



YUGOSLAV SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION
FACULTY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING – UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
YSSSR Annual – Year XXVI

**CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS CHANGES:
FROM DESECULARIZATION TO
POSTSECTULARIZATION**

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Theoretical Underpinnings and Empirical Proof*

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RELIGIOSITY AND ALTRUISTIC ORIENTATION IN ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

Summary

In this paper, we examine the relationship between religiosity and altruistic value orientation in economically developed European societies. The data come from the European Social Survey (ESS). Religiosity within ESS is measured by three dimensions – self-evaluation, frequency of attendance of religious services apart from special occasions and frequency of praying apart from at religious services. Altruistic value orientation is measured by rating of personal importance of helping people and caring for others well-being. Using cross-sectional data from the last round of the ESS (from 2016), from thirteen economically developed European countries, we revealed very weak relationship between all three dimensions of religiosity and altruistic orientation. Secondly, using data from all the prior rounds of the ESS, from 2002 to 2016, we also examined trends of both religiosity and altruistic value orientation within the same societies. The results indicate decline of religiosity and rise of altruistic orientation in all of examined countries.

Key words: religiosity, altruistic orientation, (de)secularization, Europe, European Social Survey.

INTRODUCTION

The post-World War II period has been marked in sociology (among other topics) by a dynamic debate over the question of whether religion has lost its social relevance or it is, on the contrary, still a very important component of social life. After a period in which the secularization paradigm was dominant (the sixties, seventies and even a good part of the eighties of the twentieth century), a critical turnaround followed, and research in the field of the sociology of religion focused on the various aspects of the revitalization of religion. It was called the desecularization process. From that moment, one of the important initial research premises of contemporary sociology of religion is that no general and *grand* conclusions can be given to the question whether religion is still an important social factor or it's not. Instead, analyses must focus on individual examples of both societies and religions. *Ergo*, many studies have shown that secularization has indeed taken roots in some societies, while in other communities this has not been the case. Because of that, the *micro* or *middle-range* position is the only one that is adequate for understanding the complex role of religion in contemporary society.

Also, one of the most important questions is whether religion is equally important at the individual and at the collective level in contemporary societies. In other words, contemporary research on religiosity must take into account the difference between personal spirituality and the social function of religion. On the basis of this difference we are setting our research question in this paper: taking altruistic

value orientation as an important element of sociability, we want to examine is it influenced by religiosity. In this way we can get indirect answer to the question: does religion have a social function today or it is important only on the individual and introspective level?

In accordance with aforementioned research imperatives, we decided to put our analysis at the level of *middle-range theory* (Merton 1998)¹ and we are going to try to explain the connection between altruism and religiosity in the case of European economically developed Christian-dominated countries. These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. We first want to examine the degree of religiosity in the mentioned countries, and then we will examine whether there is a connection between altruism and religiosity. In these developed societies secularization processes were convergent with the processes of modernization (of course, we are taking into account the differences between the mentioned countries) so that's why they are interesting to analyse the nexus between altruism and religiosity. Also, previous researches have already shown a decline of social functions of religiosity, so we continue to study the trend on the most recent data.

PROCESSES OF (DE)SECULARIZATION AND THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOSITY IN WESTERN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

In the aftermath of World War II, the secularization paradigm was dominant in the sociology of religion. One of the most influential authors of the sociology of religion, Peter Berger (1973), said that a multitude factors led to a diminishing importance of religion and the role of the church in (Western) societies. The main cause of secularization Berger, like Weber, saw in the Christian dogma and its connection with the Enlightenment.² Berger presume that other factors also contributed to secularization (social, economic, and technological changes that took place in Western societies in the mid-twentieth century were a catalyst for reducing the influence of religion in society), but Berger was more concerned with the link between Christian dogma and secularization so he didn't analyse other causes in detail. On the other hand, some other authors (such as, for example, Brian Wilson) focused on social change as a major cause in transforming religiosity and withdrawing religion from public life. Wilson (1976, 1982) emphasizes the convergence between modernization (industrialization, urbanization and technological advancement) and secularization. Wilson proposes a number of concepts that can be applied in different historical situations, considering different contexts. This author said that the global transition from "community" to "society" (as Tönnies defines it) influenced on the reducing the role of

¹ In short, Merton (1998) believes that *grand* theories are part of the history of social thought, and that contemporary research requires focus on individual cases using a number of different theoretical approaches. In this way, he formulates an idea of *middle-range theory* which can be applied to the study of different social phenomena, including religion.

² Weber believed that religion was the basis of worldviews everywhere, except in modern West. The Enlightenment succeeded to neutralize the influence of the religious. According to Weber, in the West at that stage of development science has encompassed almost the entire worldview. Paradoxically, the answer to the question of why the Enlightenment succeeded in initiating the process of dissolving the world lies again in the specifics of the religious ethos of Western Christianity (Jovanović 2016b: 456; Jovanović Ajzenhamer 2019: 162).

religion in societies. The most important force in this general context is process of rationalization, emphasizes Wilson. Rationalization manifests itself primarily as a transformation of social control, which loses its moral dimension and becomes more technical and anonymous. Like Weber,³ Wilson also said that rationalization manifests itself primarily in the growing bureaucratization of social interactions in different areas (Tschannen 1991: 398–399; Hamilton 2001: 185–214).

The most influential authors in the field of the sociology of religion in the 1970s and 1980s (David Martin, Richard Fenn, Peter Berger, Brian Wilson, Daniel Bell, Thomas Luckmann etc.) emphasized the various causes of secularization. They were disagreed about the way in which this process is proceeded, and to what extent it encompassed different societies, but still, the conclusion that secularization had taken over Western societies was the most common among famous sociologists of religion until the 1990s (ibid.). All the authors that we mentioned were very dedicated to prove and explain the new process of reducing the influence of religion in social life.

Despite the fact that secularization paradigm was the dominant theoretical framework of sociological research in the second half of the twentieth century, a series of empirical studies that have shown that religion is not an insignificant factor in the lives of individuals (especially in the United States and other non-European societies), the emergence of alternative religiosity (New Religious Movements⁴) and increase of the number of fundamentalist movements around the world, challenged the hypothesis that secularization is the dominant social process when it comes to religion. Berger (1999) himself said that he was wrong in his estimations. He acclaimed that the process of desecularization is now one of the major social process towards the end of the the twentieth century. After these changes, contemporary researches on religion become defined by the imperative of heterogeneity. In other words, macro perspectives and holistic paradigms are avoided, so societies and religions are analysed first in individual contexts, and then in comparative analysis. Various historical, political, economic, and dogmatic contexts are being studied, so today we talk about the development of religion in post-socialist Europe, in Western European societies, in American society, etc. Of course, the African and Asian perspectives, as well as the differences between Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims, Jews, etc., are not ignored. Correlations between religiosity and various indicators such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. are also analysed. Like we said in the Introduction,

³ The process of rationalization is one of the key concepts in the Weber's sociology. This process is immanent to the West, but has permeated different societies (not only Western) in different volumes. The process of rationalization can be identified in different social spheres, from economics and politics to religion. Although Weber has not given a exact definition of rationalization, this concept remains paramount to his sociology. There are several types of rationalization such as practical, substantive, theoretical and formal and all of these can influence different social phenomena. Rationalization in the religious domain, among other things, means the removal of magical elements and it is often parallel with the processes of rationalization in other spheres: in art, economics and politics (Jovanović, 2016a: 94–99; Jovanović Ajzehnamer, 2019: 156–160). In this paper we won't elaborate on this extremely complex topic; we will just underline the conceptual continuity that Wilson follows when he uses Weber's argument to complete his researches on secularization.

⁴ Eileen Barker (2004) formulated the concept of the *New Religious Movements* as a generic term for all forms of alternative eclectic religiosity that have emerged since the 1970s, primarily in the United States.

middle-rang theory is now the most prominent theoretical and epistemological starting position in religion studies. In this way, sociologists can complete far more accurate sociological picture of the survival or disappearance of religion in different societies.

When it comes to Europe, studies published at the end of the last century shows that religious situation at the Old Continent is very complex. Some indicators show that religion is losing its traditional role, that religion is individualized, alternative forms of spirituality are becoming more common, fewer and fewer people pray and go to church, etc. Also, there is an increasing occurrence of eclectic religiosity in which individuals combine different elements of traditional religiosity with cyber religiosity, mysticism, esotericism, etc. This is what Ulrich Beck (2010: 49) calls *Do it yourself religiosity*. William Sims Bainbridge (1997: 363–383) thought that this kind of practice is adequate example of application of the theory and logic of rational choice in the field of religion. In other words, individuals, as if they are in a large supermarket of religious ideas and practices, choose what they like best, and then practice this *religious mix* at the individual level.

While there is no doubt that religiosity in Europe has changed and that traditional religious practices and beliefs are becoming less important, on the other hand, most respondents in the academic researches at the end of the twentieth century said that rituals such as weddings and funerals at church, or baptism, were still very important to them. Therefore, it is very difficult to reach a clear conclusion when it comes to the role of religion in European societies. At first sight, one might say that religion lost its social significance, and that the various eclectic forms of religiosity become dominant, however, the situation is not so simple. When it comes to post-socialist countries, the situation is quite different then in Western European countries. In most post-socialist countries, we can mark the revitalization of religion, even at the level of collectivist feelings (Blagojević, 2015). *Ergo*, when we talk about Europe in general, the situation is quite diverse, but when it comes to Western Europe, secularization is indeed quite entrenched, and this is especially evident when it comes to the social role of religion.

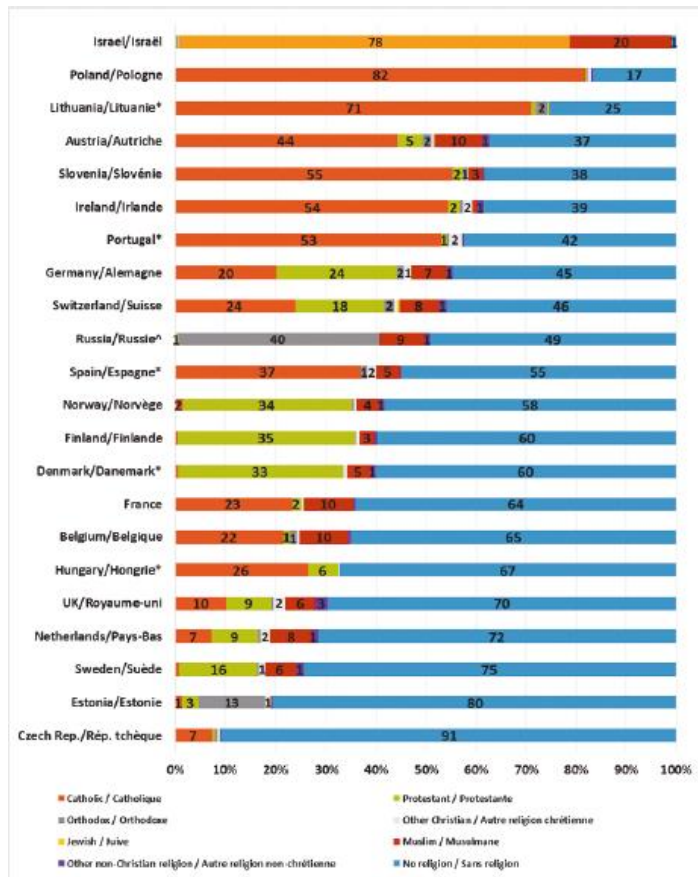
Grace Davie, first on the UK example (1994), and then later at the sample of other Western European countries (2005), has shown that indicators of belief in God and dogma are far more powerful and represented than ritual practices and feelings of belonging to certain religious communities. She calls this phenomenon *believing without belonging*. This is especially true when we are talking about Protestants, but it is present in Catholic population also. Davie is one of the more vocal proponents of the middle-range theory and idea that societies must be viewed as separate objects of study. She explains that the traditional belief in the monotheistic god is now combined with various Eastern practices and beliefs (we have discussed about that eclectic religiosity earlier), and that this is part of the personal equation of the believer. On the other hand, indicators of a sense of belonging to a religious community are diminishing, despite the fact that some traditional rituals are still practiced. One of her main conclusions is that, if we analyse Western Europe, spirituality and religiosity have not lost their significance, but only on an individual level, while the collective role of religion has diminished.

In the trace of the Davie's conclusions, we are going to analyse new data obtained in 2016. We want to examine is the continuity of *belief without belonging* continued, and we want to research how the lack of a connection between altruism

and religiosity contributes to the explanation of the loss of the social role of religion in Western European societies. But first let's look briefly at one recent paper that was conducted on the same data we are going to use, but the author analysed the population of young people. This *excuse* will be a good introduction to the story of the predictions of the future of religion in Europe, and the role it will play in the social life of future generations.

Stephen Bullivant (2018), on the basis of ESS data (2014-2016), in the category of youth aged sixteen to twenty-nine, saw an increase in those who did not declare themselves as members of any religion. Interestingly, in eight of the thirteen countries we analyzed, more than 50% of young people declare that they do not belong to any of these religions. These countries are: Spain, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden. In the remaining five analyzed countries, youth non-religiosity is also (relatively) high. These remain countries are: Austria, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland and Germany (Table 1).

Table 1: Detailed breakdown of 16-29 year-old religious affiliation in 22 European countries (ESS 2014-16)



Source: Bullivant 2018: 6.

If we observe only population of young Catholics, we can conclude the situation is somewhat different, since in this case only the youth of Portugal and Ireland declare themselves as believers in more than 50% of cases. In all other countries that we are going to analyse, a low degree of religiosity has been identified among young Catholics (Bullivant 2018: 8). It is easy to identify decline of conventional religiosity among young people, and that's the case especially with Catholic countries and, above all, economically developed ones.

As we have said, Bolivian's research gives us the jolt to continue analysing religiosity in economically developed countries, but taking into account the whole population, not just the young people. Our hypothesis is that the data from 2016 will show us the same trends that Grace Davie has already observed. We assume that in Western (economically developed) societies will emerge weak link between religiosity and social cohesiveness (in this case, we examine altruism as one of the more important variables of social dynamics and integration). In other words, we assume that the degree of altruism is impacted by factors other than religiosity, which indirectly can tell us that religion in these countries is losing social functions. As we said, one of the basic and most important ethical principles of most of the world religions is the care of others and it emphasizes altruism, so if these value orientations are induced by other factors, and not by religiosity, we can indirectly conclude that religion has lost that kind of social role. Also, based on the ESS data, we will show that there is a continuity of decline in religiosity, especially when it comes to collectivist and institutional dimensions. If we keep in mind the conclusions from the Bullivant research (2018), we can assume that this trend will continue.

RISE OF ALTRUISTIC VALUE ORIENTATION

The rise of altruism can be observed in the light of value changes in post-industrial societies. More concretely, as Inglehart (2018) states, when a society attains sufficiently high levels of existential security that a large share of the population grows up taking survival for granted, it brings coherent and roughly predictable social and cultural changes, producing an intergenerational shift from values shaped by scarcity (so called survival values), toward increasing emphasis on so called postmaterialist and self-expression values.⁵ Inglehart and Welzel (2005: 143) argue that these values reduce the need for group protection and weaken pressures for group conformity – people adopt increasingly independent conceptions of themselves. Creating ties to other people becomes no longer a matter of external constraints; it becomes a matter of intrinsic choice, which helps people move beyond the narrow boundaries of extended kinship (ibid.). Individuals are less likely to accept restrictions of their liberties for the sake of group conformity and start to view other types of human beings as intrinsically valuable beings (ibid.).⁶

⁵ High levels of existential security could also be conducive to secularization (see also: Kistler et al., 2017). Inglehart and Welzel (ibid) argue that unprecedented levels of economic development that a growing number of societies have attained in recent history diminishes material, cognitive, and social constraints on human choice, and it reduces the need for group protection. When existential threats recede, self-expression values and individual autonomy tend to become more widespread (ibid.). See also: Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Inglehart, 1990; Abramson and Inglehart, 1995.

⁶ Inglehart and Welzel also state that from the human development perspective, this wide variety of psychological and cultural traits does not represent idiosyncratic aspects of given cultures – this pattern tends to be linked with socioeconomic conditions, and is it also culturally universal (ibid).

In a similar way, Welzel (2013: 10) writes about dominance of so called emancipative values⁷, which emphasize freedom of expression and equality of opportunities. Using data from the World Values Survey, Welzel showed that emancipative values are on the rise within economically developed societies for which longitudinal data are available. He argues that emancipative values inspire people to follow their intrinsic motivations rather than being remotely controlled, and this intrinsic impulse comes with increased empathy for other people's legitimate concerns, which creates a prosocial form of individualism that sees even remote others as equals – it becomes easier for people to join forces for shared concerns.⁸

Individualization from this point of view does not undermine society but transforms it, shifting the mode of affiliation from imposed to chosen loyalties (ibid: 194). It is seen as a universal form of humanism that cuts through group boundaries and makes people more open to concern for remote and dissimilar others; it emancipates: it occurs when receding existential constraints liberate people from their dependence on narrow, uniform, and closed support groups that they have not chosen (ibid: 193-194). Individualization diminishes people's dependence on support groups against their will and at the same time as it increases their chances to join and form groups which they prefer – it does not bring the end of people's tendency to connect, but it brings the freedom to connect and disconnect as people choose, and social relations, group loyalties, and collective affiliations become more of people's liking (ibid: 194). Thus, individualization frees people to affiliate with communities as wide, diverse, and open as they like them (ibid: 193-194).

In another article, Welzel (2010) states that emancipative the individualistic nature of emancipative values implies a basic sense of human equality, which makes possible a universal form of altruism. According to him, Kagitcibasi (Kagitcibasi, 1997, 2005, in: ibid.), Schwartz (Schwartz, 2004, in: ibid.), and Etzioni (Etzioni, 1993, in: ibid.), also criticize the merging of autonomy and selfishness into individualism – they argue that individual autonomy can be altruistic, going together with social relatedness, concern for others, and solidarity with others.

METHOD

As we said, our analysis is twofold. On the one hand, we examine the cross-sectional correlation between religiosity and altruistic value orientation. On the other hand, we examine trends of these variables. In both cases, we use data from the European Social Survey. Beginning in 2002, every two years, data are being collected in a number of European countries. Within each wave of this survey, religiosity is measured through three dimensions: intensity of religious beliefs, participation in religious services, and frequency of praying.⁹ On the other hand, the altruistic value orientation is measured by one item from the Schwartz's values framework (Schwartz,

⁷ See also: Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Hageaars, Halman, and Moors, 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

⁸ In a similar way, Förster and his colleagues (Förster et al., 2008) write about a shift from “prevention focus” to “promotion focus”.

⁹ Religiosity refers to the various dimensions associated with religious beliefs and involvement, and there is growing importance of evaluating religiosity in research as a multidimensional concept, focusing on its subjective, cognitive, behavioral, and the social and cultural components (Bergan and McConatha, 2001). See also: Yeniaras and Akarsu, 2016, ten Kate et al., 2017, and Mentus, 2017, 2018, forthcoming).

2012). Our isolated samples consist of respondents from thirteen West and North European countries. All of the countries in our samples are economically highly developed, according to the World Bank classification.¹⁰ These are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

Within the European Social Survey, self-rating of religiosity is measured using question: “Using this card, how religious would you say you are?”, where 0 meant “Not at all religious”, while 10 meant “Very religious”. On the other side, participation in religious services is measured using question: “Apart from religious activities at the occasion of social events as weddings, funerals, christenings, and circumcisions, about how often do you attend religious services these days?”, where 1 meant “More than once a week”, while 7 meant “Never”. On the other side, frequency of praying was measured using question: “About how often do you pray?” and the answers were the same as for participation in religious services. Altruistic value orientation is measured using question: “Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you. It’s very important to him to help the people around him. He wants to care for their well-being”. The answers are given on a six-point scale, where 1 meant “Very much like me”, and 6 meant “Not like me at all”. In our analysis, frequency of attendance of religious services apart from special occasions, frequency of praying apart from at religious services and altruistic value orientation are coded inversely.

We examined the cross-sectional relationship between religiosity and altruistic value orientation using data from the last round of the European Social Survey, from 2016. An isolated sample for this purpose was consisted of 24,869 respondents, with a minimum age of 15 and a maximum of 100 ($M = 47.44$, $SD = 18.829$), and with 51% of females, and 49% of males. In order to carry out the trend analysis, we used all of the eight rounds of the European Social Survey, beginning in 2002 and concluding in 2016. We analyzed the mean values of each of the three dimensions of rationality and altruistic orientation within all of examined countries. Characteristics of samples from all waves are very similar to those in the last wave.

RESULTS

Self-evaluation of religiosity indicates moderate religiosity within sample ($M = 4.37$) (Table 2). Nearly half of the respondents rated their religiosity with 4 or less, while only 5% of them rated themselves as “Very religious”. Second, only 0.6% of respondents attend religious services apart from special occasions every day, and 2.3% more than once a week, while more than 60% of them attend religious services never or “Less often” ($M = 1.37$). Similar share of respondents pray never or “Less often” apart from at religious services ($M = 2.11$). The results also indicated a high level of altruistic value orientation within sample ($M = 4.96$). Three-quarters of the sample rated importance to help people and care for others well-being as “Very much like me” and “Like me”. On the other side, only 2.6% of the sample answered on the same question as “Not like me at all” or “Not like me”.

¹⁰ <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Important to help people and care for others well-being	24697	1	6	4.96	.929
How religious are you	24775	0	10	4.37	3.103
How often attend religious services apart from special occasions	24806	1	7	1.37	1.474
How often pray apart from at religious services	24646	1	7	2.11	2.401

Regression analysis indicated the predictor structure of altruistic value orientation: the statistical significance of the model is determined, but it is very weak ($r = .116$, $r^2 = .013$, $\Delta r^2 = .013$, $F_{(3/24413)} = 110.267$; $p < .001$). All religiosity dimensions are very weak predictors of altruistic value orientation (table 3). Statistical significance of the model could be result of the large sample size.

Table 3: Multiple linear regression with altruistic value orientation as a dependent variable (n = 24,869).

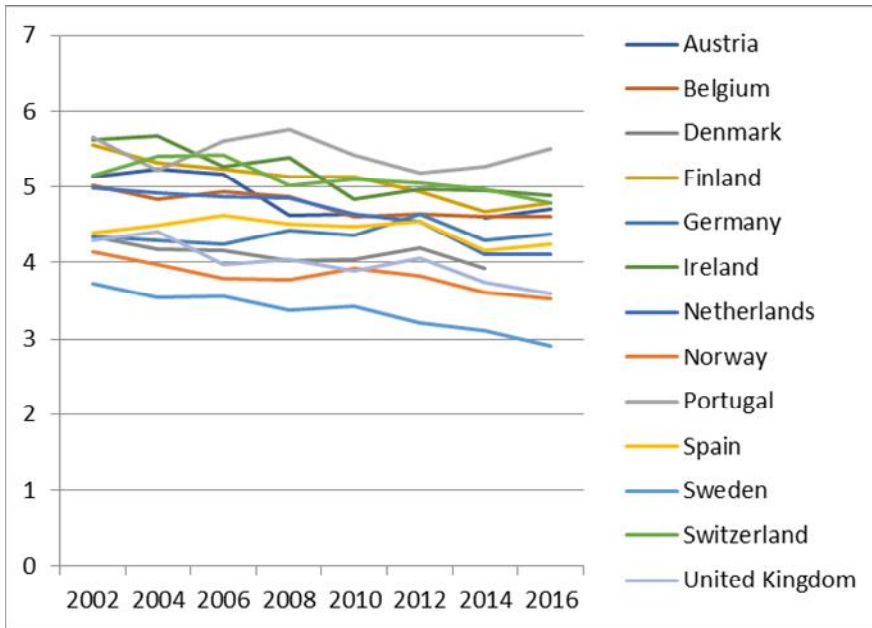
Independent variables	B	SE	Beta	t	p
How religious are you	-0.014	0.003	-0.048	-5.328	.000
How often attend religious services apart from special occasions	-0.025	0.005	-0.039	-4.634	.000
How often pray apart from at religious services	0.039	0.004	0.1	10.76	.000

R Square = 0.013; Adjusted R Square = 0.013; SEE = 0.922

* B – unstandardized coefficients; SE – standard error; Beta – standardized coefficients

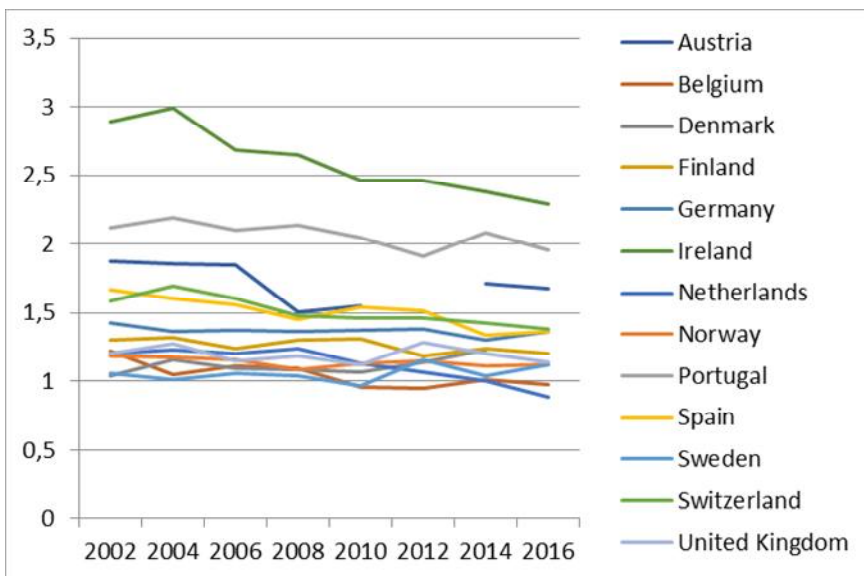
The results generally indicate very weak relationship between all three dimensions of religiosity and altruistic value orientation. In further analysis, we examined trends of three dimensions of religiosity and altruistic value orientation by country, from 2002 to 2016.

Fig. 1: Trends of self-evaluation of religiosity by country



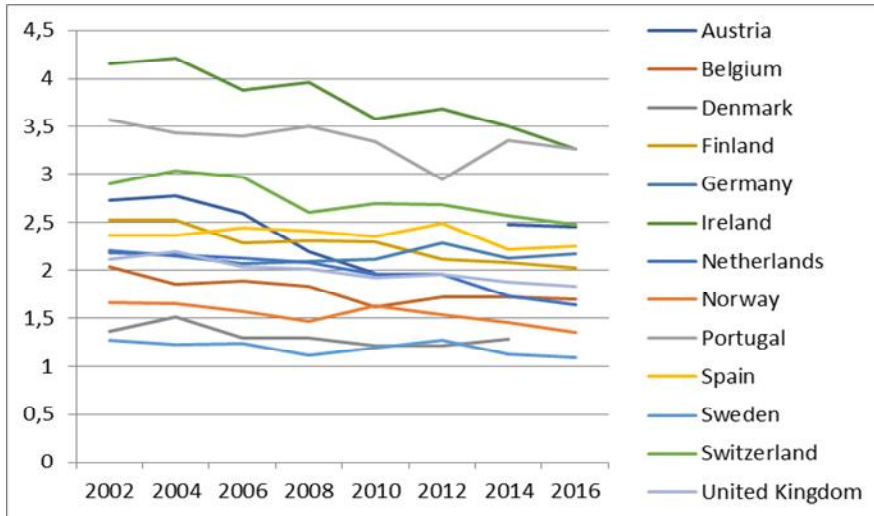
First, as it can be seen from Figure 1, results indicate clear declining trends of self-evaluation of religiosity. The most striking cases are Sweden, Netherlands, and United Kingdom.

Fig. 2: Trends of attendance of religious services by country



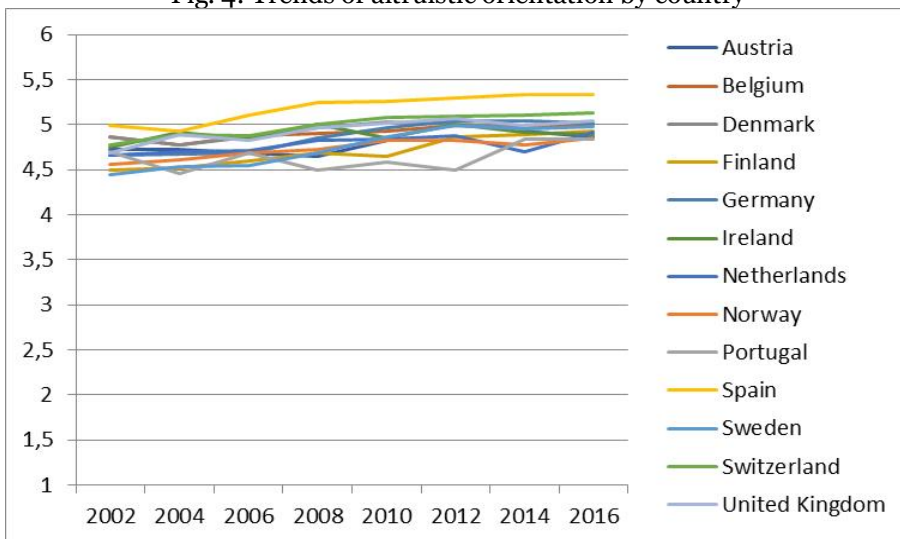
Our second dimension of religiosity, attendance of religious services apart from special occasions also clearly declined, especially in cases of Netherlands and Ireland (Figure 2).

Fig. 3: Trends of frequency of praying by country



Finally, the third dimension of religiosity, praying apart from at religious services, declined in all examined countries, and the fall is most evident in cases of Netherlands, Ireland and Finland (Fig. 3).

Fig. 4: Trends of altruistic orientation by country



On the other side, there is clear rise of altruistic value orientation in examined countries. Sweden and Finland are the most striking cases (Fig. 4). The results, thus, indicate clear lack of relationship of religiosity and altruistic orientation, not only in the cross-section, but also through time.

CONCLUSION

The analysis in our paper was twofold. Our results, first, confirmed many previous findings about the decline of religiosity in economically developed societies. This is the case with all three examined dimensions of religiosity – self-evaluation, frequency of attendance of religious services apart from special occasions and frequency of prayer apart from at religious services. We identify a decline even in intrinsic religiosity, not just in indicators relating to the collective aspects of religiosity (and this is a fundamental difference from the researches conducted by Davie). Second, the results also showed a clear tendency of the rise of altruistic value orientation among the populations of these countries. Both processes, the decline of religiosity and the growth of altruistic orientation, could be explained by rising dominance of self-expressive or emancipative values within these societies.

Finally, we examined the cross-sectional relation between religiosity and altruistic value orientation at the individual level within these societies. The results indicated very weak relationship. In economically developed societies, therefore, religiosity is losing its importance, especially in relation to altruistic value orientation. We can assume that the degree of altruism is influenced by other indicators and that it does not depend on whether person is religious or is not. In this paper, we have analysed only one aspect of sociability but we underline that similar research should be done with some other value orientations in order to obtain a more complete and comprehensive analysis. Also, given the Bullivant's research of religiosity of young people in Europe (especially of young people in Western societies), we can assume that the trend of declining religiosity, as well as the disappearance of the social role of religion will continue.

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