How to Approach (Non)Religion and Labelling Categories that Continue to be Fuzzy (Theoretical and Numerical Take Off)

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The diversity of worldviews and growing pluralism should not encompass only religious standpoints; more attention should also be paid to the certainly not thus far sufficiently grasped fields of non-religiosity. This represents another realm within the religious landscape; it is a form of *diversity within diversity*, as there are many types of worldviews, attitudes and their typologies. With this kick-off essay we attempt to identify several approaches to the study of non-religion, with a focus on the European and American context. We attempt to outline the difficulties connected with labelling and the uncertain boundaries and multiplicity of interrelations between the spheres of religiosity, spirituality and non-religiosity. Our attention is focused on the social perception of the broader sphere of non-religiosity, with the complexity of the often stereotypical perception of this group. Practical reflections of non-religion are presented through the optics of quantitative data from selected countries and qualitative data, such as a brief outline of ethnographic research conducted in Slovakia in 2019–2021. The main idea of the contribution is to point out that without a redefinition of all labelling categories used to denote the profile of modern religiosity, spirituality and irreligiosity, we can hardly use the term "nones" in the proper sense. To make such a deep reflexive turn, we need to pay attention to qualitative research and focus on multi-sited ethnographies that can shed light on the shadowy places of current research and clarify not only labels but also our knowledge on what religion is and what roles it plays in modern societies.

Keywords: non-religion, diversity, secularisation, labelling, surveys, qualitative approach

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Introduction

Research of non-religion is only slowly approaching the level of scholarly interest that it deserves. After years of suspicion, neglect, stereotypes and prejudice, we must admit that non-religion is an integral and important part of religious landscapes everywhere around the globe. Labels for non-religion as everything that is not religious seems utterly insufficient, but more scholarly attention should be paid to the vast continuum of attitudes, values and practices that prove the internal diversity of this phenomenon. The challenge is not only in the fuzziness of labels we attempt to categorise it with, but the boundary between the religious and irreligious, with many “leaks” into both spheres, is also challenging. Various types of data and research, especially from the United States (U.S.), Canada, Western, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) prove how dynamic non-religiosity can be, and how this dynamic is growing over time. This is not evident just from quantitative data, but also from interviews conducted in Slovakia in 2019–2021 that unveil the internal diversity and pluralisms of life trajectories and experiences with uncountable variations of non-religion.

Theoretical considerations – an indication of problems

The “nones” – a new topic emerging?

Glenn M. Vernon (1968), in his speech presented at the 1968 Annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Montreal, claimed that the category of so-called religious “nones” is mostly neglected within academia. The label “no religion” was probably used for the first time in 1957 in the U.S. Census to identify those who did not belong to a formal denomination. Vernon pointed out that the category of so-called religious “nones” includes quite a heterogenous variety of people: atheists, agnostics, those with “no (religious) preference”, those with no (religious) affiliation, as well as members of small groups who do not fit into the classification used and finally those who belong to a residual or “other category” (Vernon, 1968: 219). In his paper, he also questioned the label religious “nones” as such, being used to denote people considered to be without or no religion. He – very accurately – pointed out that the label category uses a *negative definition.* According to Vernon, using what it is not, rather than what it is, as a definition marker for a very multifaceted phenomena may lead to many discursive and conceptual pitfalls. Language is always a tool for evaluation and judging; thus, even negative definitions

may cause negative perceptions and interpretations of a whole group of people. Another – conceptual – pitfall is hidden in the implicit premise that the *litmus test* of being or not being religious is the affiliation and identification with formal groups (church, religion, etc.) (Vernon, 1968: 219). In this case, any kind of formal or simply declared affiliation should automatically make someone religious, which is, obviously, not true.

Another milestone in the sociological approach to "nones" is the famous paper of Norval Glenn, who in 1987 published a report mapping the trajectory of respondents reporting "no religion" on U.S. national surveys from the 1950s to the 1980s (Glenn, 1987). He found that the number of individuals reporting no religion had increased considerably during the previous three decades. However, he cautioned *not to interpret* this as straightforward secularisation. Instead, he pointed out that there were sufficient methodological and conceptual problems with the data obtained, and we should be careful with any quick interpretation.

Actually, since the end of WWII the whole so-called "Western world" (U.S., Canada and Western Europe, including the UK) has faced a profound societal change connected with the transformation of religiosity and the role of religion in public and private life (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 478). British sociologist Colin Campbell, in his book *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (1972), proclaimed that this change is becoming so obvious that the scholars *on both sides of the Atlantic* can no longer neglect the study of irreligion (1972: 11). By then it seemed that irreligion was assumed to be self-explanatory, as the "natural state of mature civilized man hardly required discussion, let alone explanation" (1972: 9). An attempt to capture the principal change of modern societies and the changing role of religion by the numbers of unaffiliated people in national or international surveys became "the programme of future" of the sociology of religion in the second half of the 20th century. Even at the turn of the millennium, there were few social scientists involved in the study of non-religion, and such scholars, especially in British and American academia, were still *lone wolves* (Bullivant, 2020: 92). Starting from the first decade of the 21st century, the sociology of religion became, in certain sense, obsessed with putting an eye on the increasing numbers of religious "nones" or "unaffiliated people" all over the world. Analysis by Dominik Balazka (2020) revealed that the frequency of papers related to non-religion in the Web of Science database started to rapidly grow in 2010, increasing from almost zero to 0.2% (as a proportion of the total number of papers) in 2018. In this regard, he defines four sources of this growth (2020: 7–8): (1) the progressive growth of religious nones in societies; (2) the multiplicity of worldviews and positions that are behind the non-religion category (such as atheists, humanists, agnostics, etc.); (3) the growing freedom of religion and belief with the actual recognition of nones; and (4) the centrality of nones within the secularisation debate.

Secularisation or individualisation of religion?

In general, there are two major competing theories applying different angles of view and explanatory frameworks on the decline of "traditional Christians" (those who belong, believe, behave and practice), accompanied by an increase of "religious nones". Framing nones as non-religious and interpreting the growing numbers of disaffiliated was often interpreted as a "shortage of intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs" (Balazka, 2020: 8). Numerous scholars (e.g., Martin, 1978; Bruce, 2006; Brauer, 2018; Norris, Inglehart, 2011; Lipka, 2015a, b; Voas, 2015; Inglehart, 2020, etc.) and public opinion leaders (e.g., Pew Research Center) have not shared Glenn's hesitation to interpret the increase of religious nones as evidence of *secularisation*. The general decline of religious-affiliated people connected with increase of nones, as witnessed in the Western World countries (America, Canada, UK and the Western Europe), resulted in the formulation of so-called *decline theory* (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 479). According to growing proponents of this theory, secularisation happens in several stages: from initially growing numbers of religiously detached people (less involved with religious groups) to people completely detached from institutional religion (i.e., not affiliated to any religious group), and finally people totally detached from all forms of religiosity and spirituality (e.g., Bruce, 2011; Dobbelaere, 2002; Voas, 2009), achieving a stage when a large majority of individually are unaffiliated and completely irreligious (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 479). According to some scholars, Western countries are "in the midst of secular transition", which is proved by the rise of non-religion as a dominant trend (Voas, McAndrew, 2012: 47).[1]

In contrast with that, opponents of this theory claim that a growing proportion of religiously unaffiliated people shows more evidence of growing *individualisation* of religion and spirituality in modern societies that tends towards more personalised forms of religiosity (e.g., Davie, 2000; Bowen, 2004; Campiche, 2010; etc.). According to the individualisation theory framework, this is due to the growing dislike of the political involvement of major national churches, disagreement with church statements concerned with moral issues and sexual behaviour (homosexuality, pre-marital sex, abortion, divorce, etc.) and a lack of time and will to participate in collective forms of performing religiosity. T. Luckmann (1967, 1990) stressed the persistence of a religiosity and spirituality that are accompanied by a growing invisibility of public and collective forms of religious practices (see also Hamplová, Nešpor, 2009); M. Featherstone (1991) pointed to the dispersion of religion onto irreligious and quasi-religious meaning systems, that has led to religion becoming more invisible; M. J. Casanova spoke about the "privatisation of religion" in this regard (e.g., 2006). P. Berger (2012), G. Davie (2006) and N. Hout (2017) interpreted the same phenomenon as a form of "transformation of religion". Heelas and Woodhead (2005) claimed that we are facing a "spiritual revolution"; J. Habermas introduced the term "post-secular society" a (post-secularism) to describe the situation

1 For the European secularisation paradigm, see e.g., Nešpor, 2009: 124–130.

in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century (e.g., Habermas, 2009). Currently, S. Wilkins-Laflamme is showing that non-affiliated, non-members, non-behaving and non-participating individuals may still retain strong personal belief (the majority of them in a personal God, i.e., a non-Biblically grounded God) and personal forms of practicing (prayer and meditation) (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 479–480). In regard to the individualisation thesis, some scholars are pointing to the phenomena of "do-it-yourself-religion" (Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013: 184). The concept of "self-made religion" is also applied to Christianity, where concrete forms of belief, practice, membership and attachment depend on the individual I-decision, not on tradition, a church or community religious habitus (Trombetta, 2004).

According to some scholars, due to "risk societies" (Beck, 2004), the demand for religion and belief in transcendent entity(ies) offering global security and protection is growing; thus, we are witnessing phenomena of religious revivalism (particularly the neo-Protestant movements and Pentecostalism and Islamic fundamentalism; see Nešpor, 2009: 129), the deprivatization of religion (Casanova, 1994) and the increasing of non-traditional forms of religiosity and spirituality, which some denote as a *u-turn of religion* and an *alternative resacralization of Europe* (e.g., Heelas, 1996, 2008; Knoblauch, 2003; Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013: 185–186).

Recently, the Bruno Kessler Foundation, in cooperation with Foundation's Center in Information and Communication technology and the Center for Religious Studies, started in 2020 to investigate religious nones and the changes of their belief system over time, focusing on "secularity and post-secularity", recognising *no religion as a peculiar form of religious discourse*, and acknowledging so-called "secular beliefs" (Balazka, 2020: 5). The theoretical premise behind this approach is that we are facing "innovation in religion" manifested by internal changes and transformations of religious tradition and communities. In this regard, the project is re-directing the attention of scholarship toward the category of religious nones, "stressing their internal differences and highlighting their similarities with affiliated religionists", intending to challenge the "diffused mis-conceptualisations of this increasingly relevant category" (Balazka, 2020: 5).

Fuzzy labelling categories

In current studies – maybe as a reflection of both negative social impact as well as conceptual inaccuracy – we can detect a more sophisticated approach to the labelling of religious and non-religious segments of populations in order to pay attention to the heterogenous inner structure of the umbrella term "religious nones". Thus, scholars – besides the unquestioned labelling categories such as atheists, humanist and agnostics – spoke about "unchurched believers" (those believing but not belonging; e.g. Davie, 2000), "liminal nones" (i.e. those who changed from being unaffiliated to affiliated and back again; e.g., Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 480), "active and ordinary atheists" (e.g., Altemeyrer, 2009; Baker, Smith, 2009a; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015), "non-affiliated believers", "affiliated believers", "culturally religious"

and "actively religious" (Baker, Smith, 2009a, b, 2015). The Pew Research Center Report on Western Europe countries (2018), in order to capture religiosity and irreligiosity, uses terms "Church attending Christians", "non-practicing Christians", "religiously unaffiliated" and "religious Christians"; Balazka also uses the labels "spiritual seekers" and "humanists" (2020: 8). In their current research, Schwadel et al. (2021) suggested introducing a dynamic aspect of religiosity/irreligiosity, pointing out that religiosity is not static during the course of one's life. Therefore, they distinguish four *religious identification trajectories*, i.e. individuals being: (a) consistently religious (i.e. *religious affiliated*), (b) once religious but stopped identifying as religious (i.e. religious *dones*), (c) currently religious but being formerly non-religious (i.e. *sacralised*), and consistently non-religious (i.e. religious *nones*) (Ibid: 868).

The other labelling categories are also not in a good shape, in regard to accuracy. For instance, it is claimed that religiousness and spirituality are interconnected, but at the same time they also have unique characteristics (Zimmbauer et al., 1997; Saucier, Skrzypińska, 2006). Both have a personal and experiential component (e.g., God or a higher power), and spirituality may also be organisationally or institutionally grounded (Zimmbauer et al., 1997). Many report being spiritual and religious at the same time, practicing and behaving as firm Christians but consuming alternative forms of spirituality from religious and spiritual markets with beliefs (e.g., Fuller, 2001; Carey, 2018; Parsons, 2018; Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013).

When using labelling categories, it is also necessary to consider the factor of religious integrity over the time, i.e. to distinguish more or less "stable" and "transitional (religious) identities". Research in the U.S., for instance, revealed that in comparison with other labelling categories, both atheists and so-called "active, convictional Christians" appear to have remained relatively stable over time (e.g., Stark, 2011; Hout, Smith, 2015; Stetzer, 2015).

Declaring "none" but being still religious at some point

In their current study J. Levin, M. Bradshaw, B. R. Johnson and R. Stark (2022) questioned the former statement that religious nones are not religious. Analysing the data from five recent U.S. population surveys – the 2012 *Portrait of American Life Study*, 2017 *Values and Beliefs of the American Public Survey*, 2018 *General Social Survey*, 2018 *Chapman Survey of American Fears* and 2017–2020 *World Values Survey* – they came to conclusion that those checking "none" on surveys (as well as atheists and agnostics) held a whole variety of religious and spiritual practices and beliefs, attending services and practice in their life (e.g., personal praying, meditation). When it comes to their belief, they often believe in God or a higher power, and they maintain belief in heaven, hell and miracles. Many nones also declare having some sort of religious or spiritual experiences (Levin et al., 2022: 2). The research revealed that religious psychology and behaviour persist following deidentification, and in the U.S.

formerly religious individuals (*dones*) are still spending money religiously. As the authors claim, the growing proportion of people reporting no religious affiliation does not automatically mean that these people are not religious in some other dimension(s) of religiosity (practicing, believing, behaving etc.). The authors also strongly criticise the use of categories like "religious none, no religion and not religious" to describe this category of people as "inappropriate, inaccurate and misleading", since they are based only on institutionally unaffiliated (or declaring no belonging and membership) or affiliated but not with the categories listed in surveys. In this regard, they encourage focused research to understand who the nones are, and whether the growth of declaring oneself to be a none can be read as a declining of religion in the world (Levin et al., 2022: 2): "To restate, our assertion is not that nones is inherently problematic in and of itself – it is a valid category and should not be discarded – but that many of the people being reported as nones are not really nones" (Levin et al., 2022: 4). The latter statement was proved in earlier research and outside of the U.S., too (e.g., Baker, 2012; Baker, Smith, 2009a; Cimino, Smith, 2011; Hout, Fisher, 2002; Lim, MacGregor, Putnam, 2010; Storm, 2009; Zuckerman, *Ed.*, 2009; etc.). The social aspect of religiosity and irreligiosity and their impact on physical and mental health (e.g., Koenig, King, Carson, 2012), choice of educational track (e.g., Mayrl, Oeur, 2009), volunteering (e.g., Lim, MacGregor, 2012), family formation (e.g., Eggebeen, Dew, 2009) and vote choice (Evans, de Graaf, *Eds.*, 2013) has been stated.

Social perception of Christians, atheist and non-believers

Even though the countries of Western and Eastern Europe have longer experience of non-religious people being a part of their societies, their perceptions may vary. On one hand, there is the stereotype of not being ingroup; on the other, the absence of religious affiliation with all social impact (such as participation, or doctrine) may lead to the absence of values usually connected with religion. Therefore, these aspects should be seen from the perspective of belonging to a certain social group – the sole fact of belonging does not just operate as a source of well-being but can also be a basis for serious intergroup conflicts (Ysseldyk et al., 2010: 60). The perception is then measured as personal attitudes toward groups, where the belonging group of a respondent is somehow reflected in the answers, too. A good example is the ISSP 2018 Religion research on attitudes towards Christians and atheist and non-believers, which proved higher acceptance and reputation of Christians even in countries that belong to the most secular (such as Czechia). The smallest difference between positive and very positive attitudes towards Christians and atheists was in France (58.3% for Christians, and 50.8% for atheists) and Sweden (55.8% for Christians and 48.1% for atheists) (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

On the other hand, the highest difference between a positive attitude toward Christians and atheists was in Bulgaria (86.4% for Christians and 40.7% for atheists), Finland (74.3% vs 35.1%) and Hungary (63% vs 23.8%). The level of secularisation

Fig. 1 Personal attitude toward Atheists and non-believers in 2018 in European countries in the ISSP 2018 Religion

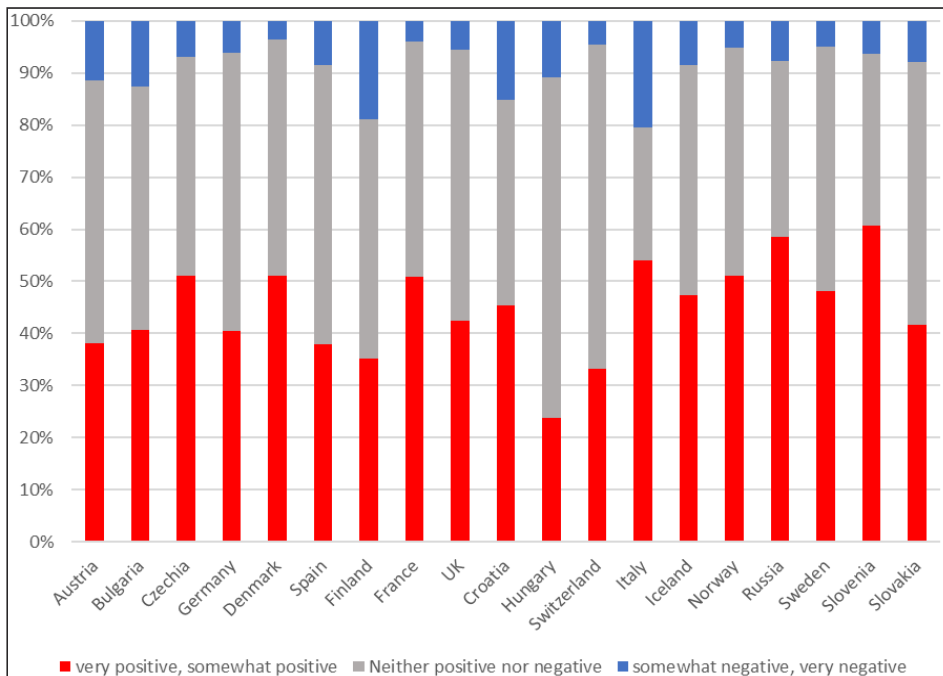
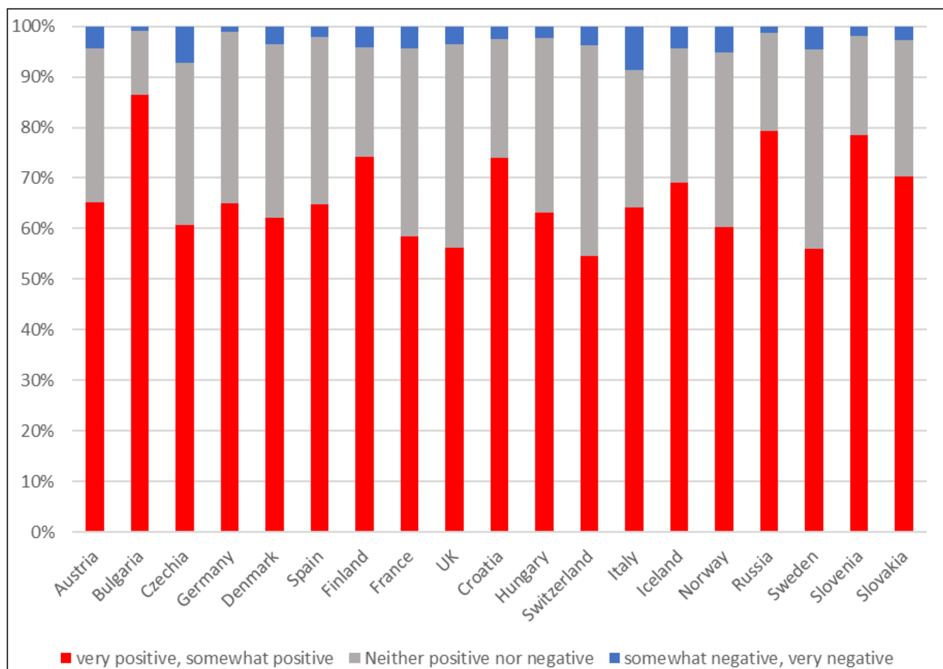


Fig. 2 Personal attitude toward Christians in 2018 in European countries in the ISSP 2018 Religion



of the country is mostly projected in having a prevalence of positive attitudes over neutral (in most countries the “neither positive nor negative” attitude is the most common). Among the highest prevalence were those in Italy (54% positive, 25.6% neutral), Slovenia (41.6% positive and 33% neutral) and Russia (58.6% positive and 33.7% neutral). More positive than neutral attitudes were found in Czechia, Denmark, France, Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Slovenia. In the case of Christians, all countries had a higher proportion of positive attitudes than neutral.

To conclude, we can say that Eastern European countries in the sample had a higher proportion of positive attitudes towards atheists and non-believers than Western European countries (47% vs 37.6%), while Western European countries had a higher proportion of neutral and negative attitudes. Italy and Finland were countries with almost 20% of negative attitudes toward atheists and non-believers.

We must also see certain limits to this data, especially in terms of Christians. There is no doubt that the power of labels is very strong, and it encompasses many forms of religiosity on the whole. It is important to see the internal dynamics, as well. In current times, especially in Central Europe, we see the processes of detachment and disconnection with traditional values, but these ruptures are not sudden and radical (Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013). The problem of declaration as a sufficient marker is challenged, as it masks different levels of religiosity, different success of traditional and new churches and movements and hides other aspects of religiosity (2013: 205). In many cases (which is an uneasy task to unveil), the declaration is the only form of a relationship to a religious group. Even being uninterested, uninvolved or even unbelieving does not sometimes provide sufficient arguments to deny a declaration, as it may put an individual in the position of a stereotypical none, or a religious “homeless” person. Therefore, we presume that due to the stereotypical visions of nones, there is an unidentified proportion of declared Christians *who keep their affiliation as a shield* against their own and communal prejudice of being without any religious feeling and as a positively perceived label.

A deeper immersion in the societal relationship between both groups (Christians vs atheist and non-believers) would need to be evaluated. Several ideas, although from the U.S., might be inspirational to think about – Gervais et al. (2011: 1202–1203) researched the topic of anti-atheist prejudice, where the matter of distrust from the side of Christians lies in the fact that they are unsure what exactly atheists believe. With Muslims and some mutual norms, Christians can infer beliefs, but in the case of atheists the distrust is the uncertainty or even perceived lack of any norms. The prosocial aspect of religion, according to these authors, is perceived as *social glue* even in more secularised societies, as in many places it is the only institute that brings people together in larger cooperative social groups.

The concluding question, in attempts to find the deeper context of mutual tolerance and acceptance in societies, should be inserted into a more profound context of pluralism and diversity in societies. Most societies depicted in charts are diverse in terms of the religious landscape, and all countries have experienced secularisation and the emergence of people who do not feel attached to any type of

collective religious bodies. The growth of diversity is therefore not just limited to diverse religious markets but also encompass those who belong to the society itself. Thus, pluralism and the call for more tolerance is the best way of their *modi vivendi*. And it seems that pluralism and its maintenance is a common platform where all religious and non-religious ideas can meet and cooperate. Although non-religious people and atheists show certain higher levels of tolerance, those who declare themselves as religious and have higher support for pluralistic views also show higher levels of tolerance (Devellennes, Loveless, 2022: 589). According to Loobuyck (2015: 93–94) *religious citizens* must (1) accept pluralism and acknowledge freedom of religion as a universal right, (2) accept the independent validity of scientific knowledge, (3) must see faith as not being in contradiction with the progress of scientific knowledge, (4) accept the secular character of a constitutional state and the priorities of secular over religious reasons in public debate, and the exercise of political authority should be neutral toward competing worldviews, (5) consider their own faith reflexively form the outside and in relation to secular views, so that the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality is connected with their own religion. A *secular citizen* (Looybuck, 2015: 94–95) should (1) overcome the self-reflexive, rigid and exclusive secularist understanding of modernity and reject secularism based on hard naturalism and radical scientism, (2) consider religion not just to be an irrational relic of pre-modern times, but rather see the politically relevant meanings of religious discourse that could be possibly incorporated into secular political discourse, (3) not *a priori* exclude the semantic contents of religions, as many philosophical approaches are secular translations of earlier religious discourse and (4) respect the sensibility of the existential significance of religion for many, and secular citizens should be able to speak with their religious fellows as equals.

Societal impact of negative labelling

Vernon's concerns from the late 1960s about the possible negative perception of the label religious nones *per se* have come true. During the late second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century the label religious nones was connected with the whole set of stereotypes against nones in public discourse that leaked into scientific discourse, as well. C. Campbell (1972) pointed to the fact that in the study of religion there has been an assumption that religion is a universal feature in societies and "is in the main beneficial in its effects, that one looks in vain for any consideration of the functions of irreligion" (Ibid: 9); there has been a natural assumption of the *connection of religion and morality* (and *irreligion* can be open to being labelled as *immorality*) (Ibid: 98), a linking of religion as societal integrative element to approach a society's goals (Ibid: 14). In society there can unintentionally be hierarchies of values, where *faith and piety* can be seen as *positive values* and *loss of faith and departure as negative values* (Szpiech, 2020: 256). In this regard, non-religion does not come with "significant baggage", while atheism comes with connotations and value judgements both positive and negative (Alexander, 2021: 4). In many cases the

level of antipathy can also be a matter of self-identification and stereotypes. Cragun et al. (2012: 108) provide a different perception when an individual identifies as a none, which does not have to implicate a counter position to religion, or when an individual identifies as an atheist or agnostic, which indicate the more pronounced out-group status of somebody who is not just "not religious" but someone who denies the existence of God. Because belief in God seems to be sufficient agent to inhibit moral behaviour, atheists are broadly perceived as *morally depraved and dangerous* (Gervais et al., 2017: 3).

In current discourse on the relationship between human rights and religion, we automatically justify more rights to something called religion and ignore, or even punish, non-religious beliefs (Nixon, 2020: 14). Under certain political situations, the prejudice in societies against atheists may rise. For example, in the U.S. in the second half of the 20th century atheism was seen as anti-American and pro-communist (Frost, Scheitle, Ecklund, 2022). Even nowadays, together with Muslims and homosexuals, atheists are among the most disliked minorities in the U.S. (Weiler-Harvell, 2011: 2). Anti-Americanism is not bound to just a false equation with communism but lacks one of the most important elements of American patriotism: faith in God (Weiler-Harvell, 2011: 42). The suspicion against atheists in America in the 1950s led to the commitment that atheists should be denied fundamental rights (Weiler-Harvell, 2011: 48). In this regard, it is interesting to trace the increasing positive recognition of atheism in past decades and its emancipation effort invested into receiving a voice in the public sphere. Thus, in the UK, for example, we face the phenomenon of so-called "new atheism", as a movement articulating a "direct set of political stances" in order to popularise anti-religious sentiment and support efforts to challenge the institutional and social power of religion (McAnulla, 2014: 126). On the other hand, as Bubík, Remmel and Václavík (*Eds.*, 2020: 6–7) have recently pointed out, in many Central European post-socialistic countries, we face the trend of crucial reinterpretations of national identities intertwined with the re-incorporation of religion. During the transformation period irreligion seemed somehow irrelevant or problematic in public discourse, and due to historical connections with Soviet ideology and atheism, such a topic still has some sort of negative connotations in scholarship, too.

"Nones" in the perspective of the data

Quantitative approach to "nones"

The core of the research of irreligiosity has thus far been focused mainly on survey data analysis in order to obtain the particular nation's landscape profile of religiosity/irreligiosity and contextualise it into the macro picture by applying a comparative, geographical or dynamic perspective. Thus, the majority of recent research on religious nones is aimed at statistical analysis, offering a quantitative perspective

on nones in figures. When summarising current reports on nones in the U.S., Canada, the UK and Western and Central Europe, we can see the similarly increasing trend of a growing number of nones or unaffiliated individuals (even if the size of these groups and the level of their irreligiosity differs considerably, based on a national or regional sample); just to mention marginal examples of the cross-national scale – Croatia has 4.1% and East-Germany has 67.8% of non-affiliated people in a representative sample of population (ISSPs 2008–2010) (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 490).

Religious "nones" in the Western world and Central and Eastern Europe – figures from international surveys

The United States

In America, around 35% of individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (i.e., millennials) report no religious affiliation. This group is mostly represented by the younger generation. However, according to surveys, the older generations appear to follow a similar, yet weaker, trend (Lipka, 2015b). National surveys also revealed some ethnic patterns of religiosity, indicating that, in general, white people tend to report no affiliation more often over time (Funk, Smith, 2012). According to one report, four Americans are becoming unaffiliated for every one that moves in the opposite direction, from unaffiliated to affiliated (Lipka, 2015a). Twenty-first century reports have argued that America is experiencing not only an increase in the number of people reporting "no religion" or "not religious" on national surveys – generally labelled as "religious nones" – but also a decline in religious participation (Baker, Smith, 2009b; Funk, Smith, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2018a, b; Alper, 2018, etc.).

Canada

In Canada, between 1985 and 2010 the rate of individuals declaring no religion in the Canadian General Social Survey rose from 10.5% to 23.8%, which represents a 126.7% increase over 25 years (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 478). However, the Project Canada surveys (Bibby, 2002, 2011) have shown that in 2000, 40% of unaffiliated people believed in God, 19% said they had experienced God's presence and 13% declared praying once a week (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 480). Nevertheless, it has been stated that when it comes to the Canadian context, the number of unaffiliated people as well as their levels of religiosity varies considerably between the provinces and regions (e.g., Wilkins-Laflamme, 2014). According to current national reports, individuals declaring no religion are, in general, less religious than religiously affiliated people, yet one-fifth of them attend religious services on an annual basis (particularly for rites of passage – marriage, baptism and funeral), one-seventh practice personal religiosity on their own at least once a week and one-third consider their religious and/or spiritual beliefs to be important for their lives (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015: 495).

United Kingdom (UK)

In their report from 2017 on religious nones in the UK, Ben Clemens and Peter Gries stated that the decline in religious identification and corresponding increase of nones has been one of the most important religious changes in the UK (Clemens, Gries, 2017). According to some authors (Zuckerman, Galen, Pasquale, 2016: 79), high levels of atheism and agnosticism combined with low levels of identification and participation make the UK one of the most secular nations worldwide. The British Social Attitudes survey has shown: (1) a considerable decline of identification with two major churches – those identifying as Anglican fell from 40% in 1983 to 17% in 2014, and Catholics declined from 10% to 8% in the adult population; (2) an increase in the levels of identification with non-Christian religions – from 2% in 1983 to 8% in 2014; and (3) a growing segment of religious nones – an increase from 31% in 1983 to 43% in 2014 (NatCen, 2015). There are three-times more non-practicing Christians (55%) as practicing Christians (18%) (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Current research revealed that secular groups in the UK converge to the ideological left (more than the religiously affiliated) and agnostics and atheists differ from each other on public policy (Clemens, Gries, 2017).

Western Europe

According to a new Pew Research Center survey of 15 countries in Western Europe (WE), most Christians in Western Europe today are non-practicing, but Christian identity still remains a meaningful religious, social and cultural marker (2018a). Most Western Europeans continue to identify as Christians though few attend church regularly. Although the vast majority of adults say they were baptised (91%), and 81% were raised as Christians, only 71% identify themselves currently as Christians (71% in Germany, 64% in France; Pew Research Center, 2018b). A rising share of adults in Western Europe describe themselves as "religiously unaffiliated", and about half or more in several countries say they are "neither religious nor spiritual" (Pew Research Center, 2018a). According to a Pew Research Center survey of religious beliefs and practices in Western Europe (2018b), some say they drifted away gradually from religion, stopped believing in religious teachings or were alienated by scandals or church positions on social issues. In every country included in the research, except Italy, non-practicing Christians (i.e., those attending the church no more than a few times a year) outnumbered regular churchgoers. The majority of Christians in Europe are not-practicing; only 22% of Christians attend services monthly or more frequently (Pew Research Center, 2018b). The Pew research also discovered that the majority of Christians in Western Europe are in some way alienated from the belief in God as described in the Bible and believe in other higher powers instead. The biggest difference is among "Church attending Christians" (where 64% believe in God as expressed in Bible and 32% in another higher power) and "non-practicing Christians" (where 24% believe in God from Bible while 51% in another higher power). A vast majority (61%) of religiously unaffiliated adults do not believe in any higher power or spiritual force in the universe, but 28% still hold some sort of spiritual belief (2018a).

As the Pew research revealed, non-practicing Christians in Europe "differ from religiously unaffiliated people in their view on God, attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants and opinions about religion's role in society" (Pew Research Center, 2018b). According to the surveys, Christian identity in Western Europe is associated with higher levels of nationalism and negative sentiments toward immigrants and religious minorities (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Majorities across the region (unaffiliated, non-practicing and also church attending Christians) support legal same-sex marriages and abortions. The majority of "religious Christians" favour gay marriage and legal abortion in Belgium, Denmark, France, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK (Ibid: 2018a). The Pew research also discovered that the share of religiously unaffiliated adults in several Western European countries is comparable to the share of religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S., but American nones are more religious than their European counterparts. In 2014 23% of Americans declared themselves to be atheists, agnostics or "nothing in particular". In 2018 Pew research detected 23% unaffiliated adults in the UK and 24% in Germany.

A Pew report on 10-key findings from its research concludes that secularisation is evident on both sides of the Atlantic, that American nones are much more prone than "unaffiliated" Europeans to pray and believe in God. Using the standard measures of religious commitment, American nones are more religious than Christians in several European countries: 13% of U.S. nones declare that religion is very important in their lives (vs. 14% of WE Christians), 9% of them attend religious services at least monthly, 20% of them pray daily (vs 18% of WE Christians), 27% of U.S. nones believe in God with absolute certainty (vs. 23% of WE Christians) (Pew Research Center, 2018a).

Net losses for Christianity have been accompanied by net growth in the numbers of religiously unaffiliated people. While Christians (taken as a whole) are by far the largest religious group in Western Europe, a substantial minority of the population in every country is religiously unaffiliated – so-called "nones" (people who identify as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"). The nones' portion of the adult population ranges from as high as 48% in the Netherlands to 15% in Ireland, Italy and Portugal (Pew Research Center, 2018b). According to a Pew summary report, nones in Western Europe are relatively young and highly educated, as well as disproportionately male.

Central Eastern Europe

From June 2015 to July 2016 the Pew Research Center conducted surveys in 18 countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in order to collect data on religious belief and national belonging in a post-socialistic and post-atheistic region. According to the Pew Research Center's report, solid majorities of adults across the region believe in God, and most identify with a religion. Orthodox Christianity and Roman Catholicism are the most prevalent religious affiliations; the current divide more or less corresponds

with the former Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires (2017). The cross-national survey research also revealed that in many CEE countries, religion and national identity are closely entwined, particularly in the case of Russia, Poland and Greece, where being Orthodox or Catholic converge with being "truly Russian", "truly Polish" or "truly Greek".

The research also showed that even though many people in the region consider religion to be an important element of national belonging, relatively few of them regularly attend religious services, pray on regular basis and consider religion central to their lives (Pew Research Center, 2017). Despite the high proportion of adults declaring belief in God and identifying with traditional Churches, the levels of daily prayer and weekly worship attendance are relatively low (comparing with other Pew Research Center surveys on a global level), thus indicating the trend of "believing and belonging, without behaving" (2017).

From all the countries surveyed, the most dramatic shift in religious believing, belonging and behaving occurred in the Czech Republic, where the share identifying as Catholic dropped from 44% in 1991 to 21% in the 2015–2016 Pew Research Center survey. Today, the Czech Republic is one of the most secular countries in Europe, with nearly three-quarters of adults (72%) describing their religion as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular." The same survey revealed that only 29% of Czech believe in God. When it comes to religiosity in the 2015–2016 Pew Research Center survey 8% declined to answer the question (for analysis of nonbelievers and *apatheist* in Czech Republic, see Fialová, Nešpor, 2018). High proportions of unaffiliated persons were also detected in Latvia (21% + 25% of "other" = those that declined to answer), Estonia (45% unaffiliated + 29% other), Hungary (21% unaffiliated + 22% other), Lithuania (6% unaffiliated + 17% other) and Russia (15% unaffiliated + 4% other). As the research showed, national patterns of both religiosity as well irreligiosity *differ considerably* across this once "monolithic atheist" region.

The comparative Western and CEE Pew research report (Pew Research Center, 2018c) claims that the former Iron Curtain divide is still present in Europe, where there are considerable different public attitudes toward religion, minorities and social issues (such as gay marriage and legal abortion). In general, Westerners are more tolerant in regard to Muslims and Jews than Central and Eastern Europeans. Here, again, it is important to consider national particularities. For instance, Czechs are highly secular, favour same-sex marriage and do not associate Christianity with their national identity – thus, following prevailing Western European trends. However, Czechs are less tolerant toward Muslims, resembling the CEE pattern of intolerance in this regard. On the other hand, for many Hungarians national identity is deeply rooted in "being truly Hungarian" (i.e., being born in Hungary and having Hungarian ancestors), which is a typically Eastern European view of national identity. Yet only about six-in-ten Hungarians believe in God, which corresponds with the Western European levels of belief (Ibid: 2018c). About half of Slovaks favour same-sex marriage, and a similar share say they would accept Muslims in their family – which is less than in most Western European countries but still more than in the majority

of countries in CEE. On the other hand, Slovakia's neighbour in Central Europe, Poland, converges with the Eastern pattern of attitudes toward most issues (national identity, Muslims, same-sex marriage and abortion).

As the Pew 2018 comparative report summarised, "for most people living in the former Eastern bloc, being Christian (whether Catholic or Orthodox) is an important component of their national identity". According to Pew surveys conducted both in Western and CEE Europe there are "high levels of religious nationalism in the East and more openness toward multiculturalism in the West" (Ibid: 2018c).

In this regard, it has already been noted that some modernisation processes in post-communist countries are in essence contrary to Western world – while Western modernity negated traditional authorities and the religiously legitimated political order, in CEE Europe we are facing a *re-evaluation* and re-establishment of the *religious tradition* and acknowledgement of national and cultural values in public discourse (Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013: 190–191). Thus, post-communist modernity represents a reformulation of traditional national paradigms, connected with the phenomena of *interrupted* and *reinvented tradition*. In some countries we could speak about the special phenomena of a *demonstrative re-sacralisation* – i.e. declarative positive attitudes towards religion, anchored in legislation and manifested in various strata of society (Zachar Podolinská, 2021: 30–31). In other countries, the "rupture of tradition" was so profound in the post-socialistic period that secularisation tendencies were instead accelerated (case of Czech Republic). Depending on the particular country and its pre-communist past, we face quite *divergent trajectories* of *post-communist religious transformation* (for national studies see Borowik, *Ed.*, 1999; Demerath, 2000; Tomka, 1995; Pollack, 2003; Agadjanian, 2006; Müller, 2008; Marinović, Zrinščak, 2006; Nešpor, *Ed.*, 2004; Václavík, Hamplová, Nešpor, 2018; Podolinská, 2010; Tížik 2011; Fialová, Nešpor, 2018, etc.). CEE has been approached in a monothematic issue of the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* (*AJEC 19*/1, 2010) capturing new forms of religiosity in Europe via national case studies focused on the religious, spiritual and irreligious landscapes in Slovakia (Podolinská, 2010), Belarus (Titarenko, 2010), Hungary (Rosta, 2010), Czech Republic (Nešpor, 2010) and Poland (Hall, 2010). The social significance of religion in the enlarged Europe in regard to research of secularisation, individualisation and pluralisation has been traced in a publication of D. Pollack, O. Müller and G. Pickel (*Eds.*, 2012). In-depth analysis of patterns of religiosity in Central European countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Austria) is available in Podolinská, Krivý and Bahna (2013).

Slovakia

The post-socialistic transformation in Slovakia is characterised by unprecedently rapid restoration of the Catholic Church as the traditional dominant national church. It was a matter of survival to de-privatise religion and return believers into the arms of the Catholic Church. Since so-called "registered churches" in Slovakia still depend on official figures from national censuses (part of their budget is based on official statistics, on the number of members declaring affiliation to the specific church or denomination),

a decline in membership would have drastic economic consequences for these churches. Even if traditional national churches are still receiving major support in society, the decisive core of believers in the early 2000s was without any political interests and demanded that churches return to spiritual matters instead of "political gaming" (Podolinská, 2010: 99). In regard to stratification of the religious landscape in Slovakia in the 21st century, it seems to be monolithic, with only few signs of "post-traditional society" (Tomka, 2006: 256–258). If, for instance, we trace the categories "believing without belonging" (Davie, 2002) or "belonging without believing" (Voas, Crockett, 2005), we find that proportion of their representatives in Slovakia in the first decade of the 21st century was less than 2% (Podolinská, 2010: 89).

Based on an analysis of three waves of the European Values Study (EVS 1991, 1999 and 2008) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP 1999, 2006–2008), T. Podolinská claims that even if institutional religiosity is still predominant on the Slovak religious scene, we are detecting here a strong *post-traditional trend* as a *prevailing form* of religiosity (Podolinská, 2010: 85). In regard to so-called "institutional (intra-church) religiosity" (Ibid: 2010: 90), *traditionalists* corresponding to the "core of believers" (Krivý, 2001: 14) can be distinguished as those reporting to be believers, believing in God, reporting attachment to any established church or confession, attending church services at least once a month, declaring the great importance of God in their life (8–10 on a scale of values), conducting a private prayer at least occasionally and at least having great confidence in a church (Ibid: 14). The investigation revealed that the proportion of "traditional" believers in the Slovak population has reached 32% in the transformation and post-transformation period (1991–2008, Podolinská, 2010: 90–93).

In the same research, the core of the population, more than 40%, was placed in the post-traditional position – *post-traditionalists* – consisting of a pool of *religious privatists*, i.e., people that declare believing in a personal God (EVS 2008 – 42.9%), having own way of connection with God or a higher power, (EVS 2008 – 36.3%), never attending church services (ISSP 2008 – 23%), holding no trust towards a church (EVS 1991 – 50.1%, ISSP 2008 – 33.8%) and considering themselves to be a spiritual person (ISSP 2008 – 60%) (2010: 93–94). Research also revealed quite a high percentage of people that never pray (EVS 2008 – 30%), do not believe in God (EVS 2008 – 15%) and people without any interest in the sacred and supernatural (EVS 2008 – 19%) among those declaring at the same time being a member of a church (EVS 2008 – 79.8%; ISSP 2008 – 83.1%). Podolinská denotes those variables of "belonging without believing" (Davie, 1993) as *religious minimalists* (2010: 94–95) within a special group of *religious post-traditionalists* in Slovakia.

The analysis also detected an interestingly high proportion of "extra-church spirituality" among "traditional believers". The proportion of those declaring a deep belief in God and a simultaneous belief in horoscopes, fortune telling and alternative healing reached 8.6% in the EVS 2008 and 12.4% in the ISSP 2008. D. Pollack (2003) distinguishes between the older forms (astrology, alternative healing and belief in reincarnation) and newer forms of non-traditional religiosity (Zen meditation and

yoga, magic, spiritualism and occultism, mysticism and New Age). Relying on the *Political Culture in Central and Eastern Europe (PCE)* survey, Pollack claims that almost one-third of the population in Slovakia holds older forms of non-traditional beliefs, whereas new forms of non-traditional beliefs (Zen meditation/yoga 19.2%; New Age 3.2%) are less presented (Pollack, 2003: 325–327). Podolinská, Krivý and Bahna propose using the term *post-Christian* in this regard for the Slovak context and to continue with the research of non-traditional churchliness, non-churchliness and extra-church religion in order to capture the innovation of both modern religiosity and spirituality in Slovakia (2013: 247).

The category of "non-believers" and "atheists" in Slovakia may be represented by figures from the EVS and ISSP as follows: 11.7% non-believers (EVS 2008; the figure was declining over two post-socialistic decades reaching 16.1% in the EVS 1991); 2.6% atheists (EVS 2008; compare with 3.4% in the EVS 1991); "do not believe in God" (EVS 2008 – 15%, ISSP 2008 – 10.1%; compare to the EVS 1991 – 23.2%); "never pray" (EVS 2008 – 30%, ISSP 2008 – 21.6%; EVS 1991 – 37.6%); "never attend church services" (EVS 2008 –22.7%, ISSP 2008 – 23%; EVS 1991 – 26.8%); "do not belong to any church or confession (EVS 2008 – 16.2%, ISSP 2008 – 16.9%; EVS 1991 – 28.1%) (Podolinská 2010: 97–98). All variables traced in the EVS and ISSP surveys in order to detect signs of secularisation within two post-socialist decades in Slovakia (1991–2008) revealed the same trend – *instead of secularisation, we are facing the religious socialisation with visible post-traditional tunes* (2010: 99). Other surveys revealed the same trend. According to the *Democracy and Citizens Survey in Slovakia* (DOS, 2014), among the non-affiliated persons 4.73% declare to believe in God, 14% report praying at least sometimes and 17% attend religious services at least sometimes. On the other hand, among "the affiliated" 14.43% declared not believing in God (Zachar Podolinská, Tížik, Majo, 2019).[2]

While Western Europe seems to be at a *post-secular turn* (De Vries, Sullivan, 2006), Slovakia is on its *post-traditional turn*. Thanks to four decades of socialism, we face the phenomenon of interrupted tradition; currently, the historically rooted traditional religious path is being accommodated in the conditions of late modernity, democracy and religious pluralism (Podolinská, 2010: 99).[3]

2 For an analysis of various aspects of religiosity in Slovakia, see also the works of sociologists of religion (Bunčák, 2001; Krivý, 2001; Kvasničková, 2005; Tížik, 2006); anthropologist of religion (Podolinská, 2008) and geographer (Majo, 2011, 2013).

3 Comparative cross-national research based on the *European Values Study* and *International Social Survey Programme* revealed that current Christianity in Slovakia is a multi-coloured mixture of traditional, post-traditional, and non-traditional religiosity. Nevertheless, when comparing the overall level of religiosity in Slovakia with its neighbours (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Austria), Slovakia occupies the middle position. The closest country to Slovakia in terms of the average level of religiosity is Austria, followed by Hungary. Following the same criterion, the most distant country is the Czech Republic. Among CEE countries, Slovakia is the only country where religiosity has increased overall (1991–2008) in all its dimensions – believing, belonging and practising (Podolinská, Krivý, Bahna, 2013; Zachar Podolinská, Tížik, Majo, 2019: 28).

Qualitative approach to research of religiosity, spirituality and irreligiosity

The "post-paradigmatic" sociology of religion (see, e.g., Nešpor, 2009: 134–140) claims that we should abandon the obsessive looking for one universal explanation of modern religiosity and cease relying on any of the "old paradigms" ("secularisation, reorganisation, individualisation and the rational choice theory, McGuire, 2002; Hunt, 2005; Davie, 2007). In this regard, a strong trend towards scientism (Berger, 2003) and a lack of ethnomethodologies involved in the research of religion was stated (e.g. Beckford, 2003; Davie, 2007).

Also, thanks to the sociological mainstream that prefers the quantitative approach in the research of nones, we claim that despite a half century of focused research, we still do not *know who they are.* In this regard we fully agree with P. L. Berger, who claims that we should avoid scientism in order to reveal human values (2003: 166–167), and G. Davie, who points to the necessity of using an ethnographical approach in order to reveal socio-cultural multifacetedness, diversity and divergence (2007).

In our understanding, the major problem of the research resides not only in the non-exhaustive definition of labels used to capture the nature of irreligion and being irreligious, but more importantly, the approaches applied so far. In the sociology of religion, the quantitative approach is the predominant method of addressing irreligion, using the combination of variables from a limited set of survey questions. The approach, offering in-depth analysis grounded in qualitative multi-sited ethnographies, remains still very rare (e.g., Bellah, 1976; Ammermann, *Ed.*, 2007; Heelas, Woodhead, 2005; Nešpor, 2009; Lee, 2014, 2015). According to our understanding, the qualitative approach is crucial at this point, since the group of so-called religious nones is characterised by heterogeneity and is unstable over time. In many countries it is still more convenient to be religiously affiliated than none; therefore, people might tend to avoid declaration of potentially stigmatising labels in surveys. For many people, it is very difficult to express their religious, spiritual or non-religious identity in "one word", not to mention that even traditional labelling categories (Christian, atheist, agnostic, etc.) are perceived to be problematic in many ways. Thus, if we want to understand and comment on religious evolution in modern Western and CEE societies in an accurate way, we have to dive deeper under the surface of self-declaration. In this regard, we suppose that research projects combining macro-and micro-perspectives, employing both qualitative and qualitative research aiming to achieve a national and locally embedded picture would bring a significant added value. We suggest that the quantitative segment of analysis should be accompanied by multi-sited ethnographies on the national level (Marcus, 1995) in order to detect local semantic "deviations" and particularities.

In this regard, we have already designed a 4-year qualitative research study conducted in 3 different regions in Slovakia and Bratislava (as a Slovak metropolis),

entitled *Ethnographic Research of Non-religion and Secularism in Modern Slovak Society (Life Trajectories and Stories)* (VEGA 2/0060/19). The research collected more than 180 life stories and religious paths to, within and out of religion. Based on our research: (1) we prefer using the gerund "being" with the corresponding adjective, claiming that it needs some sort of active personalised I-energy invested into "being religious, spiritual or irreligious"; (2) we also claim that religiosity is not used as a "revolving door", since there is a sort of moral, behavioural and discursive residuum from the "previous phase"; thus, the person never returns to the previous stage without some print marks and footprints from the former (religious/spiritual/secular) trajectory(ies); (3) the more we immerse into the qualitative research – i.e. capturing real life-stories and trajectories of particular people – the more we realise that the generally used labelling categories are fuzzy, or even absolutely do not fit the "field".

During our research, we have experienced a whole variety of religious, spiritual and irreligious profiles. In our case, "sand was hidden in every pearl", thus we were not able to collect a single "ideal type" interview. Qualitative analysis of even the most "clean type" profiles has eventually shown some sort of "deviation" from ideal type definition. Indeed, we came to conclusion that it is more proper not to use general taxonomies, and we ended up with using the key phrases or keywords instead, e.g.: *"The Star-Woman"*; *"Jesus shall not tell you what you should do"; "I do not believe in God; he decided to let my brother die"; "I believe in Mother nature and our antecedents"; "I cure people with my own power and energy"; "I do believe in God, cards and extra-terrestrial civilizations"; "I do believe in me, but I do not deny existence of transcendence"; "I am a non-believer and communist, but I twice experienced the presence of ghosts of the dead in my life"; "I do not believe in God; I hate Christians and all believers, but I acknowledge the All-Saints day, because of my parents"; "I believe in (occult) science"*; etc., etc.

During the course of our research, we also realised that, paradoxically, there is a lacuna in qualitative research of deeply or traditionally religious people, as well. Being religious is as challenging as being not religious or spiritual. Deeply religious Christians (practicing churchgoers and followers of the *Bible* and *Deuteronomy*) also have moral dilemmas; they question their belief, their attitude to their church, attachment to traditional norms and values; they are confused about how to implement and translate the message of the *Bible* onto their current modern way of life, how to successfully transmit their worldview to the next generation, etc., etc. We suppose that the future programme of research of both religion and non-religion is to disclose the intricate nature of those "etc., etc." in order to better formulate our research questions and understand what is going on in current modern societies that are *desacralized* and *sacralised* at the very same time.

Conclusion

Based on general research so far, it is obvious that religiously unaffiliated or disaffiliated persons comprise a substantial and growing segment of the population in many countries. Net losses for Christianity are accompanied by net growth in the numbers of religiously unaffiliated people. The pattern of religiosity, as well as the pattern of spirituality and irreligiosity, differs considerably, based on regional, cultural and historical circumstances. As we have already outlined, it seems that the thus far used quantitative approach is not able to grasp and explain the intricacies of modern forms of religiosity, spirituality and irreligiosity, and further methodological tuning is necessary. In this regard, there is also an urgent need develop and refine the classification of both secular as well as religious phenomena.

The categories used so far are going to be "fuzzier" and "fuzzier", not fitting the quality of phenomena that they are supposed to denote. Nor are they able to sketch the essence of current transformation and role of religiosity in modern societies. Both labelling as well as the research approach to the study of nones calls for critical self-reflection. The scholarship also needs to amplify current research and study not only of individuals and their life-courses but also families, communities and institutions and their roles in shaping religious and irreligious lifestyles and practices. Intergenerational transmission seems to be crucial to the search and connection of one's attitude to religiosity/irreligiosity due to the religiosity/irreligiosity of one's own nuclear family in a whole-life run, since it seems that people are more prone to "age into religion" if they were raised in a religiously rooted family in their childhood. We also need to pay more attention to regionally and locally rooted particularities in order to understand the complex mosaic. A dynamic perspective is also crucial to have, since religiosity and irreligiosity are evolving in a constantly transforming environment that bubbles with innovations and yet they remain deeply rooted in tradition and local patterns, histories and stories that we need to know and understand.

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