

Sustainable Development and Religion. A European Perspective

Rozwój zrównoważony i religia. Perspektywa europejska

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Abstract

Religion is an important factor associated with sustainable development. Based on the data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) – Religion IV, we analysed religiosity in 20 European countries, taking into account declarations of religiosity, frequency of religious practices, religious beliefs, and attitudes towards members of other religious groups and non-believers. We have also examined how declarations of religiosity have changed since 1991 and compared the results with the ones from the European Social Survey.

Key words: sustainable development, religion, religious practices, beliefs, Europe, International Social Survey Programme

Streszczenie

Religia jest istotnym czynnikiem powiązaniem ze zrównoważonym rozwojem. Wykorzystując dane International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Religion IV przeprowadzono analizę religijności w 20 krajach Europy. Uwzględniono deklaracje religijności, częstość praktyk religijnych, przekonania religijne oraz stosunek do przedstawicieli innych religii i niewierzących. W zakresie deklaracji religijności prześledzono jej zmiany od 1991 roku oraz porównano z wynikami European Social Survey.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój zrównoważony, religia, praktyki religijne, przekonania, Europa, International Social Survey Programme

Introduction

Sustainable development aims at achieving physical, mental and social well-being in harmony with economic development and environmental protection. Religion is an important factor in shaping this well-being.

Researchers from the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) analysed the causal mechanisms for different dimensions of religiosity – from the perspective of sustainable development. The results of empirical research confirm that different dimensions of religion exert an influence on 12 elements of the economic pillar of sustainable development, 4 elements of the environmental pillar, and as many as 40 elements of the social pillar of sustainable development (e.g., in the area of health and well-

being, education, social capital, and social conflicts) (Basedau, Gobien, Prediger, 2017).

Religion plays a fundamental role in shaping societies, not only through its direct influence on human behaviour but above all, through its effects on formal and informal norms and values, as well as public discourses. Research on the social dimension of sustainable development has shown that a number of religious dimensions exert a positive influence on physical and mental health as well as on the general well-being, while a significant religious diversity is negatively correlated with well-being. Regarding physical health, the risk of cancer and sexually transmitted diseases is lower for religious people, for example. Many studies have shown that religiosity can prevent harmful behaviour such as drug abuse. Studies on democracy have provided evidence that Christian

and Hindu countries are, on average, more democratic and better governed than Muslim or Orthodox Christian countries (it remains unclear, though, whether this is due to the predominant religious tradition, the level of secularization or some other factors). As far as conflict is concerned, most researchers agree that the dominance of one religious group and parallel ethnic and religious cleavages increase the risk of conflict (Basedau, Gobien, Prediger, 2017). Moreover, religion is often perceived as the main cause of conflict, both within societies and internationally. On the other hand, the influence of religion on promoting peace-building is also emphasized (Silvestri, Mayall, 2015).

For these reasons, it is crucial to study religiosity- in this case the religiosity of Europeans. The article attempts to examine religiosity in contemporary Europe based on the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) research carried out as part of the Religion IV module. The aim is to answer the following research questions: (1) how often do Europeans declare that they are religious and have these declarations changed over time? (2) how often do Europeans engage in religious practices? (3) how common are religious beliefs? (4) how frequent are negative attitudes towards members of other religions? These questions are asked in the context of international comparisons. The surveys were conducted in: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Iceland, Lithuania, Germany, Norway, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden, Hungary, Great Britain, and Italy. Although the study does not cover all European countries, almost all areas of Europe are represented¹.

Methodology

The International Social Survey Programme is an international research programme aimed at regular measurement of variables covering a broad scope of social life throughout the world. The ISSP surveys are repeated every couple of years (starting from 1985), which allows for observing changes in the measured phenomena. The ISSP has a modular structure, with each module devoted to a particular topic (e.g., religion, environment, social networks, perception of the role of government, etc.). Currently, it includes 11 modules, within which 34 studies have been carried out (another 4 are still being developed)².

The ISSP Religion IV survey (2018)³ was conducted in 33 countries around the world, including 20 countries in Europe. Overall, the European sample consisted of 27,284 respondents (around 1,350 from

each country, on average). The samples were selected randomly (simple random sampling, systematic sampling and proportionate stratified sampling). Various research techniques were used to collect the data: face-to-face interviews (computer-assisted and traditional questionnaire interviews), indirect (telephone) interviews and survey questionnaires (both paper and online)⁴.

The issue of religion and religiosity was also addressed in other surveys that covered all or most European countries. These include in particular: the Euro-barometer Survey (2010 and 2019) and the Pew Research Poll (2015). Single variables concerning religion were also used in the Gallup Survey (2007, 2008, 2009) and in the European Social Survey (2019/2020 and earlier).

However, the Euro-barometer Survey included only 4 questions about religion (affiliation to a religion or faith, self-declaration of religiosity, frequency of religious practices and frequency of praying). Consequently, these data are not sufficient for conducting more in-depth analyses, although they can be useful for observing major trends. When it comes to the Pew Research Poll, only one survey dealt with religiosity in Europe. Since it contained many variables, it could potentially enable conducting an in-depth analysis. However, this study covered only Central and Eastern Europe. The Gallup Survey contained only one question on religiosity. Hence, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) with its module on religion seems to be the most promising research programme for cross-European comparative studies that would include many variables. What is more, the ISSP surveys on religion were carried out four times (in 1991, 1998, 2008 and 2018), which enables us to observe some trends in religiosity. The drawback is that different countries participated in the surveys in different years (for details, see Table 1).

It is pointed out that pan-European research should take into account the religious map of Europe. The European continent can be divided into four main areas of religious influence: (1) the Catholic Church is the main religious influence in central and southern parts of Europe (Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, central and southern part of Ireland, Italy, Malta, South Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, part of the Netherlands, Latvia, and Ukraine); (2) Protestantism is the main religious influence in central and northern areas (Iceland, England and Northern Ireland, Central and Northern Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, part of Hungary, the Netherlands, and Belarus); (3) the Greek and Russian Or-

¹Data from the 2018 surveys released in autumn 2020.

²More information on the ISSP can be found at: <http://w.issp.org/menu-top/home/>.

³ISSP Research Group. International Social Survey Programme: Religion IV – ISSP 2018. *GESIS Data Archive, ZA7570 Data file Version 2.0.0*, Cologne 2020.

⁴For more details, see: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7570.

Table 1. Declarations of religiosity by country and survey year

| | | | ISSP 1991 | ISSP 1998 | ISSP 2008 | ISSP 2018 | ESS 2018 | ISSP 2008- 2018 |
|---------|-------------------|---|------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Country | Austria | n | 613 | 591 | 477 | 506 | 892 | |
| | | % | 61.2% | 60.1% | 46.8% | 42.7% | 35.7% | -4.1% |
| | Bulgaria | n | 557 | | | 537 | 516 | |
| | | % | 50.5% | | | 55.5% | 23.5% | |
| | Croatia | n | | | 926 | 627 | 644 | |
| | | % | | | 77.1% | 63.7% | 35.6% | -13.4% |
| | Czech Republic | n | 296 | | 283 | 368 | 405 | |
| | | % | 24.2% | | 18.7% | 27.5% | 16.9% | + 8.8% |
| | Denmark | n | 313 | | 435 | 244 | | |
| | | % | 28.1% | | 21.7% | 15.2% | | -6.5% |
| | Finland | n | | | 445 | 396 | 791 | |
| | | % | | | 39.2% | 34.0% | 45.1% | -5.2% |
| | France | n | 319 | | 698 | 247 | 664 | |
| | | % | 28.2% | | 28.4% | 27.5% | 33.0% | -0.9% |
| | Spain | n | 1401 | | 1021 | 615 | 479 | |
| | | % | 56.3% | | 43.1% | 36.9% | 28.7% | -6.2% |
| | Iceland | n | | | | 465 | | |
| | | % | | | | 40.7% | | |
| | Lithuania | n | | | | 520 | 786 | |
| | | % | | | | 52.6% | 42.8% | |
| | Germany | n | 413 ⁵ | 614 ⁶ | 653 | 552 | 763 | |
| | | % | 41.3% | 45.6% | 38.3% | 32.9% | 32.4% | -5.4% |
| | Norway | n | 581 | 511 | 375 | 387 | 279 | |
| | | % | 37.9% | 33.9% | 35.0% | 31.7% | 19.8% | -3.3% |
| | Russia | n | 747 | 295 | 585 | 801 | | |
| | | % | 43.9% | 10.0% | 57.6% | 52.0% | | -5.6% |
| | Slovakia | n | | | 683 | 598 | 510 | |
| | | % | | | 60.0% | 45.2% | 47.1% | -14.8% |
| | Slovenia | n | 371 | 766 | 401 | 613 | 408 | |
| | | % | 36.9% | 36.8% | 37.7% | 58.2% | 31.0% | + 20.5% |
| | Switzerland | n | 447 | | 529 | 713 | 573 | |
| | | % | 37.1% | | 43.0% | 31.0% | 37.2% | -12.0% |
| | Sweden | n | 188 | | 222 | 239 | 307 | |
| | | % | 15.8% | | 18.0% | 14.0% | 19.9% | -4.0% |
| | Hungary | n | 453 | | 351 | 387 | 436 | |
| | | % | 45.3% | | 34.8% | 38.7% | 26.2% | 3.9% |
| | Great Britain | n | 312 | 529 | 1354 | 474 | 556 | |
| | | % | 38.8% | 42.1% | 44.0% | 32.5% | 25.2% | -11.5% |
| | Italy | n | 648 | 665 | 712 | 640 | 1340 | |
| | | % | 64.3% | 67.7% | 66.0% | 53.7% | 48.8% | -12.3% |

thodox Churches are dominant in south-eastern areas (Greece and part of Cyprus and Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia, and Belarus); (4) Islam is influential over the eastern part of Europe (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Albania and parts of Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Barrett, 2001).

Religious diversity in contemporary Europe has received much attention of researchers, who in their studies focus on one or several European countries or on a particular region of Europe: Eastern Europe

(e.g., Pickel, Sammet, 2012; Tomka, 2011; Saghal, Cooperman, Schiller, 2017), Western Europe (e.g., Halman, 2004; Nicolet, Tresch, 2009), or the entire Europe (e.g., Coutinho, 2016; Cipriani, 2010; Liedhegener, Odermatt, 2013).

Self-declarations of religiosity

For self-declarations of religiosity, the responses *extremely religious*, *very religious* and *somewhat religious* were added together to create one variable value (*religious*), which was then counted. The same procedure was used for the data sets collected in

⁵West Germany

⁶West Germany.

1991, 1998, 2008 and in 2018, i.e., when the ISSP included the module on religion. Table 1 displays the distribution of this variable, with the last column showing the differences in results for the last decade (from 2008 to 2018). Table 1 also includes data collected in the 2018 European Social Survey, which allows for comparing the ISSP data and the ESS data collected in the same year.

As can be seen, the differences between these two are significant in almost every case. While in the ISSP survey, religiosity was measured with a word scale, which was an ordinal scale (obviously after the response *I don't know* was excluded), in the ESS the analogous variable was measured with an interval scale consisting of 10 points (from 0 to 9) – with only the most extreme values described. Thus, it was the researcher's task to decide which points on the scale should be included in the category *religious*. Unavoidably, such decisions tend to be arbitrary. I decided to take a *broad* approach and to include points 6, 7, 8 and 9 in the category *religious*. Nevertheless, the differences between the ESS and ISSP results are very noticeable (and would be even bigger if points 7, 8 and 9 were combined). How can these discrepancies be explained? They may result from using structurally different measurement tools: questions that contain an ordinal variable (with all values described), and questions that contain an interval variable (with only extreme values described and numbers for the remaining values). The following conclusion can be drawn: when measuring the level of religiosity based on self-declarations, the questions to which answers are given in the form of a number scale that does not contain descriptions of the intensity of a given feature, except for extreme points (for example, *very religious* vs. *definitely non-religious*) are more likely to generate more negative choices, as compared to questions with all possible answers described (e.g., *very religious*, *rather religious*, *definitely non-religious*, etc.)⁷.

Examining declarations of religiosity over time, we can observe a general downward trend: Europeans see themselves as becoming less and less religious. Obviously, this thesis requires further research to be confirmed. In this analysis, we rely on fragmentary data and moreover, the surveys that would allow for a complete, or even cursory description of changes in religiosity were not conducted in all countries. Nevertheless, the overall trend is clearly visible.

Countries for which we have relatively complete data and which show a clear downward trend in declared religiosity include: Croatia (a decrease of more than 13% in the percentage of people who consider themselves religious over the last 10 years), Slovakia (a decrease of nearly 15% over the same period), Switzerland (a decrease of 12%), Great Brit-

ain (a decrease of almost 12%), and Italy (a decrease of over 12%). In all these countries, decreases amount to over 10%. An interesting trend can be observed in Great Britain and Italy. These countries saw a slight increase in the number of people who consider themselves religious between 1991 and 2008, to be followed by a decrease in 2018.

In Austria, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Germany, Norway, Russia and Sweden, the number of respondents who consider themselves to be religious fell by about 3-6% between in 2008 and 2018. In Bulgaria, this decrease amounted to 5%, but in the period from 1991 to 2018. If we take into account a longer perspective (from 1991 to 2018), then in many countries the decreases in declared religiosity are even greater (obviously, this comparison can be made only if the data for 1991 is available). An even sharper decline can be observed in Austria (18.5%), Denmark (12.9%), Spain (19.4%), and Germany (12.7%).

An increase in declared religiosity is observed in 3 countries, all of which are former *people's democracies*. These are: Slovenia (an increase of over 20% between 2008 and 2018), the Czech Republic (an increase of approx. 9%), and Hungary (an increase of approx. 4%). France, with the percentage of declared religiosity remaining basically at the same level (difference below 1%) throughout the observation period (1991-2018), is a special case here. It was already some years ago that researchers concluded that: *traditional religious beliefs and involvement in institutionalized religion vary considerably from one country to another; and they have steadily declined throughout Western Europe, particularly since the 1960s. Studies have often reported that many Western Europeans have ceased to be regular church-goers today outside of special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, weddings and funerals, a pattern especially evident among the young* (Norris, Inglehart, 2004).

After analysing changing trends in religiosity, let us look at differences in declared religiosity between inhabitants of individual countries in 2018. The following countries have the highest percentage of respondents who consider themselves religious: Croatia (63.7%), Slovenia (58.2%), Bulgaria (55.5%), Italy (53.7%), Lithuania (52.6%), and Russia (52%) – except for Italy, these are all countries of the former Eastern Bloc. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who consider themselves religious is the lowest in Sweden (14%) and Denmark (15.2%), as well as in the Czech Republic and France (27.5%). The Czech Republic is an interesting case here. This country is usually considered to be the most secularized in Europe. However, the percentage of people who consider themselves religious in the Czech Republic is by no means the lowest in the group of countries under study. It stands at 27.5% and it shows a clear

⁷Obviously, after removing responses *I don't know*, *hard to tell*, etc., which reduce the level of measurement to the nominal one.

Table 2. Self-declarations of religiosity by country

| | | | Very religious | Somewhat religious | Neither religious nor non-religious | Somewhat non-religious | Definitely non-religious |
|---------|----------------|---|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Country | Austria | n | 158 | 348 | 180 | 163 | 336 |
| | | % | 13.3% | 29.4% | 15.2% | 13.8% | 28.4% |
| | Bulgaria | n | 117 | 420 | 184 | 85 | 162 |
| | | % | 12.1% | 43.4% | 19.0% | 8.8% | 16.7% |
| | Croatia | n | 275 | 352 | 149 | 48 | 160 |
| | | % | 27.9% | 35.8% | 15.1% | 4.9% | 16.3% |
| | Czech Republic | n | 74 | 294 | 378 | 259 | 332 |
| | | % | 5.5% | 22.0% | 28.3% | 19.4% | 24.8% |
| | Denmark | n | 58 | 186 | 570 | 222 | 562 |
| | | % | 3.6% | 11.6% | 35.7% | 13.9% | 35.2% |
| | Finland | n | 89 | 307 | 267 | 126 | 375 |
| | | % | 7.6% | 26.4% | 22.9% | 10.8% | 32.2% |
| | France | n | 42 | 205 | 222 | 149 | 283 |
| | | % | 4.7% | 22.8% | 24.6% | 16.5% | 31.4% |
| | Spain | n | 116 | 499 | 388 | 316 | 395 |
| | | % | 6.8% | 29.1% | 22.6% | 18.4% | 23.0% |
| | Iceland | n | 86 | 379 | 273 | 145 | 260 |
| | | % | 7.5% | 33.2% | 23.9% | 12.7% | 22.7% |
| | Lithuania | n | 257 | 263 | 270 | 32 | 162 |
| | | % | 26.1% | 26.7% | 27.4% | 3.3% | 16.5% |
| | Germany | n | 138 | 414 | 209 | 191 | 725 |
| | | % | 8.2% | 24.7% | 12.5% | 11.4% | 43.2% |
| | Norway | n | 103 | 284 | 343 | 116 | 375 |
| | | % | 8.4% | 23.3% | 28.1% | 9.5% | 30.7% |
| | Russia | n | 263 | 538 | 164 | 144 | 431 |
| | | % | 17.1% | 34.9% | 10.6% | 9.4% | 28.0% |
| | Slovakia | n | 192 | 406 | 267 | 226 | 230 |
| | | % | 14.5% | 30.7% | 20.2% | 17.1% | 17.4% |
| | Slovenia | n | 144 | 469 | 136 | 79 | 226 |
| | | % | 13.7% | 44.5% | 12.9% | 7.5% | 21.4% |
| | Switzerland | n | 320 | 393 | 489 | 252 | 849 |
| | | % | 13.9% | 17.1% | 21.2% | 10.9% | 36.9% |
| | Sweden | n | 63 | 176 | 552 | 348 | 572 |
| | | % | 3.7% | 10.3% | 32.3% | 20.3% | 33.4% |
| | Hungary | n | 70 | 317 | 172 | 208 | 232 |
| | | % | 7.0% | 31.7% | 17.2% | 20.8% | 23.2% |
| | Great Britain | n | 114 | 360 | 315 | 168 | 502 |
| | | % | 7.8% | 24.7% | 21.6% | 11.5% | 34.4% |
| | Italy | n | 179 | 461 | 176 | 152 | 223 |
| | | % | 15.0% | 38.7% | 14.8% | 12.8% | 18.7% |
| Total | | n | 2858 | 7071 | 5704 | 3429 | 7392 |
| | | % | 10.8% | 26.7% | 21.6% | 13.0% | 27.9% |

increase (of nearly 9% between 2008 and 2018, after a fall of approx. 6% between 1991 and 1998).

Let us take a closer look at self-declarations of religiosity in individual countries (Table 2). Those who consider themselves to be very religious most often live in Croatia (27.9%) and Lithuania (26.1%), followed by Russia (17.1%), Italy (15%), Slovakia (14.5%), Switzerland (13.9%), Slovenia (13.7%), Austria (13.3%), and Bulgaria (12.1%). On the other hand, people who declare themselves definitely non-religious most often live in Germany (43.2%), Switzerland (36.9%), Denmark (35.2%), Great Britain (34.4%), Sweden (33.4%), Finland (32.2%), France (31.4%), and Norway (30.7%). The respondents who are the least likely to declare themselves non-religious

come from Croatia (16.3%), Lithuania (16.5%), Bulgaria (16.7%), Slovakia (17.4%), and Italy (18.7%).

The data shows that countries of the former Eastern Bloc along with Italy are the *mainstay* of religiosity in Europe. On the other hand, non-religious attitudes are predominant in the Scandinavian countries as well as in Germany, France and Great Britain.

Religious practices

Another common indicator of religiosity is the frequency of religious practices. The original variable in the ISSP surveys had the following values: (1) several times a week or more often, (2) once a week,

Table 3. Frequency of religious practices by country

| | | | At least once a month | At least once a year | Less than once a year or never |
|---------|----------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Country | Austria | N | 236 | 420 | 536 |
| | | % | 19.8% | 35.2% | 45.0% |
| | Bulgaria | N | 105 | 396 | 436 |
| | | % | 11.2% | 42.3% | 46.5% |
| | Croatia | N | 346 | 342 | 291 |
| | | % | 35.3% | 34.9% | 29.7% |
| | Czech Republic | N | 152 | 248 | 993 |
| | | % | 10.9% | 17.8% | 71.3% |
| | Denmark | N | 91 | 465 | 1075 |
| | | % | 5.6% | 28.5% | 65.9% |
| | Finland | N | 93 | 339 | 778 |
| | | % | 7.7% | 28.0% | 64.3% |
| | France | N | 99 | 205 | 622 |
| | | % | 10.7% | 22.1% | 67.2% |
| | Spain | N | 398 | 302 | 1020 |
| | | % | 23.1% | 17.6% | 59.3% |
| | Iceland | N | 88 | 354 | 693 |
| | | % | 7.8% | 31.2% | 61.1% |
| | Lithuania | N | 280 | 364 | 329 |
| | | % | 28.8% | 37.4% | 33.8% |
| | Germany | N | 227 | 323 | 1173 |
| | | % | 13.2% | 18.7% | 68.1% |
| | Norway | N | 102 | 347 | 789 |
| | | % | 8.2% | 28.0% | 63.7% |
| | Russia | N | 186 | 434 | 926 |
| | | % | 12.0% | 28.1% | 59.9% |
| | Slovakia | N | 470 | 201 | 650 |
| | | % | 35.6% | 15.2% | 49.2% |
| | Slovenia | N | 228 | 400 | 442 |
| | | % | 21.3% | 37.4% | 41.3% |
| | Switzerland | N | 288 | 633 | 1298 |
| | | % | 13.0% | 28.5% | 58.5% |
| | Sweden | N | 113 | 386 | 1256 |
| | | % | 6.4% | 22.0% | 71.6% |
| | Hungary | N | 147 | 248 | 605 |
| | | % | 14.7% | 24.8% | 60.5% |
| | Great Britain | N | 271 | 151 | 807 |
| | | % | 22.1% | 12.3% | 65.7% |
| | Italy | N | 446 | 338 | 405 |
| | | % | 37.5% | 28.4% | 34.1% |
| Total | | N | 4366 | 6896 | 15124 |
| | | % | 16.5% | 26.1% | 57.3% |

(3) two or three times a month, (4) once a month, (5) several times a year, (6) about once a year, (7) less than once a year, (8) never. For the purposes of the study, these values were grouped as follows: *at least once a month* (responses from 1 to 4), *at least once a year* (responses 5 and 6), *less than once a year or never* (responses 7 and 8). Frequent religious practices (at least once a month) are most common among inhabitants of Italy (37.5%), Slovakia (35.6%), Croatia (35.3%) and Lithuania (28.8%), and to some extent also Spain (23.1%), Slovenia (21.3%) and Austria (19.8%) (Table 3). On the other hand, very rare religious practices (or lack of religious practices) are declared mainly by inhabitants

of Sweden (71.6%), Czech Republic (71.3%), Germany (68.1%), France (67.2%), Denmark (65.9%), Great Britain (65.7%), Finland (64.3%), Norway (63.7%), Iceland (61.1%), and Hungary (60.5%). As it was the case with self-declarations of religiosity, religious practices are more frequent in some former Eastern Bloc countries and in Italy (to some extent also in Spain), while inhabitants of the Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and the United Kingdom (to some extent also Hungary and the Czech Republic) do not engage in religious practices or do it very rarely. It can be concluded that the declared frequency of religious practices is consistent with self-declarations of religiosity.

Table 4. Religious beliefs by country

| | | | Believe in afterlife | Believe in heaven | Believe in hell | Believes in religious miracles | Believe in the supernatural powers of deceased ancestors |
|---------|----------------|---|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Country | Austria | N | 619 | 460 | 329 | 722 | 435 |
| | | % | 71.9% | 53.4% | 38.2% | 83.9% | 50.5% |
| | Bulgaria | N | 274 | 265 | 248 | 264 | 214 |
| | | % | 75.7% | 73.2% | 68.5% | 72.9% | 59.1% |
| | Croatia | N | 553 | 572 | 519 | 523 | 286 |
| | | % | 82.3% | 85.1% | 77.2% | 77.8% | 42.6% |
| | Czech Republic | N | 484 | 377 | 293 | 385 | 421 |
| | | % | 70.0% | 54.6% | 42.4% | 55.7% | 60.9% |
| | Denmark | N | 511 | 357 | 154 | 286 | 260 |
| | | % | 77.0% | 53.8% | 23.2% | 43.1% | 39.2% |
| | Finland | N | 501 | 385 | 229 | 332 | 219 |
| | | % | 81.6% | 62.7% | 37.3% | 54.1% | 35.7% |
| | France | N | 364 | 233 | 166 | 309 | 187 |
| | | % | 75.1% | 48.0% | 34.2% | 63.7% | 38.6% |
| | Spain | N | 710 | 641 | 467 | 551 | 434 |
| | | % | 72.6% | 65.5% | 47.8% | 56.3% | 44.4% |
| | Iceland | N | 641 | 383 | 140 | 401 | 324 |
| | | % | 85.6% | 51.1% | 18.7% | 53.5% | 43.3% |
| | Lithuania | N | 457 | 374 | 355 | 433 | 377 |
| | | % | 79.8% | 65.3% | 62.0% | 75.6% | 65.8% |
| | Germany | N | 628 | 501 | 262 | 890 | 338 |
| | | % | 58.7% | 46.8% | 24.5% | 83.2% | 31.6% |
| | Norway | N | 418 | 315 | 174 | 311 | 218 |
| | | % | 75.7% | 57.1% | 31.5% | 56.3% | 39.5% |
| | Russia | N | 647 | 609 | 596 | 698 | 582 |
| | | % | 67.9% | 63.9% | 62.5% | 73.2% | 61.1% |
| | Slovakia | N | 669 | 545 | 486 | 579 | 496 |
| | | % | 85.3% | 69.5% | 62.0% | 73.9% | 63.3% |
| | Slovenia | N | 457 | 377 | 326 | 631 | 289 |
| | | % | 63.8% | 52.7% | 45.5% | 88.1% | 40.4% |
| | Switzerland | N | 1178 | 910 | 483 | 1032 | 756 |
| | | % | 77.4% | 59.8% | 31.7% | 67.8% | 49.7% |
| | Sweden | N | 546 | 352 | 144 | 304 | 310 |
| | | % | 81.0% | 52.2% | 21.4% | 45.1% | 46.0% |
| | Hungary | N | 356 | 396 | 326 | 299 | 230 |
| | | % | 70.8% | 78.7% | 64.8% | 59.4% | 45.7% |
| | Great Britain | N | 621 | 556 | 352 | 386 | 238 |
| | | % | 78.6% | 70.4% | 44.6% | 48.9% | 30.1% |
| | Italy | N | 739 | 617 | 537 | 714 | 398 |
| | | % | 83.7% | 69.9% | 60.8% | 80.9% | 45.1% |
| Total | | N | 11373 | 9225 | 6586 | 10050 | 7012 |

Religious beliefs

The ISSP questionnaire included a number of questions concerning what can be generally referred to as *religious beliefs*. The article does not examine these variables separately, instead we use summary statistics (*multiple responses* procedure). The procedure for defining multiple responses combines the variables into dichotomy sets for which tables are created. Table 4 contains the results for questions about belief in life after death, belief in heaven, belief in hell, belief in religious miracles, and belief in the supernatural powers of deceased ancestors. Only positive responses (*definitely yes* and *probably yes*) were

counted. Since each respondent could give a positive answer to any number of statements (maximum 5, as 5 variables were taken into account), the response percentages exceed 100⁸.

Religious beliefs are much more common than one would expect from self-declarations of religiosity and the frequency of religious practices. Over 80% of inhabitants of Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Slovakia, Sweden and Italy, and over 70% of inhabitants of Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Spain, Lithuania, Norway, Switzerland, Hungary, and Great Britain believe in life after death. Germans are the least likely to believe in life after death (approx. 59%). Approximately 85% of

⁸Respondents could also select: *probably not*, *definitely not* and *I don't know*.

Table 5. Belief in God by country

| | | | Does not believe and never has | Does not believe, but used to | Believes, but did not use to | Believes and always has |
|---------|----------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Country | Austria | N | 185 | 221 | 71 | 536 |
| | | % | 18.3% | 21.8% | 7.0% | 52.9% |
| | Bulgaria | N | 198 | 58 | 82 | 482 |
| | | % | 24.1% | 7.1% | 10.0% | 58.8% |
| | Croatia | N | 137 | 52 | 61 | 627 |
| | | % | 15.6% | 5.9% | 7.0% | 71.5% |
| | Czech Republic | N | 664 | 165 | 115 | 276 |
| | | % | 54.4% | 13.5% | 9.4% | 22.6% |
| | Denmark | N | 578 | 258 | 52 | 437 |
| | | % | 43.6% | 19.5% | 3.9% | 33.0% |
| | Finland | N | 268 | 212 | 53 | 368 |
| | | % | 29.7% | 23.5% | 5.9% | 40.8% |
| | France | N | 248 | 169 | 70 | 277 |
| | | % | 32.5% | 22.1% | 9.2% | 36.3% |
| | Spain | N | 247 | 313 | 43 | 1009 |
| | | % | 15.3% | 19.4% | 2.7% | 62.6% |
| | Iceland | N | 174 | 260 | 93 | 450 |
| | | % | 17.8% | 26.6% | 9.5% | 46.1% |
| | Lithuania | N | 91 | 52 | 176 | 425 |
| | | % | 12.2% | 7.0% | 23.7% | 57.1% |
| | Germany | N | 459 | 294 | 103 | 627 |
| | | % | 31.0% | 19.8% | 6.9% | 42.3% |
| | Norway | N | 444 | 218 | 48 | 332 |
| | | % | 42.6% | 20.9% | 4.6% | 31.9% |
| | Russia | N | 277 | 86 | 335 | 562 |
| | | % | 22.0% | 6.8% | 26.6% | 44.6% |
| | Slovakia | N | 295 | 213 | 278 | 476 |
| | | % | 23.4% | 16.9% | 22.0% | 37.7% |
| | Slovenia | N | 253 | 153 | 47 | 478 |
| | | % | 27.2% | 16.4% | 5.0% | 51.3% |
| | Switzerland | N | 469 | 480 | 163 | 859 |
| | | % | 23.8% | 24.4% | 8.3% | 43.6% |
| | Sweden | N | 751 | 219 | 68 | 360 |
| | | % | 53.7% | 15.7% | 4.9% | 25.8% |
| | Hungary | N | 286 | 85 | 111 | 402 |
| | | % | 32.4% | 9.6% | 12.6% | 45.5% |
| | Great Britain | N | 377 | 271 | 56 | 526 |
| | | % | 30.7% | 22.0% | 4.6% | 42.8% |
| | Italy | N | 94 | 167 | 62 | 787 |
| | | % | 8.5% | 15.0% | 5.6% | 70.9% |
| Total | | N | 6495 | 3946 | 2087 | 10296 |
| | | % | 28.5% | 17.3% | 9.1% | 45.1% |

the Croatian population and approx. 79% of the population of Hungary believe in heaven. In almost all other countries included in the survey, the percentage of those who believe in heaven exceeds 50% (except for France - 48% and Germany - approx. 47%). The percentage of respondents who believe in hell is markedly lower. Inhabitants of Croatia (approx. 77%), Bulgaria (approx. 69%), Hungary (approx. 65%) as well as Russia, Lithuania and Slovakia (approx. 62%) are the most likely to believe in hell; whereas respondents from Iceland (approx. 19%), Sweden (approx. 21%) and Germany (approx. 25%) are the least likely to believe in hell. Inhabitants of Slovenia (approx. 88%), Austria (approx. 84%), Germany (approx. 83%) and Italy (approx. 81%) are

the most likely to believe in religious miracles, whereas those living in Denmark (approx. 43%), Sweden (approx. 45%) and Great Britain (approx. 49%) are the least likely to believe in religious miracles. Beliefs in the supernatural powers of deceased ancestors were also examined. Such beliefs are most common among inhabitants of Lithuania (approx. 66%), Slovakia (approx. 63%), Czech Republic and Russia (approx. 61%), and the least common in Great Britain (approx. 30%) and Germany (approx. 32%).

When compared with self-declarations of religiosity and religious practices, religious beliefs are surprise-

Table 6. Negative attitudes towards members of various religions and non-believers by country

| | | | Christians | Muslims | Buddhists | Jews | Non-believers and atheists |
|---------|----------------|---|------------|---------|-----------|-------|----------------------------|
| Country | Austria | N | 52 | 436 | 133 | 171 | 130 |
| | | % | 9.9% | 83.2% | 25.4% | 32.6% | 24.8% |
| | Bulgaria | N | 8 | 146 | 61 | 80 | 101 |
| | | % | 3.9% | 71.9% | 30.0% | 39.4% | 49.8% |
| | Croatia | N | 24 | 117 | 119 | 68 | 136 |
| | | % | 9.6% | 46.6% | 47.4% | 27.1% | 54.2% |
| | Czech Republic | N | 97 | 836 | 247 | 181 | 93 |
| | | % | 10.9% | 94.3% | 27.8% | 20.4% | 10.5% |
| | Denmark | N | 58 | 581 | 64 | 124 | 55 |
| | | % | 9.4% | 93.7% | 10.3% | 20.0% | 8.9% |
| | Finland | N | 48 | 681 | 136 | 166 | 184 |
| | | % | 6.4% | 90.9% | 18.2% | 22.2% | 24.6% |
| | France | N | 38 | 257 | 35 | 73 | 33 |
| | | % | 13.2% | 89.5% | 12.2% | 25.4% | 11.5% |
| | Spain | N | 36 | 445 | 108 | 157 | 139 |
| | | % | 7.1% | 88.1% | 21.4% | 31.1% | 27.5% |
| | Iceland | N | 50 | 325 | 60 | 134 | 90 |
| | | % | 12.8% | 82.9% | 15.3% | 34.2% | 23.0% |
| | Lithuania | N | 16 | 363 | 176 | 178 | 135 |
| | | % | 3.5% | 79.8% | 38.7% | 39.1% | 29.7% |
| | Germany | N | 17 | 455 | 97 | 108 | 91 |
| | | % | 3.3% | 87.8% | 18.7% | 20.8% | 17.6% |
| | Norway | N | 64 | 395 | 70 | 105 | 60 |
| | | % | 14.4% | 88.8% | 15.7% | 23.6% | 13.5% |
| | Russia | N | 20 | 206 | 133 | 148 | 114 |
| | | % | 6.2% | 64.0% | 41.3% | 46.0% | 35.4% |
| | Slovakia | N | 35 | 840 | 235 | 280 | 100 |
| | | % | 4.0% | 96.4% | 27.0% | 32.1% | 11.5% |
| | Slovenia | N | 19 | 172 | 45 | 91 | 63 |
| | | % | 8.2% | 73.8% | 19.3% | 39.1% | 27.0% |
| | Switzerland | N | 85 | 654 | 69 | 284 | 100 |
| | | % | 10.3% | 79.5% | 8.4% | 34.5% | 12.2% |
| | Sweden | N | 77 | 668 | 102 | 132 | 75 |
| | | % | 10.4% | 90.5% | 13.8% | 17.9% | 10.2% |
| | Hungary | N | 22 | 442 | 145 | 252 | 101 |
| | | % | 4.1% | 82.8% | 27.2% | 47.2% | 18.9% |
| | Great Britain | N | 50 | 282 | 63 | 91 | 74 |
| | | % | 14.7% | 82.7% | 18.5% | 26.7% | 21.7% |
| | Italy | N | 39 | 375 | 124 | 124 | 178 |
| | | % | 8.3% | 80.1% | 26.5% | 26.5% | 38.0% |
| Total | | N | 855 | 8676 | 2222 | 2947 | 2052 |

ingly much more common. This may suggest that in many European countries, religious beliefs are more stable than declining declared religiosity and religious practices. It seems that for some Europeans these beliefs have somehow got separated from institutionalized religion, and now these two function independently – at least to some extent.

Some researchers believe that religion regains ground in many parts of the world, including Europe. There is talk of a striking religious revival in former Socialist countries – but also in the Catholic south of the continent, religion appears to erode much less than in the Protestant regions. While in North-Western Europe, the mainline churches may have become more grey and empty, evangelical movements and smaller, conservative religious communities are flourishing there at the same time (Hart, Dekker, Halman, 2013).

Belief in God is undoubtedly the most important religious belief. In the surveys under study, the question about believing in God was formulated in such a way as to take into account how this belief has changed. The respondents were asked to choose from the following statements: *I do not believe in God now and I never have; I do not believe in God now, but I used to; I believe in God now, but I didn't use to; I believe in God now and I always have*. First, let us examine the responses that indicate belief in God, regardless of when it occurred (responses 3 and 4). In 13 countries (out of 20 under study), over 50% of respondents believe in God. Belief in God is most often declared in Lithuania (approx. 80%), Croatia (approx. 78%), Italy (approx. 77%), Russia (approx. 71%), Hungary (approx. 71%), Bulgaria (approx. 69%), and Spain (approx. 65%). On the other hand, respondents in Sweden (approx. 31%) and the Czech Republic (approx. 32%), as well as in Denmark and

Norway (about 37% each) are the least likely to declare that they believe in God. Once again it can be noted that there are more respondents who declare that they believe in God than those who consider themselves religious. By way of example, in Germany approx. 32% of respondents declare themselves religious, while about 56% believe in God. God-believers most often declare that they have always believed in God; they are less likely to declare that they believe in God now, but they did not use to in the past. If the latter is the case, such religious conversions are reported most often in Russia (approx. 27%), Lithuania (approx. 24%) and Slovakia (approx. 22%), whereas they are the least common in Spain (approx. 3%) and in Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Slovenia, Great Britain and Italy (approx. 4- 6%). Inhabitants of Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Great Britain, France and Austria are the most likely to lose their faith in God (approx. 22-27%), while those living in Croatia, Russia, Lithuania and Bulgaria are the least likely to report loss of faith in God (approx. 6-7%). The Czech Republic and Sweden, along with Denmark and Norway have the highest percentage of those who have never believed in God (approx. 54% and 43-44%, respectively). The lowest percentage of non-believers is noted in Italy (approx. 9%) and Lithuania (approx. 12%). Table 5 shows the results concerning belief in God.

Attitudes towards members of other religious groups and non-believers

Attitudes towards members of other religious groups and non-believers are also related to religious issues. When asked about their attitude towards these people, respondents indicated very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative and very negative attitudes. Since social problems arise as a result of spreading negative attitudes rather than positive ones, I would like to take a closer look at the former. Table 6 shows the frequency of negative attitudes (negative and somewhat negative attitudes combined) by country. Based on Table 6, we may conclude that negative attitudes towards Muslims are overwhelmingly dominant in all 20 countries under study. Such attitudes are most often (over 90%) displayed in Slovakia (approx. 96%), Czech Republic, Denmark (approx. 94%) as well as in Sweden and Finland (approx. 91%) and France (approx. 90%). Inhabitants of Norway and Spain are also very likely to declare negative attitudes towards Muslims (approx. 88-89%). Likewise, such attitudes are common in Austria, Iceland, Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Great Britain, and Italy (approx. 80-89%). Inhabitants of Croatia are the least likely to display negative attitudes towards Muslims (approx. 47%). By contrast, negative attitudes toward Buddhists are much rarer. Most often they are declared

in Croatia (approx. 47%) and Russia (approx. 41%), while in Switzerland they are the most unlikely (approx. 8%). Negative attitudes towards Jews are most often manifested by inhabitants of Hungary (approx. 47%), Russia (46%) and Bulgaria (approx. 40%), and the least often by respondents in Sweden (approx. 18%). Negative attitudes towards Christians are declared most rarely; relatively most often in Norway (approx. 14%), France and Iceland (approx. 13%), and the least often – in Germany (approx. 3%), Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary and in Bulgaria (approx. 4%). Another issue worth considering is the attitude towards non-believers and atheists. A negative attitude towards such people is most likely to be expressed by respondents in Croatia (approx. 54%) and Bulgaria (approx. 50%); less likely by inhabitants of Italy (38%) and Russia (approx. 35%), and the least likely by those living in Denmark, Czech Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Norway, and Slovakia (approx. 11-14%).

Factors differentiating religiosity

Our analyses so far have been based on the frequency distributions by country. A question may be asked, however: is differentiation by country the most important in Europe (or at least in the 20 countries under study)? What about such factors as gender, age, education, etc? Perhaps socio-demographic variables differentiate the most important dimensions of religiosity more strongly than the fact of living in a given country? Since the ISSP data is obtained from random samples, statistical inference may be applied. Table 7 contains regression results for qualitative data (CATREG optimal scaling) – separately for 3 main dependent variables: self-declaration of religiosity, frequency of religious practices and belief in God now and in the past.

All three regression models turned out to be significant, with coefficients of determination (fit) (R^2) of similar values, which indicates the value of explained variance ranging between 13 and 15%. Standardized beta coefficients allow us to determine the hierarchy of the influence of most important independent variables on the 3 dependent variables. In each case, the influence of a country of residence turns out to be stronger than that of any other socio-demographic variable included in the model (i.e., age, gender, size of the place of residence and level of education). Considering Europe as a whole (or more precisely, 20 countries under study), it can be stated that nationality is a key factor differentiating the examined dimensions of religiosity, and its influence is markedly stronger than that of socio-demographic factors.

Having answered the main question, let us briefly examine how much independent variables (shown in the rows of Table 7) influence the three main dependent variables (shown in the columns of Table 7).

Table 7. Regression results for qualitative data

| | Self-declaration of religiosity | Belief in God now and in the past | Frequency of religious practices |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Model significance | <0.0005 | <0.0005 | <0.0005 |
| Significance of independent variables | <0.0005 | <0.0005 | <0.0005 ⁹ |
| Model Fit (R ²) | 0.134 | 0.151 | 0.131 |
| | Beta standardized coefficients | | |
| Country | .265 | .294 | .302 |
| Age | -.174 | .161 | -.152 |
| Gender | .139 | .146 | .101 |
| Size of the place of residence | -.046 | .057 | -.056 |
| Level of education | .070 | -.063 | .017 |

This hierarchy of influence is almost identical for each dependent variable: (1) country, (2) age, (3) gender, (4) level of education, (5) size of the place of residence (only in the case of religious practices, the size of the place of residence exerts more influence than the level of education)¹⁰. Age increases religiosity in all three dimensions, while education and the size of the place of residence decrease religiosity – also in all three dimensions. Taking into account gender, women are more religious than men¹¹.

Conclusions

A general trend that can be observed based on the ISSP results is that Europeans are becoming less likely to declare themselves as religious. This is different in some countries of the former Eastern Bloc, mainly in Slovenia but also in the Czech Republic and Hungary, where an increase in declared religiosity has been noted. The findings demonstrate that countries of the former Eastern Bloc along with Italy are the *mainstay* of religiosity in Europe. On the other hand, non-religious attitudes are predominant in the Scandinavian countries as well as in Germany, France, and Great Britain.

Likewise, religious practices are more frequent in some former Eastern Bloc countries and in Italy, while inhabitants of the Scandinavian countries, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (to some extent also Hungary) do not engage in religious practices at all or do it very rarely. It can be concluded that the declared frequency of religious practices is consistent with the declared religiosity.

Religious beliefs are expressed much more often than it might be expected from the frequency of religious declarations and practices. Over 80% of Europeans believe in afterlife and in religious miracles. The belief in the supernatural powers of deceased ancestors, which is the least common, is declared by almost 50% of Europeans. The frequency of belief in God corresponds with this to some extent. In 13

countries (out of 20 under study), over 50% of respondents believe in God.

The attitude of Europeans towards members of other religious groups and non-believers varies from country to country. Negative attitudes towards Christians and non-believers and atheists are relatively rare (ranging from a few to a dozen or so percent). Negative opinions about Buddhists and Jews are more common, but by far most respondents (from approx. 70% to over 90%) express hostile attitudes towards Muslims.

The regression results show that living in a given country is the most important factor that influences key dimensions of religiosity and it is markedly stronger than age, gender, education level, and size of the place of residence.

The survey results described in the article cover the time before the COVID-19 pandemic. We will have to wait for the results of similar studies that will deal with the post-pandemic period. Can we expect significant changes here? Such changes may be expected in relation to issues connected with sustainable development (Pawłowski, 2020). What about religiosity? History shows that epidemics have usually resulted in increased religious involvement – though in a short-term perspective. Time will show what will happen this time.

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⁹Only the variable *education level* had a lower significance = 0.005.

¹⁰In the case of variables: *self-declaration of religiosity* and *frequency of religious practices* (Table 2 and Table 3), higher values indicate weaker religiosity; while for the variable *belief in God now and in the past* (Table 5), higher value indicates stronger religiosity. This is the system of variable values originally used in the ISSP Religion IV.

¹¹Gender is coded as follows: 1 - male, 2 - female.

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