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# Alternative spiritual community as a factor of social support

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## Résumé

The religious transformation that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are undergoing in the post-socialist period is associated, on the one hand, with the revival of traditional churches and, on the other hand, with the spread of so-called alternative spirituality (in the broad sense of the word). In the context of AS, individualism and "working on oneself", self-development, etc. are usually emphasized. Nevertheless, it is clear that people involved in the alternative sphere have an equal need to be part of communities. An example of this is women's circles, which bring together women of different ages and backgrounds. Here, I will explore how bonding is established and why the group plays an important role in alternative spirituality.

Previous studies have shown that religious rituals strengthen social bonds and solidarity; however, much less is known about the communal dimensions of ritualized activities in alternative spiritual groups. Spiritual rituals do not merely transform individual emotions but weave them into a collective experience through "emotional contagion/mimicry" (Gelder, 2009; Hess et al., 2014). Additionally, shared narratives shape the "post-sacralization" (Martos et al., 2011) of personal experiences, reinforcing their significance within the group. Through these processes, communal rituals create a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, which, in turn, enhance overall well-being and social cohesion.

Danijela Jerotijević, Mgr., PhD. (0000-0002-9825-3887) works at the Institute of Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Her field of interest are anthropology of religion, medical anthropology, and anthropology of education. She conducted long term field research in Serbia on the social and cognitive aspects of supernatural harm believes. During 2011 - 2013 she worked as a researcher at LEVYNA (Laboratory for experimental research of religion), Brno, at Masaryk University and is still its research associate. With colleagues from Brno she worked on experimental research that examined the impact of ritualized behaviour on the buffering of negative emotions, specifically the relationship between ritual and anxiety (Lang et al., 2015). During the pandemic she did research on the impact of the pandemic on families with children. She was involved in a project focusing on teachers', parents' and children's coping with pandemics, and curriculum reform in Slovakia. She has also conducted long-term research on alternative spirituality in Slovakia (Jerotijević & Hagovská 2019; Jerotijević & Hagovská 2020; Jerotijević, Králová & Kulichová 2022).

**Mots-Clés:** alternative spirituality, transformation, community

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