawn from the religious sphere. The ‘sacred canopy is more and more restricted’ (Dobbelaere 2002: 23). As a consequence, religion became marginalized in society and its influence on people’s lives was reduced. In other words, religion has lost its societal and public functions, and religion has become privatized and marginalized within its own differentiated sphere (Casanova 1994: 19). The emancipation of the individual, the growing emphasis on personal autonomy and individual freedom, the de-unification of collective standards and the fragmentation of private pursuits seem advantageous to ‘a declining acceptance of the authority of hierarchical institutions, both political and non-political’ (Inglehart 1997: 15).

Thus, citizens are increasingly questioning the traditional sources of (religious) authority and no longer bound by common moral principles. All in all, it seems reasonable to assume that moral and sexual choices are increasingly based on personal decisions and lifestyle preferences and less on prescriptions by the church and church leaders. Thus, personal convictions have grown to be the major sources of people’s moral convictions. ‘The final authority of ethical behavior is the individual alone’ (Crittenden 1992: 78). Hence, we can expect that the traditional dogmatic moral rules have diminished in favor of a personal morality of ‘anything goes.’

In the political sphere, individualization and the emancipation of the individual delineates a decline of traditional authority and a growing anti-institutional mood. Institutions, and in particular the authoritarian ones, are regarded to restrict the freedom of the individual to behave and act as he or she prefers and thus in a highly individualized society, people do not longer want to be ruled by such institutions. Instead people want to decide for themselves and the guidelines and prescriptions provided by these institutions conflict with ideas of personal autonomy and individual freedom. The emancipation of the individual, the growing emphasis on personal autonomy and individual freedom seem advantageous to ‘a declining acceptance of the authority of hierarchical institutions, both political and non-political’ (Inglehart 1997: 15; see also Norris 1999; Dalton 2004). Thus, we may expect to find a decline in levels of confidence in institutions.

It is easy to see the resemblance between the rise of postmaterialist values and growing individualization. A key component of postmaterialist values is personal autonomy. What Inglehart describes as the rise of postmaterialist values can be understood easily in terms of increasing levels of individualization. Materialist values are held by people who give highest priority to physical sustenance and safety, maintaining order in society, a high rate of economic growth, the need for a strong army, and so on. Postmaterialists, on the other hand, emphasize self-expression, quality of life, freedom of speech, self-expression and self-determination (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Rising levels of postmaterialism indicate that the key issues of individualization, such as self-esteem, self-expression, and personal choices, are gaining in importance. Therefore, we predict that levels of postmaterialism should have increased in Europe.

The increased emphasis on personal autonomy makes human relations less bound to traditions, less likely to be prescribed by social norms, and less enforced by social control. Traditional institutional control particularly has weakened the control ‘associated with family and domestic ties and gendered expectations’ (Morgan 1996: 197). The conventional conjugal family increasingly has been regarded as limiting individual freedom and impeding self-realization and confining intimacy (Elliott 1996: 9). The proponents of what is called the theory of the ‘second demographic transition’ have argued that the low levels of fertility in the Western world reflect behavior that is rooted in an ever-growing individualism in Western societies. In their view, the growing emphasis on the individual affects the traditional family orientation in the sense that it involves ‘shifts from marriage towards cohabitation, from children to the adult couple as the focus of a family, from contraception to prevent unwanted births to deliberate self-fulfilling choices whether and when to conceive a child, and from uniform to widely diversified families and households’ (Van de Kaa 1987: 9). Demographic trends such as the decreasing attractiveness of marriage, which is reflected in the decline in the number of marriages and increasing levels of divorce and
March 2009

the low number of children, seem indicative of the fundamental shifts in values which has been denoted in evolutionary terms ‘from altruism to individualism’ (Van de Kaa 1987: 5; Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa 1986; Manting 1994; Jansen 2002), suggesting the incompatibility of individualization and the preservation of traditional familial solidarity. ‘Maintaining family relations is nowadays a matter of choice, not of necessity’ (Inglehart & Welzel 2005: 29; see also Beck 2002). People increasingly opt for themselves and for their personal benefit, and, as a consequence, not for marriage and traditional family life. Hence, we propose the hypothesis that traditional family and marital values have declined.

Thus, we expect that individualization has resulted in a decline in traditional orientations. This is what we refer to as the de-traditionalization hypothesis. Since the decline in traditional views is not expected to be restricted to only one specific life domain, but will have occurred in all distinct life spheres, ranging from religion and morality to politics and family life and marriage, we propose a generalization hypothesis stating that the decline in traditional views has occurred in all life domains.

When individual choices are based on personal convictions and preferences, the predictability of people’s orientations and behavior should have decreased. It is one of the basic characteristics of post-modernity that everything is possible and unpredictable. Waters (1994: 206) portrays contemporary society as follows: ‘We may no longer be living under the aegis of an industrial or capitalist culture which can tell us what is true, right and beautiful, and also what our place is in the grand scheme, but under a chaotic, mass-mediated, individual-preference-based culture of post-modernity.’

However, not only the clearly defined patterns of behavior and orientations have departed, the modern or postmodern individual also faces a multitude of alternatives as a consequence of internationalization, transnationalization, and globalization. Today’s world is a ‘global village,’ denoting that the world is a compressed one, and that the consciousness of the world as a whole has intensified tremendously (Robertson 1992: 8). The globalization of social reality is a main effect of the rapid evolution of modern communication means. Today’s world is a ‘global village,’ where people encounter a great variety of cultural habits, alternative lifestyles and different modes of conduct. Because individualized people are liberated from the constraints imposed by traditional institutions (e.g., religion), globalization implies that people can pick and choose what they want from a global cultural marketplace. Globalization, thus, may be considered favorable to a pluralization of views and diverging ideas because these are increasingly dependent upon personal convictions and preferences. As van Deth (1995: 4) observed, if independence and self fulfillment are stressed, people will be inclined to design their own set of values and choose their orientations ‘à la carte’. It implies increased diversity even in once homogenous groups in society and value heterogeneity. Van Deth (1995: 4) continues, ‘the emergent ‘postmodern’ cultural order is marked by value heterogeneity with an emphasis on ‘structures of feeling’ and individual identities based on differences in lifestyles and tastes’. Thus, we expect that the heterogeneity of people’s value preferences has increased.

Therefore, we should expect changes not only in value orientations away from traditional views and in the direction of more individualistic and secular values and a decline in the acceptance of traditional authoritarian authorities, but we can also expect a growing diversity in these orientations and opinions as a result of individualization and globalization. This is denoted as the heterogenization or pluralization hypothesis: ‘an increase in the differences in opinions between individuals’ (Peters 1995: 20).

Data, Measurements and Analytical Strategy

Data

The surveys of the European Values Study from 1981, 1990 and 1999 will be analyzed using the European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981-2004, v.20060423 (2006; see also Halman 2001; Inglehart, Basáñez, Díez-Medrano, Halman & Luijkx 2004; Halman, Inglehart, Díez-Medrano, Luijkx, Moreno & Basáñez 2008; www.europeanvalues.nl). The European Values Study in an international, longitudinal comparative survey project aiming at exploring values and values changes in contemporary Europe. The latest wave was conducted in 1999/2000 in almost all European countries. Norway,
Switzerland, a number of former Yugoslavian countries, and some former Russian countries were not covered. A new wave is taking place right now (2008; see also www.europeanvalues.nl).

The analyses here are confined to the European countries that were part of all three waves: Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, West Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Malta. We restrict the analyses to people aged 18–75. In total, 39 (3 time 13) surveys are used. The total number of cases is 45,802. Some surveys are rather small (Northern Ireland and Malta in 1981 and 1990), but on average the size is about 1,200. To make sure that the relative weight of each country in each wave is in accordance with the relative share in the total population of the thirteen countries together, we are using population weights. Were available, also design weights are used.

The questionnaire used contained questions on attitudes and opinions in a wide variety of life domains, including measures for the 5 dimensions we target on: confidence in institutions, religiosity, moral values, orientations towards family and marriage, and postmaterialism. For more information the reader is referred to Halman (2001) and the European Values Study website: www.europeanvalues.nl.

Measures

*Trust in institutions* (TRUST) refers to the level of confidence in traditional institutions: trade unions, the police, parliament, and the civil service. This measure, like most of the following, is constructed by means of factor analysis. High factor scores indicate high levels of confidence in these institutions.

*Religiosity* (RELIGIOS) is measured in terms of beliefs and not in terms of behavior (such as church attendance) using items as being a religious person, importance of God in one’s life, getting comfort from religion, and belief in God. High factor scores indicate high levels of religiosity.

Two moral dimensions can be distinguished in EVS: *personal sexual morality* (SEXPERM) and *civic morality* (CIVPERM). The first refers to personal sexual and ethical issues and taps the acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and euthanasia. Malta and Denmark are excluded from this dimension due to missing data on one of the items. The second refers to public issues such as the acceptance of illegally claiming state benefits, cheating on taxes, joy riding, and bribery. In quite a number of studies these two dimensions have been identified by means of factor analysis. High scores on the first factor indicate high levels of personal sexual morality, while high scores on the second dimension can be interpreted as high levels of public or civic morality.

With regard to family issues, we will investigate a *traditional family pattern* (TRADFAM), indicated by people’s opinions on the need for children to have both a father and a mother to grow up happily, on the need for women to have children in order to be fulfilled, and on the (dis) approval of women wanting to have children without stable relationships. Sweden is excluded here due to a missing item. *Parent-child relationships* (PARCHILD) are indicated by the views on parents’ duties towards their children and children’s duties towards their parents. High scores on this dimension reflect not only the opinion that parents have to do their best for their children even at the cost of their own well-being, but also the view that children should always love and respect their parents regardless of their parents’ qualities and faults.

The dimension of *materialism-postmaterialism* (POSTMAT) is based on people’s priorities for either maintaining order in the nation, giving people more say in important government decisions, fighting rising prices and protecting freedom of speech, a distinction will be made in pure materialists, mixed and pure postmaterialists.

Analytical Strategy

A first indication of overall change in orientations can be obtained from a comparison of the mean scores on the dimensions distinguished. Increasing diversity, i.e., the decreasing homogeneity of values, can be investigated by examining the distributions of scores indicating a person’s value orientation (Halman & Pettersson 1996 a, b; Draulans & Halman 2003). For this purpose, we make use of the standard deviations of the constructs in the three waves. The more people score differently on a given dimension, the greater the variance and thus the less homogeneous or the more heterogeneous a population is (see
Results

The hypothesis on the decline of traditional values/orientations in Europe in the last two decades of the twentieth century is, at the aggregate level, more or less substantiated (see Fig. 1). As expected, levels of trust in traditional institutions declined, as well as levels of religiosity, adherence to the traditional family pattern, and traditional views on parent-child relationships. Sexual permissiveness increased and Europeans became more postmaterialistic after 1981. Civic permissiveness, however, declined too in the same period and this was the only clear exception to the trend of declining levels of traditional views and values.

Figure 1. Mean scores on the six value dimensions in 1981, 1990, 1999 for thirteen European countries

However, changes were not linear. The trend of decline took mainly part during the nineties and were preceded by increases during the eighties. Religiosity, however, declined more dramatically in the eighties and continued to decline during the nineties, although at a less pronounced rate. The same, but opposite, shift occurred with respect to sexual permissiveness. The is a steady increase in this kind of permissiveness during the eighties and nineties. Although from 1981 to 1999 the orientations with regard to family pattern and parent child relations changed in the expected direction, that is a decline of traditional views, the major decline took place during the nineties while the eighties demonstrate the opposite trend of increasing levels of traditional views. A similar development took place with regard to civic permissiveness. From 1981 to 1990 this kind of permissiveness increased, but from 1990 to 1999 levels of civic permissiveness declined. Levels of trust appear to be steadily on the decline, as expected.

Thus, permissiveness with respect to personal sexual ethical issues and behavior increased, as was expected. The idea was that an ‘ideology of anything goes’ or ‘ethos of everything is possible’ emerged and indeed permissiveness increased during the previous two decades. A similar expectation was formulated with respect to deviant and indecent behavior. It is assumed that increasingly such behavior is accepted because, in an individualized society, people have to decide for themselves, which implies that they have to allow others to behave differently and in ways that are even deviant from the norms. This hypothesis cannot be substantiated at the aggregate level. From 1981 to 1990, we see a small increase in this kind of permissiveness, but from 1990 to 1999, Europeans became stricter towards the issues and behavior
incorporated in this measure of civic permissiveness.

At first glance, the conclusion should be that the de-traditionalization hypothesis is not corroborated. European society has not become more lenient, but instead more strict about civic issues and behaviors. Because the changes are not that dramatic, the conclusion could also be that European society remains as strict as before. Most of the behaviors included are not acceptable, as becomes clear in Table 1. Displaying for the three waves the percentage of respondents claiming that the behavior mentioned can never be justified (scores 1-3 on the 10 point scales ranging from 1 = never justified, to 10 = always justified). The overwhelming majority, almost unanimous, does not accept these kinds of behavior, particularly the misuse of state benefits, joyriding, and bribery. Bribery increasingly appears to be unacceptable for Europeans, while joyriding was and remained unacceptable to an overwhelming majority of the Europeans.

The idea was that adherence to traditional family patterns would be on the decline. Different kinds of cohabitation increasingly are accepted and occur frequently, stimulating the assumption that indeed the traditional forms would be less favorable in European society. In the period between 1981 and 1990 the popularity of the traditional family pattern increased, while the nineties seem to conform to the ideas as expressed in our hypotheses. Indeed the traditional pattern was less favored in 1999 than in 1990 and in 1981.

We expected a decline in the traditional parent-child relationships, but this decline only took place in the nineties, but not in the eighties when we see an increasing popularity of the traditional view of parent-child relationships.

We also hypothesized increasing levels of postmaterialism. Inglehart’s ideas about the transformation of society from materialist towards postmaterialist can be confirmed European wide. However, this increase took place mainly in the period between 1981 and 1990. From 1990 to 1999 postmaterialism was on the decline.

Table 1. Percentages of respondents stating that claiming state benefits illegally, cheating on taxes, joyriding, and bribery can never or almost never be justified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1990</th>
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<tr>
<td>Illegally claiming state benefits</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating on taxes</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyriding</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bribery</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Mean scores on postmaterialism in 1981, 1990 and 1999
We do not find a steady increase in levels of postmaterialism in Europe which is quite unexpected, since European society experienced a relatively prosperous era and high levels of security.

The heterogenization or pluralization hypothesis states that diversity has grown as a result of growing individualization and globalization. From the standard deviations displayed in Figure 3, we can evaluate whether this hypothesis is confirmed or not.

However, in general heterogeneity did not increase. On the contrary, from 1981 to 1999, European society became (slightly) more homogenous with regard to levels of trust in institutions, civic permissiveness and hardly changed with regard to views on parent child relations and postmaterialism. This clearly refutes our expectation. This process of homogenization appears to be not a steady transformation when it comes to civic permissiveness and trust in institutions. The homogenization trend was stronger during the eighties and remained more or less at the same level during the nineties.

Also with regard to the other orientations the expectations cannot be corroborated either, or only partly and then only for the trend in the nineties. From 1981 to 1990 diversity declined but increased from 1990 to 1999 with regard to sexual permissiveness, and both family dimensions. Thus, the trend towards more heterogeneity is not a continuous trend, but mainly a process that characterized the nineties. In other words, increasing heterogeneity is a rather recent trend. The opposite is true for religiosity. Europe became more diverse during the eighties and the level of diversity remained more or less the same during the nineties. The major conclusion from these analyses is that the idea that a process of growing diversity is taking place in European society has to be refuted.

We theorized that the process of de-traditionalization was not limited to one dimension only, but was a process that occurred to other dimensions as well. Further we argued that European people would be increasingly diverse in their views and as such increasing levels of heterogenization were expected in all dimensions distinguished in this chapter.

The idea that similar processes took place in all domains and all dimensions is answered partly by the previous analyses and they demonstrate that the evidence is not very strong. It is clear that there was not a general decline in all traditional values since 1981. During the eighties an opposite trend can be observed. During the nineties trends in the expected direction of de-traditionalization can be observed, but as such, the generalization hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

In terms of an increasing heterogeneity, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed for all dimensions either. Only with regard to levels of religiosity, sexual permissiveness and traditional views on family did European
people become more diverse, but this was not the case for the other dimensions distinguished in this chapter. These other dimensions showed increasing levels of diversity in the nineties but homogenization tendencies during the eighties. These figures cannot be interpreted as a falsification of the hypothesis, but the evidence is not always in line with our theoretical considerations.

Conclusions

In this paper, we focused on values and value changes in European society. According to contemporary modernization theories, Western and thus European societies are gradually transforming as a result of growing individualization, secularization, and globalization. Key issues in these transformation processes are the de-traditionalization and heterogenization of people’s values. We have explored whether values have indeed become more individualistic in the sense that traditional preferences are decreasingly chosen and whether this trend affected all value domains. According to the generalization hypothesis de-traditionalization is not confined to one single value but has affected orientations in all life domains. We have focused on topics that seem to be changing most in Western and also probably in non-Western societies.

The de-traditionalization hypothesis is more or less confirmed. From 1981 to 1999 the traditional views on religion, institutions, family and morality have declined. However, the eighties often show an opposite trend compared with the nineties. During the eighties traditionalism increased, while particularly during the nineties de-traditionalization occurred. The trend of increasing postmaterialism took place during the eighties and a reversed trend of decline took place during the nineties. So, it has not been a linear process, but a reversed one during the eighties and it is not easy to find any clues why that has been so. Most pronounced are the changes with regard to the acceptance of different kinds of sexual behavior. Increasingly, sexual behavior is considered a personal matter that does not allow the interference of other people or institutions. This development does not necessarily mean that an ethos of ‘anything goes’ has developed. Sexual permissiveness has to be understood clearly. It refers to the idea that one accepts and understands others to be engaged in such behavior, but it does not necessarily imply that people themselves prefer to behave in such ways. Thus, acceptance and the acceptability of such behavior have grown. That an ethos of ‘anything goes’ has not evolved in Europe also appears from the low level of acceptance of deviant and indecent behavior, such as claiming state benefits illegally, cheating on taxes, joyriding and accepting bribery. Such behavior is rarely accepted by Europeans and some behavior has become less acceptable during the last two decades.

According to the heterogenization hypothesis, we should find growing levels of diversity as a result of growing individualization and globalization. We cannot find much evidence to support such claims. We have seen that a growing diversity in religious beliefs and postmaterialism in the 1980s turned into a growing homogeneity in the 1990s while the reversed trend has been observed with regard to trust in institutions, sexual permissiveness, and views on family and parent child relations. However, the trends are not very substantive and only indicate gradual and slow changes in various directions. Which direction the course takes depends upon the issue at stake.

The generalization hypothesis suggested that a similar process is taking place in all value domains in European society. Also this hypothesis cannot be confirmed unanimously. However, in most orientations we observed a shift away from traditional preferences towards more individualistic stances from 1981 to 1999. The period in between however showed a reversed trend of increasing emphasis on traditional orientations. Others have observed before that the views with regard to family patterns and parent-child relations had not changed dramatically in either direction. In contrast to the predictions, the traditional views survived and the old patterns persisted (Van den Akker, Halman & de Moor 1994; Halman 1998). With regard to family values, Inglehart even noted ‘a reversal of trends’ (1997: 285) showing that the traditional pattern did not disappear despite the larger individual freedom, emphasis on openness of society and extended range of opportunities in the domain of family and marriage. It seems as if most
people still value the traditional patterns of family life and thus it seems as if in Europeans’ minds the old patterns have survived the flows of modernity. What has changed is that people as autonomous individuals are free and not any longer constraint or forced by traditional institutions. Despite this freedom and liberty, they the traditional views remained.

As others have indicated (Nauta 1987; Felling, Peters & Scheepers 2000; SCP 2001), de-traditionalization continues gradually and is not a dramatic instantaneous development. It seems as if indeed more dramatic changes occurred before the 1980s, during the ‘exciting,’ ‘turbulent’ 1960s and 1970s. During these decades, the sexual revolution took place and together with unprecedented levels of existential security and increasing levels of welfare in European society, peoples’ views on many issues changed. Particularly the role and position of traditional institutions were no longer taken for granted. The 1980s and 1990s do not show stability in values, but also no dramatic value changes. Instead, values gradually changed in a more individualistic and less traditional direction and it seems as if Europeans increasingly shared similar values. The current popular view among European people in general and politicians and culture pessimists in particular is that values are on the decline and slowly disappearing cannot be substantiated, however. As such, the answer to the question of what has happened to European values can be answered in two words: not much.

Such an overall conclusion may be rejected when it comes to the particular trends in values that took place in the different countries. We have seen that countries differ to the degree that the populations are active in voluntary organizations and trends in European countries differ also in different age groups (see Halman 2003: 193). In another setting we have analyzed the Dutch trends in the orientations described here (Halman & Luijkx 2008). Although the very general conclusion that no dramatic changes have taken place could also be drawn for the Netherlands, the patterns of change are not always in the direction shown in this chapter covering all European countries. At other places we have concluded that Europe is not a homogeneous area when it comes to values (Arts, Hagenaars & Halman 2003; Arts & Halman 2004; Halman, Luijkx & Van Zundert 2005), and also trajectories of change appear to be ‘path-dependent’. As Inglehart and Baker (2000) have shown, although societies develop in similar directions, the trajectories they follow differ from country to country, dependent upon a multitude of factors, being cultural, structural, political or economical. This is the more reason to explore the trajectories in Europe taking into account such varieties between countries.

Finally, the data collection within the framework of the fourth European Values Study in 2008 (see www.europeanvalues.nl) will provide a wealth of data that can be analyzed to explore further whether values are indeed changing in the predicted direction. At this moment the data collection takes place and we have to wait until the data of this immense project will become available for analyses to elaborate on the transformation processes that are taking place in contemporary Europe.
References


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ABSTRACT

According to contemporary modernization theories, Western and thus European societies are gradually transforming as a result of growing individualization, secularization, and globalization. Key issues in these transformation processes are the de-traditionalization and heterogenization of people’s values. Analyses of the survey data from the European Values Study in 1981, 1990 and 1999 do not yield much evidence of vast changes. The trends appear not very substantive and seem to reveal gradual and rather slow changes in various directions. Which direction the course of changes takes depends upon the particular issue at stake. All in all it must be concluded that the answer to the question of what has happened to European values can be answered in two words: not much.

Key Words: individualization, value change, Western Europe