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CHANGING PATTERNS? OCCASIONAL CONSUMERS OF NEW ACTIVITIES IN OLD CHURCHES

Abstract

This article examines motivations for participation in a specific church activity (baby hymn singing) within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark from a consumer profile perspective. The following research question is addressed in this article: Is it possible to identify what motivates contemporary individuals to participate in a specific church activity through the perspective of consumer profiles? The analysis is based on a national study from 2014 among participants of baby hymn singing containing survey data and interview data, as well as participant observation. The analysis shows that a majority of participants can be identified as occasional consumers with a primary motivation of betterment.

Keywords: Consumer culture, church activities, life styling of religion, occasional and regular consumers

Introduction

One question that frequently arises within research in contemporary religion relates to the development of robust typologies for different patterns of affiliation to religious institutions and traditions. These questions of typology are linked to general theoretical discussions concerning how to understand the primary patterns of transformation of religion today. A plethora of distinctions has appeared in recent decades in order to separate various modes of religiosity. These distinctions often include a category meant to capture the majority pattern within traditional, institutional religion, such as the European majority churches. British sociologist of religion Grace Davie has suggested using different modes of believing and/or belonging identify major trends in the development of religion today inside and outside the traditional institutions. Her category of belonging without believing is presented as the primary category describing the majority of members in historical churches in Europe (Davie 2000). British sociologist David Voas has presented a category of "fuzziness" in order to describe similar patterns of individuals. This category display "fuzzy fidelity", which designates a pattern
where people maintain an affiliation to a historical religious tradition or institution without strong features of belief or attendance (Voas 2008). Croatian sociologist Slavica Jakeli has suggested that the major distinction, which should be applied to this question today, is "born-again" over against "born-into" religion (Jakeli 2010). "Born into"-religion is the culturally normative religious tradition, which a person takes for granted when growing up in a specific context. The pattern of "born-into" does not necessarily include strong personal belief or regular attendance, but designates a culturally normative framework, where boundaries between religious affiliation and other identity markers, such as ethnicity or nationality are difficult to define.

The concepts of belonging, fuzziness and "born into" offer different takes on the issue of how to describe the majority pattern of religion found in many contexts in Europe today. In many European countries, a large proportion of the population still to some degree maintains a connection to the historical, religious institutions connected to their cultural setting. In a Danish context the typology of "cultural Christians" is often utilized as a concept meant to capture a majority pattern of low participation in the regular life of the church, few expressions of personal beliefs, and a high support for and participation in rites of passage rituals, such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and burials. In his work Danish theologian Hans Raun Iversen defines cultural Christians as a specific group of Danes today, who do not engage actively in the life of the church, but maintain a connection through their cultural identity to the Christian heritage represented by the church (Iversen 2005). American sociologist of religion Phil Zuckerman identifies the same pattern in his study based on interviews with Danes and Swedes concerning religion. Zuckerman concludes that these societies are "without God", but not without organized religion primarily in the form of participation in culturally normative rituals (Zuckerman 2008). Others have pointed to how the Lutheran majority church has begun to provide more and more activities tailored to the needs of these "cultural Christians" in order to expand its contact with the majority of members (Nielsen 2009).

One central question, however, is what the dynamics are behind the behavior of this majority of church members. This article will focus on the question of individual motivation for participating in church activities among members, who can be identified as "cultural Christians". Developments in consumer research will be taken as a point of departure for an examination of motivations for participation in particular church activities.

Consumer culture and religion

The argument for contemporary consumer culture as a fundamental societal shift can be found among researchers from a broad spectrum of disciplines. In her book Consumer Culture, History, Theory and Politics (2007), Italian sociologist, Roberta Sassatelli, presents a strong argument for the appearance of a modern consumer culture, and at the same time links this new consumer culture to a longer historical development. In relation to this article, her attention to the complexity of contemporary con-
Consumer culture is of special interest. She emphasizes how participants of consumer culture are both passive recipients of pressure from advertising and commercial interests and at the same time active consumers, who are able to use the same dynamics to develop individual identities and mobilize new, collective initiatives (Sassatelli 2007: 136). Even processes such as the famous McDonaldization, e.g. extreme product uniformity, can function as a context for interaction (Sassatelli 2007: 177). People interact with the products they consume and Sassatelli gives as one example: the IKEA bookshelf named Billy. This bookshelf, the Big Mac of furniture, is sold all over the world in the same format, and at the same time becomes part of the over-all value system of the individual consumer. They "life style" the bookshelf in the context of their own homes either by customizing it further or through the way they display items on the shelves. It becomes "their" Billy. Through such examples of the life styling of objects, Sassatelli emphasizes the complexity of studying consumer culture. In her view, it is not constructive to diagnose the current patterns of consumption as void of individual freedom or as controlled entirely by the side of businesses.

In her work from 1996, British sociologist Celia Lury stressed the dynamics of life styling as a key element of consumer culture (Lury 2003/1996). She calls for a perspective, where consumption would be seen as a complex activity, through which the consumer is not only shaped by outside forces, but also able to reshape and challenge culture (Lury 2003/1996: 3, 143). Lury concludes her book by raising key questions concerning identity formation in consumer culture. Her emphasis on how identity formation is changing in relation to shifts in how individuals engage in social collectives is of special relevance here. Consumer culture is the expression of individual identity in the context of social relations (Lury 2003/1996: 15). According to Lury, identity is shaped through consumption and individuals navigate their lives through their consumer patterns in fluid social structures, what Lury refers to as neo-tribes: “marked by their fluidity; they are locally condensed and dispersed, periodically assembled and scattered. They are "momentary condensations in the flux of everyday consumer life” (Lury 2003/1996: 251).

Both Lury and Sassatelli point to a common tendency: life styling through consumption in relation to the construction of individual identity in a social context. This tendency to life style consumer products is confirmed when examining current consumer research. Researchers point to a shift in strategies for selling products from approaches focused on the functionality of a product to the life styling of products, often in relation to brand development (Salzer-Mörling 2010: 531). When studies of consumer behavior begin to use terminology such as yearning and storytelling, they touch upon themes that have been relevant in the study of religion for decades. It is therefore not surprising that various researchers within the field of religion seek to explore if and how consumer culture perspectives can provide constructive frameworks for understanding contemporary religion. Indeed, Gauthier, Woodhead and Martikainen call for a turn to a consumer culture perspective in the study of religion (Gauthier et al. 2013; Gauthier and Martikainen 2013).

In Religion in Consumer Society (2013), Gauthier and Martikainen emphasize how companies are selling identities, feelings, stories, meaning that they employ a spiritual
or symbolic economy, where elements, such as the expression of identity, play an increasing role in the competition between brands. By drawing on Lury and Sassatelli, they argue that consumer culture is both a further development of individualism and of the social dynamics of collectives. Their position allows for a continued consideration of the changing forms of community in a consumer culture. They therefore strongly emphasize the social dimension of consumer behavior and its role in the formation of new forms of sociality. Their perspective includes a focus on how new forms of community are created through consumer culture at the same time as old ones are challenged and destroyed (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013: 23).

The issue of individual and social context in relation to consumer culture is addressed by British sociologist of religion, Andrew Dawson (2013). Dawson applies a concept of associational individualism in order to capture how individuals seek out communities as a framework for expressing identity in specific time and place. Dawson touches upon the issue of the motivations behind the participation in episodic communities and points to the search for "betterment" as a key factor. Betterment refers to a motivation for engaging in activities, where participants seek bodily and/or mental improvement as part of their general life style (Dawson 2013: 138–140). Dawson primarily links the motivation of betterment to developments within New Age religion or spiritual milieus in general. In this article, however, I examine how the same processes of life styling and a search for betterment of life are at play within the context of a Lutheran majority church, thereby arguing for how these dynamics are influencing religion across the both new age and old institutional forms. Traditional institutional religion, e.g. Lutheran majority churches, is being transformed by the same dynamics found within new age religion.

When arguing for a consumer perspective as useful in the field of religion, scholars have raised the question of how the field of religion might relate to and differ from other areas of consumption. Swedish sociologist of religion, Per Pettersson, addresses this question in relation to the development of Lutheran majority churches. Pettersson suggests a concept of "services" as a key to understand the consumption dynamics between members and providers within the Church of Sweden. Pettersson emphasizes how contemporary culture is permeated by "a logic of services" (Pettersson 2013: 52). Since the provider and the product are not separate in the consumption of a service, the successful purchase of a service does not imply the transfer of an object from one person to another. Instead, the transfer of a service entails a high degree of trust and a relationship between service provider and consumer.

Pettersson’s perspective illustrates how a consumer perspective in the study of religion is based on an interest in shifts in economic logic. Pettersson contrasts earlier forms of consumption driven by a focus on standardization with contemporary individualized culture and its focus on flexibility and adaptation. He explores how this shift affects Lutheran majority churches formed by the modes of previous societal logics. Pettersson’s perspective is of special relevance in relation to the question of the dynamics within European majority churches today in general and the Lutheran majority churches in particular. According to him: "Church membership is made up in the main of occasional users of the Church, who attend at the times in their lives when they have
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personal need, while the Church organisation primarily aims at promoting regular attendance at a specific activity, the Sunday service" (Pettersson 2013: 48). Pettersson links a consumer perspective to the typology of the majority of members of this church through the terminology of "occasional users". This raises the question of how to further understand the dynamics of an occasional pattern. And to further identify what it is exactly that these occasional consumers consume.

The aim of developing typologies from a consumer perspective, which will enable an examination of the motivation for participation in church activities, calls for a further development of the typology of occasional versus regular consumers. The question of why consumers choose a product is at the core of studies of consumer behaviour (Biel et al. 2010). Research projects concerning consumer behavior include considerations of habits and loyalty as schemes for why consumers express a specific consumer pattern (Söderlund 2010). A typology of occasional versus regular consumers has been developed in detail within contemporary research of consumer patterns in relation to organic products, primarily food products (e.g. Pino et al. 2012). In the studies of purchase intentions of buyers of organic food, Pino et al. have distinguished between "habitual" or "regular" consumers and "less frequent" or "occasional" consumers (Pino et al. 2012). In one study, they examined the patterns of motivation behind the different consumer behavior. They concluded that habitual users are motivated by a clearly felt and articulated ethical identity, whereas the occasional consumers primarily saw their infrequent purchases as related to food safety, which was not prioritized in all purchases. The habitual consumer expressed an over-all identity through her purchase related to an ideological standpoint, which was often linked to active, public support for organic production, or a "matter of life-style choice" (Pino et al. 2012: 159). These consumers are labelled as "ethical consumers". The habitual, ethical consumers are defined through their focus on the consequences of their individual actions as consumers and how they use their positions as consumers to achieve social goals, such as better environment or other public and societal goals. The involvement for the larger good is an expression of personal identity, where an ethical obligation for others is seen as essential (Pino et al. 2012: 159). The occasional consumers primarily purchase the products on a more direct motivation, such as safety and health for their family and themselves (Pino et al. 2012: 159). The two distinct groups of consumers share the tendency to life style their choices, but they vary in the intensity and form of life styling. One group ties the consumption directly to a strongly felt long term commitment securely anchored in their identity as ethical people making a difference in the world. The other group performs a life styling of the product primarily linked to a more narrow focus on their own personal health and that of their family. The question is, whether it is possible to identify similar patterns among participants of activities within a religious context. If so, is it possible to identify the dynamics behind the specific patterns in order to provide an insight into what motivates contemporary individuals to participate in specific church activities?
Research questions, method and data

The primary research question for the material analyzed in this article is, whether it is possible to identify what motivates contemporary individuals to participate in a specific church activity through the perspective of consumer profiles. The data material analyzed comes from a research project concerning the relationship between young families and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Baby hymn singing is an activity inspired by secular initiatives to stimulate infants through music, which has been readapted into a church activity by clergy and musical teachers. The activity is targeted at parents on parental leave with children from new-born to one year of age and has become popular in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark during the last decade.4

The research project began with a pilot study of three churches in 2013 in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark. In the spring of 2014 the national research project was developed and carried out. The project included a national mapping of the use of baby hymn singing. A survey was sent out to providers and users of baby hymn singing. The survey to providers of the activity was sent out to approximately 1200 parishes. We had a 65 per cent response rate (776 responses) for the provider survey. The survey to participants was sent out through the contacts established among providers of the activity and we received 570 responses. It is not possible to calculate a response rate, as there is no registration of the total number of participants in this activity currently available.

The survey to the participants were supplemented by interviews with 3–4 participants in each of the nine churches selected for qualitative studies, as well as by participant observation at the nine churches. We found a high degree of consistency in the answers across different contexts and between the pilot study in the Aarhus area and the national study, but the lack of response rate for the participant survey means, that the material cannot be used to claim universal patterns for the whole Danish context.5

We found that approximately 55–60 per cent of the parishes arrange baby hymn singing, which gives an estimated 700–800 venues during the spring of 2014.6 The activity is geographically widespread, as more than 45 per cent of all parishes in all dioceses offer the activity. The popularity of the activity is in line with developments previously identified in a Danish setting of how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is tailoring activities for specific target groups (Nielsen 2009).

The survey questions to the participants were primarily focused on motivations for participation. The questions concerning motivations for participation were multiple choice-questions, and the responses are presented as percentages of answers in order to identify the high and low scoring options. In order to identify the profile of the participants in relation to church activities, they were asked questions about their religious activity patterns. We used questions formulated in line with the European Value Study in order to ascertain their profile in relation to the majority patterns in a Danish context. Survey questions concerning high commitment to church life, e.g. regular participation in church services and strong expressions of religious belief were seen as indicators of an ethical, regular consumer profile. Questions of low commitment to church life as
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well as a primary focus on the health and wellbeing of mother and baby and the mother–child relationship were seen as indicators of an occasional consumer profile.

A key comment in relation to the mapping of consumer profiles, is that it is necessary to consider how a given individual might both change her pattern of behavior in the long-term, e.g. in relation to specific life phases, as well as in the short-term, e.g. be more focused on the item or service, while in the process of purchasing it. The research project surveyed the participants either in the particular time and space of the activity or very close to it. The participants were only surveyed once and there has not been a follow-up study. This means, that the results of the project cannot be used to examine any long-term patterns or shifts in motivation or patterns of religious belief or practice.

Analysis

The mapping of the activity revealed information about the typical organizational form of the activity. The way that the baby hymn singing activity is organized can vary from setting to setting, but generally we found that it consists of small musical intervals in the form of singing and playing on instruments, as well as motoric activities suited to infants. The activity is planned as blocks of 8–10 sessions, and often takes place before noon on a week-day. Ideally, the same group of mothers and babies participate in all 8–10 sessions, although new people do sometimes join later.

In many settings there was no charge for the activity, although we did encounter some churches that charged a fee. Almost all churches provided a social activity after the baby hymn singing, serving coffee and cake. The activity often took place inside the church in front of the altar, where the organizer would place pillows and blankets in a circle, so that the parents and babies sit close to the altar. Some churches held the activity in other rooms or buildings outside the church (e.g. parish facilities). The question of the importance of space will be addressed in the analysis and discussion below. The music consisted of hymns and sometimes popular songs for children. The activity was often ritualized, so that the same events happened in the same order every time. There was also some use of other sections of the church space, such as a dance around the baptismal font or a procession from the back of the church towards the altar and back again. The activities used various props, such as musical rattles or dolls.

We found that the typical participant of the activity was: a woman (97%) and is a member of the church (93%). She has an education level above high-school (86%) and a majority has more than three years of further education (75%). She belongs to the middle-class and has the necessary resources to support her life style choices. Even though we purposely extended the study to areas of Denmark with lower incomes and educational levels, only very few individuals with lower educational levels appeared in the surveys and interviews indicating that this activity appeals to a specific group of women across regions.

Only three per cent of the respondents went to church regularly, and 43 per cent primarily came for traditional events. They did not provide any form of religious activities
for their children at home. The participants did, however, tend to have a general openness towards questions of spirituality, in that 71 per cent said that they see themselves as "someone who believes", and that 65 per cent pray or meditate, at least sometimes. The majority of the respondents were therefore identified as occasional consumers of church activities in line with the typology of "cultural Christians" as mentioned above. The question of how to address the issue of formal membership in relation to a consumer perspective will be discussed further below.

The overall picture, which was also confirmed in the detailed, qualitative study of the nine selected churches, was of middle-class women with resources to provide for themselves and their babies. This was also reflected in how the majority of the mothers took part in other activities organized for parents on leave, such as maternity groups (ante-natal class), baby swimming, baby cinema, etc. Only six per cent reported baby hymn singing as the only activity they attended with their child. The pilot study had shown that a majority of participants were very positive towards the baby hymn singing activity. This positive attitude was also reflected in the national survey, even to the point of one respondent answering "everything!" when asked: "what do you think is the best thing about baby hymn singing?" mirroring the 100 per cent "yes"-response to the question: "would you recommend this activity to others?".

Figure 1 shows the answers to question 12 in the survey: "There are many reasons why someone chooses to participate in baby hymn singing. Do you agree or disagree with the following reasons?: "I have chosen to participate in baby hymn singing..."

![Figure 1. Motivations](image)

When examining the options with the highest scores, the primary motivation was clearly linked to issues of the wellbeing of mother and child and the child's development. Interestingly, the perceived openness of the activity also received a very high score. The activity was chosen primarily because it is good for the child. In the middle
range we found a cluster of answers, where issues of familiarizing the child to the church and Christianity in general are mixed with social and practical motivations. We found a general image of the participants as positive towards the church in general and to the questions of hymns in particular. When examining the lowest scoring options, we found questions linked to a more committed religious dimension of the activity. This is further confirmed when looking at the lowest scoring option of catechism. Only very few fully agree with the notion that the activity is catechism training [dåbssøplæring], a word used by the church to describe Christian education in relation to baptism. The highest and lowest scoring options are considerably distanced from the middle range of options.

Almost 100 per cent of participants focus on the benefit for their baby and their connection with the baby. What is the significance of this pattern? It is of course to some degree not surprising. The participants have been identified as resourceful, active parents, highly interested in their child’s wellbeing. They seek out activities that affirm their relationship with their child and where they feel that the child responds positively. They are, however, also generally positive towards familiarizing their child and themselves to Christianity and interacting with the church. They are mostly focused on the wellbeing of the baby, and as long as the premise of openness is met, they are open to church activities and Christianity. They are not ethical consumers, who primarily come because they see this activity as linked to a deeply rooted Christian belief system and their participation does not spring from a strongly felt Christian identity and practice. Instead it springs from their interest in providing their child with the best possible avenues for development and betterment, physically and mentally.

A series of questions were posed, which were meant to capture the different aspects of the activity. Figure 2 shows the responses to the question 13: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about baby hymn singing?":

![Figure 2. Religious Aspects](image)

These answers indicate that the small rituals and repetitions, as well as the room, were seen as positive elements. A majority found the activity to be religious to some extent,
but less religious than they had expected. Also, we found a clear indication that the level of "religiousness" is experienced as ideal and should not increase. For most of the participants, the activity was not seen as a church service. At the same time, it becomes clear that the church space in itself is a factor that many participants appreciate.

Figure 3 shows the answers to question 15 in the survey: "Here are some statements about church space in relation to baby hymn singing. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

Figure 3. The Room

The answers are more evenly divided between fully agree and agree than in the previous questions presented in figure 1 and 2. The data show that a majority shares the feeling that it is a special room. The church space is described in a terminology of relaxation, depth and safety found in both the room and the repetition of small rituals, as can be seen from the answers in figure 2. There is something religious in the activity for many of the participants, but it is not linked to what they perceive as "very religious". They are participating in a special meaningful activity, which gives them a feeling of connection with their child and a sense of peace and safety. And the church space, the hymns and the small rituals all play a central part in this.

Figure 4 shows the answers to question 17 of the survey: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning the effects of baby hymn singing?"
So far the answers have established a high degree of positive evaluation of the activity, and have pointed to how the feeling of doing something meaningful together with the child and the other participants is the primary motivation. This is followed by other motivating factors and also to some degree linked to the special atmosphere created in the special room through the ritualized activities. These findings raise the question whether this activity will have a long-term effect on behavior in relation to church activities. This cannot be ascertained on the basis of our study, but we were interested in the respondents’ view of their own future behavior.

Figure 5 shows the answers to question 18 in the survey: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements on how you will act in the future? I..."

The participants clearly see this activity as a very positive experience, and will recommend it to others and come again if relevant. They also express a wish to attend other similar activities, e.g. activities tailored to families, and have intentions to transfer one
key factor from the church into the private sphere: hymn singing. At the same time, a majority will not use the church more in the future.

Discussion and conclusion

When employing the typology of occasional versus regular consumer, the majority of the participants were identified as occasional consumers. They focus on what is good for them and their baby in this specific situation, e.g. in the context of parental leave. They do not link this participation to an over-all, explicitly expressed Christian identity in relation to regular participation in church activities or personal involvement with the daily life of the church. Also, they do not express any interest in increasing their personal religious activity as such in this context. They are interested in an introduction to the elements of church and Christianity, they find most appealing, e.g. the hymns and the atmosphere of the room in relation to what it offers them as a context for their child’s development and a venue for social connections.

They like it and will probably like similar activities. However, the data suggest that they will not become regular users of the church on a more over-all basis. Their emphasis is on the emotional and aesthetic values of this particular activity, specifically linked to the responses of their child and the "special" and solemn atmosphere of the setting.

The typology of occasional consumers allows for a detailed analysis of the dynamics of this group of members and shows relevant nuances in how they frame their participation in church activities. They appreciate the church as a special context and the activity is deeply meaningful for many of them, but they do not see themselves as entering into a long-term commitment. Their heightened activity in this new church activity is therefore not a shift from an occasional to a regular pattern, but should instead be seen as a further development of their occasional profile in line with the goals of their life style. They are motivated by betterment of body and mind, engaging in contexts allowing for associational individualism and within the cultural norms for care takers of children.

The transformation found in this case does not represent a breach with traditional patterns of occasional use of the church, nor of a revival of personal piety. Instead it is an expansion of participation within their pattern of behavior. Within the category of fuzzy, cultural Christians, with low expressions of personal beliefs and low church attendance, a high level of involvement in episodic, life-styled activities can be identified. The participants have chosen among the options made available to them, and they have profoundly enjoyed it. Perhaps it is the flexibility of the occasional consumption, which is of greatest interest. The increase in their participation in church activities has to do with a general life styling of their choices. They feel able to tune in and out of what they can choose from, including offers from the church setting.

If the question of condensing and dispersing communities in a contemporary setting is considered, it becomes clear that the respondents are participating in a community for a specific life phase. They join in this neo-tribe to use Lury’s phrase, and disperse again.
We did not find indications of these communities lasting over time, e.g. remaining in contact as a group after the activity ended. There was no significant institutionalization of the condensed group of participants collective, which was left to disperse, when the mothers returned to work and the children started in day care. The only bridging towards more regular involvement with the church was in the form of invitations to attend family services in the future or invitations to musical activities in the church for the next age group of children (toddler activities). We did find patterns of maternity groups, who would go collectively to the activity. The data showed, for example, that 37 per cent of the respondents had heard about the activity from the maternity group, and 47 per cent through friends and family. Other external factors were recommendations of the activity by local health visitor. These findings of pre-existing social networks and external factors need further research in order to examine the role of other systems outside the church context, which could contribute in motivating participants. The behavior of the participants was embedded within a social context, where the maternity groups played the most profound role. This points to how pre-existing and secular social networks should be examined further in relation to the question of motivation for participation in religious activities. The participation of the entire maternity group seemed to be a key factor in lending legitimacy to attending a church activity. The study of consumer culture is not the study of pure, detached individualism, but a study of the interaction between individual and social context.

The over-all patterns of participation indicate that the increase in the form of church activity is a result of the life style of resourceful middle class parents most of all. When analyzing the answers given by the respondents, it is evident that the participants are life styling their activities in relation to the specific life phase, e.g. maternity leave. The general life styling of the activities linked to health and life phase dimensions is in line with the pattern of occasional consumers, who join various "neo-tribes" for duration of time based on motivations of betterment and wellbeing of self and immediate family.8 This focus on betterment, which has been emphasized by Andrew Dawson as central to motivations for participating in non-mainstream and alternative religiosities, seems to indicate a general trend relevant across a spectrum of expressions of contemporary religion.

These results point to how research into contemporary religion should not be separated into studies of alternative, non-mainstream religiosities over against mainstream religious institutions, such as the Lutheran majority churches. Consumer culture perspectives allow for comparisons across this divide and thereby contribute to the identification of large-scale trends of transformation of contemporary religion.

The data examined provides a strong basis for examining motivations behind this specific new activity, but further studies are needed in order to examine the over-all patterns of transformation of contemporary religion across new age and old institutions. One question, which goes unanswered in this project, relates to the connection between participation in church activities in relation to other forms of religious practices on the individual level, such as prayer, meditation as well as involvement in religious groups inside or outside the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. We only touched upon this in the survey, and therefore are not able to conclude how these par-
participants generally incorporated religious and spiritual elements into their everyday lives.

As mentioned above, there is also the key question of how to understand the role of long-term church membership from this perspective. The issue of membership in relation to a consumer perspective presents some challenges. A detailed study of the representations of membership and the consequences of membership patterns from a consumer perspective lies outside the scope of this article, but it remains a relevant topic to be examined further as it points to a preexisting relationship between participant and provider. This study of a specific activity primarily seems to indicate how membership is merely a framework within which the tendencies found in general in culture and society express themselves in the choices of individuals.

The data material collected and analyzed here provides a strong basis for analyzing patterns in the motivation for specific participants. At the same time, the data only consists of answers from those already attending this activity. Parents, who have been presented with the opportunity to attend, but chose not to, are therefore not represented in the material. Also, the data primarily provides a background for an analysis of the here-and-now image of participant motivation and does not offer any longitudinal perspectives. The participants were asked to reflect on their experience either directly in connection with their participation or shortly after. This could affect the results of the survey, as the respondents are perhaps more likely to reflect positively on the activity in this context, than would be the case if they were asked months or years after participation. The material does not offer insights into the issue of transmission of religion as there is no follow-up study examining behavior and viewpoints following participation in the activity. But it does raise questions concerning the impact of new patterns of participation of church activities; especially in relation to activities directly aimed at families and children.

The primary issue for the study was to provide a here-and-now image of the motivations among "cultural Christians" for attending new activities in a Lutheran majority church. The issue of the here-and-now image of participant motivation raises questions concerning the possibility of identifying specific consistent participant or consumer profiles over time. Research into the potential of consumer perspectives in the study of religion will have to consider the question of other dynamics influencing behavioral patterns, such as previous socialization and the importance of established social networks. The aim of this article is primarily to argue for how the patterns of consumption of church activities—for betterment and care and for expressions of identity in the context of fluid communities—are in line with the general tendencies of consumer culture.

This article presents the consumer activity pattern of these participants neither as a shallow or meaningless consumption, nor as a sign of a return of traditional church religion. Instead, the study finds a group of content users of a specific product, tailored to meet their needs and therefore transcending the obstacles, which might otherwise keep them from attending church activities. The typology of occasional versus regular consumers allowed for an identification of patterns of activity among this specific group of participants in church activities. This enables an analysis of the motivational pat-
terns, which have proven constructive in this specific research context. At the same time, the consumer perspective, as it is developed and utilized here, seems to lack the ability to capture the question of long-term membership of historical churches. Therefore, this study cannot conclude how best to understand the selection of a specific activity in relation to the long-term relationship with the institution providing the activity. Further studies are needed to explore whether the life styling of specific activities should be seen as a diversion from or a continuation of the previous patterns among church members, and specifically how the participation in new activities relates to participation in traditional, culturally normative events such as baptism.

In relation to the point concerning how "the drive of consumerism, marketization, and branding creates new forms of sociality (such as virtual and globalised networked communities) even as it destroys old ones" (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013: 23), this article wants to emphasize the need for a continued interest in how the same drive also transforms old structures without necessarily destroying them. Instead it seems that these old structures in some contexts adapt to the drive of consumerism by drawing on traditional resources, such as the church space, musical tradition and a "special, authentic atmosphere". The study of new activities within old churches is one case of how new condensing and dispersing communities are not only developing outside the context of the historical churches, but also within, thereby nuances the image of traditional, organized religion in relation to general trends in the transformation of contemporary religion.

Notes
1 The research project on baby hymn singing was funded by The Church Development Fund 2013 (Folkekirkens Udviklingsfond). Research team: Associate Professor Marie Vejrup Nielsen and research assistants Christina Skovgaard Iversen and Gitte Ranfelt Laugesen. The research project was connected to a larger project developed in cooperation between Center for Contemporary Religion, Aarhus University, and Danmarks Kirkelige Mediecenter (DKM).
2 Membership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark: 77.8 per cent of the population (January 1st 2015). The institutional framework of the church will not be addressed in further detail here. For a presentation and discussion of state-church relations and the question of church autonomy see (Kühle and Nielsen 2011; Nielsen 2012).
3 The broader terminology of cultural religion can also be used to describe patterns, which are not necessarily tied to formal membership of a religious organization, but designate the cultural attachment to traditions, e.g. Buddhism (Borup forthcoming).
4 Parental leave in Denmark is primarily used by mothers and ranges from a period of 6 months to one year.
5 There are currently new initiatives for the collection and analysis of statistics concerning activities in the The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, but these data were not available within the framework of the research project.
6 The use of the terminology "parish" here is a translation of the Danish term "pastorat", which is a larger unit than the individual local parishes, e.g. a "pastorat" can contain several local parishes ("sogne"). The church is divided into 1350 large parishes [pastorater], which again
include 2100 parish units [sogne]. The estimated number of venues is based on surveys sent out to the churches.

7 In general, women in Denmark have employment outside the household and engage in full-time care of their children only during maternity leave. This article will not examine perspectives on gender and religion in relation to the material. The gender dimension of the study will be examined in detail in other publications from the research project. The patterns described here seem to be in line with those examined in studies of religion and women in similar contexts, see Aune and Woodhead (eds.) 2008.

8 This is in line with the patterns identified in research concerning religion and middle class women, see Aune and Woodhead (eds.) 2008.

References


Borup, Jørn. Forthcoming. Who are these Buddhists, and how many of them are there? Theoretical and methodological challenges in counting immigrant Buddhists – a Danish case study. Journal of Contemporary Religion


