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The Many Faces of Dialogue

Driving Forces for Participating in Interreligious Activities

Introduction: Interreligious Communication as a Multi-Layered Phenomenon

On July 31st 2001, the following question was posted in the fatwa section of the Muslim internet portal Islamweb.net:

“We are a Muslim community in Germany and have a mosque. In order to ameliorate the relationship with non-Muslims and show them the right view of Islam, we invite non-Muslim people to visit our mosque. They attend also the prayer to have an idea about Muslim spirituality. These visits are not welcome from all brothers in the mosque. [...] That’s why the following questions: is it allowed to let non-Muslims enter the mosque? Are there any restrictions on such visits? Do women have to cover their heads? Is it allowed to invite groups of men and women together? Is there any restriction about the attendance of the prayer? Is there any difference between these issues in Muslim countries and in Europe where we live and where we have great interest at having good relationships with the society in which we live and that need our support to find the right way of Islam.”¹

At the core of this question lies a conflict within a mosque congregation: On the one hand, interreligious openness in its relation with the majority of society is emphasised, on the other, the presence of non-Muslims causes problems during prayers. It shows that interreligious events such as open mosque days take place inside a complex web of interests and expectations whose balance is a vital prerequisite for their continued success. That is why it is important both for a better academic understanding and a more successful practical implementation of these activities to understand the variety of driving forces behind them. This contribution represents an attempt to identify and categorise such impulses and motivations from findings of empirical research.

The idea that interreligious communication takes place at many levels simultaneously is not a new one. As early as 1991, the Pontifical Council on interreligious dialogue presented a document titled “Dialogue and Proclamation”.² It not only lays out the theological justification for regarding dialogue as a task of the Catholic Church, but also distinguishes between four types of dialogue. Whereas the “dialogue of life” is focused on “human problems and preoccupa-

1 <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=83119> (last accessed December 10, 2013)

2 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (last accessed December 10, 2013)

tions”, the “dialogue of action” aims at the “integral development and liberation of the peoples”. By contrast, the “dialogue of theological exchange” refers to specialists deepening their understanding of their own religious tradition and the “dialogue of religious experience” denotes an encounter of people “rooted in their own religious traditions, [who] share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute”.³

It is remarkable that these types of interreligious dialogue are regarded as equally important. As a sociologist of religion Levent Tezcan has pointed out that, in practice, the aspects of theological and practical interests in interreligious dialogue can be instrumentalised against each other: “In an interview, a Protestant representative responsible for dialogue with Islam carefully phrased the suspicion that the Muslims were not so much interested in “honest dialogue” as pursuing “concrete interests”.⁴ Tezcan describes how such mutual suspicions and the instrumentalisation of dialogue can corrode trust on all sides. While Christian representatives criticised the pragmatic attitude of their Muslim partners that made it difficult to arrive at a genuine exchange on matters of faith, many Muslims suspected that the Christian insistence on theological issues was a cover for missionary intent.⁵ This clearly demonstrates that aside from actual intentions, assumed motivations can play an important role. Both an interest in theological exchange and a practical goal such as building a mosque or an Islamic cemetery may motivate parties in interreligious dialogue. According to Tezcan, though, the expectations and goals that the outside world brings into interreligious dialogue are at least as important. This is especially the case where government agencies support formalised contact between representatives of organised religions in the hope of furthering social integration.⁶

Tezcan views this mixing of levels as potentially problematic. It can lead to misunderstandings, as in the above case, or, where government is involved, may even undermine genuine understanding between the partners in dialogue. Gritt Klinkhammer et al. propose a less sceptical view on public-private collaboration in interreligious matters in their recently published study “Interreligiöse und interkulturelle Dialoge mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland” (Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogues with Muslims in Germany).⁷ They distinguish four “directions of dialogical activity”, namely sensitisation, cooperative problem-solving, empowerment, and theological discussion. Sensitisation aims to disseminate knowledge about and defuse prejudice against religious groups⁸

3 Ibid., § 42.

4 Tezcan, L. (2006) *Interreligiöser Dialog und politische Religionen*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (28/29), 26–32.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 26.

7 Klinkhammer, G. et al. (2011) *Interreligiöse und interkulturelle Dialoge mit Muslimen in Deutschland. Eine quantitative und qualitative Evaluation*. Bremen: self-published.

8 Ibid., 24.

while cooperative problem-solving focuses on resolving concrete difficulties (often of social integration) as a joint task of representatives of government and religious communities.⁹ Empowerment describes the desire to mutually strengthen each other's resolve to pursue a goal¹⁰, thus contributing to the mobilisation of resources, while theological discussions aim to explore common ground and the possibilities and limits of religious coexistence.¹¹

Along with these general 'directions', the quantitative part of the study also surveyed concrete 'goals' and 'initial motivations' of dialogue initiatives. Many respondents mention neighbourly interest or global events such as the 9–11 attacks as an initial motivator, though practical challenges or personal experience of social conflict are also recorded.¹² Beyond these, three quarters of all initiatives identified with the global goals of "fostering shared values", "reducing prejudice", "shaping coexistence together", "understanding one's own religion better", "equality of all religious communities" and "fostering social participation by migrants".¹³ This remarkable level of agreement on goals is indicative of the medley of overlapping motivations that underlie interreligious activities. Moreover, we can see how these categories are interrelated e.g. where global events create a local need for education or empowerment translates into claims for social equality and participation.

This overlap marks out the semantic field we will refer to as "driving forces for interreligious activities" in the following. It encompasses both the individual motivations of participants and the stated collective goals of groups and organisations engaged in interreligious dialogue as surveyed by Gritt Klinkhammer et al. When speaking of interests and goals, however, it is important to note that this does not mean we regard interreligious dialogue in a voluntaristic sense as an encounter of rational actors in full awareness of their goals and means. In order to avoid such oversimplification, we include the discursive and structural impulses that shape individual motives in our concept of 'driving forces'. Along with global political events, these include local or national incidents such as the opening (or closing) of places of worship, right-wing violence, or opportunity structures provided by government or charitable foundations.

The following analysis is based on empirical research carried out in the context of the North Rhine-Westphalian young researchers' group "Civic Potentials of Religious Communities". In a subproject on "Interreligious Activities and Religious Encounter in the Ruhr Area" we carried out a total of 26 participant observations in interreligious activities ranging from traditional public dialogue events through peace prayers and Iftar celebrations to school prayer services and

9 Ibid., 25.

10 Ibid., 26.

11 Ibid., 27.

12 Ibid., 43.

13 Ibid., 47.

football tournaments.¹⁴ The observations were recorded in individual observer protocols and memos exchanged. We further conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with the hosts or organisers of these activities which were transcribed in full. This contribution presents the first steps towards a categorising analysis following the common approach of summarising, explication and structuring.¹⁵

While the abovementioned scholarly contributions concentrated primarily on Christian-Muslim dialogue, we deliberately tried to include other religious communities in our choice of events and interview partners. These comprise adherents of poly- or non-theistic religions such as Hindus and Buddhists, Baha'i and smaller Christian denominations such as the Old Catholic Church or the New Apostolic Church. This contribution will limit itself to a descriptive elaboration of our case, i.e. the identification and systematic categorisation of driving forces for interreligious activities. First, we will look at exogenous factors, namely the structures, expectations and events that can motivate such activities. In the following chapter, we will turn to endogenous factors, i.e. the goals and motivations of religious communities participating in interreligious activities. Here, we will distinguish between political, symbolic, dialogue-oriented and communitarian interests. In the conclusion part, we will summarise our key findings and outline a theoretical perspective on the link between endogenous and exogenous driving forces for interreligious activities.

Impulses from Outside: Structures, Expectations, Events

Many of the interreligious activities in our sample were motivated by exogenous impulses, which include local opportunity structures, social expectation and single events. An example for the *structural* driving forces for interreligious activities is provided by the rising number of Muslim pupils in some urban schools. This demographic shift presents a challenge for the tradition of holding Christian services for new and graduating cohorts. A Protestant pastor explained: "There is a long tradition of the churches holding services for new pupils, and then the schools said it didn't really fit any more. Now they are taking in classes full of Muslim pupils and there is no Muslim representative there." In this case, the problem was solved by the pastor, who had long experience in Christian-Muslim cooperation and good contacts to local mosques. She organised a joint interreligious service at the school.

An example for the incentives and impulses that can arise from *local politics* is provided by an interreligious circle that has been organising joint peace prayers for Christians, Muslims, Jews and Baha'i for several years. The head

14 Nagel, A.-K. (2012) Vernetzte Vielfalt: Religionskontakt in interreligiösen Aktivitäten. In: Nagel, A. (Ed.) *Diesseits der Parallelgesellschaft. Neuere Studien zu religiösen Migranten-gemeinden in Deutschland* Bielefeld: Transcript, 241–267.

15 Mayring, P. (2003) *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken* Weinheim, Basel: Beltz, 58.

of the initiative recalls the last prayer taking place at a town hall: “Because the Peace Light by Leo Lebendig (an art project) was hanging there, they really asked us if we wanted to have our peace prayer there, together with the Peace Light of the Abrahamic faiths, in the town hall.” The event took place by invitation and under the aegis of the local government, hosted by the mayor who also gave an opening speech. Thus, the political interest of joining the peace prayer and the Peace Light exhibition allowed the circle to make its efforts accessible to a much larger audience.

Along with such impulses and incentives, some respondents cited social or political *expectations* they felt they were facing as motivating their interreligious activities. This was particularly evident in the case of an unsalaried imam who is active in several interreligious groups and regards this commitment as a societal duty incumbent on all religious communities. Communities that abstained could expect to face harsh criticism: “How could the churches presume to say ‘that doesn’t concern me’? [...] We are an open society, and we need to demonstrate that, demonstrate it by setting an example, so we do not leave [...] the field to the demagogues.” The “demagogues” (Scharfmacher) referred to here are right-wing populists such as the Pro NRW movement who use the opportunities of an open society to destabilise social peace. As a consequence, all religious communities are presented with the responsibility of actively and visibly furthering the cause of social cohesion.

This brings us to the role which individual *events* can play in triggering interreligious engagement. Such events need not be of global significance. Often, it is especially what happens at the local or regional level that impels people to become active. Many respondents stated that their activities came about in response to a conflict. The initial motivation then was to educate people in order to moderate local fault lines and defuse future conflicts. In one case, the chairman of a Muslim congregation reported: “Pro NRW was here, so we organised an interreligious service, a peace prayer at the mosque, as a counter-demonstration.” These interreligious prayer meetings arose as an immediate response to social and political action directed against religious pluralism in general, and against one religious community in particular. Their participants see their activities as an expression of interreligious solidarity.

As in the findings of Klinkhammer et al. and Tezcan, the 9–11 attacks are also often quoted as a trigger for interreligious activities by respondents in our study. Especially in Europe and North America, these events led to a rise in suspicion of Muslims and forced their communities to explain themselves. A Protestant pastor confirms: “Then, after 2001, the attacks in New York, this need for information came on strongly again.” However, other global events also played a role in his work. He had earlier supported opening a Muslim section of the cemetery: “I was gone for a year. When I came back [...] nothing had happened. [...] Then something interesting happened, the Bosnian war started and the Bosnians suddenly had no country to go back to any more. [...] and they had an interest in making the cemetery happen right away. And we put

it into action with their help.” The new situation in the homeland of Bosnian immigrants led them to look more fully to their host country and develop the wish to build up an own religious infrastructure. It is remarkable in this case that the interest of a single immigrant community is sufficient to reactivate the negotiating process and establish a cemetery open not just to Bosnians, but to all Muslims.

Impulses from the Inside: Political, Symbolic, Dialogue-Oriented and Communitarian Interests

Along with the exogenous impulses outlined above, there are a number of intrinsic driving forces for interreligious activities. We can distinguish political, symbolic, dialogue-oriented and communitarian interests here.

Political interests can be found where interreligious contact is used as a means to pursue concrete political goals. Our analysis indicates that particularly migrant communities who are still in the process of developing a religious infrastructure tend to regard religious and political dialogue as two sides of the same coin. A prominent example are Muslim communities planning to build a mosque or establish a cemetery and thus are in need of administrative assistance or symbolic affirmation.

A Protestant pastor who has been active in interreligious dialogue for almost 30 years explained: “[this support] is also expected, or hoped for, in solidarity between believers. The idea is: We finally need a fixed place to pray and teach in [...] and you are Christians, you are also believers and know that you need a place to pray. [...] Can you help us?” The expectation of political support is seen as deeply anchored in the nature of interreligious contact through empathy and solidarity between different religious traditions. Unlike the pastor quoted by Tezcan (s.a.), this respondent does not feel suspicious about ‘concrete interests’, but embraces the political dimension as a legitimate aspect of interreligious encounters.

In a similar vein, the imam of a mosque congregation stated: “The interests of the Muslims are part of dialogue work, of course. [...] I would advise anyone who is building a mosque to start with a dialogue so as to have fewer problems.” The political interests of mosque congregations, though not usually the sole aims of interreligious activities, are not only seen as legitimate, but as a matter of course. Even though it will more often be religious migrant communities facing practical problems in everyday life, the above mentioned imam emphasises the fundamental mutuality of interreligious solidarity: “When [...] a church is closed, I’d say, we will take part in protesting, we will gladly do that. Yes, you could say it is a [...] mutual support.” This interreligious solidarity was realised e.g. in Duisburg-Marxloh, where a large Muslim community successfully

protested against the closure of the neighbouring church.¹⁶ The possibility of an interreligious alliance between dialogue-oriented communities in the face of perceived threats to religion (e.g. through church closures) is brought to the foreground here. As the example shows, it is not only small and migrant communities that enter into alliances of this kind to defend their interests.

While political interests can be directed towards specific projects arising from religious needs or requirements, respondents in our sample also often voiced the general wish to strengthen religion as a factor in an increasingly secular society. We termed this a *symbolic interest*. A Protestant pastor explained this regarding interreligious school services: “The parents and children are supposed to see that we [pastor, imam] are involved with them getting into school and leaving school.” Above all, though, she considered it “important to somehow get the Divine in [into society] at all.” This example indicates that the aim is not the teaching of specific tenets or the demonstration of religious distinctions, but the inter-traditional sacralisation of the secular social space that is public school.

While political interests need to be communicated to specific target groups, symbolic ones rely on a broad, public display of interreligious harmony. For example, the chairman of a Jewish congregation reported of interreligious events in a sports arena: “[At the final song ‘We are the world’,] the church president stood along with the bishop, and all were doing this [waving the arms in the air] that was a great sight, an image of connection. And that is more important, more accessible to the masses, than getting deeply into theology.” The image of a religious community of values united across its different traditions is prominently presented here. The reference to being accessible to the masses stresses the desire for a broader impact.

Aside from strengthening religion in the abstract, there are efforts to use interreligious activities to strengthen the status of a particular religious community. We also group this kind of self-interested PR with symbolic interests. One Old Catholic priest interviewed sees his activities in a local Arbeitskreis Christlicher Kirchen (ACK, church cooperation group) primarily as a contribution to strengthening ecumenical cohesion: “We must speak with one voice on some matters, as Christians, and also present ourselves to the public as a church.” Encounters with other religions are secondary to his view, taking place mainly in the context of a predominantly social neighbourhood project. Even where contact with other religious communities does take place, he stresses the importance of *interconfessional* exchanges. It is necessary for the Christian confessions to close ranks, “because the world needs it [...] because we have something to tell the world”. The propagation of a Christian message is clearly in the foreground here, justified by the belief that Christianity is indispensable to the world. A priest in the New Apostolic church regarded the above

16 <http://www.derwesten.de/region/kirchen-in-duisburg-muessen-schliessen-st-peter-in-marxloh-bleibt-id6268345.html> (last accessed December 10, 2013).

mentioned neighbourhood meetings as one of the few opportunities to meet with other denominations. The New Apostolic church generally takes a critical stance towards ecumenical and interreligious efforts and does not participate in the *Arbeitskreis Christlicher Kirchen*. Hence, he considers his interreligious engagement primarily as an opportunity to represent his faith: “There, you could also present yourself a little and show, when the position was explained from the Catholic side and the Old Catholic or from the Protestants, what it is like from the New Apostolic point of view.” Especially the encounter with other Christian confessions was important for as little as a few decades ago, the New Apostolic church was widely regarded with suspicion. Preparatory meetings for interreligious neighbourhood events were a good and low-threshold venue to reduce such fears: “Yes, just to show what we are like, that we don’t, let’s say, don’t walk around with halos on our heads [...] that the others can see, we aren’t from another planet, we are fellow humans, just like everybody else, only with the consciousness that we have a faith that we stand for, that we live and try to represent to others, too.” As is the case in many Muslim communities (s.b.), education and public relations are seen as indivisible. Interreligious contact provides the forum to combat prejudice and improve the public image of one’s own religious tradition.

Once again, the interest in good PR is not restricted to the marginal and contested, but also to the well-established denominations as the following statement by a Catholic priest demonstrates: “As the Catholic Church, we are also interested to ensure that people see us as an open community that accepts people and seeks to understand them.” Given shrinking congregations and bad press, participation in interreligious activities may become a marker for openness and social responsibility through the advocacy for religious pluralism on the part of the Catholic Church.

Among the non-Christian religious communities, symbolic interests are especially pronounced among Muslim congregations. Unlike the established Christian churches, they often take a defensive stance against a perceived anti-Islamic prejudice and strive for acceptance and social recognition. Thus, the chairman of a small Muslim congregation reported: “We hold open mosque days to have a dialogue, to live better with the people, the neighbourhood. [...] If you know each other better, you can accept and respect each other.” The invitation to an open mosque day is offered with the goal of symbolic recognition in mind. Acceptance will improve the community’s standing in the neighbourhood.

Interestingly, we also have a representative of a German Buddhist community stating that the potential image gain for his tradition is the driving factor for his interreligious activities: “It was afterwards that it all changed, also through the work we did here. [We wanted to show] that we, too, are a real religion [...] and above all, that it is a problem, and it continues to be a problem today, that we aren’t recognised as a religion.” Once again the public recognition of a religious congregation is linked to its commitment to dialogue. In contrast to many Muslim communities, however, the primary goal is not to correct miscon-

ceptions or prejudice. The symbolic interest here is to present the non-theistic tradition of Buddhism as a ‘real’ religion which duly assumes an active role both in interreligious dialogue and public discourse.

The third pillar of intrinsic motivation is – what we call – *dialogue-oriented* interests. While in the case of symbolic interests, the desire for public presence and recognition is the central motivator, dialogue-oriented interest aims at shaping interreligious communication. In line with the above considerations of types of interreligious dialogue, we could identify two dominant trends representing different interests in interreligious dialogue in our sample. Theological dialogue on dogmatic questions is directed at discovering common ground or cultivating difference whereas the exchange about concrete matters of the religious conduct of life focuses on personal religious encounter and the reduction of prejudice (s.a.). The chairman of a dialogue initiative had this to say about the theological profile of its activities: “Well, we do see ourselves as an interreligious dialogue initiative that strives to, let’s say, address social and theological questions, though I would see a certain focus in the theological field, and at least tries to look at them from both perspectives [Christian and Islamic] and to see, where is the common ground, where are the differences?” In this case, dogmatic and ethical issues are brought to the centre. The positions of religious traditions are related to each other, discussed, and often allowed to stand as equals.

One prominent interest in theological dialogue frequently appears to be exploring the historical family relationship – and thus the commonalities – among (primarily the Abrahamic) religions. This necessarily entails uncovering theological differences, as the chairman of another dialogue initiative reported: “We don’t want the things that divide us to be [...] swept under the rug, either [...]. The significance of the person of Jesus in Christianity and Islam is fundamentally different. Those are two positions that cannot possibly be reconciled.” An imam explained: “And, well, those differences do exist [...] and we should experience that, too.” Alongside the differences they cultivate and make explicit however, participants regularly emphasise the importance of the common ground they discovered as the following statement from a New Apostolic pastor illustrates: “That was the principle, in the end, too, and that is the point, that it is possible to find some common ground that we as Christians, and also people who adhere to Islam, that we share.” In this case, finding common ground is primarily understood as a definitory exercise in order to clarify where one stands in a relationship.

As a matter of fact, this approach may easily exclude religious traditions outside the Abrahamic model (characterised by Abraham as a founding figure, monotheism, shared social ethics). One member of a German Buddhist community explained: “As a Buddhist, it can sometimes be [...] difficult because there are lots of God-topics (laughs) like ‘Grace of God’ or what have you. That is so far removed, it has nothing to do with us, you see?” The example suggests that interreligious dialogues, for all the evident differences they explore, are often

based on a more or less tacit theistic consensus that excludes some participants from the beginning.

Aside from theological exchanges, a dialogue on everyday questions of practical religiosity can likewise be subsumed under dialogue-oriented interests. Events of this type are often more popular and more accessible to laypeople. One organiser of evening dialogue events told us: "People should get together and talk about what they care about in their neighbourhood." Other groups hosting such events, too, regard them primarily as an "opportunity for neighbourly conversations". They frequently focus on dealing with specific situations with dialogue happening in a generally religious, but not specifically theological sphere. "We are no theologians. It is more about issues and arguments from our own lives", a Muslim woman who is active in interreligious dialogue explained. Along with personal experience, the media may be a prominent source of religious issues, such as headscarves: "That is brought up every now and then [...] there are questions [...]; like, is that required by Islam?" This is less a matter of theological education as an effort to deal with a sense of alienation that arises from visible differences in religious practice and lifestyles.

Last, but not least, *communitarian interests* are important motivators for interreligious activities. Their primary rationale is the desire to establish a more open, less prejudiced society where members of different religions can live together with rather than merely alongside each other. The creation of a sense of community primarily is effected through reducing fears, creating opportunities to become familiar, and promoting 'neighbourliness'. Visiting a mosque, for example, could be very important to 'reduce the sense of alienness'. The chairman of a mosque congregation pointed out that this was an important precondition of "getting closer to each other". Similarly, a spokeswoman of a Jewish congregation stated: "We wish to get to know each other and produce cooperation rather than separation." This was the path to "discover common ground". The pastor of a Protestant congregation records that they "[care about] meeting as neighbours, including neighbours that are interested in religion and religiously affiliated, not to define our differences, but to strengthen what unites us". This is to create a sense of community not solely on a religious basis, but also rooted in common humanity. Unlike with dialogue-oriented interests, the emphasis is less on the cognitive and more on the affective elements of coming to know each other, with the preferred instrument being not education, but direct human encounters.

The desire to maintain peace in the neighbourhood plays a significant role in these efforts to strengthen community ties. One member of a mosque congregation stated: "[Our goal is] to live together truly as neighbours in this city. This way, you can avert many things and simply foster peace." A more sobering, but similar assessment came from the priest of an Old Catholic congregation: "I just think it's positive that we keep in mind there are those living among us who are not Christian, but who have a different religion and that we respect their way of life and meet them, and once again: If you live together and do things together,

the risk that you fight each other is reduced.” Where the Muslim respondent emphasised the idea of living together, the Old Catholic rather stressed the importance of mutual tolerance as a means to defuse potential conflict.

Likewise, the priest of a Hindu temple regarded it as a religious duty to create a peaceful environment for his congregation: “We hold our peace prayers for all citizens, their health, happiness and peace [...] that is our duty.” A member of a small Baha’i community, too, places interreligious community in a theological context: “Where representatives of different religions meet, [they have] one fundamental goal in common, to celebrate religion as such – the most important pillar for, you could say, the world’s order. If you look at it from that perspective, you cannot but support all religions. [...] That is why the Baha’i support it, too.” This corresponds closely to the symbolic interest of strengthening the public presence of religion in a secular society through interreligious activities. In this case, however, the community of religions goes beyond a PR exercise. As a “pillar of the world’s order”, it takes on soteriological qualities.

The reduction of prejudice, tied closely to educational and informative projects for dialogue-oriented interests (s.a.), becomes a key to the creation of a community under different premises. Encountering and coming to know the other from the perspective of communitarian interests requires not so much an exchange on theology and religious tenets as an experience of mutuality and respect. “If you don’t engage with something, you don’t have an idea in your head”, the spokeswoman of a Jewish congregation explained. Likewise, the chairman of a Christian-Muslim dialogue group reported from his own experience: “[We find] fear and rejection with people who don’t know anything about the others.” Both statements envision as their goal a peaceful, pluralist mode of existence that presupposes a rapprochement at the human level, beyond the realm of theological positions. That is why, the above-mentioned chairman stated, it was “very wise, that there are invitations from the Muslim side to such big events [open mosque days], [...] because they show the real side of Islam.”

This is also confirmed by a Muslim theologian who has been offering guided tours of her congregation’s mosque for many years: “People initially come in with their questions and prejudices, and then, when you set things straight for them, I always got a positive reaction. They did not insist on their preconceived notions, but say ‘right, we didn’t know that, now we got it from the mouth of an expert’, well, it is that way, I have had positive experiences with that.” Beyond correcting prejudices and presenting one’s own community, an open mosque day also aims to create the opportunity for direct encounters and positive experiences with the (religious and cultural) other. Through its strong presence in the media, Islam tends to be the focus of most interreligious activities of this kind. A Protestant pastor who heads a dialogue initiative said: “I think it’s quite irritating that when they talk about Islam on television [...] you see the same pictures, long rows of men’s behinds. That’s just stereotypical, it explains nothing. But if you are there around prayer time [...] you feel something completely different from these stereotypes.” Here, too, a strongly affective stance towards

interreligious dialogue based on human proximity and shared experience is expressed. Exchanging knowledge is very much a secondary consideration.

Conclusion and Prospects

Our intent with this contribution was to arrive at a better understanding of the driving forces that underlie participation in interreligious activities. From a religious studies perspective this endeavour is relevant since there has so far been rather little empirical research on interreligious contacts in modern immigration societies. Moreover, our analysis could gain practical value for participants in interreligious dialogue if they accept our findings as an invitation to consider the various motivations underlying their activities and thus secure the lasting commitment of the communities involved. Starting with extant studies of different types or trends of interreligious dialogue that adopted a primarily external perspective, we deliberately adopted a broader concept, linking the extrinsic and intrinsic driving forces for carrying out interreligious activities. This encompasses both the structures, expectations and events that can move participants to engage in dialogue from the outside and the various interests intrinsically motivating the religious communities involved in it.

Among the extrinsic factors, we count contextual ones such as local demographic and political *structures* (e.g. active support and involvement by local authorities) and their dynamics (e.g. religious pluralisation in an urban neighbourhood). As a matter of fact, these structures do not foster interreligious commitment 'objectively', but only as far as they become an issue in the local discourse. A more short-lived, but no less potent motivator were *events* such as religiously motivated or xenophobic attacks. It does not matter whether these were of global or local significance as long as they generated a certain level of presence in the media. Remarkably, throughout our sample, it is only conflictual events, perceived attacks on peace and cultural plurality, which motivate people to participate in interreligious activities. Finally, at a more discursive level, both given and assumed social *expectations* can underlie interreligious activities as well. Many respondents referred to a special responsibility for social cohesion that religious communities bore. As in our initial example, though, expectations can also grow out of discourses of endangerment and force parties to proactively participate in interreligious activities in order to escape suspicion.

By intrinsic motivation, we understand the interests and wishes that parties in interreligious activities connect with their participation. Where interreligious contact is sought out primarily to further concrete political goals, e.g. building a place of worship, we refer to *political interests*. It must be emphasised that, in contrast to Tezcan's observations, none of the respondents in our sample regarded such interests negatively. Political interests in the context of interreligious activities usually are religiously motivated even though their target group are political decision makers and processes. By contrast to political interests,

we referred to the intent of improving the public image both of religion in general and one's own religious tradition in particular as *symbolic interests*. Where interreligious encounters are aimed more at education and mutual understanding, we refer to *dialogue-oriented interests*. Their goal is less to improve public perception or achieve specific goals, but instead to cognitively explore common ground and delineate differences. Where dialogue-oriented interests emphasise the acquisition of knowledge about each other, *communitarian interests* focus on the social capital of religion(s).¹⁷ Interreligious exchange in this case is intended to build shared values and foster mutual trust.

It does not need emphasising that in practice these driving forces are closely intertwined rather than presenting themselves as distinct ideal types. Given the narrow scope of our survey and its limited sample size, it is equally clear that these findings cannot represent the final word, but rather must be understood as the beginning of a systematic, theoretically grounded typology of motivations for interreligious activity. Programmatically, we considered it important to combine an understanding of the motivations of participants based on action theory with a broader structural understanding of the environment interreligious communication occurs in.

This poses a theoretical challenge that can be delineated, but not explored in depth here: A synthetic typology of motivations for interreligious activities would require a theory on the link between exogenous and endogenous factors. In this regard, a sociology of knowledge perspective could argue that the objective or perceived change in religious structures towards pluralisation made interreligious interaction both evident and plausible.¹⁸ A Neo-institutionalist focus would analyse interreligious activities as a space of legitimacy and empowerment: 'real religions' (s.a.) are supposed to be transparent and open to outside questions even though, as our initial example shows, this can create internal tension.¹⁹ Finally, a rational-choice approach seeking the tie between external and internal impulses in the specific logics of the interreligious situation could equally present valuable insights.²⁰

If this contribution has made one thing evident, it is that interreligious dialogue has many faces. As religious pluralism and awareness both of religion and religious difference grow, the significance of organised and structured forms of interreligious contact will increase. For participants in interreligious activities, this means they will need to understand their own expectations and aims, and

17 Kippenberg, H. G. (2006) Das Sozialkapital religiöser Gemeinschaften im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. In: G. Pfeiderer & E. W. Stegemann (Eds.) *Religion und Respekt. Beiträge zu einem spannungsreichen Verhältnis* Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 245–271.

18 Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1990) *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

19 Meyer, J. W. et al. (2005) Ontologie und Rationalisierung im Zurechnungssystem der westlichen Kultur. In: G. Krücken (Ed.) *Weltkultur. Wie die westlichen Prinzipien die Welt durchdringen* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 17–46.

20 Esser, H. (1999) *Situationslogik und Handeln* Frankfurt am Main: Campus.

negotiate them with their partners. In this process, no goal can claim greater legitimacy per se. If religion has its *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life), why would you deny this to interreligious encounters? Where participants can view this complexity as an opportunity to better understand their goals and communicate on shared projects, it can become a source of strength for their work.