

Call for papers

Workshop of the Visegrad Fund project “Assessing the study of religious change in Central-Eastern Europe”

New fields in the study of religious change in Central-Eastern Europe

23-24 March 2023

Bratislava

This two-day hybrid workshop addresses emergent religious practices and the shifts in traditional religious institutions in the Visegrad countries and their vicinity. This region presents distinctive features that make it a particularly fruitful laboratory for the study of religious change. These societies, often qualified as “post-socialist”, have attracted scholarly attention as compelling examples of social rupture and transformation. If the interconnection of the idea of “transition” with the label “post-socialism” has been put into question (Hann, Humphrey & Verdery, 2002; Cervinkova, 2012; Müller, 2019), Central-Eastern Europe is still perceived, both in social scientific and common-sense thinking, along the East-West divide determined by the socio-historic past of the region. In this perspective, the study of religion in this region seems to raise some conceptual, methodological, and epistemological challenges that justify an intensified focus on the Visegrad countries and their surroundings.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Central-Eastern European societies have been marked by several waves and forms of concomitant religious decline and revival which have constantly shaped and reshaped local identities, making them a fertile soil yielding new phenomena that defy the conceptual frameworks of the study of religion in this area (see e.g. Borowik and Babiński 1997; Aitamurto and Simpson 2014). Indeed, the prevalent religious/secular divide became increasingly problematic in accounting for the more recent germination of new religious phenomena nourished by wider, global dynamics. For example, in Hungary, from the 1990s onwards, congregations as varied as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, The Church of Scientology, a locally founded charismatic church, as well as different strands of Buddhism have gained social visibility, while alternative medicines and different forms of Neo-shamanism and Neopaganism have also become popular (Kürti 2001). At the same time, more recently, in different countries in the region, as also in the West, techniques of personal development such as relaxation, yoga, and mindfulness, have penetrated managerial practices, tinging working environments with a touch of spirituality. In Poland, where the power of Catholicism has been long uncontested, even during socialism, heritage sites have been appropriated for spiritual purposes: one example is the courtyard of the Wawel Castle in Krakow, where individuals seek to absorb the “chakra energy” purportedly emanating from one of its corners (Niedźwiedz 2022). In the same vein, also in Krakow, historical re-enactment, in principle devoid of religious overtones, may merge and overlap with new forms of religiosity, notably Neopaganism (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2016, 2022).

Should these phenomena be considered as being specific to this region? If so, in what ways? If not, how do they relate to more global processes of religious change? Is there a particular historicity that gave rise to these emergent practices? How do shifts in the religious field relate to wider socioeconomic and political transformations? Can we trace a relationship between consumer culture and social class on the one hand and religious alternatives on the other? Do contemporary spiritual values affect more traditional religious denominations and/or the other way around? Do the diverse New Age practices inspired by traditions originally remote in space and/or time, such as Neo-shamanism and Neopaganism,

acquire the same political valence in this region as in the West? Does gender play a role in the transformation of religious or spiritual practices?

The possible topics may include, but are not limited to the following:

- New Religious Movements
- Contemporary spiritualities (New Age, Neopaganism, Neo-shamanism, etc.)
- Emergent practices within established religious contexts
- New rituals
- Pilgrimage
- Alternative therapies
- Personal development
- Religion and new technologies
- Religious appropriations of cultural heritage
- Ecology and religion/spirituality
- “Conspiritualities”
- Religion/Spirituality and science

The workshop welcomes contributions from MA and PhD students from different disciplines of social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and contemporary history.

Organized with the financial support of the Visegrad Fund and hosted in Bratislava by the Slovenská Asociácia Sociálnej Antropológie (SASA), the event follows the aims of the Visegrad Fund project “Assessing the study of religious change in Central-Eastern Europe” (based at Charles University in Prague). Its purpose is to enable an encounter between senior and junior researchers and to offer the young generation of future scholars a possibility to present fresh data from their research. In this way, students will be provided with an opportunity to develop their research questions through exciting discussions with peers and senior colleagues, to gain experience in conference participation, and to have access to the academic networks that may secure their future interest in their field of study.

The format of the workshop will be hybrid, meaning that participants residing in Bratislava will have the possibility to attend onsite, while presenters studying in the other Visegrad countries involved will join online. Please note that participation is *not* restricted to V4 citizens: submissions from MA and PhD students of all nationalities are welcome. The language of the workshop is English.

Guidelines for submission:

Submissions for papers should include a max. 300-word abstract and state your level of studies and institutional affiliation.

Deadline for proposals: **March 1, 2023.**

Please submit your proposal to Zuzana Bártová, Agata Ładykowska and Viola Teisenhoffer to the following email addresses *at the same time*:

zbartova@tf.jcu.cz, agata.ladykowska@fsv.cuni.cz, teisenhoffer.viola@gmail.com

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to write to us.

Notification of acceptance: March 3, 2023.

Academic experts: Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska (Polish Academy of Sciences), Zuzana Bártová (FSS, Charles University), Daša Bombjaková (SASA), Helena Dyndová (Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, University of Pardubice), Agata Ładykowska (FSS, Charles University), Kinga Povedák (MTA-SZTE

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