

Emerging Patterns of Church Participation. The Community Movement in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland

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Abstract

This article examines an emerging “community movement” in the national Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Finland. Emerging from the local level, with links to wider renewal networks across Protestant Churches, the movement consists of a variation of 30–40 worship communities that are based on strong roles for laymen, challenging the traditional models of church life. Many communities are expanding and drawing young adults, in contrast to general developments in the Church. This article asks: What kinds of patterns of participation exist among the members and how are they related to experiences of membership? The results of a quantitative survey (N=529), conducted 2017, revealed three types of participation: “traditional,” “community-oriented” and “experiential.” The main finding is the distinct community process typical to these communities, which is connected to a strong sense of membership, commitment, and contentment, and which is actualized through lay participation. The article sheds light on the developments in a specific Nordic majority church in response to a changing cultural environment.

Keywords: Finland, Church, community, participation, renewal

Introduction

Christianity and modernity have developed in close relationship with each other. In many European countries Protestant Churches were created after the Reformation, together with the emerging nation-states of early modernity, and their membership became part of the national identity.

Modernization has challenged Christian worldviews in many ways, among which the emphasis on individual freedom of choice has conflicted with the role of mass institutions, such as national majority Churches, as sources of meaning and belonging (Kühle et al. 2017; Woodhead 2016, 197; Inglehart 2018, 64). Membership in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland (later the ELCF) remained a strong part of the national identity until recently, but during the last few decades this union has faced a serious weakening, in particular among young adults, the “generation Y” (Niemelä 2015; Mikkola, Niemelä and Petterson 2007; Furseth et al. 2017, 45–49).

In terms of Christianity, different movements can be described in relation to their manner of relating to modernity. These include adapting to modern values, holding on to the old ones, and in some

cases, developing new ways of existence in modern contexts (Woodhead 2016, 197–213; McGuire 2008, 289). British sociologist Grace Davie has described movements within the traditional Churches that have managed to make Christianity relevant in modern contexts, calling them “mutations of the religious DNA” (Davie 2000, 192–94).

This article examines one such movement that has emerged within the national Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland during the last two decades, known as the “community movement.” The movement is minor in size, but since it associates with a wider phenomenon of renewal-oriented networks within traditional Churches in Europe, and since it is currently expanding in the ELCF, it is an interesting subject of study in terms of the developments of religious organizations in late modernity.

Kenneth Pargament (1997, 43), an American psychologist of religion, has stated that new religious movements emerge in the dynamic meeting between individual needs, situational and wider societal forces. This article examines the patterns of participation that are developing within the emerging community movement in the late modern context of Finland and discusses these patterns in light of the changes in the societal and religious landscapes. In order to set the foundations of this study and to define the research questions, the context, the main concepts and the theoretical framework are presented.

Institution or community?

American church historian Roger Haight notes that there are two dynamic forces that often pull churches in different directions: the dynamics of *community* and *institution*. The community involves “the creative energy of interacting people” with “shared bonds that hold a group together,” whereas institution is the objective structure that “controls and channels this energy” (Haight 2008, 47). A distinct development of the Nordic Churches has been their association with the nation-state and its institutions as part of the Nordic welfare model where social security has been externalized to state institutions (Kühle et al. 2017; Nivala 2008, 159). In this context the ELCF could also afford to build an institution run by highly educated professionals. This professionalization has had many benefits, but there are also disadvantages such as the strong distinction between clergy and laypeople, and the institutional appearance that in some cases might overshadow the community dimension in parish life (Thitz 2013, 16–17).

The need to renew the working culture has been recognized at the executive level of the ELCF. Concepts such as *community* and *participation* have featured prominently in its official strategies as the Church has strived to emphasize its function as a community rather than an institution (ELCF 2015). Finnish researcher and bishop in the ELCF, Häkkinen, has suggested that this new community paradigm in the ELCF has been adopted from the international ecumenical movement in which the theological model of *koinonia ecclesiologia*, which emphasizes sharing, companionship, and solidarity, has been developed in response to the challenges of the modern world (Häkkinen 2010, 63; Doyle 2000, 7–8). There have even been extensive developmental projects aimed at establishing the community paradigm, such as the *Church 2000 Process* and the *Tiellä – På Väg* project (“En route”) of 2011–2013 (ELCF 2016a). However, according to a follow-up study, structural changes aimed at transforming the working culture of a huge organization are not easy to bring about in practice since they require the challenging of deep-seated attitudes and power structures (Thitz 2013, 45–47, 87–89). On the other hand, more recent research has reported accounts of such developmental projects that did prove successful (Malkavaara and Valtonen 2019).

Under these circumstances, the “community movement” has emerged during the last two decades within the ELCF, mostly from the “grass-roots level,” and in part outside of the official endeavors of the established Church. It consists of a group of new types of worship communities (later NCWs) that are coexistent with local parishes and that attempt to revitalize parish life by building worship communities and making Christianity relevant for members of the new generations that are becoming alienated from the Church (Niemelä 2005). The movement does not form a single organization, but consists of loose networks that cross national and denominational boundaries, which Castells (1996) claims is typical of newer movements. The individual communities share common characteristics such as making the services more ‘culturally’ approachable through the use of contemporary language and music styles, modern technology, and more informal services, as well as high roles for volunteers in the implementation. “Lay” members are invited to take responsibilities ranging from practical tasks in the execution of the worship services to leadership and the planning of various community activities, events and small groups. The movement is still small, consisting of about 30–40 individual communities around the country, with participant figures of between one and five hundred each, but contrary to the general developments in the ELCF, it is expanding and attracting younger generations (ELCF 2016b; Hannikainen 2020).

On the organizational level, renewal-oriented networks within the traditional churches of Europe are among the impulses from which NCWs have drawn inspiration. Examples of these are the

Spiritual Renewal in Our Church association in Finland (Haapalainen 2015a), and the *New Wine* network and the *Alpha course* from England that have emerged from evangelical streams in the Anglican Church of England, which faced the challenges of the secular and pluralist society decades before the ELCF in Finland, and which came into partnership with the ELCF through the *Porvoo Communion* in 1995 (Porvoo Communion 2014). They are characterized by the so-called charismatic renewal as a means of renewing traditional Churches to respond to the challenge of the secularized and pluralist society (Hunt 2004; Bolger and Gibbs 2005). Theologically their approach to church as a community seems to be the application of the biblical principle of a *common priesthood of all believers* that is inherent in the global charismatic movement. According to American researchers of religion, Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori (2007), this principle is responsible for the certain *egalitarian* nature of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, as it gives all members equal access to God and to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and thus the possibility of exercising power and influence in the community (Miller and Yamamori 2007, 177–79; see also Woodhead 2016, 211). These impulses have been adapted and developed in the contexts of the local Lutheran parishes.

As discussed above, the emphasis of the Church as a *community* is emerging in the ELCF, even from different theological frameworks. However, lately the communities of worship have been recognized by Church officials, even as a possible future strategy of the Church (ELCF 2016c, 75). The report of the Bishop’s council on worship community states that the emergence of these communities, which seems to reflect the needs of the members, implies that the Church’s developmental projects of renewing Worship “have not reached their goals yet” (ELCF 2016b, 4).

Changing patterns of church membership

Participation in the European historical Churches has been characterized by Davie as “believing without belonging” (Davie 2002). The Scandinavian version, however, has been more that of “believing in belonging,” where a large majority of the population has Church membership even if this is not accompanied by high attendance rates at church services. In the last two decades this pattern has shown strong signs of weakening due to the increasing number of members resigning from the Church, young adult members in particular. Still, about 70 per cent of the Finnish population belong to the ELCF in 2019, of whom only a few per cent are actively engaged in the life of the Church in terms of attending Worship services on a regular basis (ELCF 2020; Kühle et al. 2017, 316–19).

The significance of traditional, close-knit communities has become weaker in modern societies. This has been attributed to the value of *individual freedom* and the rise of the modern society – its institutions and industrial enterprises (Wilson 1982). It has been argued, however, that the human need for community has not disappeared. “The community” in the modern information society has rather relocated to spheres of interaction that are less defined by locality and spatiality (Kurzban and Neuberg 2005; Delanty 2003, 30; Yeung 2004, 18–25). Moreover, membership in these contexts is more defined by consumerism and individual preferences, and is thus more temporary and “liquid” by nature (Baumann 2000). Sociologists Zygmunt Baumann and Ulrich Beck have pointed out that, paradoxically, the high demand for individuality creates a need for shared frameworks and identities in modern societies (Baumann 2000, 16; Beck 1986, 137). However, as people in the West are socialized in a culture that holds individual freedom and self-determination in high regard, it might be difficult for them to feel at home in traditional types of communities (Baumann 2001; Taylor 1995). According to British sociologist Gerard Delanty, modern neo-communality builds up from highly individualized actors who commit themselves to the collective goals and values on their own terms (Delanty 2003, 189–90).

American sociologist Peter Berger, among others, have pointed out that European societies are developing culturally towards a growing plurality, the co-existence of different ethnic, moral and religious communities, and different sub-cultures and counter-cultures (Berger 2014, 15). Given that the space of the ELCF and Christianity in Finnish society in general is becoming narrow, as society provides less support for the formation of religious identities, it might be that those who are committed to religious convictions have a need to form tighter communities that support Christian socialization and identity formation. This might lead them to assume stronger sub-cultural and counter-cultural positions (Kuhle et al. 2017; Hageaars, Halman and Moors 2003; Smith 1998, 89).

According to sociologists Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas (2008, 40), the declining pattern of membership in traditional Churches in Europe is the formal cultural membership. They also recognize that an emerging pattern among a minor – but not insignificant – group of churchgoers in Europe is that of *active participation*, based on personal choice. In the sociology of religion, changes in religious participation are often related with the ongoing transformation of cultural values in modern societies (McGuire 2008, 265). These changes have been described in terms of the “subjective turn” towards individual autonomy in moral and spiritual choices instead of external forms of institutional and traditional authorities (Taylor 1995). Some have suggested that

this development would lead to the strengthening of individualistic forms of religiosity (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). A national study of religious organizations in Finland, however, questions this view. Finnish researcher Kimmo Ketola (2007) discovered that individualism is not a common pattern among the expanding religious organizations, as they include “congregational” types of organizations that include strong collective and normative elements. Rather, he found a common factor to be the *instrumental* approach to religion that includes a promise of “religious empowerment” in terms of health, well-being and transformation. Moreover, it is often accompanied by a *democratization of means of access to the sacred*, which, according to Ketola, could be seen as a modern trait. He contrasts the instrumental approach with the *symbolic* approach that is more objective and non-personal, and often prevalent in traditional Churches. Ketola suggests that the *instrumental* approach to religion seems to respond to more individual-level human needs, whereas the declining *symbolic* approach seems to serve the continuity of the community and shared cultural/national identity (Ketola 2007; 2008, 351).

Church participation

There are several dimensions related to participation in religious organizations, including spiritual, social, ideological, experiential, cultural, and others (Stark and Glock 1968, 14–16). In a study of American Protestant Churches, Pargament (1997) found several factors that explained Church participation. Besides spirituality, the informants in his study looked for personal growth, identity, physical health and well-being, community, and “better world” (Pargament 1997, 46–59). American sociologist Dean Hoge and his colleagues discovered that variables of *commitment to core doctrinal beliefs*, *child-rearing* and *status-group membership* predicted church participation in Protestant churches in the US in the 1970s (Hoge and Carroll 1978; Hoge and Polk 1980). Other studies among North American Protestants have connected *investment into youth programmes*, *contemporary worship-styles*, *conservative beliefs* and *shared sub-cultural identity* to expansion and active participation in Protestant Churches (Haskell, Flat and Burgoyne 2016, 23–24; Smith 1998, 117–19). However, Hoge and Carroll (1978) conclude their extensive study on church participation by stating that future studies “should begin with an analysis of motivations generated by church-life itself,” referring to the complex processes related to social and doctrinal dimensions of church-life (Hoge and Carroll 1978, 107). This article addresses these dynamic processes within the community with a specific focus on the *experience of membership* in the Finnish context.

In social-scientific research on community membership, the benefits of membership on human well-being in some cohesive communities have been widely recognized. They have been discussed

through such concepts as *social identity* (Smith 1998), *social support* (Cohen and Syme 1984), *religious support* (VandeCreek et al. 1999), *social networks* (Berkman 1995), “*sense of community*” (MacMillan and Chavis 1986), *participation* (Campbell and Jovchelovitch 2000), and *social capital* (Putnam 2000), the last two of which are the most influential (Campbell and Jovchelovitch 2000).

Finnish researcher of Social Pedagogy Elina Nivala (2008), following Quintana (2005), has presented a model that describes the process leading to *full membership* in a society or a community. She describes three ingredients or levels through which a full experience of inclusion and membership is acquired in a process between the individual and the community: 1. Formal membership, 2. Participating membership and 3. Experienced membership. Figure 1 below illustrates the model.

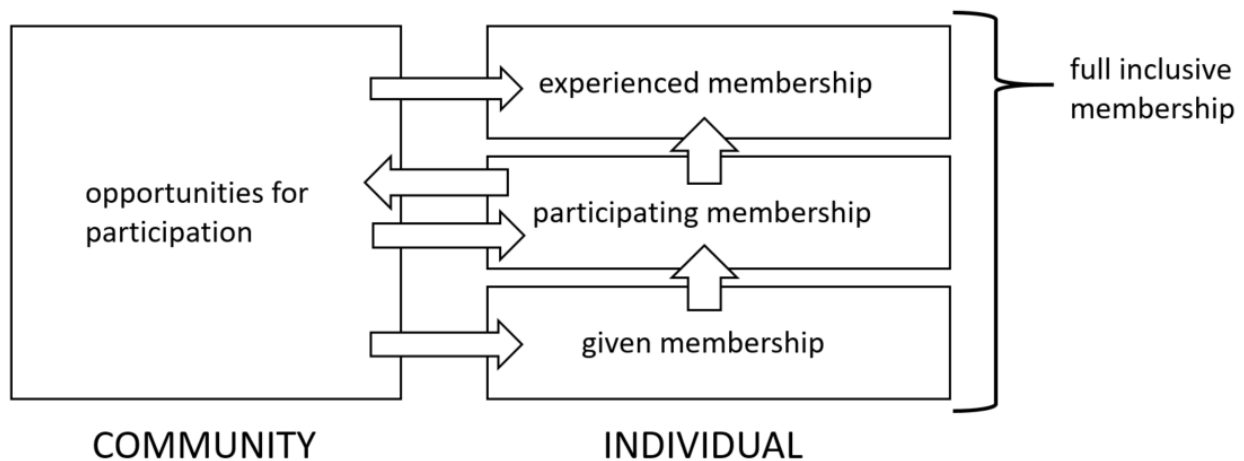


Figure 1. The model of full inclusive membership in terms of community-participation. (Hannikainen, following Nivala 2008, 169)

Based on her analysis on citizenship education, she proposes that the formation of *personally experienced membership* is a vital element of community identification, which produces loyalty to the community and solidarity towards other members. She notes that the experience of membership can, at some level, be based on shared cultural and historical meanings and symbols, but a stronger experience of membership often requires the possibility of active participation in the life of the community and the possibility of having an impact within it (Nivala 2008, 170–72). The experience of membership is considered here to relate to basic human needs, such as connectedness (Baumeister and Leary 1995), meaning (Pargament 1997), and social identity (Smith 1998).

Nivala’s approach is an application of *Participation theory*. This broad theory has different focuses and ideological stances, but the common feature in these approaches is *the role of community in*

decision making (Claridge 2004; Carpentier 2017, 86–88). The reason why it has been chosen here is for its capacity to identify the dynamic processes between individuals and the community that might explain membership in the Community movement from a social-psychological point of view, as the movement provides its members more extensive opportunities for lay agency and community participation in comparison to traditional Church life. Participation theory is frequently applied in sociologically oriented qualitative studies of religion, the study of diaconia in particular, and tends to be applied in research of a qualitative nature¹. This study explores new territory in an attempt to study these processes by means of quantitative analysis.

With regard to the three levels of membership presented above, a majority of the ELCF members seem to be content with level one formal membership that includes some benefits, such as Church rites related to life-span events. Identifying with cultural, historical and spiritual dimensions may be related to a certain level of experienced membership through participation in the rituals related to significant life-span events or a few yearly celebrations. Häkkinen (2010, 58) calls this type of membership *folk-churchy*. This does not imply that in the ELCF, “laymen” are restricted to passive roles only, as there are various duties where they are functioning actively, such as voluntary work, board membership, youth ministry and choir singing, for example (Porkka 2019; Häkkinen 2010, 187). Still, much of the work is planned and executed by paid workers only (Thitz 2013, 16–17). In Lutheranism, the primary vocation of lay people is considered to be located outside the Church walls in their daily life and professional calling (Häkkinen 2010, 237). Revivalist movements and lay-based organizations have been channels for lay activity within the Church, aimed at changing the religious and cultural structures as well as establishing more individual models of religious participation (Kääriäinen, Niemelä and Ketola 2005, 49–53). Nivala’s model suggests that the more extensive opportunities for community participation in terms of lay participation and even lay leadership in NCWs could imply opportunities for levels two and three forms of membership that are connected to stronger experiences of community membership.

Research question

NCWs provide their members new opportunities in functioning in roles of (lay) participation and influence in the context of a national Church, which might be connected to new kinds of patterns of participation. Nivala’s model of membership suggests that such opportunities for active participation might produce stronger experiences of membership and community identity (Nivala

¹ In this context, diaconia means Christian social practice. See Nordstokke (2012).

2008, 170–72). This article tests this hypothesis through the means of a quantitative study, with a focus on the role of *experienced membership in NCW participation*, and discusses the findings in the framework of the developments of religious organizations in (late) modern contexts. As it can be assumed that there are different patterns of participation within the data, the research questions are:

What kind of patterns of participation are found in the data?

and:

How is the strength of experienced membership related to these patterns?

Methods

Participation Theory is usually applied in research of a qualitative nature. This study explores new territory in an attempt to measure these processes by means of a quantitative analysis. I first describe how the research questions are addressed in terms of instrument building, data collection, and data analysis.

Instrument

In order to answer the research questions it was necessary to pose more detailed questions on how they are to be answered in terms of a quantitative study. This section describes the following:

- 1) *How are the different patterns of NCW participation to be measured?*
- 2) *How is the strength of experienced membership measured?*

Regarding the patterns of participation, the significant dimensions of NCW participation needed to be identified in order to perform sets of analyses that could find different patterns of participation in the data. The Communities of Practice theory by Etienne Wenger (1998) is fitting as a rough framework since it addresses the dimensions of membership relevant for this study. In Wenger's definition, a community of practice is *a learning community* that consists of three elements: 1. *Shared cause*, 2. *Community* and 3. *Practice*.² Sets of items that were identified through literature review and used as part of the research questionnaire are presented below in the framework of Wenger's dimensions of community life, including learning as its own dimension. As the research design includes multiple items and scales, the graphic figure (2) that depicts them all together is

² Wenger's definition follows the general definitions of a community in sociological literature with special reference to the dimension of Practice. For community definitions, see Crow (2007, 244).

presented first. The statistical information of the principal components analysis and the building of the consequent sum variables that are referred to in following paragraphs are reported in the results.



Figure 2. The structure of the research variables that measure different aspects of community participation. (Hannikainen, following Wenger 1998)

Shared cause

Fundamentally, the defining shared cause in Christianity is faith in God. More specifically, the shared cause in NCWs as communities of worship is likely to be the common act of worship, but also the mission of building lively Christian communities. It might also involve shared theological views.

The significance of the Christian faith was measured through a single item that tested the *importance of God* to the individual, which is a widely used variable that is used in European Value Studies, for example (Inglehart 2018, 69). The importance of common worship was measured through two different scales, approaching it both in terms of a *collective expression of spirituality* and in terms of *experiences*. These scales are included in the principal components matrix in the appendix (C). Finally, theological orientations were measured through the Christian Beliefs Scale

(Haskell, Flatt and Burgoyne 2016), that *per se* measures the positioning between two poles of theological orientations: “conservative” and “liberal.” The scale is included in the appendix (A).

Community dimension

Community dimension was approached from the perspective of the Participation theory, as described above, based on three aspects (Nivala 2008, 171). First, the level of *togetherness* with others in the community as an indicator of participation in the social life of the community was measured through five items. Second, the *importance of leadership* in the community was measured through five items that addressed the importance given to the leadership and their authority, as an indicator of the level of independence and dependence (Yeung 2004, 18–25). Finally, a scale was formed that measures the level at which the respondents experienced the community’s policies and conducts as *supportive* towards their participation in the community. The scales were tested and verified through a principal components analysis, the rotated loading matrix of which is included in the appendix (C). In terms of outcomes, single variables measuring the levels of *contentment* with and *commitment* to the community, as well as *years of attendance*, were also included. All items were measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

Practice dimension

Religious practice was measured on both individual and group levels. *Individual practice* was measured with two five-point items measuring frequency of prayer and Bible reading. Group-level “practice” was measured by two single items measuring frequency of NCW *attendance* and importance attributed to participation in Church *small-group meetings*, both measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

The level of participatory membership was measured through a dimension that is called “lay participation” due to the historical distinction between ordained religious professionals (the clergy) and non-professional members (the laity) in the Church. It was measured through a four-item scale that focused on functioning in personally meaningful positions of lay participation and influence in the Church community. The three variables that form the Lay Participation Scale are included in the component matrix in the appendix (C).

The style of participation was measured through a grouping item that rated four types of voluntary positions including “helpers,” “visionaries,” “leaders,” and those who did not volunteer/participate at all. This follows the typology of Haapalainen (2015b), and it is also related to the typology of

Wenger, which divides community members into series of circles beginning from leaders and core-group members in the middle and widening towards more peripheral spheres of participation (Wenger 2000, 219).

Learning dimension

Learning was measured with items that measured the sense of learning and personal/spiritual growth within the community. Interestingly, the items loaded to several factors, correlating the most with items indicating the *importance of leadership*. After removing items with significant side loadings, a sum variable including variables of learning and of the importance of leadership was formed. The loadings are reported in the component matrix in the appendix (C).

Experience of membership

The strength of the *experience of membership* that is discussed in Nivala's model (2008) is a key variable that indicates the level of inclusion in the community. This aspect was measured via a theory-based instrument comprising four items that include different aspects of the membership experience as described by Nivala (2008), namely identification with the community and its purpose, sense of togetherness with others, willingness to make sacrifices for its cause, as well as a variable designed for this specific case that describes the community as one's "spiritual home" (Ubani and Murtonen 2017). The Scale is included in the appendix (B).

Background variables

The sociodemographic background variables of the study included variables such as *gender, age, education, level of income, work status, life situation* and *level of religious upbringing*.

Data collection

For the data collection it was necessary to define the universe of the study. The term *community of worship* in the ELCF refers to a community that gathers in common worship apart from the local parish. There are about a hundred different kinds of such communities representing different language groups and traditional revivalist movements (ELCF 2016b). The NCWs that are not connected to any of the five traditional revival movements or to any language groups constitute the universe of this study. The number of these NCWs is estimated at between 30 and 40, reaching several thousand people.

The ten communities from which the data was collected were selected by three criteria. First, they needed to represent different types of communities in terms of age, size and location. Second, they needed to be willing to co-operate. And third, a minimum response rate of about 25 per cent of the

estimated membership size was required. From fifteen communities that were originally chosen, ten fulfilled the requirements and were selected for the study.

The data was collected in the spring of 2017 via a questionnaire that was available for the participants of these 10 communities in an electronic form through their mailing lists and on paper in their gatherings. In total, 529 satisfactorily completed forms were processed. The average response rate was 37.2 per cent. In response analysis the sociodemographic profile of the respondents followed the estimated structure of the initial population in terms of gender and age. Only with regard to the number of active and passive members, the active ones were over-presented in the data. The table (1) below describes the difference. The estimated size is the group sizes reported by the community leaders, and the dataset reports the distribution of respondents in the data. Because there are no official statistics, the estimated sizes may not be accurate, but should be considered as directional.

Table 1. The estimated and measured group sizes related to activeness in the community.

	Occasional	Regular	Volunteer
<i>Estimated size %</i>	44.3	25.7	31.0
<i>Dataset %</i>	29.4	20.2	51.4

Data analysis

The analysis of the data consisted of several stages. They included preliminary principal components analyses through which sum variables measuring different dimensions of community life were built. Then, together with single-item variables, they were used in the following phases of analyses in following order. First, a K-mean Cluster analysis with different numbers of clusters was conducted on the variables, resulting in the discovery of three different types of NCW participation. Second, the explanatory force of the independent variables regarding participation to the dependent variable of *experienced membership* was tested through a multivariate regression analysis in order to identify the role of experienced membership in different types of participation. Finally, the effects of *sociodemographic variables* in relation to experienced membership, as well as the effects of experienced membership on outcome variables such as contentment and commitment to the community, were measured through tests of differences of group means (t-test, anova and Kruskal-Wallis test).

The analyses brought up some issues regarding their reliability. There were some variables with non-normal distributions due to the nature of the data as a homogeneous group. This was dealt with

by using principal components analysis instead of factor analysis and Kruskal-Wallis test instead of anova.

The requirements of regression analysis, most of which are addressed in the results part, include normal distributions of the variables. Given that some of the sum variables were not normally distributed, they had to be adjusted to fit into the Gaussian curve. Those that were most skewed in the data, such as conservative and charismatic orientations, had to be reclassified into three groups and some, such as the variable of experienced membership, into four groups.

Results

The Scales that are described in the Instrument section include one existing scale and several that were created for this study and tested by a Principal components analysis in an explorative manner. The Religious Beliefs Scale was tested through a confirmatory factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation, KMO .870), which confirmed the assumption of two polar belief orientations, even though there was a third component just below eigenvalue one (0.85) with loadings of variables that indicated charismatic orientation. Because the existence of the “charismatic” orientation was assumed based on theoretical discussions (Hunt 2004), these three components were tested for their reliability (Cronbach’s alpha values 0.658–0.779), and sum variables measuring the *Charismatic*, *Conservative*, and *Liberal orientations* were built. All the other items that were operationalized from the research literature described in the previous section, except for the Experienced membership scale that was built on a theoretical basis, were built into a set of sum variables through a factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation, KMO .833) after removing variables with high side loadings (> about .30). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the whole scale was .829. The factor matrix is included in the appendix (C). The Experienced membership Scale was tested for its reliability through Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, and it turned out to have good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha 0.773), so the sum variable *Experienced membership* was formed. All of the single and sum variables, described above in the Instrument section, and their figures are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Sum and single variables measuring aspects of participation, their mean values, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients of the sum variables.

Dimension	Sum variable	M	SD	Alpha
Shared cause	<i>Charismatic orientation</i>	4.61	0.66	0.658
Shared cause	<i>Conservative orientation</i>	4.59	0.66	0.779
Shared cause	<i>Collective spirituality</i>	4,40	0,56	–
Shared Cause	<i>Worship experience</i>	4.28	0.75	0.608
Community	<i>Supportive structures</i>	4.11	0.74	0.614
Experienced membership	<i>Experienced membership</i>	4.07	0.72	0.773
Shared cause	<i>Importance of God</i>	3,83	0,58	–
Community	<i>Togetherness</i>	3.70	0.82	0.810
Practice	<i>Lay participation</i>	3.63	1.02	0.811
Practice	<i>Church attendance</i>	3.18	0.82	–
Practice	<i>Individual practice</i>	3.60	0.88	0.691
Community & Learning	<i>Leadership/Learning</i>	3.35	0.76	0.769
Practice	<i>Small-group</i>	3.30	0.87	–
Shared cause	<i>Liberal orientation</i>	1.54	0.82	0.734

The table shows the levels that the participants in general attach to each dimension of community participation. As a preliminary result this table presents the variables in the order in which the participants as a group valued them the most. Things like charismatic and conservative theological beliefs, collective worship, supportive structures, and strong experiences of membership characterize these communities as a whole.

Types of participation

K-mean cluster analysis was conducted in order to reveal different patterns of participation in the data. During the process the variables that had little significance to the analysis according to the anova table were removed from the final analysis. Table 3 below presents the three clusters and their most relevant characteristics (bolded). It needs to be noted that because of the skewness in the data, the percentages do not represent accurate proportions in the population.

Table 3. The main characteristics of the three types of NCW participation based on K-mean cluster analysis.

	Traditional (28 %)	Community- oriented (63 %)	Experiential (9 %)
<i>Liberal orientation</i>	1.41	1.32	3.20
<i>Worship experience</i>	3.88	4.47	4.02
<i>Collective worship</i>	4.00	4.63	3.99
<i>Togetherness</i>	2.87	4.05	3.39
<i>Lay participation</i>	2.44	4.12	3.24
<i>Leadership/Learning</i>	2.88	3.55	3.13
<i>Experienced membership</i>	3.30	4.43	3.59
<i>Personal practice</i>	3.60	3.84	2.18
<i>Conservative orientation</i>	4.65	4.77	3.48

The analysis revealed three types or patterns of participation. The first pattern is called “traditional,” and it refers to the pattern of attendance in services and personal devotion with no involvement in the “community process” that relates to variables of *Lay participation*, *Togetherness* with others and *Experienced membership*. The second pattern, “community-oriented,” included high rates in all measured dimensions (except for the *Liberal orientation*), including the highest levels of church attendance, individual and collective spirituality, as well as involvement in the “community process.” Interestingly, this type correlated significantly higher with regard to the importance of leadership than other types. The third type was characterized mainly by their high scores in collective and experiential aspects of worship. Their level of commitment to personal devotion and the leadership was weaker and thus they were named as “the experiential” type.

The role of experienced membership

The K-mean cluster analysis already revealed the connection between *Experienced membership* and the “community type” of participation that included such variables as *Lay agency*, *Togetherness*, and – perhaps surprisingly – the importance of *Leadership*. Next, the relationship of the variables that seemed to be connected to the strong experience of membership were tested for their explanatory force as independent variables in multivariate regression analysis. The sum variables *Worship Experience*, *Collective spirituality*, *Togetherness*, *Lay participation* and *Leadership* were included. The model explained together 58.9 per cent of the experienced membership in the community, $F(5, 512) = 147.00, p = .000$. *Lay participation* alone explained most of it, 40.0 per cent whereas the importance of *Collective spirituality* explained 14.2 per cent and the rest of the variables together only 4.7 per cent. Table 4 below presents the results of the analysis.

Table 4. The R Square values, Beta values, Standard errors, and t- and p-values of the explanatory variables in the linear multivariate regression analysis with *Experienced membership* as dependent variable (Stepwise).

Explanatory variable	R Square	B	SE	t-value	p-value
<i>Lay participation</i>	0.403	0.38	0.03	10.81	0.000
<i>Collective spirituality</i>	0.542	0.27	0.04	7.71	0.000
<i>Togetherness</i>	0.564	0.15	0.04	3.88	0.000
<i>Worship experience</i>	0.579	0.12	0.04	3.92	0.000
<i>Leadership/Learning</i>	0.589	0.12	0.04	3.65	0.000

Regarding the requirements of the linear regression analysis, the residuals were normally distributed, and there were no significant outliers. This confirms its validity in terms of the non-linearity and skewness of some variables as discussed above. The random dispersion of the points around the horizontal axis in the residual plot confirmed that the linear model is appropriate for the data. The analysis revealed the surprisingly high role of agency in comparison to the other variables for the experienced membership in terms of NCW participation.

Other explanatory variables

Finally, none of the socio-demographic background variables – *gender, age, wealth, education, social status, and religious upbringing* – explained experienced membership to a statistically significant degree. Interestingly, however, the lack of variation among the different age and sex groups, even between those who had or had not experienced Christian socialization in childhood, could imply that NCWs have succeeded in producing a milieu in which people of different ages and from different backgrounds are able to become involved and to feel they belong.

The statistically significant relationship of some other variables and the experienced membership was revealed through linear variance analysis, or its non-parametric alternative, the Kruskal-Wallis test. The variables and the statistical data are presented in the table below. For the sake of uniformity, all analyses were reported through mean rank values produced by the Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Table 5. Results of the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test by four variables.

	Mean rank	X²	DF	p
<i>Years of attendance</i> (0-2/2-4/4-8/9-12/12+)	225.2/235.8/274.8/271.2/277.5	11.56	4,497	.021
<i>Level of participation</i> (not/occasional/regular/volunteer)	154.0/135.3/231.7/345.4	187.14	3,527	.000
<i>Style of participation</i> (none (144)/ helper (209)/ planning & organizing (53)/ group leader (123))	154.0/263.6/346.1/356.3	136.75	3,527	.000
<i>Contentment towards the community</i> (little/middle/high)	145.5/239.9/324.9	70.88	2,527	.000

These analyses revealed that experienced membership was connected to several factors, even though it seems that the cause-effect relationship between these connections may not be unidirectional. In any case these statistically significant connections imply that the deepening experience of membership is a process where level of lay participation, collective spirituality,

length of attendance, style of participation, level of commitment and contentment towards the community all play a role. The community process that is offered in NCWs may be described as an upward spiral where each factor contributes to each other factor.

Discussion

This article addresses the patterns of Church participation made available by the Community movement in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and its communal model that offers members extensive opportunities to function in significant roles of (lay) participation as part of the community of practice. The Participation theory model of inclusive membership and the central role it attributes to participating membership as a means of strengthening the experience of full community membership was tested by means of quantitative analysis through two research questions: *What kind of patterns of participation exist in the data, and how is the experience of membership related to these patterns?* A multi-dimensional model of community participation was designed in reference to the framework of *Communities of practice* by Wenger (1998).

The results revealed, first, three significantly different patterns of NCW participation that were named as “traditional,” “community-oriented” and “experiential.” The Traditional type follows the traditional but decreasing pattern of ELCF participation, characterized by Church attendance and personal devotion (see Häkkinen 2010, 182). The Community-oriented type, which seems to represent the type that relates specifically to NCW participation and the opportunities for active involvement that it makes available, was characterized by high levels of involvement in the “community process.” The third type was characterized by excitement towards the modernized and innovative worship life of NCWs, but otherwise it represents a less committed membership.

Second, the results revealed that the community oriented pattern was significantly more connected to experienced membership than to the other types. In closer view, linear regression analysis revealed in particular that lay agency was highly connected to the experience of membership. Analyses of group mean values gave even more specific information: the level of influence and responsibility in lay participation was connected positively to the strength of experienced membership. The overall picture indicates that the “community process” was recognized to comprise of a set of variables that comply with the framework described by Nivala (2008). Even as the experienced membership variable was built on a theoretical basis, the discoveries of the analyses confirm the existence of the group processes that include participation, togetherness,

experienced membership, and commitment, which together form a deepening process of membership in the community.

The relatively strong liberal views of the “experiential” group as well as the inclusiveness of the community process in relation to the sociodemographic variables indicates a certain inclusiveness in NCWs, which allows different types and levels of participation. Even though a majority of the members shared the conservative and charismatic orientations as “common causes,” the “experientials” could still feel an even higher rate of experienced membership than the “traditional.” Thus theological orientation was not after all a defining shared cause in the community movement, as was suggested in the Instrument section. The only aspect where all three types scored equally highly were those related to the common worship, which confirms the nature of NCWs as communities of *worship*. Interestingly, the importance attributed to the leadership was significantly higher among those who committed to the community process in NCWs. The loading of the leadership items to the same component in Principal components analysis implies that the type of authority connected to them is *rational authority*. However, since the leadership component also included items related to moral guidance, *moral authority* also seems to be connected to those who were committed to the community process. Thus, even though the results assume a type of “democratization” in the NCW model, the role of leadership significant to a number of participants implies that the “democratization” of the movement is more about the biblical idea of a “common priesthood” rather than the ultimate ideals of participatory democratic ideology, for example (Häkkinen 2011; Miller and Yamamori 2007, 177).

In terms of reliability, given that the universe of the study was a limited group of people with a certain homogeneity, it was to be expected that some of the variables that would have a normal distribution in wider populations, in this case did not. The solution was to carry out non-parametric analyses, ones that are not sensitive to non-normality, and to transform the sum variables before conducting the linear regression analysis. These procedures proved to be useful: the residuals were normally distributed in the consequent linear regression analysis and there were no outliers, which attested to their reliability. Regarding the initial skewness of the data with regard to the level of activeness in the community, it had no effect on the results other than the proportions of different groups that were identified through cluster analysis, as it was the only method that measures respondents and not variables. The sizes of the groups were not important as the aim was to identify different types, not proportions. The study was designed with reference to this particular movement and the results can be considered valid in this specific universe.

The findings of this study can be discussed on different levels. On the level of *individuals*, this research has proven that these close-knit but still inclusive communities are able to produce personally significant types of membership in late-modern contexts. NCWs offer opportunities for different types of engagement, of which the community-oriented type was connected to the strongest personal investments and consequently the most personal rewards. On the level of *the Church and religious movements*, the community movement represents a type of Church renewal-oriented aimed at renewing Church life and also reviving spirituality in the Church. Theologically they represent a more conservative but inclusive type, which might be related to the influence of the Charismatic movement (see also Hannikainen 2020). The inclusiveness of the community process as well as the connection of the experiential type of participation with more liberal views implies that the community movement is in some measure capable of staying outside of the liberal-conservative division that is deepening in the overall picture of the ELCF. These characteristics might be one reason why NCWs are able to draw members of different age groups and backgrounds. On the *societal* level, the influence of societal secularization in which society at large no longer supports Christian identity might reflect a need for tighter communities of identity. On the level of social structures, it is possible that the emerging emphasis of the community in the Church might reflect the gap that the late modern society has regarding the need for belonging, meaning and – at least in some cases – spirituality.

In conclusion, the complexity of changes in social, cultural and religious landscapes challenges not only religious groups, but also research into them. This study explored new ground in the area of religious organizations in a late-modern context and produced intriguing results with regard to different types of participation. The results invite further studies on the subject. In terms of empirical research, the methodology should be tested and developed further. It would also be useful to take a multi-method approach that would yield more detailed information about the dynamics that are related to participating membership in Church-based communities.

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Appendix

A) Religious Beliefs Scale (Likert 1–5)

1. God performs miracles in answer to prayer
2. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of my sins
3. It is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians
4. I have committed my life to Christ
5. The beliefs of the Christian faith need to change over time to stay relevant
6. All major religions are equally good and true
7. The Bible is the product of human thinking about God, so some of its teachings are wrong or misguided
8. Only those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ will receive eternal life
9. Jesus rose from the dead with a real flesh and blood body, leaving behind an empty tomb
10. Speaking in tongues is a valid expression of worship for today

B) Strength of Experienced Membership Scale, 4 items, (Likert scale 1–5).

1. To what extent do the following factors explain your participation in the community? It offers me a spiritual community that could be described as my “spiritual home.”
2. What do you think of the following claim, how well does it describe you and your relationship with the community?
I experience mutual belonging with the others in the community.
3. What do you think of the following claim, how well does it describe you and your relationship with the community?
I associate the goals of the community with my own goals.
4. What do you think of the following claim, how well does it describe you and your relationship with the community? I am ready to sacrifice my time and resources for the sake of the community.

C) Rotated component matrix (Principal components, Varimax-rotation, KMO .856).

What do you think about the following claims concerning yourself? (Likert 1–5)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>I spend time with other community-members also in my free time</i>	.823					
<i>I have important relationships in the community</i>	.814					
<i>Connection with other people is an important part of my participation</i>	.659					
<i>Interaction with other community members is important for me</i>	.612					
<i>I receive emotional support from others in the community</i>	.546	.311				
<i>I have a meaningful task in the community</i>		.821				
<i>My contribution to the community has a positive influence on others</i>	.334	.781				
<i>Possibility to participate in the work is important reason for my participation</i>		.753				
<i>The community and its leaders are important authorities in my life.</i>			.840			
<i>The community sets clear boundaries in my life.</i>			.806			
<i>The personnel is important part of my participation</i>		.318	.696			
<i>The teaching in the community has opened me a new way to live</i>			.639			
<i>I get to learn and grow in the community</i>			.527			
<i>The Word and the sacraments strengthen my relationship with God</i>				.814		
<i>My spirituality would be incomplete without my congregation</i>				.745		
<i>Church attendance strengthens my relationship to God</i>				.648		
<i>It is allowed to disagree and question in the community</i>					.745	
<i>I don't feel pressure to participate to work</i>					.742	
<i>One does not need to act in a certain way to be accepted here</i>					.735	
<i>Innovative worship is important for my participation</i>						.745
<i>The differences to traditional worship do not bother me</i>						.745
<i>The type of music and worship are important for me</i>						.609