

## **Sinus Milieus as a Tool for Contextual Church Development and Missiological Research**

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### **Introduction**

From 2001-2008, I conducted a theoretical and empirical study on the transfer of missiological impulses from an U.S. mega church to German contexts (Schacke 2009). Primarily due to the influence of Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC, South Barrington near Chicago, Ill.), hundreds of new church services with a seeker-sensitive intention had developed in German Protestant mainline and Free Church congregations since the mid-1990s. In-depth research on the complex effects, benefits and potential problems of transferring WCCC's impulses to Germany, however, was lacking. As one core element of the research design, I applied milieu data of the Heidelberg Sinus Sociovision Institute to understand and compare the specific cultural contexts of local churches in Germany and the U.S. and to draw conclusions for a missional church development. Three main questions guided the research process of the study:

*(1) To what extent are evangelistic church services an effective and necessary bridge to the diverse societal lifestyle clusters in Germany?* On the theoretical level, this question included the necessity of both a theological and a sociological analysis; existing theories and data relevant for the research topic had to be evaluated and taken into account.

*(2) To what extent, in particular, is the need-orientated seeker-sensitive approach of WCCC transferable into German milieu contexts?* This question included a description of WCCC's model with an update of its current practice as well as a theological critique and a working out of immanent biblical principles in WCCC's approach. Likewise, a comparison of selected aspects of the religious and cultural situation in the U.S. and Germany was necessary in view of the topic of contextualisation.

*(3) Is the Sinus milieu model applied in the study an appropriate instrument for contextualisation in local churches?* On the theoretical level, this question included an introduction and description of the relevant model as well as a critical evaluation.

This paper focuses on the third question and argues for an integration of the Sinus milieus into church development strategies; it also pleads for an implementation of milieu data into further international and intercultural missiological research. Local churches frequently struggle with keeping up to date with societal developments in their rapidly changing cultural contexts. Elaborate and practical tools for contextual church development are urgently needed. Here, the Sinus milieus can help considerably to better understand local contexts and target groups as well as to keep up with broader societal trends. Likewise, the milieu approach offers comprehensive data of lifeworlds in many countries and proved useful for intercultural missiological comparisons in my study.

## **Methodology**

The study combined several qualitative and quantitative data sources. The basic method was a triple-series of semi-structured *expert interviews* with leaders of ten urban church service projects for seekers (or similar evangelistic events), most of them situated in the city of Berlin (conducted in the years 2001, 2002 and 2007). The findings gained by these interviews have been expanded with the results of participant observation and triangulated with (1) data of milieu research and (2) further available data analysed in desk research.

The sample of cases and experts was done with the premise that their projects should represent a cross section of relevant ‘types’ in the field (with different combinations of type determining items per case): (1) Protestant mainline (EKD) *and* Free Church projects, (2) established churches *and* church planting projects, (3) West *and* East German churches, (4) well-known (based on publications about the project and references in the relevant literature) *and* less prominent projects and (5) different lifestyle contexts. Half of the evangelistic projects (group 1) were church services for seekers significantly inspired by WCCC; the other half of events (group 2) did not refer to WCCC as a main influence.

I used open interviews based on an outline of questions. A small set of questions with standardised categories was integrated as well (milieu classifications, classifications of seeker sensitivity, classification of the distance of seekers to the church). In the second round of interviews (2002), the Sinus milieu types were introduced. The experts were asked to classify their church contexts (members/attenders/secular surrounding) as well as themselves in the Sinus model after the milieus had been explained to them on the basis of detailed milieu

descriptions. The same data was conducted in the third round (2007) to explore potential developments and changes.

Further data on the geographical milieu contexts of the Berlin churches was available through a connection of the Sinus milieus with micro-geographical data. Another ‘control’ source was our own participant observation. Furthermore, in the first interview round, all interviewees had to describe the sociological contexts of their churches with their own words. All expert interviews have been designed and evaluated according to the *theory-generating* approach of Meuser and Nagel (Meuser/Nagel 2003).

Besides these expert interviews, a number of additional interviews were conducted. This data collection was necessary for understanding WCCC’s current practice and cultural context in the U.S. as well as its activities and perception in Germany. Likewise, participant observation at WCCC’s campus in South Barrington as well as at German Willow Creek conferences and workshops was used to gain a more comprehensive picture.

To define the cultural context, the target groups and the core milieus of WCCC (including long-term changes) with the Sinus model, I conducted interviews with WCCC officials in 2003 and 2007.

### **What Are the Sinus Milieus?**

Today, there is a large degree of consent in the sociological debate that ‘traditional concepts of class systems orientated only at vertical dimensions of income, profession and level of education are no longer sufficient to understand the social stratification’ of societies. Instead, an ‘individualisation and pluralisation of milieus and lifestyles have been diagnosed taking the place of traditional, relatively static, structures of stratification’. (Herlyn 1998)

The Sinus milieus aim to mirror these societal realities. The approach builds on more than three decades of social scientific research of people’s everyday life. The first milieu model was formulated at the end of the 1970s and the research programme has been continuously elaborated since that time. (Sinus 2005a)

The milieu approach ... aims to describe changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the population against the background of changing values. Within the framework of milieu research all the important areas which a person experiences on a daily basis

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(work, leisure, family, money, consumption, media, etc.) are registered. A key aspect of this research is the condensation of the empirically established value priorities and lifestyles into a basic typology ... Contrary to traditional social stratification, the Milieus are defined by means of a classification regarding content. As well as basic values, lifestyle and life strategy, the analysis takes also into account everyday attitudes, aspirations, anxieties and expectations for the future. Unlike social classes, the Sinus-Milieus are genuinely existent subcultures within our society, whose respective everyday worlds feature common terms of meaning and communication. (Sinus 2005a: 7)

A milieu or a lifeworld (cf. Husserl and Schütz) ‘means the whole of subjective reality of an individual, i.e., all significant experience areas of the daily life ... which are determining for the development and the changes of attitudes, values and behaviour patterns; but also wishes, fears, desires, dreams etc.’ (Flaig et al. 1997: 51) The model also integrates personal aesthetical preferences of everyday life which are extensively described and documented. The dimension incorporating values and behaviour patterns is then combined with dimensions of socio-economic status like formal education, income and occupational group. The milieu data are integrated into large representative surveys (about 100,000 cases per year in Germany) so that the members of the different lifestyle clusters can reliably be assigned quantitatively to the adult population (data from 14 years onward). (Sinus 2005a: 9)

Country-specific research has been done in Germany (including a differentiation between East and West Germany) and in many other European countries as well as in China, Russia and in North America (which offered the possibility to compare German milieu contexts with WCCC’s target groups in the U.S.).

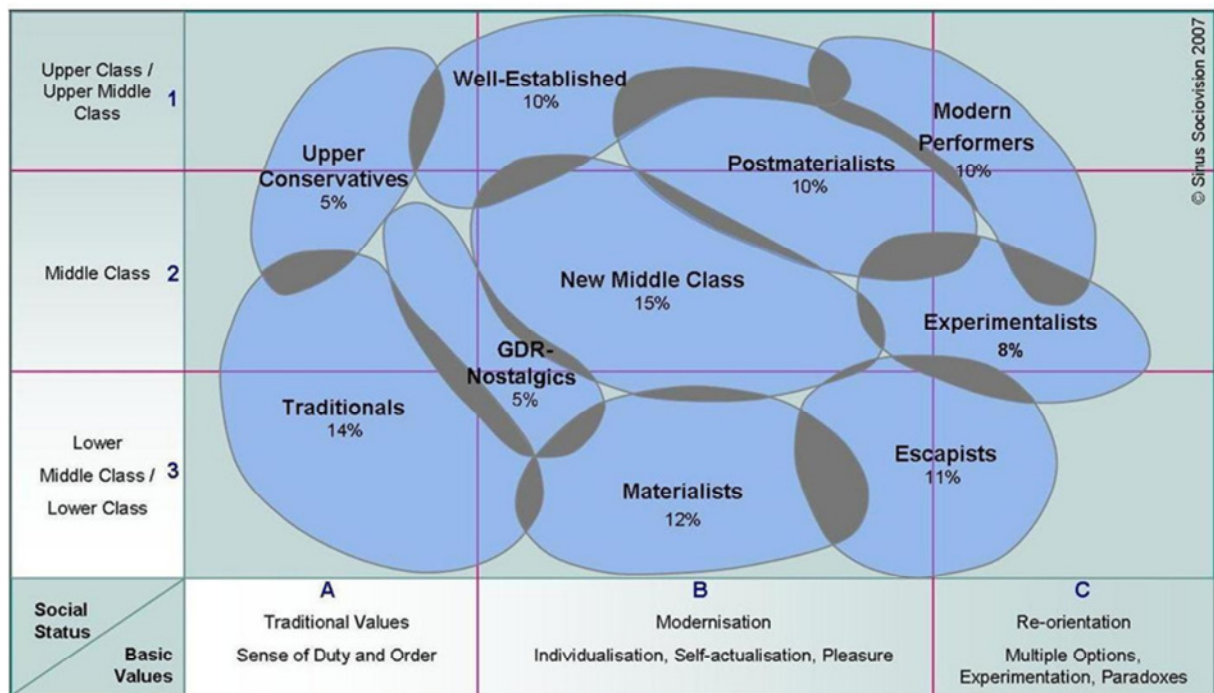
It was clear from the beginning that in internationally comparative research there can be no question of transferring the findings gained from one country to other countries without close inspection. The initial aim has always been to understand the specific, historically evolved everyday life cultures of every single country by applying integrated methodological standards, and then to detect common features *and* differences between countries via systematic inter-cultural comparison. Starting from the specific results of each country, it quickly became apparent that ‘groups of like-minded people’ did exist, stretching beyond national borders and that common basic orientations, values and lifestyles could be identified. ... This fact led to the

identification of broad, multi-national everyday life segments ... [They] reflect important cultural differences as well as existing common characteristics. (Sinus 2005b: 5)

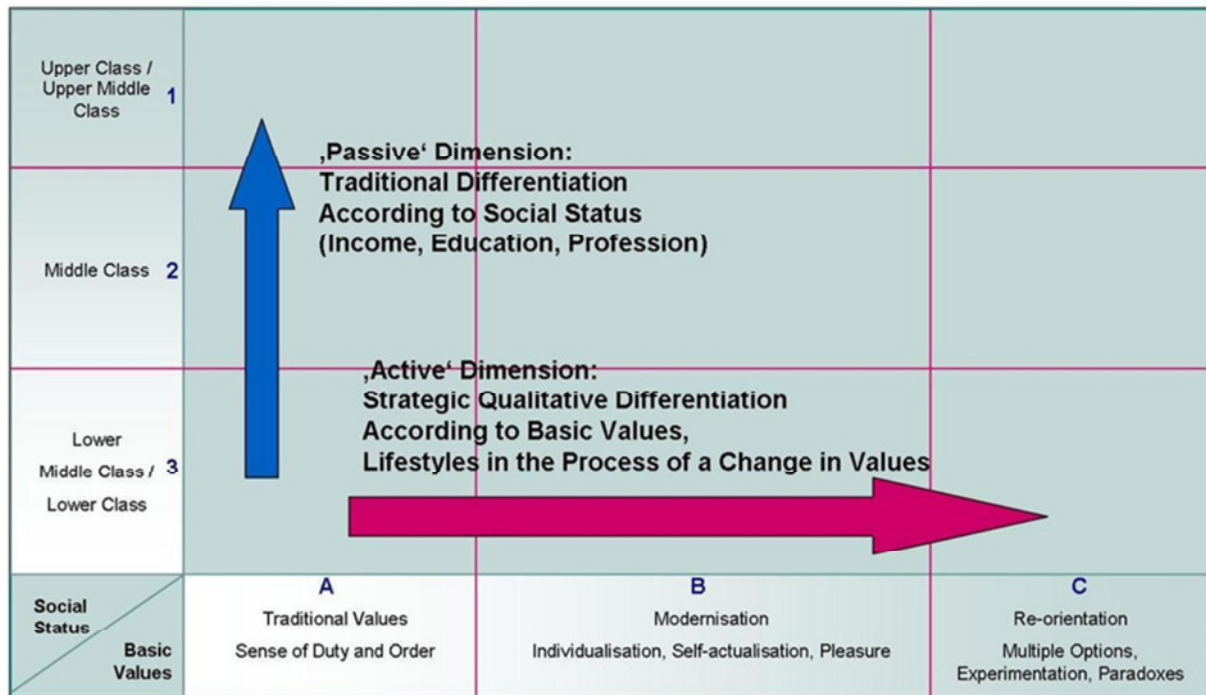
Considering the national milieus, Chart 1, for example, shows the percentage of the Sinus milieus in Germany. Chart 2 explains the reading of the model. The horizontal axis also mirrors the ‘process of value changes in the course of time of the post-war society’ (chart 4). It is important to note that the ‘boundaries between the different milieus are not fixed ones.... The existence of cross-checking points and areas of continuous transitions between the different Sinus-Milieus are inherent to the very concept of the milieus.’ (Sinus 2004)

The German Sinus milieus are frequently structured into four groups: (1) *Society’s Leading Milieus*, (2) *Traditional Milieus*, (3) *Mainstream Milieus* and (4) *Hedonistic Milieus*. Other combinations, however, are also possible. *Society’s Leading Milieus* serve as models for other milieus. There are two main focal points of orientation in the milieu landscape (chart 5): The *Well-Established* are a model for the *Traditionals* and the *GDR-Nostalgics*. The other Sinus milieus basically orientate themselves towards the intersection with the *Modern Performers*. (Leo Burnett 2002:20)

**Chart 1. Sinus Milieus in Germany**



**Chart 2. Social Status and Value Orientation**



Source: Leo Burnett, 'Die Sinus-Milieus als strategisches Zielgruppenmodell' (Frankfurt am Main, Leo Burnett, 2001), 20 (tba).

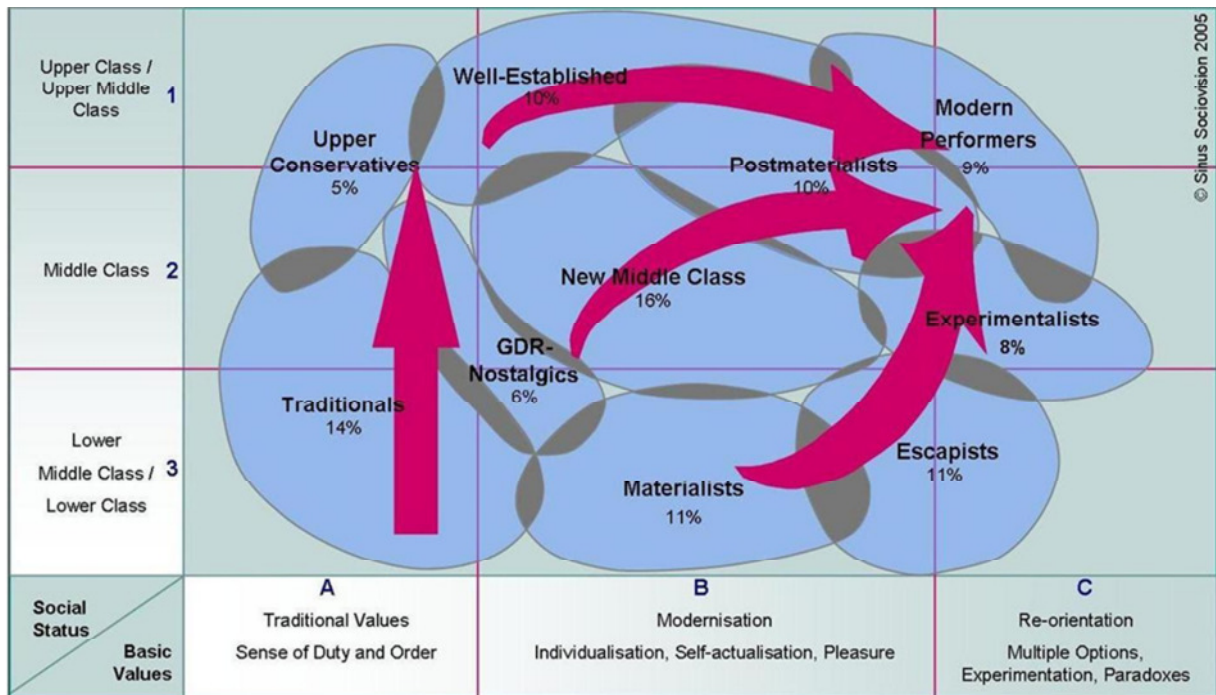
**Chart 3. Socio-cultural Change in Germany: Development of Basic Orientations**

Main Period	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s/90s	2000 +
	<u>Rebuilding and Restoration</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duty and Acceptance</li> <li>Adjustment, Traditional Moral</li> </ul>	<u>Era of the „Economic Miracle“</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Status and Possession</li> <li>Life Quality and Pleasure</li> </ul>	<u>Era of the Socalled Change of Values</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>„Being“ instead of „Having“</li> <li>Self-realisation, Emancipation, Ecology</li> </ul>	<u>Relativisation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility, Mobility (World of Chances)</li> <li>Complexity, Adaptive Navigation</li> <li>Aestheticism, Eclecticism</li> <li>Multimedial Reality</li> <li>Virtualisation</li> <li>Knowledge Society</li> </ul>	<u>Desublimation vs. Search for Meaning</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insecurity as a Basic Experience (World of Risks)</li> <li>„Trash“ Culture, Loss of Inhibitions</li> <li>Discount Consumerism</li> <li>Reflection on the Paradoxes of Modernisation</li> <li>Refocussing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional Role Model</li> <li>Safety Needs</li> <li>Status Quest</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disintegrating Hierarchy</li> <li>Feminisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotions</li> <li>Thrill</li> <li>Pleasure</li> <li>Learning Individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal Meaning</li> <li>Life Harmony</li> <li>Network Culture</li> <li>Taste for Technology</li> </ul>
	<b>SENIORS</b>	<b>BABY BOOMERS</b>		<b>35 TO 45</b>	<b>YOUTH TODAY</b>
<b>Basic Orientation</b>	<b>A</b> Traditional Values Sense of Duty and Order Self-control	<b>B</b> Modernisation Individualisation, Pleasure Self-realisation		<b>C</b> Re-orientation Multiple Options, Experimentation, Paradoxes Self-management	

Source: Own combination of MDG/Sinus, *Milieuhandbuch*, 4 with a Sinus chart on generational types of Jürgen Schwörer, 'What Drives the Consumers', lecture at the Eurofinas Annual Conference, Sorrento, 4 October 2004.



**Chart 4. Target Group Orientations among the Milieus**



Source: Leo Burnett, 'Sinus-Milieu', 21.

The landscape of the Social-Milieus is in a state of flux. Although the constituent characteristics of the milieus, namely people's basic values, remain relatively constant even in turbulent times, as society develops and values change, this is bound to influence the Milieu structure (in the longer term). . . . [T]he basic tendencies that are characteristic for social development as a whole [are]: . . . [(1)] Modernisation: Opening up of social space due to higher educational qualifications, growing mobility and communication, leading to greater scope of self-development[; (2)] Regression: A growing sense of being out of one's depth and disconcerted as a result of change, leading to a lack of orientation, loss of meaning and values, promoting authoritarian and aggressive tendencies[; (3)] Segregation: Drifting apart of everyday-lifeworlds and values, sociohierarchical differentiation and greater social downgrading . . . (Sinus 2005a: 14)

## Cultural Preferences and Attitudes in the Different Milieus

My analysis of selected attitudes and cultural preferences in the ten milieus in combination with the general descriptions of each milieu with regard to evangelistic church services basically confirmed the general Sinus position that - in many respects - there is an 'incommensurability with respect to values, meanings, stylistics, language and aesthetics' between the milieus; 'a real mutual understanding' of adherents of different lifeworlds often seems hardly possible or only possible in a limited way (MDG/Sinus 2005: 7). This is not to say that milieus with specific commonalities could not be combined to a greater target group when it comes to the question of how the different milieus could be reached with evangelistic approaches. But many combinations are clearly problematic since the so-called 'sub-cultural difference' (MDG/Sinus 2005: 7) is great.

Let us consider, for instance, the musical taste in the different milieus. Classical music is still the predominating style in the Protestant and Catholic churches and, with respect to the milieu landscape, it is also a favourite style in the traditional and modern upper class milieus (*Upper Conservatives, Well-Established, Postmaterialists*). But it is not at all a preference in society's important leading milieu of the *Modern Performers* nor in any other milieu. *Modern Performers* would prefer dancefloor and techno music and enjoy other popular styles like hip hop or modern jazz. Among the *Traditionals*, German *Volksmusik* is highly popular; similarly, among the *GDR-Nostalgics*. Even more, however, *GDR-Nostalgics* like country and western music. The *New Middle Class* prefers German 'Schlager' and pop music. Likewise, the *Materialists* listen to German hits, but their favourite style, again, is country and western. Among the *Escapists* and the *Experimentalists*, heavy metal is the favourite sound. Music is a core medium of expressing oneself in contemporary society and it is obvious that, for instance, a combination of the musical preferences of the *Traditionals* with those of the *Modern Performers* is almost impossible.

Likewise the main TV-programmes and formats, print publications and genres, favourite leisure activities as well as selected basic attitudes of the different milieus, in many respects, express enormous differences. In particular, the traditional milieus (which are core milieus of the churches) and the postmodern avant-garde milieus are almost like fire and water in many respects. At the same time, the results also suggested that a combination of selected related milieus with regard to evangelistic approaches is possible.



Much has been written about generational orientations and changes from traditional via modern to postmodern needs with regard to religion and evangelism. Generational developments are also mirrored in the Sinus milieus. However, the milieu approach also shows that, while a generational differentiation may be helpful as a first basic structure, reality is much more diverse. Just one example: the traditional milieus have the oldest average age and the postmodern milieus clearly have the youngest, but we also find 20-year-old *Traditionalists* and 50-year-old *Escapists*. The analysed milieu data likewise show the importance of the social status dimension which is usually left out in works on generational (or traditional/modern/postmodern) forms of evangelism. Milieu research shows that ‘socio-demographic twins’ may have extremely different lifestyles and value-orientations. The Sinus clusters mirror the importance of taking into account the different lifeworlds in a holistic manner, as well as their wider societal context.

### **Sinus Research on Religious Attitudes**

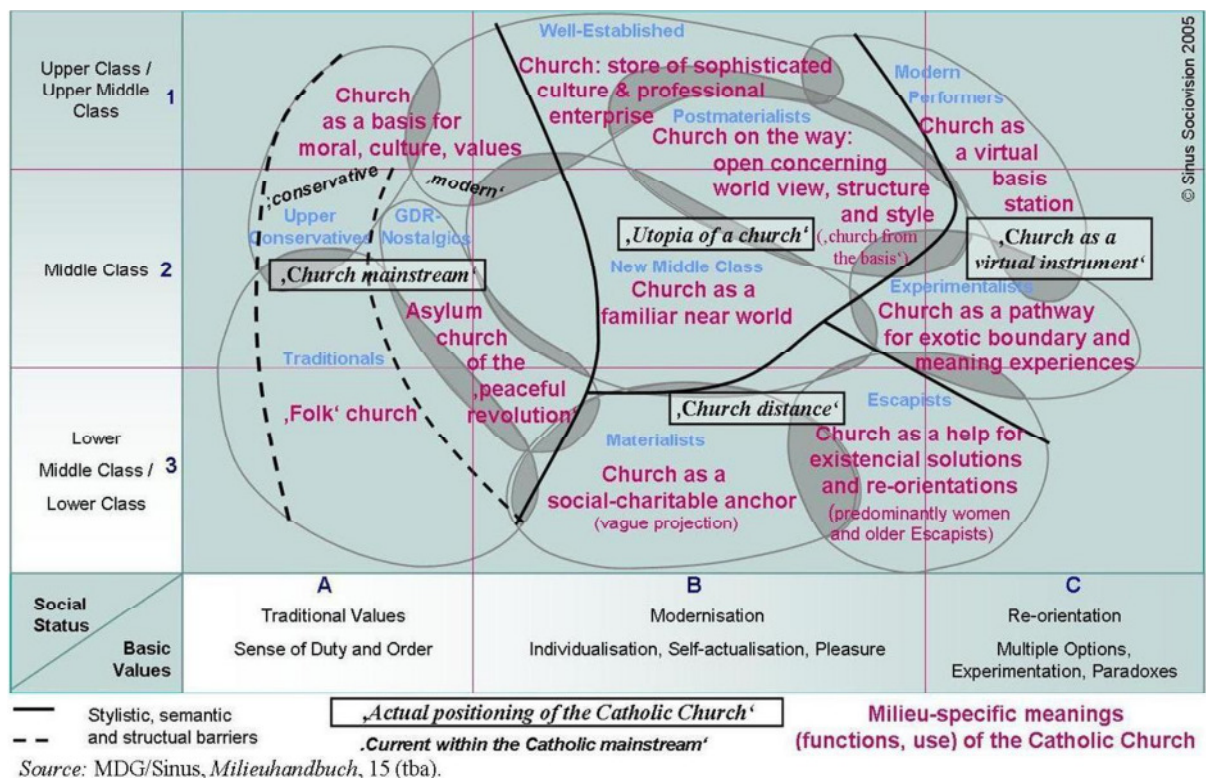
In the year 2005, the German Sinus milieus have been extensively investigated in a qualitative basic study regarding their attitudes towards the church, the Bible, their world view, Christianity and religion in general (MDG/Sinus 2005). The study was conducted with a special emphasis on the Catholic Church, but according to the Sinus researchers, the attitudes are qualitatively representative for the total German population.

Besides many other results, the positioning and meaning of the church in the different life worlds was summarised on a milieu chart (chart 5). It demonstrates that the mainstream of the church in Germany is situated in the declining traditional milieus of the basic orientation A (with different accents). In the segments of the basic orientation B, there are already great stylistic and semantic barriers as well as a significant criticism of inner structures of the church. In the upper and middle class of the orientation B, people have an interest in changes. They want ‘more personal participation, creative freedom and responsibility. Here, the leitmotiv is a utopia of a church.’ (MDG/Sinus 2005, 16-17)

The lower class milieus of the basic orientation B and C are greatly distanced from the church and evangelistic approaches need to integrate answers for their existential needs and particular problems. In the milieus of the basic orientation C, there is hardly any contact with the church, even among those who are still nominal members. In the market of ‘religions,

philosophies and life aids’, the Christian churches, currently, are not a very attractive option for them. ‘Typical in this value segment is an autonomous, individual and instrumental relationship to the church.’ People in the upper and middle postmodern milieus expect that, ‘their specific competence is demanded, that they can contribute with it in a [certain] function and that they can participate in decisions, according to the model of a professional enterprise or their sub-culture’. (MDG/Sinus 2005: 18f)

**Chart 5. Positioning and Meaning of the Church**



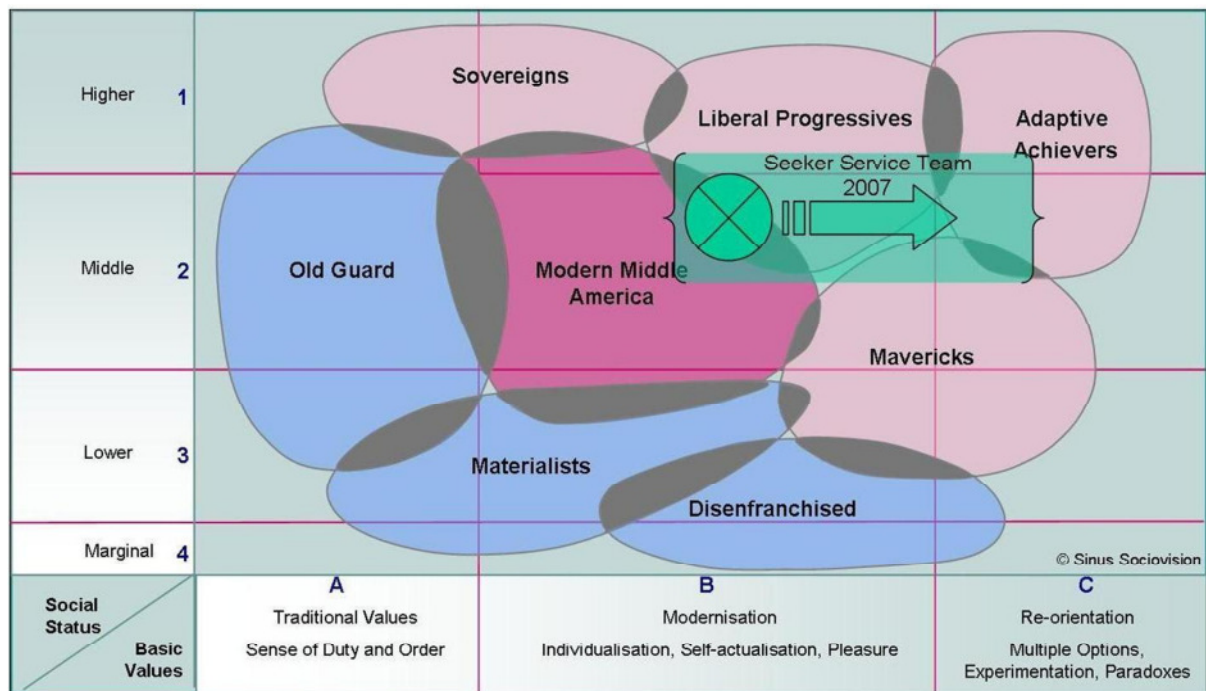
We analysed the relevant general and religious data of the Sinus milieus with view to our topic and later on triangulated the results with our empirical findings and further data evaluated in desk research. The holistic milieu data offered a very helpful source for diverse conclusions regarding our topic.

### Comparison of Milieus in Germany and the USA

The positioning of WCCC’s milieu relations in the U.S. milieu model showed the embeddedness of this church in U.S. suburban mainstream culture as well as a more differentiated picture of the suburban context with a moderately increasing diversity of

mentality clusters. The people that are reached today through WCCC's main seeker-sensitive church service primarily belong to the *Modern Middle America* cluster, but there is also a proportion of *Liberal Progressives* and - increasingly - of *Adaptive Achievers*. Some *Sovereigns* are among the attendees as well. Chart 6 shows WCCC's target groups in relation to the milieu affiliation of WCCC's leaders Bill Hybels and Nancy Beach and their team.

**Chart 6. WCCC's Seeker Service: Reached Milieus, Milieus of Leaders and Team**



Source: Classification by Jon Vesely (IntJV); cf. Appel, 'Update'.

Dark violet: main milieu reached; violet: further milieus reached; green dot: leaders; green: seeker service team

A comparison of German and U.S. milieu data shows that lifestyle clusters in both countries share a significant number of milieu-determinant cross-border commonalities. The Sinus researches argue that today similar lifestyle clusters of different countries often have more in common than different milieus of one country. At the same time, we find important national milieu specifics which need to be taken into account as well. Chart 7 shows the current Sinus meta model with seven 'multi-national everyday life segments' for Western Europe and the USA. Chart 8 gives a brief explanation of each cluster. Chart 9 compares the national originalities of Germany and the U.S. within these types. Corresponding with many other studies, the basic shift from traditional to modern and postmodern values can be proved on both sides of the Atlantic. We also find a social stratification with several similarities. One main difference is the broader social gap in U.S. society - a development, however, which is

also emerging in Germany today. With respect to WCCC's target milieus in the middle and upper social status of the modern and postmodern value patterns, we find considerable basic commonalities with the German clusters. (Sinus 2006: 8ff)

Concerning the differences between Germany and the U.S., milieu research mirrors the general national originalities, however in a much more differentiated markedness, with milieu-specific accentuations. One main difference between the two countries is the much stronger significance of religious values in U.S. society. The Sinus milieus, however, show considerable differences between the milieus and demonstrate that religious attitudes are also influenced by (and influence themselves) the general basic orientations and driving motives in the different milieus. For example, U.S. *Traditionals* have a strong foundation in the biblical dogmas and in the Christian tradition of 'God's own country'. Among the *Established*, a certain Protestant ethics with a consciousness of their religious roots plays a role. Members of the *Modern Mainstream* are often looking for self-help and religious resources to manage their everyday life. *Intellectuals*, if they are consciously religious, have a more intellectually reflected pathway to religion. *Adaptive Achievers* show a strongly eclectic, patchworking style of integrating spiritual sources and concepts of meaning. While, generally, few people in Germany state that they have ever changed their religion in their life, in the U.S., there are significantly more 'converts'. The socially accepted supply of religion is much broader and the researchers, stronger than in Germany, speak of a 'religious shopping' attitude, particular in the modern and postmodern clusters. U.S. milieu data mirror a more conservative value orientation in various respects. For instance, there is an increasing identification with traditional role patterns of man and woman even in the younger milieus. The *Established* are generally more conservative than in Germany, but also members of the *Modern Mainstream*. The tendency of striving for material possession is increasing in the U.S. and self-realisation as a driving motive is declining. WCCC's predominant target group of the *Modern Mainstream* has a higher propensity to consume and is even more under pressure to succeed and to conform than its German counterpart. People of the *Modern Performing* group in the U.S. have a stronger competitiveness and 'social-Darwinist' attitude.<sup>1</sup> (cf. Chart 9)

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schipperges, Director Research and Consulting, Sinus Sociovision, personal communication, April 2006.

I am indebted to him for his advices and the information on the U.S. milieus applied in this paragraph.

**Chart 7. Meta Milieus in Western Europe and the USA: Social Status and Basic Values**

Higher 1		Established	Intellectual	Modern Performing
Middle 2	Traditional	Modern Mainstream		Sensation Orientated
Lower 3		Consumer-Materialistic		
Social Status Basic Values	<b>A</b> Tradition <i>Sense of Duty and Order</i>	<b>B</b> Modernization <i>Individualization, Self-actualization, Pleasure</i>	<b>C</b> Re-orientation <i>Multiple Options, Experimentation, Remakes</i>	

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Source: Sinus Sociovision

**Chart 8. Meta Milieus: Core Characteristics**

<p><b>Traditional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Security and status-quo orientated, rather rigidly sticking to traditional values (e.g. sacrifice, duty, order)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consumer Materialistic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Materialistic and consumer hedonistic; striving to keep up with the Middle Classes, but often socially disadvantaged and uprooted</li> </ul>
<p><b>Established</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Performance and leadership, status-conscious, exclusive tastes, connoisseurship</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sensation Orientated</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Looking for fun, action, and entertainment; rather unconventional and rebellious; living for today; tendency to escape reality</li> </ul>
<p><b>Intellectual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Open-minded; post-material goals; searching for self-actualization and personal development; cultural and intellectual interests</li> </ul>	<p><b>Modern Performing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Young, flexible, and socially mobile; looking for an intensive life which means having fun and success; good qualifications and readiness to perform; multimedia fascination</li> </ul>
<p><b>Modern Mainstream</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Looking for harmony, comfort and pleasure; striving for social integration and material security</li> </ul>	

Source: Sinus Sociovision



**Chart 9. Comparison USA/Germany: Meta Milieus and Summarised Country Specifics**

Meta Milieus	US Country Specifics	US Milieus
Traditionals (A23)	Strictly religious in a traditional sense; respect for leadership and authorities; strong sense of patriotism: belief in the US as 'God's own country'; over-represented in of the Mid-West and the 'Bible-Belt' of the South	Old Guard
Established (AB1)	Typically WASP; significantly more conservative than their (continental) European counterparts; strong sense of honor and duty; Calvinistic ethos; responsibility and leadership; engaged in community service, charity, foundations; pride in America and its leading role in the world	Sovereigns
Intellectual (B12)	Outspoken cosmopolitan and lay orientation; interested in European, Asian and Latin-American culture, susceptible towards authentic traditions; striving for a health-orientated way of life; socially critical and anti-authoritarian mindsets; over-represented in the Eastern and Western Coast States	Liberal Progressives
Modern Mainstream (B2)	The modern middle classes of American 'suburbia'; always friendly and sociable – yet under pressure to succeed and to conform; striving to keep up with the Joneses; high propensity to consume (also on credit)	Modern Middle America
Consumer Materialistic (B3)	Precarious financial conditions, struggling to survive, often over-burdened with debt, many 'working poor', African Americans and Hispanics over-represented, but also [discriminatorily] so-called 'White Trash'	Materialists Disenfranchised
Sensation Orientated (BC23)	Different sub-cultures; resentment of social norms; marked underdog sentiments, strong peer group identity; high acceptance of violence and low concern for laws; body cult; whenever possible: show-off consumption	Mavericks
Modern Performing (C12)	Very mobile and flexible; high sense of competitiveness; social-Darwinist thinking; tendency towards hyperactivity (fitness, travel, entertainment); easily adopting and dismissing new fashions, trends – and brands	Adaptive Achievers

Meta Milieus	German Country Specifics	German Milieus
Traditionals (A23)	Retreat into the narrow familiar environment; trying to maintain the status that was achieved by great efforts after World War II; rigidly sticking to old German ('Prussian') virtues (discipline, order, punctuality, honesty)	Traditionals GDR-Nostalgics
Established (AB1)	Strong motivation to keep up with new developments, high involvement in new media and communication technologies; often retaining traditional gender roles. – 'Upper Conservatives' are sticking to old highbrow values	Well-Established Upper-Conservatives
Intellectual (B12)	Relatively strong ecological concerns; looking for personal freedom, 'deceleration', meaningful consumption (esp. intelligent services); doing well in professional and private life	Postmaterialists
Modern Mainstream (B2)	Relatively high level of ecological awareness; ready to support change, but underlying fears of personal consequences (e.g. restructuring the Welfare State, liberalisation and globalisation, new technologies)	New Middle Class
Consumer Materialistic (B3)	Fun-orientated within the limits of their financial means	Materialists
Sensation Orientated (BC23)	Also older age groups (up to 50 years); identification with sub-cultures in leisure whilst conforming at work (double lives); high affinity to information and communication technologies and virtual realities	Experimentalists Escapists
Modern Performing (C12)	Enjoying luxury and prestige items, but less showy; self-perception as true European and global citizens	Modern Performers

Source: Sinus Sociovision

## **Critique of the Sinus Milieu Approach**

Generally, my study showed that the Sinus milieus offer very helpful qualitative and quantitative data for a definition of target groups in the context of local churches as well as for an international comparison of lifeworlds and a cross-cultural transfer of WCCC's impulses (see below). Certainly, however, the approach also has limitations.

First, milieu clusters are constructs, not 'exact' realities. The basic German Sinus model, for example, describes ten different groups of mentalities. Further sub-groups, however, certainly do exist and other approaches of categorisation are possible as well. Particularly when it comes to the disparate youth scenes, the Sinus model is clearly too broad. Likewise, ethnic originalities are not mirrored in the basic typology. But the lifeworlds of people with a migration background in Germany (ca. 15 million) have been investigated in a special Sinus study (Sinus 2007). Furthermore, people at the fringes or outside the German social system are not sufficiently taken into account in the model. Poverty and homelessness, however, certainly do exist, and the number of people with such needs is growing significantly.

Due to the specific character of a national milieu model, local and regional originalities can only be mirrored within the existing Sinus types: through different numbers of milieu adherents in different geographic spaces and through a connection with micro-geographical data. Additional local and regional information is often necessary with regard to church development. Scherz argues that too strong of a concentration on lifestyle clusters in church strategies would lead to a neglect of further important social-spatial phenomena. In each local context, an appropriate combination of milieu-orientation with local developments and further aspects needs to be discovered. (Scherz 2004)

Generally, one must keep in mind that, as helpful as cluster models are for a description and understanding of target groups, at the same time, all members of a milieu are individuals with their particular personality and biography. Milieu descriptions are not a substitute for personal contact of church leaders within the respective lifeworlds they want to reach and milieu knowledge should never lead to a prepackaged and stereotyped treatment of individuals.

The question of how far Christians - with their core orientation so radically different from the one of the secular world - may properly be assigned to the milieus within the



theoretical framework of the Sinus approach needs some special consideration. Moltmann is certainly right: 'In any human life, there is an equivalent between the meaning of life one has found and the style of life one unfolds.' If a person repents and turns to Christ, his or her 'crisis of life is not only a crisis of meaning but always a crisis of the lifestyle as well'. (Moltmann 1977: 32f) While research suggests that Christian believers are predominantly situated in the more conservative milieu, it is important to note that Christian values are not all simply conservative *per se*; they also have a dynamic, experimental and 'revolutionary' accent. As a main commonality, with their hope on the Kingdom of God, Christians of all (sub-)cultures have an immaterial foundation. With regard to their 'secondary' values and their daily lifestyles, however, they may nonetheless differ significantly among each other - from aesthetic preferences to diverse aspects of their world views and ways of perceiving God and humanity. Like non-Christians, followers of Christ are individuals with their own personality structure and a wide range of cultural preferences. While existing research on religious attitudes suggests that Christians, like non-Christians, can be assigned to Sinus types, a total congruence of their values and attitudes with the typical values and attitudes of these lifestyles is rather improbable. Within all Sinus types, besides the positive and 'neutral' aspects of a sub-culture, un-biblical orientations are to be found as well and they certainly need to be rejected by followers of Christ. On a hermeneutical level, however, with an appropriate critical distance towards the model, Christians should nonetheless be able to identify with one or more milieus showing the most affinities with their personal lifeworld.

Likewise, the question if local churches themselves form particular kinds of milieus which are not expressed in the Sinus types needs special attention. What we have said about individuals is magnified in a Christian community: A group of people driven by Kingdom values forms a special kind of lifeworld beyond all secular categories. Again, however, with respect to the more 'secondary' aspects of lifestyle, we can presuppose that most people(groups) within a congregation, on a hermeneutical level, can be assigned to one or more milieus within the model.

During our research, it seemed to be no problem for WCCC's leaders to broadly position themselves and their fellow Christians within the Sinus types. Likewise, all interviewed German church leaders recognised the model as a useful tool for contextualisation and all of them were able to broadly position themselves, their churches and their unchurched attenders in the Sinus model. But it was also remarked in the interviews that attitudes on church and religion are not sufficiently mirrored in the basic Sinus model. A

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classification of Christians in the milieus was therefore considered a rather ‘approximate value’.

## **Conclusions**

Churches need adequate tools for a holistic contextualisation of the Gospel and for a transfer of missiological impulses from other cultural contexts. Generally, my research showed that the description of target groups in the context of local churches is often connected with a number of insecurities and uncertainties. Many pastors are not sufficiently aware of the different lifeworlds of society in general and, more specifically, of the particular social context of their congregations. Interviewees of both groups of the sample expressed that they would lack knowledge and information on potential non-Christian attenders and that it is generally not easy for pastors and ministry leaders to adequately stay up-to-date with the rapidly changing culture. As one pastor summarised: ‘You sense that what you have done so far doesn’t work anymore but you don’t know why. You don’t have the context.’

All of the interviewees considered the Sinus milieus as a useful sociological instrument for a better understanding of the social context of a local church. Interviewees of the WCCC related group, in particular, strongly emphasised that the Sinus model and data offers very important information for church development purposes. A number of examples for a potential application of the model were given in the interviews.

Generally, the study showed that the milieus offer very helpful qualitative and quantitative data for the definition and comparison of target groups in the context of local churches. Sinus data and milieu descriptions for Germany and many other countries are available at rather low costs (or even for free); the model is designed for practical application; it is updated on a regular basis and can be combined with other empirical data of missiological research including participant observations of church leaders. In Germany, the Sinus milieus are a kind of ‘target group currency’ and an established model in sociological research and consumer studies. The Sinus milieu handbook on religious attitudes (MDG/Sinus 2005) is an especially recommendable source of information for churches and Christian researchers.

What I have introduced at the beginning of the research period in 2001 - to geographically localise the Sinus milieus on a map for church development purposes with the

help of the Microm approach<sup>2</sup> - was officially offered at the end of the research period by the Catholic church in Germany as a service for its parishes. I consider the provision of these maps as a very valuable support for local churches and would encourage the Protestant Church in Germany as well as the Free Churches to do the same for their congregations. But even if local milieu maps based on micro-geographical data are not available for local churches, the Sinus approach is still a very useful tool to understand and identify target groups on a local level.

Contextualisation should be understood as an always ongoing process. It is a dialogue between Christians, the specific culture and God. At its best, it gives way to the creativity of Christ to express himself incarnationally in the life of a local church and individual Christians. Milieu research can help considerably to understand the unchurched and offers practical tools to exegete the socio-psychological context of a local congregation, cities or regions. Due to the fact that Sinus milieu data is available for a lot of countries, milieu research is also a very useful source for intercultural missiological studies.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.microm-online.de](http://www.microm-online.de)

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