
Alternative spiritual practices in Slovakia: lived experience, identity, and community

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Résumé

The paper addresses an increased interest in spiritual beliefs and practices that represent an alternative to Christianity as a dominant religion in contemporary society in Slovakia. I will present the results of ethnographic research carried out in several spiritual circles in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. I will focus on how practitioners represent their spiritual experiences in relation to their religious or spiritual identity as well as relationships inside spiritual circles. I will also address the role of the political change in the 1990s in their narratives, as people with Christian backgrounds or non-religious upbringing had then to reconcile their worldviews with new forms of spirituality. I argue that participants' motivations for seeking out spiritual alternatives was influenced by (1) their upbringing, religious or non-religious; (2) the influx of information about new forms of spirituality that after the political change broadened their views and knowledge and contributed to the development of their spiritual abilities; (3) their current spiritual experiences inside spiritual circles that shape continued motivations to maintain their practices. I will demonstrate that spirituality as such is an essential part of how practitioners represent their identity. Community also plays a significant role in this, also its importance depends on social ties inside spiritual circles. In any case, spiritual practice is understood in moral terms, as beneficial for the whole society and at the same time as allowing the development of individuality and personal spiritual constructions.

Mots-Clés: alternative spirituality, Slovakia, spiritual experience, identity

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