Interreligious Dialogue and Relations in Germany from a Multilevel Governance Perspective

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1   Introduction

Against the background of the increasing secularization and pluralization processes of recent decades in Germany, this chapter deals with the resulting change and its dynamics and effects in the religious field. More precisely, the chapter explores how religious communities and their congregations respond to religious diversity and enter into interreligious dialogue or relations (hereinafter referred to as IRD) which can range from loose contacts to forms of deep understanding. This corresponds to a broad sociological understanding of conviviality as a cooperative coexistence that can range from minimum standards of non-violence, tolerance of difference, mutual recognition, non-hierarchical organization, and equality to the extension of these and other principles to non-human entities (Adloff 2023). In this context, IRD is often seen as a beacon of hope for contributing to tolerance, understanding, and peaceful coexistence between people of different religions and beliefs. However, empirical dialogue research is only a recent development. By following a non-normative concept of IRD and focusing on organized or institutionalized forms at different spatial levels, this chapter therefore offers an empirical contribution to better understand conviviality and, in particular, the question of "the structural conditions that have an influence on the micro, meso, and macro levels" (Bieler in this volume). To this end, the chapter brings together multiple strands of research exploring interreligious dialogue and the governance of religious diversity (Section 2) and presents empirical findings on IRD in Germany from a multilevel perspective (Section 3). Specifically, it focuses on IRD at the national level and in an East-West context (3.1); on IRD and its differentiation with regard to spatial distribution, actor constellations, and its main goals across national, regional, and local levels (3.2); and on IRD in a broad understanding of interreligious relations at the local level of congregations (3.3). Methodologically, the findings are based on both quantitative surveys and qualitative mappings, interviews, and observations, as well as existing research and literature. The reflections on the different levels stand on their own and, taken as a whole, shed light on how religious communities (re-)act in an increasingly religiously pluralized and sec-

ularized context, what role IRD plays in this, and what challenges this poses for religious communities as well as for future empirical research (Section 4).

2   Interreligious Dialogue from a Multilevel Governance Perspective

The chapter relates to two strands of research. First, in view of a "dialogical turn," in the sense of an increasingly normative claim to a dialogical organization of social processes aimed at recognizing diversity, it contributes to empirical dialogue research, which is still in its infancy in Germany (as well as elsewhere) and has only developed in the last decades. On the one hand, scholars have begun to analyze IRD at the individual micro level, conducting case studies in terms of dialogue types (Rötting 2012), underlying motivations (Nagel/Kalender 2014), aims, conditions, potentials, limitations (Kalender/Ohrt 2018), spatial and material interactions (Kalender 2023), effects on identity formation (Klinkhammer/Neumaier 2020a; Klinkhammer/Neumaier 2020b), related boundary work (Klinkhammer 2019), and communicative potentials to bridge differences and inequalities (Radosh-Hinder 2022). On the other hand, a number of studies have developed at the institutional meso level, focusing on organized forms of IRD initiatives (Klinkhammer/Frese/Satilmis/Seiber 2011), inter(ethno)religious representational relationships between religious communities in municipalities (Schubert 2022), and the influence of a governance network on the management of religious diversity specifically in rural areas and small towns (Emmerich 2023). From a spatial perspective, the analyses of Klinkhammer et al. (2011) are among the very few studies at the national level in Germany (see also Hinterhuber 2009), while further studies deal with East Germany (Körs/Lehmann 2020), the regional situation in Baden-Wuerttemberg (Schmid/Akca/Barwig 2008) and Hamburg (Körs 2018a), and local cases of Christian-Muslim dialogue groups (Wilke 2006) and initiatives (Schubert 2015), and finally with a single case study on the meso level – e.g. on the "Theological Forum Christianity – Islam" (Klinkhammer/Spieß 2014). In addition, scholars are highlighting the integration of IRD within the wider context of German society, putting particular emphasis on migrant communities (Nagel 2016) and state-interfaith collaborations (Körs/Nagel 2018).

Second, this chapter takes up the sociological research on the governance of religious diversity and goes beyond it by shifting the perspective in two ways. While governance of religious diversity is generally understood as a complex fabric of actors, fields, forms, and effects (Körs 2018b), this chapter brings religious communities into focus and sheds light on their self-regulation (governance *by* religions) through interreligious activities in an increasingly plural environment. The existing research has so far dealt primarily with state actors and, for instance, legal and political modes (governance *of* religions) as well as the intertwining structures of state and religion(s) (governance *with* religions) (Körs/Nagel 2018; Körs 2019). This chapter combines these two strands of research and goes beyond the perspective of the national level that dominates research (see e.g. Triandafyllidou/Magazzini 2020) by examining IRD in Germany at the regional and local levels. By doing so, and with a focus on the meso level of organized IRD forms and their structural conditions, this chapter contributes to a differentiated understanding of convivi-

ality. Thus, the following empirical evidence illuminates IRD at different spatial scales, with the question of their interrelationships being addressed as a desideratum.

3   Empirical Evidence

3.1   The East-West German "Dialogue Gap" at the National Level[1]

Looking at IRD in Germany, it is striking that it is largely a West German phenomenon, which is also reflected in the focus of IRD research on West Germany, while East Germany is largely unexplored. As mapping studies show, 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 – triggeredbythesocialdevelopmentsofthelate1990sand early 2000s (Körs/Lehmann 2020). Given this gap between East and West Germany, the question arises as to potential explanations. To this end, it is argued that the socio-cultural differences and institutional asymmetries between East and West Germany have shaped quite distinct contexts for IRD to (not) evolve.

At least four aspects might be relevant to better understand the gap between East and West Germany: Three external aspects (at the micro, meso, and macro levels) as well as one internal aspect (concerning the development of the churches in East Germany). The following considerations are based on existing empirical studies and statistics in the East German context as well as on personal observations and informal discussions "in the IRD field." In this sense, they offer well-founded hypotheses for future research.

First, current comparisons between the eastern and western parts of Germany suggest that the level of IRD might be influenced by demography and religious affiliation. There are significant differences between East and West. Roughly speaking, the West German states (*Länder*) are fairly religiously plural and can be divided into two groups: One group of West German states 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 consists of states with moderate diversity that are still dominated by a Protestant or Catholic majority or – as in the case of Berlin – a secular majority. In contrast, the five East German states are substantively dominated by the "non-affiliated." These states are characterized by a majority of religiously unaffiliated societal groups, low religious diversity, and the Protestant Church as the largest minority church (for statistical data see Körs/Lehmann 2020). In other words, there seems to be a "demographic asymmetry" that might have consequences for IRD in as far as a lower degree of religious affiliation in the East seems to coincide with a lower degree of IRD.

Second, 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 regard to non-Christian minority groups. We find quite a comprehensive Christian congregational landscape in East Germany with more than an estimated 4,300 Protestant congregations (out of a total of about 13,000 in Germany) and about 230

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1   This section is based on the article by Körs/Lehmann (2020) on IRD in East Germany.

Catholic congregations (out of a total of nearly 10,000).[2] In contrast, only a few Jewish and Muslim 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;[3] out of 835 Muslim congregations, 13 are located in East Germany and 36 in Berlin (Haug/Müssig/Stichs 2009).

This "institutional asymmetry" also exists at the level of umbrella organizations: The two large Christian churches are composed of 20 regional churches of the Protestant Church and 27 dioceses of the Catholic Church and form historically established Germany-wide organizational structures. Due to structures that evolved historically, the boundaries of the regional churches or dioceses and the borders of federal states differ considerably in some cases. However, these two large Christian churches are represented throughout Germany, including East Germany, with a nationwide structure. 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 by 15 regional associations, 14 of which are in West Germany and 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 non-Christian religions (and especially Islam) is centralized in West Germany and Berlin (and hardly at all in East Germany). These religious umbrella organizations often have regional representatives with financial and human resources designated for IRD. 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 find parallels in the findings on IRD that show how the weaker structural conditions in East Germany correspond with lower levels of IRD, which might be more likely to be initiated by the Christian churches, and the Protestant church in particular, than by the less represented non-Christian religious minorities.

Third, current research highlights differences at the macro level especially in the role religion plays in social discourse as well as in the public perception of religion in East and West Germany. Studies do not only show evidence of stronger resentments towards foreigners, and especially Muslims, among the East German population but also indicate a stronger demand for more restrictive policies to limit plurality. In East Germany, the conviction that Muslims should be forbidden to immigrate is, for example, twice as frequent as in West Germany (Pickel 2019). This is also reflected in the political climate. The right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*), which represents and promotes a policy that limits plurality, achieves a far above-average share

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2   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 Protestant and Catholic churches, exact figures on the number of congregations by state are not available.

3   Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: "Gemeinden", March 12, 2024 (https://www.zentralratder juden.de/vor-ort/gemeinden).

of votes in the East German states, mainly due to its rejection of immigration, and especially immigration of Muslims (Pickel/Yendell 2018). It seems plausible that a context in which religious plurality is hardly present and rather rejected makes the development of IRD more difficult. Nevertheless, IRD can be conducted all the more consciously and intensively in such a cultural climate.

Fourth, while these are so far external aspects, internal aspects such as the very different historical developments in East and West Germany should also be taken into account. The frictions of the 20th century followed a different pattern in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) than in the West. Generally speaking, the West German state had a positive relationship with religion and saw the main Catholic and Protestant churches as valuable institutions for societal integration. In contrast, the East German state imposed many restrictions on religion and saw the churches – at least until the 1960s – as its ideological enemy. East Germany witnessed a strongly accelerated and qualitatively different secular transition in that state repression in the 1950s and 1960s caused people to actively disaffiliate from the churches and led parents to cease socializing children religiously (Stolz/Pollack/De Graaf 2020). After 1989 this perception changed only marginally, and 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 sense of distance from 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 (Pollack/Rosta 2015). As a result of these 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, faces the task of asserting itself in 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. In the case of the former GDR, however, it seems more plausible that they have made IRD more difficult.

3.2 Differentiation and Institutionalization of IRD Across Spatial and Actor Constellations

Beyond this regional East-West "dialogue gap", the second central observation is that IRD has experienced considerable spatial and actor differentiation and institutionalization in recent decades and has evolved from a theological concern to a socio-political project. Looking at the development of IRD in Germany, we find evidence of a relatively strong process of institutionalization of IRD in Germany – in different actor constellations (interreligious, multireligious, state-interreligious) and at different spatial levels (local, regional, national, international). 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 at the local level – where e.g. 59% of 270 identified Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Germany have been established since 2001 (Klinkhammer/Frese/Satilmis/Seibert 2011) – as well as to the regional level – where e.g. "Interreligious Forums" have been established in several German states (*Länder*) since the early 2000s

– and even more so at 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 facilitate exchange and cooperate with representatives of religious communities from around the world. Even though such developments need to be evaluated in comparison with other countries, a strong institutionalization of IRD in Germany can generally be observed, which has developed into a rather complex field of interaction.

As these examples indicate, the institutionalization of IRD often goes hand in hand with increased collaboration between religious communities and the state or political stakeholders. At the local level, e.g., 48% of the municipalities state that they support interreligious initiatives to foster diversity and tolerance (Gesemann/Roth/Aumüller 2012). At the regional (*Länder)* level there have also been initiatives, e.g., the Senate Chancellery for Cultural Affairs (*Senatskanzlei für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten*) in Berlin initiated the "Berlin Forum of Religions" in 2011 and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration (*Ministerium für Soziales und Integration*) in Baden-Wuerttemberg broadened 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 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 examples, IRD has developed beyond a theological endeavor to become a political issue and serves as a format for exchange and negotiations between the state and religious communities.

Correspondingly, this increased political engagement in IRD goes hand in hand with a limiting (self-)selection of religious communities involved in IRD. Generally speaking, IRD often falls far short of representing the existing (internal) religious plurality by reducing it to the world religions and usually to representatives of the "Big Five" – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism – and sometimes also representatives from Baháʼí and Sikhism are involved. The different religious orientations within these religions, as well as the smaller religious communities outside of the world religions, are often not taken into account. This is not a coincidence because the question of which religious communities are (or are not) involved in IRD is already based on mechanisms which, above all, regard those that are included (or want to be) as "accepted" or "legitimate" religions. Frequently, religious communities are included that are considered open, non-dogmatic, non-converting, respectful of other faiths, committed to the common good, etc. and are therefore considered "suitable" for dialogue, the selection of which in turn is strongly influenced by the category of world religions (Baumann/ Tunger-Zanetti 2018). This means that the spectrum of religious plurality remains limited and tensions within and between religious communities are selectively avoided from the outset.

Stronger political commitment and (self-)selection on the part of the religious communities is also connected with a shift in the goal of IRD from an "understanding-oriented" to an "integration-oriented" dialogue. Such a juxtaposition is certainly based on ideal types, and the different objectives are not mutually exclusive – just as the diversity of dialogue practices goes far beyond these categories. But given the strong tendency to-

ward institutionalization of IRD, it remains a key question as to how institutionalized state-interreligious dialogue relates to IRD aimed at understanding and religious experience. Critics point to the overlap of the IRD and the integration debates, whereby IRD increasingly serves as a strategy for the governance of religious plurality but moves away from its orientation toward understanding and recognition (Amir-Moazami 2011, Tezcan 2006). It is therefore more appropriate to assume "dialogues" in the plural in order to differentiate and concretize the respective objectives, instead of subsuming them into one supposed "dialogue," which in the singular sometimes obscures more than it expresses.

3.3 Interreligious Relations at the Local Congregational Level

Religious communities are not only involved at the level of their representatives in IRD, but also at the level of their local congregations. In local congregations, however, the focus is no longer primarily on interreligious *dialogue* as a sophisticated form of understanding, nor on strategic partnerships. Rather, it seems appropriate to broaden the focus of IRD to interreligious *relations* in general in the form of contacts and networks. These less intentional forms of interaction may initially appear to be less important, but in fact they are not only significantly widespread in everyday (urban) life (Vertovec 2007: 14) but are also highly relevant for the reduction of prejudices and the promotion of tolerance (Pollack et al. 2014: 224; Pollack/Müller 2013: 46f.).

However, because of the secularization thesis and the assumption of the de-institutionalization of religion that had been dominant for some time, the field of sociology of religion in Germany primarily dealt with either the great trends of religious developments in a macro perspective or individual religiosity in a micro perspective. In contrast, the meso level of social forms of religion, including the congregations, were not considered for a long time. This is not only contrary to their numerical strength – there are nearly 13,000 Protestant and 10,000 Catholic congregations as well as an incomprehensible number of congregations representing the many different Christian denominations. There are also about 130 Jewish, more than 2,200 Muslim and 100 Alevi, several hundred Buddhist and Hindu, about 30 Sikh, and a few hundred Baháʼí congregations throughout Germany. High expectations are also addressed to these congregations, especially in light of increasing religious pluralization. While there are many differences between these communities, their commonality is that the people in them gather in local places to practice their religion and possibly come together for other social activities – forming the potential for local interreligious relations and interactions. The question is then: To what extent do congregations actually engage in interreligious relations, and how is this influenced?

The empirical insights presented here are based on a representational congregational study in Hamburg, in which congregational leaders of 350 out of a total of 547 identified congregations in the city of Hamburg were interviewed. Of these, the majority, 266 congregations, are Christian, 101 of which are Evangelical Lutheran and 24 are Catholic. The other 141, and thus more than half, are distributed among the many other denominations along the Christian spectrum. Also surveyed were 43 Islamic, 25 Buddhist, and several

other congregations of "other non-Christian religions" – two Jewish, three Hindu, one Sikh, seven Baháʼí, and three Alevi – which were combined for the analysis.[4]

First, the study shows that interreligious relations between congregations are neither omnipresent, as an automatic outcome of religious diversity, nor are they a marginal phenomenon. Looking at the data, a slight majority of congregations (54%) do not have any interreligious relations at all and those who do mainly engage with only a single other religion (25%) while only 12 and 10 percent, respectively, maintain contact with congregations from two, three, or more other religions. Given that Hamburg is religiously a highly diverse city, and that interreligious dialogue enjoys a high profile in politics and at a citywide institutional level, this may be discouraging at first glance. In fact, interactions in the religious field seem to organize themselves following the homophily principle, as the tendency to form connections with others who are similar, and interreligious relations are not at the forefront of these activities.[5] However, taking into account that congregations are first formed to practice their own religion and that the establishment of interreligious relations might not be seen as one of the core competences of congregations, interreligious relations can still be considered a widespread and relevant phenomenon in the religious field and as contributing to transformation in the course of pluralization and secularization.

Fig. 1: Interreligious contacts and networks, according to religious affiliation
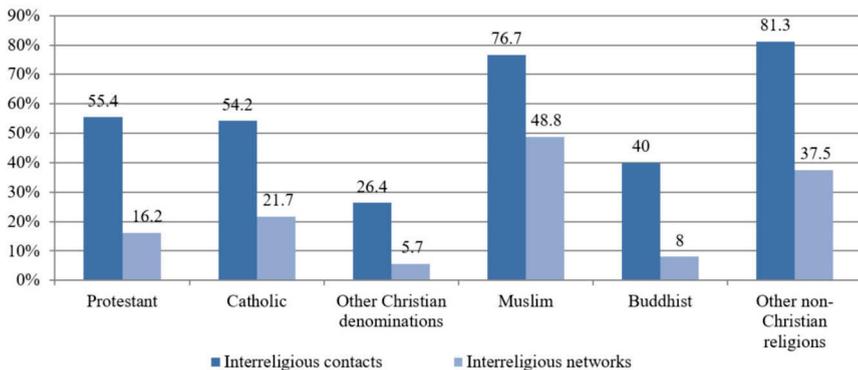
Second, as figure 1 shows, there are significant differences among congregations of different religious traditions. It is especially striking that the congregations of non-

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4   This congregational study was conducted as part of the research project "Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies," funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research from 2013 to 2018 (see Körs 2018a).

5   As shown elsewhere (Körs 2018c), the comparison with *intra*religious contacts – that is, contacts between congregations of the same religion – reveals that 75% are in contact with congregations of *other* persuasions (for example Protestant with Catholic congregations) and almost all congregations (95%) have contacts with congregations of the *same* persuasion (for example Sunni congregations with other Sunni congregations). Moreover, intrareligious contacts are also evaluated more positively than interreligious relations.

Christian religions, with the exception of Buddhist congregations, maintain interreligious relations much more frequently than Christian congregations. This especially applies when comparing them with Christian congregations beyond the Protestant and Catholic churches, which are by far the least interreligiously active. While this is mostly in line with the findings of other studies (Rebenstorf et al. 2015: 62; Halm et al. 2012: 113; Ammerman 2005: 130), it raises the question of why there are significant differences between religious communities and their levels of interreligious engagement.

One reason is simply the fact that minorities, in principle, have statistically better chances of building interreligious relations with the majority than vice versa. Since, however, the minority congregations behave quite differently here, there must be other motivations, especially for the Muslim and other non-Christian congregations, to become interreligiously active. An obvious reason is that – unlike many of the Christian minority denominations and the Buddhist congregations, who are hardly perceived as conflictual in Germany – Muslims top the scale of *perceived* threats in the population due to their assumed potential for conflict (Pickel 2015: 26–32), which confronts them with high normative expectations. For Muslim congregations in particular, their own integration and legitimation could therefore be an important motivation for interreligious relations, which can also be interpreted as an "integration performance." This supports the seemingly paradoxical assumption that social observation and the discourse of endangering ("Gefährdungsdiskurs") is conducive to interreligious relations, rather than leading to closure and "parallel societies," as is also shown in a comparative study of different migrant congregations (Nagel 2015: 255; Suder 2015: 183).

However, it would certainly be oversimplistic to attribute strong interreligious engagement solely to the external pressure. Nor could this argument serve to explain the interreligious commitment of the Alevis and other non-Christian congregations, which exceeds even that of the Muslims, while their adherents find much greater acceptance in the population (Pickel 2015: 28–32). While, conversely, the lower interreligious engagement of the Buddhist congregations might also be due to organizational factors, such as their comparatively small size and fewer resources, the Christian congregations, beyond the two main churches (Protestant and Catholic), constitute a considerable proportion of the religious field, but remain rather self-centered in their activities (Körs 2018c), which corresponds with their low interreligious engagement.

However, interreligious relations are far from being a phenomenon of only certain non-Christian minorities. It is also important to note that the congregations of established Protestant and Catholic churches largely maintain interreligious contacts, even if comparatively fewer. This is remarkable insofar as it indicates that established congregations do not limit contact with non-established newcomers in order to prevent them from sharing in the established groups' privileges. Instead, they are more likely to engage in interreligious activities and thus, as Stolz and Monnot found in a Swiss congregational study, "clearly seek to use inclusive rather than exclusive means in order to further their strategic interests," which is one of the reasons for their interreligious activities (Stolz/ Monnot 2017). In this perspective, interreligious relations may not only be an instrument used by minorities for their positioning but may also be used by the established main churches to preserve their privileges by including non-established groups in the religious field. However, in an overall perspective, our study suggests that this struggle emanates

more from the Muslim and other non-Christian congregations, since these are the most active in terms of interreligious relations.

Third, while religious *affiliation* is therefore significant and, in our interpretation, also indicates social position, religious *beliefs* turned out not to be essential for interreligious relations. This is remarkable, and requires further explanation, since it contradicts previous research that truth claims are relevant for interreligious relations (Körs 2018a: 33f.). The survey shows that a pluralist stance on religious truth claims was professed by a majority of 56 percent of the congregations' leaders who agreed with the statement: "Truth exists in many religions, and all religions are equal in this regard." Conversely, exclusivist understandings of religious truth are held by a minority of 18 percent of the congregations' leaders who found that: "Truth only exists in a single religion." The bivariate analysis showed that those congregations where an exclusivist attitude is represented have less interreligious relations than all other congregations. The association, however, is not stable, and disappears in the multivariate analysis (see also the chapter of Claudia Hoffmann in this volume). One possible explanation is presented by McCarthy in her study "Interfaith Encounters in America." She finds that there are reasons, such as the achievement of a particular social aim or the improvement of relations with the wider society, which, if they are strong enough, can also motivate those groups who reject pluralist views to join or even initiate interreligious relations, and she therefore claims that "there are important countercurrents in this pattern" (McCarthy 2005: 199).

This seems plausible even for our study since we find a stable positive connection between interreligious relations and relations with the societal environment: The more congregations have social contacts, the more likely they are to be involved in interreligious relations and networks. However, even if exclusivist attitudes only exist to a limited extent and do not necessarily lead to demarcations in the practical realm, it would be misleading to interpret this as evidence of their general harmlessness. This also seems important as, according to our study, exclusivist positions are not the domain of a few outliers across religions, but are concentrated in Christian congregations outside the established churches (44%) and in Muslim congregations (22%).[6] These two minority groups within the Christian and Islamic spectrum require us to engage with the question of how religious exclusivism can be addressed in a more differentiated manner and distinguished from fundamentalism and extremism (Pratt 2013; Streib/Klein 2014). This is important because not every type of exclusivism is equally problematic but rather when connected with other attitudes such as, for example, a pronounced missionary drive. According to our study, this combination applies to 14.7 percent of the congregations. The belief in the superiority of one's own religion and a missionary agenda, aimed to convince others, are significantly related but cannot be equated. Also, exclusivity cannot be regarded as a counterpart to reflexivity in the sense of reflection and speech about religious questions (Meulemann 2014: 83). Rather, as Trinitapoli shows in her study on exclusivism among

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6   This matches the findings of the *Religionsmonitor* survey which found that for the German population the statement "All religions have a true core" is rejected by significant minorities among Muslims (32%) as well as Evangelicals and Pentecostalists (30%). These groups also more frequently agree with the exclusivist statement that only their own religion is true (Pickel 2013: 33–34).

U.S. adolescents (2007: 476), exclusivist positions are seen as a contradiction to a plural society and are modified in order to not be perceived as intolerant so that "the cultural mores of pluralism and tolerance may have done more to erode the possibility of *expressing* exclusivist religious beliefs freely than the possibility of *holding* such beliefs."[7] Exclusivist attitudes therefore continue to be a challenge in an increasingly plural society and call for further empirical research (see also Koopmans 2015; Pollack/Müller/Rosta/Dieler 2016).

4   Conclusion

IRD and interreligious relations of religious communities and their congregations are a relevant phenomenon in the religious field and impact its transformation in the course of pluralization and secularization. By focusing on the meso level of organized forms of IRD at different spatial scales and how they do (not) develop, this chapter offers a nuanced understanding of IRD and sheds light on its structural embeddedness. It thus also touches on power relations and mechanisms of both inclusion and exclusion and contributes to a "critical account of conviviality" (see Bieler in this volume).

On a national level, there is a divide between East and West Germany and the socio-cultural differences and institutional asymmetries between East and West Germany have created very different contexts for the (non-)development of IRD, which is mainly a West German phenomenon. East Germany may appear to be a special case in view of the comparatively strong secularization that has been accelerated by historical developments (Pollack/Rosta 2015; Stolz et al. 2020). However, as secularization progresses throughout Germany (and other countries), it could also serve as a seismographic case to indicate which developments to respond to in practice and research in the future. This applies to the need to include newly formed and numerically smaller religious groups as well as religiously unaffiliated parts of society in the analysis of IRD.

At all levels – (inter-)national, regional, and local – and across different actor constellations we find strong processes of institutionalization of IRD. While IRD has thus become established in diverse settings, its institutionalization creates tensions insofar as the dialogue between religious communities has increasingly changed into a state-interreligious dialogue, in which political actors, on the one hand, and a limited selection of religious communities, on the other hand, are involved. This is associated with a shift in goals from mutual understanding between religious communities to strategic partnerships between religious communities and state actors. This ambivalence points to a research desideratum and the need to gain more knowledge about different forms of IRD at the micro, meso, and macro levels and how these are linked, or rather decoupled, as well as how these affect the possibilities for deeper integration or, on the contrary, lead to new lines of conflict.

At the local congregational level, we find that interreligious relations are a relevant form of social action for congregations who can thus cross boundaries between different religions and influence changes in the religious field in light of increasing pluralization

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7   Emphasis in italics by Anna Körs.

and secularization. However, interreligious relations do not automatically result from religious diversity. Rather, they require development and depend both on their position in the religious field and the degree to which a congregation is integrated into society at large. Even though it turns out that religious beliefs are not essential for interreligious relations, exclusive attitudes continue to be a challenge in plural societies and require further empirical research.

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