Spaces and Borders
Spaces and Borders

Current Research on Religion in Central and Eastern Europe

Edited by
András Máté-Tóth and Cosima Rughiniş

De Gruyter
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Introduction

ANDRÁS MÁTÉ-TÓTH
COSIMA RUGHINİŞ

In Eastern and Central Europe, the regional specificity of religiosity derives from the historical experiences of three generations. After the Second World War, the young people were socialized by parent and teachers with deeply held Christian beliefs, and religion was a visible reference and support in their lives. After communist regimes enhanced their political strength, a second generation was schooled in an atheist spirit and in open hostility to religion. It was also a period in which Churches have adopted different strategies to accommodate and to resist state policies. After 1990, democracy was gradually reinstated alongside a broad religious landscape – and this is how a third generation learned to make sense of their lives. There is a contemporaneous tension between three different historical traditions concerning religiosity, atheism and secularity, as regards fundamental questions of human life, and it can also be observed in the academic community.

Contributors to the present volume belong to the third generation, sometimes described, with criteria taken from the past, as post-communist, post-totalitarian or post-secular. Perhaps one could just say that they are contemporary young scholars of religion. Their religious interests and perspectives are different from other generations. If much of previous literature in the region is centered on the dominant traditions, such as Christianity or Islam, and on the conflict between national state policies, church strategies, and individual existential orientations, the younger generation focuses more on the pluralistic religious landscape. The political turning point around 1989–1991, the so called system-change, does not play for them anymore the central hermeneutical role it had for the former scholar generations. Previously, researchers have often been concerned with the problem of national identity re/construction, holding that religious beliefs and practices were central in shaping these processes. Young scholars contributing to this volume are not so much concerned with the relation between ideas of “the nation” and religion, and they position themselves in a distinctive topography of issues.
The articles published in this edited volume are the best works emerging from the Exchange Program of REVACERN (Religion and Values – Central and Eastern European Research Network) coordinated by Prof. András Máté-Tóth and supported by European Union’s 6th framework program (2007–2009). After a rigorous selection process, twenty applicants out of seventy-two were granted academic and financial support for completing their own research on religion in Central and Eastern Europe. Apart from high scientific quality, one of the most important requirements in the Call for applications was the international comparative approach, meaning that the scholarly work had to cover at least three societies. After the first research semester, grantees presented their projects and findings in a workshop held at the University of Szeged, where they were also involved in an intensive academic writing course. Based on these presentations, fifteen young scholars were selected for a second semester of research support, in order to refine their findings.

The contributions address three broad topics, which also inspired the sections comprised in the title of the volume. Gábor Attila Feleky, Tomas Hrustič, Michaela Ondrašinová, and Rafal Smoczińszky discuss religious experiences, with a focus on conversion to new religions, addressing the challenging topic of new religious movements. Onder Çetin, Milan Fujda, and Dumitru Minzarari concentrate on questions related to the strategies of religious elites. Milda Ališauskiene, Branko Ančić, Victor Cebotari, Marko Davor, Dorota Hall, Bogdan Radu, Cosima Rughiniş, and Tamás Szilágyi analyze the interactions between religion and politics with topics and data drawn from a multiplicity of social milieu.

This diversity of interests is still tightly bound around a dominant theoretical concern – namely, the creation, maintenance and transgression of religious boundaries. In a time of pluralism and synergy of spiritual experiences, currents of thought and organizations, when democracies acquiesce changing institutional arrangements of integration and separation between the public sphere and various forms of religiosity, the issue of observing, establishing, traversing and challenging boundaries becomes increasingly relevant.

The articles in the first section, religious experiences, address this critical issue of border creation and maintenance between different communities. Distinctions between religious beliefs, ethnic or other social categories are often employed to support one another. For example, Hrustič discusses the use of ethnic border maintenance devices, such as stereotypical discourses, as a procedure of differentiation between Jehovah Witnesses from other religious communities. Comparing
Interview data with accounts published in magazine articles, Ondrašinová explores strategies for defining oneself as a spiritual traveler in counter-distinction to church-based Catholic religiosity. The author argues that interviews differ from textual accounts in that they construct the distinction between “spirituality” and “religion” through a careful classificatory work in which respondents mark some forms of spirituality and some forms of Catholicism as illegitimate, thus establishing positions with finer granularity. Furthermore, as illustrated by Hrustić, borders are observed, interpreted and further employed, as discursive boundaries, to re/produce other borders: the “Yoga versus Catholicism” debate is a field in which different Yogic schools strive to assert their superiority. Smoczińszky traces changes in the antagonistic differentiation strategies targeted against the new religious movements (NRMs) in Poland, focusing on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness – ISKCON, and the new social ties that bridge old moral panic divides. The distinctiveness of NRMs and spiritual journeys is also a matter of methodological concerns for scholars interested in tracing their formation and changes. Tackling these issues, Feleky discusses the operational definitions of New Age beliefs in surveys, assessing the common ground covered by several pieces of research.

The papers in the second section follow the thread of the use of differentiation strategies by religious elites, through looking at their strategic interactions with formal political institutions. Çetin examines the positions of religious elites concerning the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia, to discuss how distinction between “religious” vs. “non-religious” spheres of life bears upon the recommendation to distance or engage across confessional borders. Internal diversification within the Muslim community is brought about by the introduction of different Islamic interpretations, and is mutually reinforced with references to ethnic and political distinctions. Fujda traces the development of Czech traditions of Yoga by following the work and relationships of several movement leaders. The author dedicates particular attention to both the influence of communist policies and resistance to the regime’s impositions on the development of Yoga movements. Minzarari explores the shape of Church – State boundaries and their influence on political institutions, in relation to the Orthodox Church and State in Post-Soviet Russia.

The third section of the volume includes contributions that are particularly oriented towards the position of religion and religious experiences in the public arena, exploring various patterns of influence between religiosity and other areas of life, with a focus on public opinion. Ališauskienė discusses liberty of religious expression in the Baltic State,
tracing legal changes and public discourse transformation, especially regarding new religious movements. Ančić evaluates religiosity levels estimated in comparative international surveys, and people’s expectations towards religious guidance in personal and public matters. Cebotari explores national pride among majority and minority religious communities in Eastern Europe. His analysis brings together considerations of religious, ethnic and national identity. Hall discusses the multi-layered patchwork of national and religious identities among students and highly educated individuals in Poland. Radu identifies multiple patterns of coexistence of religious belief and political values, and Rughiniş discusses methodological and sociological accounts of variability and even inconsistence about secularity by drawing on a public opinion survey. Moving towards a more structured political level, Marko discusses media reports on Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina, identifying an apologetic discourse, a secular-religious clash discourse, and an Islamophobic discourse. Finally, Szilágyi evidences the variable relationships between radical right wing groups and Christian churches in Eastern Europe countries.

Overall, the contributions of this volume indicate that media accounts and political projects are structured on clearer lines of demarcation between religious beliefs as compared to personal experiences and public opinion – in which finer nuances can be identified in relations to borders within and around religious communities. Boundaries are often invoked and often experienced, but they are also resisted and re-defined. Religiosity and spirituality is lived on a rugged terrain, in which heterogeneous parties compete for influence and autonomy, in a heavily regulated but sometimes surprisingly changing social arena.
Experiencing Religion
The Vague Borders of New Age
Methodological Comparison of Studies Concerning New Age in Central and Eastern Europe

GÁBOR ATTILA FELEY

Introduction

The mapping of borders between New Age and other religions is an especially hard task. The concept of New Age and approaches towards it differ significantly in the works of different scholars, therefore one can find a vast variety of the operationalization of the notion. Methodological problems are not hard to find in studies concerning spirituality in CEE, nevertheless their comparison – and lessons drawn from researches carried out in other regions – can lead to a better understanding of New Age.

Empirical Studies about the Holistic Milieu in CEE

When comparing different studies concerning New Age, one must be aware of the proliferation of the definition of certain notions, especially New Age itself. To illustrate the situation, York enumerates several descriptions from “a blend of pagan religions, Eastern philosophies, and occult-psychic phenomena” (Michael York) through “forms of religious movement most closely associated with the New Age are occult, neopagan, and Asian” (William S. Bainbridge), to “endlessly entertaining saturnalia of ill-defined yearnings” (Harold Bloom). Relation and overlapping between terms like New Age, (subjective-life) spirituality or holistic milieu varies study to study, sometimes used interchangeably sometimes making clear differentiation between them. Scholars use different definitions, or – quite frequently – opt to avoid any definition at all.

1 In present paper, these notions are used as synonyms.
It must also be stressed that only few empirical studies have been carried out concerning New Age beliefs. Scholars investigating New Age can’t stop complaining that the claims and arguments concerning New Age are in many cases based mainly on personal observations and experiences, or on personal opinions – even in academic environment. Some of them call for a radical “sociologisation” in the research of New Age and spirituality.\(^3\)

The few existing studies applied different approaches, and the comparison (if possible at all) requires a good deal of creativity. In order to demonstrate these problems, we briefly summarize the most important available studies concerning New Age.

**Qualitative Studies**

Under the label of qualitative studies we can mention Dorota Hall’s examination and Barbara Potrata’s study. Both scholars carried out numerous in-depth interviews, and were active in participant observation as well. Dorota Hall’s two investigations titled Space in the New Age Culture and New Age – Between Belief and Wisdom were carried out in 2000–2002 and 2002–2004, respectively. With the help of 30 students of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology she was engaged in fieldwork research in Warsaw alternative medicine fairs, esoteric-like shops and galleries, and offices of therapists and fortune tellers advertised at the previously mentioned places. The investigations were based on participant observation and in-depth interviews. Hall gathered about 500 interviews and observation descriptions. Apart from that, she analyzed the relevant literature, focusing on the content-analysis of one popular monthly magazine. She avoids the definition of New Age.\(^4\)

Barbara Potrata’s fieldwork was conducted in Slovenia between 1998 and 1999, and was reinforced by further investigations in the subsequent three years. She mapped a New Age network by employing the “snowball” sampling method. She participated in numerous New Age related events and carried out about 70 interviews. According to


Potrata, the interviewees were involved in about 50 types of New Age activities.\(^5\)

**Quantitative Studies**

In this part we give a short overview of four New Age related quantitative studies in the CEE region – three of them focusing on university students. Franz Höllinger conducted an empirical study – titled *Religion and Esotericism among Students* – in 1999 in five European (Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal), one North American (USA) and four Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay). The investigated population was reduced only to university students because of the presupposition that the reception of New Age literature and esoteric techniques is higher among them than in the rest of the population – although his choice must have been influenced by the easy and low-cost availability of the students. The inquiry also focused on the relationship of academic disciplines and religious worldviews. Höllinger finds that both Christian religiosity and esoteric beliefs are more popular among students of languages, arts, health and social sciences, while students of natural sciences and law are likely to reject these teachings and practices. In intercontinental comparison, Latin-American and US students are more likely to believe in occult phenomena and esoteric methods than European students. Results also show that most students have experiences of esoteric practices, nevertheless only a small proportion practices these regularly.\(^6\)

As part of a wider range survey carried out by Education Faculty at the University of Maribor (Slovenia), the acceptance of New Age ideas was measured during four subsequent years, from 2001 till 2004. Miran Lavrič finds that in spite of their popularity, New Age ideas show less vitality than those of Catholicism, as a widely accepted religious tradition of the country. According to the scholar, the New Age movement – with specific regard to its eclectic and individualistic views – cannot be a bearer of a spiritual revival.\(^7\)

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Tadeusz Doktór’s study *The New Age worldview of Polish students* 183 students (of art, humanities, technology, social sciences and agriculture) were asked with the help of a questionnaire distributed during the lectures. The study had five fields of examination: world-views, personality traits, relations with parents, future expectations and mysticism. New Age positively correlated with mysticism, anxiety and self-esteem, and negatively with the father’s religiosity. The role of the individual self in the construction of the New Age worldview, the lack of certainty of these beliefs and their magical and mystical orientation are interpreted in terms of narcissism, a trait fostered by the deinstitutionalization and the subjectivization of modern culture. Doktór interprets the results suggesting that New Age worldview might be considered to be a loosely structured belief system, individually constructed by way of bricolage, “this-worldly” in orientation, and emphasizing experiential legitimation.\(^8\)

In 2005 a survey was carried out by the Department of Sociology at the University of Szeged. It used a sample (N=1390) representative for the population of the city of Szeged (Hungary). 336 cases of the sample (24.2% of the total sample) were aged 30 years or less. The results show that the correlation between age and spiritual belief is not straightforward. Although esoteric beliefs are harder to find among the elderly than among the youth, several beliefs (in healing powers and in telepathy) are the most popular in the second and third quintile. Results also show a strong positive correlation between the level of education, and the involvement and belief in spiritual techniques.

**Methodology of the Quantitative Researches**

In the following lines we give a brief insight into the methodology of the mentioned studies in order to find out what kind of comparison is possible among them, and to spot the available best practices. The overview aims to help scholars willing to carry out New Age related studies, thus ensuring the prevention of certain “incompatibility problems” in the future.

Defining the Key Terms

As we will see, in the analyzed studies normally there is not even a working definition of what New Age is. Moreover, it also has to be noted that some scholars frequently, and commonly use notions like New Age, esotericism, subjective-life spirituality or Holistic Milieu interchangeably, meanwhile others make a distinction. For Höllinger New Age is “the new forms of spirituality and esotericism”. He enlists under this label the following:

Therapies for improving one’s health and psycho-physical well-being (e.g. homeopathy, Shiatsu, spiritual healing); spiritual and meditation techniques (e.g. Yoga, Tai Chi, Zen); methods based on ‘paranormal’ powers (e.g. geomancy, telepathy); methods for predicting events and analysing the personality of human beings (e.g. astrology, Tarot cards).9

Lavrič confesses that New Age is “difficult to define or measure”, and “there is no clear and universal definition of New Age.” Nevertheless, he argues that New Age (ideas) can be measured by examining the acceptance of its fundamental beliefs – labelled mystical, holistic and millenaristic themes10.

Tadeusz Doktór affirms the difficulties of defining the exact meaning of “New Age”, and thinks that an operational definition (indicating methods required for its measurement) can make up a good solution. He finds three common points in the definitions and interpretations of the New Age: content, structure and function. Since Doktór is to give an operational definition, the item used in his research (and enlisted later on) will give a clue about his notion on New Age.11

The elaborators of the Szeged Studies 2005 questionnaire did not have a clear definition of New Age in mind, therefore only the applied items may get us closer to get to know what they actually meant by New Age.

Franz Höllinger conducted his study with the help of a standardized questionnaire, which was distributed during lectures. The process took place at seventeen universities (and involved 3,569 students.), and followed the same sampling procedure: courses from four to eight academic disciplines were selected with the only criterion of including at least two disciplines from the exact sciences and two disciplines from the human sciences. This sampling procedure resulted in samples representative\(^\text{12}\) neither for university students of a given country, nor for the students of the universities where the data were collected. The only university in the CEE region participating in the study was the Austrian Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz. (Höllinger and Smith 2002)

For Lavrič's work a wider range survey was introduced in four subsequent years, from 2001 till 2004 to trace among other issues, the attitude of university students towards New Age. The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire – including a New Age item battery – filled in the classrooms. The sample was around 1000 students of the Maribor University, with quota sampling – taking into account the faculty, the gender and the year of the study.\(^\text{13}\)

In Doktór’s study the questionnaire was distributed during lectures as well. The majority of the items were based on the World-View Questionnaire developed in Finland. The subjects (N = 183) were students of art, humanities, technology, social sciences and agriculture in Warsaw.\(^\text{14}\)

The questionnaire used in the Szeged Studies 2005 contained more than 100 items, a battery of religious and esoteric questions was introduced. The applied random sampling procedure resulted in a sample (N=1390) representative for the population of the city of Szeged (Hungary). In a contrast to the other studies described here, it was not self administered, but carried out with the help of trained commissioners (students of sociology).

\(^{12}\) Even Höllinger himself puts it: “This sampling procedure did not necessarily lead to a representative sample” (Höllinger 2004) and “Even if the resulting samples are not representative for the population of the respective universities, all kinds of students […] were included in the sample” (Höllinger and Smith 2002).


Bearing in mind the mentioned variety of approaches, one can imagine that a well-elaborated and used-by-everybody method or scale to trace or measure New Age doesn’t exist. Since – as it was mentioned before – the majority of the investigations lack the definition of New Age, it is of crucial importance to examine how New Age is operationalized in these studies.

Höllinger in his cross-cultural comparative study used a questionnaire with the following items to measure occult beliefs and New Age activities. Items examining beliefs in nature spirits (fairies, etc.), spirits in old houses, contact with the dead, psychic healers, telepathy, clairvoyance, astrology and healing energies of stones made up the “occult belief” battery (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.85). Items measuring involvement in fortune-telling, Tarot cards, Runes, I-Ging, horoscope-interpretation and dream-interpretation were categorized under the label “esoteric methods for predicting events and for analyzing one’s personality”. Involvement in Asian techniques (Yoga, Tai Chi, etc.), meditation and massage techniques were components of the “body-oriented spiritual techniques” scale, while the item battery to trace involvement in alternative medicine (homeopathy, Bach flower remedies, etc.), psychic healing, acupuncture, observation of moon phases and psychotherapy was called “alternative healing methods”. Items belonging to the three latter categories made up a “New Age activities” scale (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.72). Activities were measured by the frequency of practicing it (the available answers being: regularly, several times, once or a few times, never), meanwhile concerning beliefs, the possible answers were the following ones: believing, not believing and undecided.15

As a result of his previously mentioned idea, according to which New Age ideas can be measured if you examine the acceptance of certain fundamental beliefs, Lavrič used the following items in his questionnaire. The scale “occultism” (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.74) contained three 5-point Likert-scale ranging from total agreement to total disagreement: “the destiny of an individual is influenced by the position of stars and planets”; “after death of an individual, his soul moves into another body”, and “it is possible to harm people by magic spells”. The “New Age” scale (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.72) included the following Likert-type items: the entire Universe is an expression of a

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unified spiritual energy, spiritual powers; each individual has a higher spiritual self, which can be awakened and lead to personal enlightenment; and we are facing times of rapid spiritual growth of human consciousness.\(^\text{16}\)

The questionnaire items in use in Doktór’s study can be categorized within five basic groups, one of them being “worldview” with 85 items related to various religious, irreligious, parareligious and para-scientific beliefs. Doktór constructed a New Age scale of eighteen items related to oriental religious beliefs, occultism, and magic, based upon the factor analysis of these items. The questionnaire measured the degree of agreement with the content of different statements\(^\text{17}\) on a 5-point Likert-scale (0 – absolutely no agreement, 4 – total agreement). According to Doktór, the New Age scale seems to be a reliable tool for the measurement of the cluster of beliefs and practices related to New Age.\(^\text{18}\)

In the Szeged Studies 2005 the following questions were put to trace the acceptance of spiritual beliefs: Do you believe … in the existence of healing powers? / … that there are spiritual powers one can make contact with? / … in reincarnation? / … in life after death? / … that curses may be effective? / … in telepathy? / … in fortune-telling? Beliefs were measured with a binary variable (the available answers being yes or no). The consistency of this “spiritual beliefs” scale is quite high (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.81). To measure involvement in spiritual activities, the following questions were introduced: Have you ever used the services of a

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17 The statements were the following: Although most people do not believe it, some kinds of nature-spirits do exist, in the old days these were referred to as fairies or elves. / Telepathy or thought transference is possible. / Telepathy or thought transference is possible. / Telepathy or thought transference is possible. / There is some truth in astrology. / It is possible for certain people to get information about hidden things through clairvoyance. / It is possible that ghosts may exist in certain old houses, although most people do not believe so. / The astrological sign under which one was born may be of great importance for the development of one’s character. / I believe in reincarnation/ I know that I have a lucky number. / I know that there is a special date or day in a week which brings bad luck to me. / It is possible in certain cases to make contact with the dead. / It is probably true that UFOs or “flying saucers” have visited our planet/ I have had at least one experience of telepathy or thought transference. / It is likely that humans originate from another planet. / Evil spirits exist and may harm people who let themselves be influenced by them. / I have or have had an amulet or good luck charm which has brought good fortune to me. / Animals have a soul. / I have sometimes felt a premonition or a hunch that something was going to happen, and it proved to be true. / Humans are born into life in order to realize themselves, and are born again and again until the goal is reached.

fortuneteller? / Have you ever participated in psychomancy, table-turning? / Have you ever asked for the help of an astrologist? / Have you ever been involved in reiki? / Have you ever asked for a Feng Shui counseling? / Have you ever asked for the help of a naturopathic practitioner? (the available answers being: never, once, several times, and more or less regularly). These six items made up a “spiritual involvement” scale (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.60).

Results – Conclusions of the Comparison of the Operationalizations

As we can see, scholars apply items measuring the level of acceptance of certain statements and/or the engagement in different activities. Although the overlapping among the items used in the examined studies is not overwhelming, we can find numerous common points. Comparison of the item shows that the following themes appeared in two or more studies (see Table 1).

The picture showed by Table 1 may seems brighter then it is in reality, since even the same (or similar) items were formulated differently, making the comparison harder. To illustrate the problem, we will give a comparison of several items of three of the mentioned four studies (see Table 2).

As it has been shown in the previous lines, a handful of studies concerning New Age have been carried out in the previous years in CEE. These studies differ from each other in several ways, nevertheless common points are not too hard to find. Among the four examined investigations there is a significant overlapping concerning the main themes, the items that were used to operationalize New Age. Notwithstanding we still face two problems, firstly, these items, even if searching for answers for the same question, are put in different way, which makes comparisons less unambiguous. Secondly, the sampling seems to be of secondary importance to scholars, although the validity of the statements can be challenged when the sample cannot be considered to be representative for a given population.

Three of the analyzed studies focused on university students, meanwhile in the Szeged studies there is no special focus on this group. The Austrian, Polish and Slovenian data represent only one university in each case (Karl-Franzens-Universitat Graz, University of Warsaw and University of Maribor, respectively), so it cannot reflect the opinion of students of all universities of the given country. And even if representative samples were used, the results would be valid only to a
number of university students, and would not say anything of a broader population. Nevertheless, due to the peculiarities of the sampling, the results and conclusions of the three mentioned studies on university students must be treated cautiously.

Table 1: Frequency of New Age themes in the examined studies (elaborated by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Höllinger’s study</th>
<th>Lavrič’s study</th>
<th>Doktór’s study</th>
<th>Szeged Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune-telling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits (in old houses, etc.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telepathy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative medicine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian techniques</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clairvoyance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact with the dead</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curses</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature spirits (fairies, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychic healing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-realization</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual forces</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: A comparison of items applied in the examined studies
(élaborated by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Lavrič’s study</th>
<th>Doktór’s study</th>
<th>Szeged Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Astrology</strong></td>
<td>The destiny of an individual is influenced by the position of stars and planets.</td>
<td>There is some truth in astrology. The astrological sign under which one was born may be of great importance for the development of one’s character.</td>
<td>Have you ever asked for the help of an astrologist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curses</strong></td>
<td>It is possible to harm people by magic spells.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do you believe that curses may be effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fortune-telling</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have sometimes felt a premonition or a hunch that something was going to happen, and it proved to be true.</td>
<td>Do you believe in fortune-telling? Have you ever used the services of a fortune-teller?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reincarnation &amp; life after death</strong></td>
<td>After death of an individual, his soul moves into another body.</td>
<td>I believe in reincarnation. Humans are born into life in order to realize themselves, and are born again and again until the goal is reached. It is possible in certain cases to make contact with the dead.</td>
<td>Do you believe in reincarnation? Do you believe in life after death?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-realization</strong></td>
<td>Each individual has a higher spiritual self which can be awakened and lead to personal enlightenment.</td>
<td>Humans are born into life in order to realize themselves, and are born again and again until the goal is reached.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spirits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is possible that ghosts may exist in certain old houses, although most people do not believe so. Although most people do not believe it, some kinds of nature-spirits do exist. In the old days these were referred to as fairies or elves.</td>
<td>Do you believe that there are spiritual powers one can make contact with? Have you ever participated in psychomancy, table-turning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telepathy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Telepathy or thought transference is possible. I have had at least one experience of telepathy or thought transference.</td>
<td>Do you believe in telepathy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measuring New Age in Northwest Europe

Being aware of the methodology of New Age studies conducted outside our region can be fruitful for future researches on spirituality in CEE. Therefore, hereby we give a short introduction of several studies, with a major focus on the operationalization issue. One of the most extensive researches on New Age is the Kendal Project, which aimed to collect information on activities related to alternative spirituality (the holistic milieu) – and also to the activities of church and chapel (the congregational domain) – in the city of Kendal (UK). The fieldwork started in October 2000 (by an initial pilot study) and ended in June 2002. The first step in the exploration of the holistic milieu was the mapping of associational activities (groups, one-to-one encounters) not related to the congregational domain. This was followed by more detailed qualitative research, including the determination of the grade of “spiritual dimension”, which facilitators and practitioners attribute to the mapped 126 holistic activities. Afterward a questionnaire was given to facilitators and participants of all associational activities which had at least a minimum level of spirituality. The holistic milieu questionnaire\(^{19}\) was divided into four sections. The first section examined if the person was involved in the certain therapies and activities\(^{20}\) (during the week prior to the study, or before that). The subject also had to decide whether he or she regarded the activity as having spiritual dimension (possible answers being yes and no). Concerning activities another question was introduced in the questionnaire (Do you ever do any of the following at home?), but in this

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19 Available at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf

20 Acupressure / acupuncture / Alexander technique / aromatherapy/ art therapy or group / astrology / Bahai group / Buddhist group / CancerCare group / Chinese College of Physical Culture (sic!) / chiropractic / circle dancing / counselling / craniosacral therapy / energy management workshops / flower essences therapy / foot massage / GreenSpirit group / healing or spiritual healing / herbalism / homeopathy / hypnotherapy / Indian head massage / inter-faith group / Iona Group / kinaesiology / massage / meridian therapy / metamorphic technique / naturopathy / nutritional therapy / osteopathy / pagan activities / palm readings / play therapy / psychic consultancy / psychotherapy / rebirthing / reflexology / reiki / relaxation therapy / Sai Baba group / sea of faith group / shiatsu / spinal touch therapy / Tai Chi or Chi Kung / Taize singing group / Tarot card reading / true vision group / universal peace dancing / vision therapy (not opticians) / wild women group / women’s spirituality group / yoga / other (please state). Source: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf, downloaded on 08.08.2008.
case only seven possible answers\textsuperscript{21} were given. The questionnaire also included a list of beliefs\textsuperscript{22} (available answers being: yes/no/don’t know). The holistic questionnaire of the Kendal project investigated special personal experiences by asking people if given experiences\textsuperscript{23} have happened to them, and – in case of positive response – if they consider them religious, spiritual or neither.\textsuperscript{24}

Granqvist and Hagekull chose a different way to grasp New Age. When investigating attachment and emotional compensation among New Age members, they constructed a so called “New Age Orientation Scale” using 22 items grouped into 10 overlapping content areas.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Meditate / pray / yoga / Tai Chi / massage (give or receive) / healing (give or receive) / other spiritual or therapeutic activity (please write in).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Life after death / reincarnation / heaven / hell / the power of prayer / miracles / special healing powers / that humankind is entering a new age of spiritual evolution / a true self / a soul / some sort of spirit or life force that pervades all that lives / chakras / subtle energy (or energy channels) in the body / extra sensory perception / precognition / God / Jesus was the son of God / Jesus was just a man / Jesus was just a story / in / the devil / angels / other holy or higher beings / a spirit world / UFOs / ley lines / other (please state). Source: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf, downloaded on 08.08.2008.
\item \textsuperscript{23} An awareness of receiving help in answer to prayer / a feeling of being in touch with someone who had died / an awareness of spirits or ghosts / an awareness of the presence of God / a sacred experience of nature / a pattern of events in your life that convinces you that they were your destiny / a pattern of events in your life that convinces you that they were controlled by a higher power / a sense of great peace / an extraordinary feeling of inner bliss / an out of body experience / a near-death experience / an extraordinary inner experience triggered by giving birth / an extraordinary inner experience triggered by having sex / an extraordinary inner experience triggered by taking drugs / an accurate precognition of future events / extra sensory perception of events or someone’s thoughts / other (please state).
\item \textsuperscript{25} A conviction that the individual’s „intuition“ is a reliable source of knowledge (and outperforming science-based knowledge) / a belief that a new age is approaching, with dramatic implications for science, the evaluation of human nature, etc. / a belief in the efficacy of „alternative“ treatments (potentially outperforming regular medical treatments) / a belief in parapsychological and occult phenomena / an emphasis on personal development and spirituality, as well as an interest in the „alternative“ literature on these issues / a favorable evaluation of pseudopsychological and pseudophysical jargon / an emphasis on nature and cosmos as animate / an emphasis on Eastern holism (as opposed to „Western reductionism“) activities and beliefs / a favorable evaluation of religious syncretism and of practices of „forgotten“ cultures and traditions, coupled with an unfavorable evaluation of mainstream Western religion / an emphasis on being an „open seaker“ (as opposed to absorbed by the „dogmas“ of institutionalized religions) to whom „the new age“ is personally valuable. Granqvist, Pehr, and Berit Hagekull. 2001. Seeking Security in the New Age: On Attachment and Emotional Compensation. \textit{Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion} 40 (3):527–545.
\end{itemize}
A previous study, Michael J. Donhaue’s investigation on the prevalence of New Age beliefs among members of six American protestant denominations is also important. His survey included several items to trace New Age ideology, among them after the factor-analysis seven belief statements proved to make up a consistent New Age belief factor.  

Houtman and Mascini underline that New Age is “notoriously difficult to operationalize” and they used a twofold instrument to do it while investigating the correlations New Age – rationalism and New Age – individualism. Firstly, he followed the practice of former Dutch New Age investigations by presenting the respondents with activities, ideas closely related to New Age (and New Age namely), and asking them to what extent they are involved in astrology, New Age, yoga, oriental religions and reincarnation. Apart from that, the scholars added five Likert-type items (based by a former investigation by Gussenhoven and Van den Maagdenberg) that – according to them – express four core ideas of New Age. The idea holism appeared in the following statements: “one’s character is strongly determined by the stars and planets” and “one can predict one’s future to a large extent by reading the lines in one’s hand”. Spiritual trasformation was represented by the item “after death, one’s soul passes to another human being or animal”, syncretism by “one should search in different religions oneself to make one’s own religion” and perennialism by “the one and only true religion does not exist, but there are truths one can find in all religions of the world”. The combination of all the 10 items produced a consistent scale (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.78), thus Houtman and Mascini regarded it as a valid measure of affinity with New Age.

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26 Human nature is basically good / I believe in reincarnation – that I have lived before and will experience other lives in the future / I believe in astrology / through meditation and self-discipline I come to know that all spiritual truth and wisdom is within me / I am in charge of my own life – I can be anything I want to be / it is possible to communicate with people who have died / an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church.  


Conclusions

These different ways of measuring New Age reflect the authors’ distinct concepts about it, nevertheless, there is notable overlapping among them. We can conclude that basically four main approaches can be identified in the endeavours to trace New Age. The first one concentrates on the involvement in spiritual techniques and/or methods, the second one is based on investigating different spiritual/religious beliefs, the third one focuses on transcendent experience, while the forth one searches for signs of pluralistic religious views and individualistic characteristics.

Nevertheless, even if the same approach is used in different studies, the comparability cannot be guaranteed due to different operationalization of the same notions. Therefore, we suggest to incorporate the best practices from New Age researches, and to elaborate an ontology – an inventory of potential items with several “must-use” ones. As an annex to it, a description of where and how – and with what results – these were previously applied would be also of great use. This ontology could guarantee the comparability of future researches. Several methodological guidelines should also be observed – and formulated if deemed necessary – in order to ensure that the result of future researches be unquestionable.