

REVACERN Exchange Programme

Preliminary publication of results of the first period of
the exchange programme of the REVACERN

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Introduction

In this publication I would like to gather some of the results of my work during the first period of the EP. This paper is two parts. The first one deals with former empirical studies about in the field of the holistic milieu, with a strong emphasis on the possible measurement of New Age. The second part runs on several data analyses in order to test the validity of some assumptions concerning the holistic milieu.

Elaborating an investigation plan was one of the main goals of the group "Societal Relevance of Esoteric and Neopagan Worldviews" of the REVACERN. To achieve it, I was asked to scrutinize former investigations in the field, especially with the focus on how New Age or spirituality can be measured. It must be stressed that only **few empirical studies** have been carried out concerning New Age beliefs. Scholars investigating New Age can't stop complaining that even in academic environment the claims and arguments concerning New Age are in many cases based mainly on personal observations and experiences, or on personal opinions. Some of them call for a radical "sociologisation" in the research of New Age and spirituality (Höllinger 2004, Aupers and Houtman 2006). The studies also applied **different approaches**, and the comparison (even if possible) requires a good deal of creativity.

Another problem is not the lack of **definition for New Age**, but the proliferation of them. To illustrate the situation, York (2001:363) enumerates several descriptions from "a blend of pagan religions, Eastern philosophies, and occult-psychic phenomena" (Michael York) through "forms of religious movement most closely associated with the New Age are occult, neopagan, and Asian" (William S. Bainbridge), until "endlessly entertaining saturnalia of ill-defined yearnings" (Harold Bloom). I myself don't have the intention to just pick up (or work out) one definition and adhere to it, rather I will use notions like New Age or subjective-life spirituality according to scholars experts in the given subject.

Measuring New Age

Bearing in mind the mentioned variety of approaches, one can imagine that a well-elaborated and used-by-everybody method or scale to trace or measure New Age doesn't exist. Nevertheless scholars have made significant effort to grasp New Age finding different ways to do it. I will show by what instruments it was carried out in several previous studies.

Höllinger in his cross-cultural comparative study used a questionnaire with the following items to measure occult beliefs and New Age activities (Table 1):

Scale	Item	Cronbach's alpha
Occult beliefs		0.85
	belief in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nature spirits (fairies, etc.), • spirits in old houses, • contact with the dead, • psychic healers, • telepathy, • clairvoyance, • astrology, • healing energies of stones 	
New Age activities		0.72
<i>(1) esoteric methods for predicting events and for analyzing one's personality</i>	belief in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fortune-telling, • Tarot cards, Runes, I-Ging • horoscope-interpretation , • dream-interpretation 	
<i>2) body-oriented spiritual techniques</i>	belief in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian techniques (Yoga, Tai Chi, etc.), • meditation, • massage techniques 	
<i>(3) alternative healing methods</i>	belief in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alternative medicine (homeopathy, Bach flower remedies, etc.), • psychic healing, • acupuncture; • observation of moon phases, • psychotherapy 	

1. Table: Items measuring occult and New Age beliefs (source: Höllinger and Smith 2002:234)

We can see that one way to trace New Age is by concentrating on some basic beliefs or techniques. Nevertheless, these methods are by far not the same in different studies. To make a comparison, it is enough to take a good look at the Kendal Project.

In the Kendal project the questionnaire¹ used to get to know the holistic milieu was divided into four sections. The first section examined if the subject was involved in the following

¹ The applied questionnaire is available at:
<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf>

therapies (during the week prior to the study, or before that). The subject also had to decide if he or she regarded the activity as having spiritual dimension (possible answers: yes/no).

Acupressure	Circle Dancing	Indian Head massage	Palm readings	Spinal touch therapy
Acupuncture	Counselling	Inter-faith group	Play therapy	Tai Chi / Chi Kung
Alexander Technique	Cranio-sacral therapy	Iona Group	Psychic consultancy	Taize singing group
Aromatherapy	Energy management workshops	Kinaesiology	Psychotherapy	Tarot card reading
Art therapy/group	Flower essences therapy	Massage	Rebirthing	True Vision group
Astrology	Foot massage	Meridian therapy	Reflexology	Universal Peace dancing
Bahai group	GreenSpirit group	Metamorphic technique	Reiki	Vision therapy (not opticians)
Buddhist group	Healing/ Spiritual healing	Naturopathy	Relaxation therapy	Wild Women group
A CancerCare group	Herbalism	Nutritional therapy	Sai Baba group	Women's spirituality group
Chinese College of Physical Culture	Homeopathy	Osteopathy	Sea of Faith group	Yoga
Chiropractice	Hypnotherapy	Pagan activities	Shiatsu	Spinal touch therapy
Acupressure	Circle Dancing	Indian Head massage	Palm readings	Other (please state)

2. Table: Methods examined in the holistic questionnaire of Kendal project (source: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf>)

Another question concerning activities was asked in the questionnaire “Do you ever do any of the following at home?”, but in this case only 7 possible answers were given: Meditate, Pray, Yoga, Tai Chi, Massage (give or receive), Healing (give or receive) and Other spiritual/therapeutic activity (please write in). The questionnaire also included a list of beliefs to choose if it is believed by the subject (possible answers: yes/no/don't know):

Life after death	A soul	Jesus was just a story
Reincarnation	Some sort of spirit or life force that pervades all that lives	Sin
Heaven	Chakras	The devil
Hell	Subtle energy (or energy channels) in the body	Angels
The power of prayer	Extra sensory perception	Other holy or higher beings
Miracles	Precognition	A spirit world
Special healing powers	God	UFOs
That humankind is entering a New Age of spiritual evolution	Jesus was the son of God	Ley lines
A true self	Jesus was just a man	Other (please state)

3. Table: Beliefs examined in the holistic questionnaire of Kendal project (source: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf>)

The holistic questionnaire of the Kendal project investigated “special personal experiences” asking people if given experiences have happened to them, in case of positive response, if they consider them religious, spiritual or neither.

An awareness of receiving help in answer to prayer	An extraordinary feeling of inner bliss
A feeling of being in touch with someone who had died	An out of body experience
An awareness of spirits or ghosts	A near-death experience
An awareness of the presence of God	An extraordinary inner experience triggered by giving birth
A sacred experience of nature	An extraordinary inner experience triggered by having sex
A pattern of events in your life that convinces you that they were your destiny	An extraordinary inner experience triggered by taking drugs
A pattern of events in your life that convinces you that they were controlled by a higher power	An accurate precognition of future events
An awareness of receiving help in answer to prayer	Extra sensory perception of events or someone's thoughts
A feeling of being in touch with someone who had died	Other (please state)
A sense of great peace	-

4. Table: Experiences examined in the holistic questionnaire of Kendal project (source: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/documents/HolisticQuestionnaire.rtf>)

Granqvist and Hagekull (2001:532-533) chose a different way to grasp New Age. When investigating attachment and emotional compensation among New Age members, they constructed a so called "New Age Orientation Scale" using 22 items grouped in 10 overlapping content areas:

1. A conviction that the individual's "intuition" is a reliable source of knowledge (and outperforming science-based knowledge) (item 14);
2. A belief that a new age is approaching, with dramatic implications for science, the evaluation of human nature, etc. (item 4);
3. A belief in the efficacy of "alternative" treatments (potentially outperforming regular medical treatments) (items 9, 14);
4. A belief in parapsychological and occult phenomena (items 1, 3, 7, 8, 13, 19);
5. An emphasis on personal development and spirituality, as well as an interest in the "alternative" literature on these issues (items 2, 10, 20);
6. A favorable evaluation of pseudopsychological and pseudophysical jargon (items 6, 11, 18, 20);
7. An emphasis on nature and cosmos as animate (items 12, 20, 21);
8. An emphasis on Eastern holism (as opposed to "Western reductionism") activities and beliefs (items 5, 10, 12, 15, 16, 21);
9. A favorable evaluation of religious syncretism and of practices of "forgotten" cultures and traditions, coupled with an unfavorable evaluation of mainstream Western religion (items 5, 17);
10. An emphasis on being an "open seeker" (as opposed to absorbed by the "dogmas" of institutionalized religions) to whom "the new age" is personally valuable (items 17, 22).

A previous study, **Michael J. Donhaue's** (1993:178) investigation on the prevalence of New Age beliefs among members of six American protestant denominations is also important. His survey included several items to trace New Age ideology, among them after the factor-analysis the following seven belief statements proved to make up a consistent New Age belief factor:

1. Human nature is basically good
2. I believe in reincarnation – that I have lived before and will experience other lives in the future
3. I believe in astrology
4. Through meditation and self-discipline I come to know that all spiritual truth and wisdom is within me
5. I am in charge of my own life – I can be anything I want to be
6. It is possible to communicate with people who have died
7. An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church

Houtman and Mascini (2002:462) underline that New Age is „notoriously difficult to operationalize” and he used a twofold instrument to do it while investigating the correlations New Age – rationalism and New Age – individualism. Firstly, he followed the practice of former Dutch New Age investigations by presenting the respondents with activities, ideas closely related to New Age (and New Age namely), and asking them to what extent they are involved in those:

- Reincarnation
- Astrology
- New Age
- Yoga
- Oriental religions

Apart from that, the scholars added five Likert-type items (based by a former investigation by Gussenhoven and Van den Maagdenberg) that – according to him – express four core ideas of New Age (see Table 5). The combination of all the 10 questions produced a consistent scale (with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.78), so Houtman and Mascini regarded it as a valid measure of affinity with New Age.

Measured core ideas of New Age	Item
Holism	One’s character is strongly determined by the stars and planets One can predict one’s future to a large extent by reading the lines in one’s hand
Spiritual transformation	After death, one’s soul passes to another human being or animal
Syncretism	One should search in different religions oneself to make one’s own religion
Perennialism	The one and only true religion does not exist, but there are truths one can find in all religions of the world

5. Table: Items measuring the core ideas of New Age (source: Houtman and Mascini 2002:262, edited by the author)

These different ways of measuring New Age reflect the authors’ distinct concepts about it, nevertheless, there are notable overlapping among them. I suggest that four main approaches to trace New Age should be separated. The first one concentrates on involvement in spiritual techniques/methods, the second one is based on investigating different spiritual/religious

beliefs, the third one focuses on transcendent experience, while the fourth one searches for signs of pluralistic religious views and individualistic characteristics.

Results from data analysis – Testing some presupposition about the holistic milieu

As I have mentioned above, there are some assumptions associated with (members of) the New Age movement, which are accepted by many scholars, but backed only by a few empirical evidence. In order to test the validity of some of these assumptions, I decided to make data analysis of two different datasets. The first one comes from the holistic milieu questionnaires of the already mentioned Kendal project². It contains 237 cases, all of them involved in spiritual-like activities. The second dataset stems from the Szeged Study 2005. This is a survey carried out by the Department of Sociology of the University of Szeged. It uses a sample (N=1390) representative for the population of the city of Szeged (Hungary). In the Szeged Study 2005 the following items concerning spirituality were used:

Scale	Item	Cronbach's alpha
Spiritual beliefs		0.81
	belief in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing powers • Spiritual powers • Reincarnation • Life after death • The power of curses • Telepathy • Fortune-telling 	
Spiritual involvement		0.60
	involvement in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fortune-telling • psychomancy, table-turning • astrology • reiki • feng shui • alternative medicine 	

6. Table: Items measuring occult and New Age beliefs – Szeged Study 2005 (elaborated by the author)

Using these two datasets allows me to examine the effect of religious or spiritual upbringing on religious choices, the relationship between the level of education and the appeal of the holistic milieu and the nexus between age and the reception of New Age techniques. Using these two datasets also makes some kind of comparison between two cities (one in Central-East Europe and one in North-West Europe) possible.

² Available at: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/methods.htm>.

The effect of religious and spiritual upbringing

One main hypothesis of the unit *Societal Relevance of Esoteric and Neopagan Worldviews* is that “People with strong traditional religious background or firm worldviews are less likely to be involved in esoteric practices. However, its degree varies from denominations to denominations.” Household production and human capital approaches can handle (among others) this issue of mobility. The main concept is that people get their religious education mostly from their parents, so it is very probable that they will follow the religion of their families, and even if they don’t, they chose a religion close to it – in order not to lose too much of their religious capital. Where religious groups are similar, mobility is significantly bigger. People with huge and special religious capital (strong traditional religious background or firm worldviews) have a little level of mobility. People who have spent less time, energy and money in their faith are more probable to get involved in esoteric practices.

My analysis of the datasets of Kendal Project (see charts in Appendix 1) has shown that we can affirm the hypothesis that people with traditional religious background are less likely to be involved in esoteric practices, although only with some restrictions. Religious upbringing at church or at school seem to have no effect on future orientation towards the religion or spirituality. Religious upbringing at home do seem to have important effect, since the 74,3% of the people belonging to the congregational domain got religious upbringing at home, while this figure is 58,2% in the case of the holistic milieu. The fact that that 16,0% of the institutionally religious people got spiritual upbringing, and only the 9,3% of members of the holistic milieu was brought up to be spiritual needs further consideration.

To the question asked in the congregational questionnaire *If you have children over the age of 18, how often do they attend church?* (concerning the first child mentioned) 18,8% of the total valid (missings filtered out) answers was *never*, also 18,8% *less than four times a year*, at least once a year, 14,6% *less than once a month*, at least four times a year, 8,3% *less than once a week*, at least once a month, 15,6% *once a week* and 24,0% *more than once a week*. To a similar question asked in the holistic questionnaire *Is your interest in this activity or therapy shared by any children you have had?* only 31,6% of the valid (not applicable and blank filtered out) answers was affirmative.

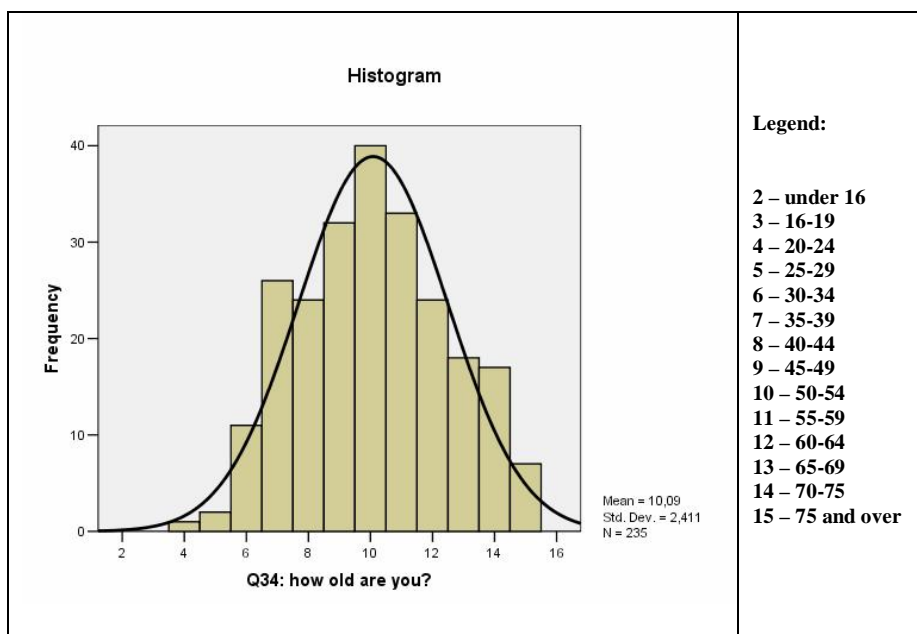
Spirituality – for the young and the intellectual?

One of the main presupposition of Höllinger’s already mentioned cross cultural study is that “the reception of New Age literature and esoteric techniques is higher in the younger and middle-age cohorts and in the higher-educated middle classes than among older and less educated persons” (Höllinger 2002:230). In the following I will make an attempt to test the two elements (hypothesis) of this statement:

1. the reception of New Age and esoteric techniques is higher in the younger and middle-age cohorts than among older persons
2. the reception of New Age and esoteric techniques is higher in the higher-educated middle classes than among less educated persons

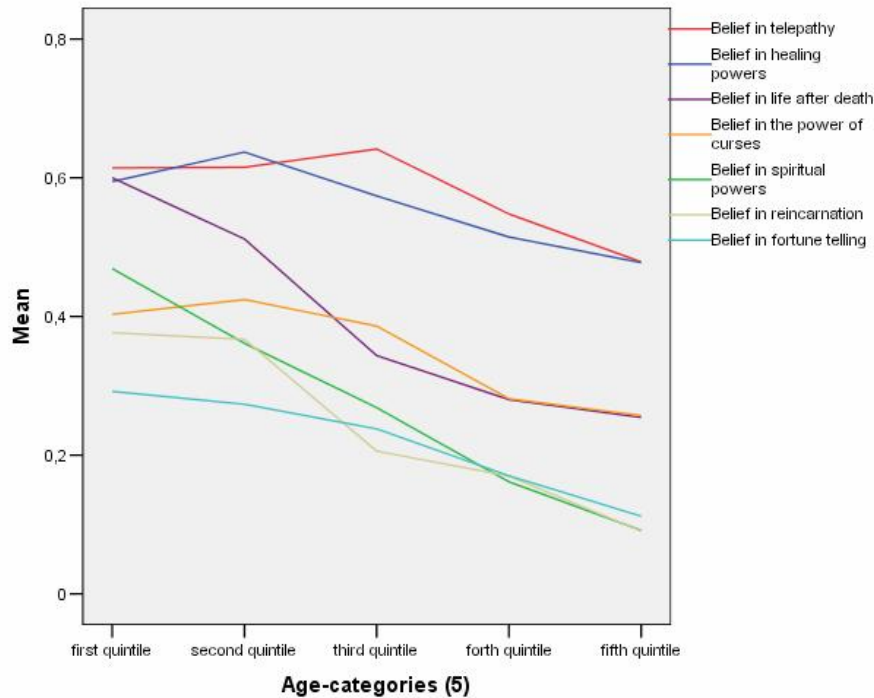
Age and the reception of New Age techniques

Analysis of the dataset derived from the Kendal Project made me discover that the frequency histogram of age groups concerning members of the holistic milieu almost perfectly fits the normal curve. This finding clearly proves that at least in Kendal spiritual techniques are not that easy to find among the young at all. Only 1,3% of the holistic milieu sample was aged under 30. The highest activity-rate was shown by the age group 50-54 years.



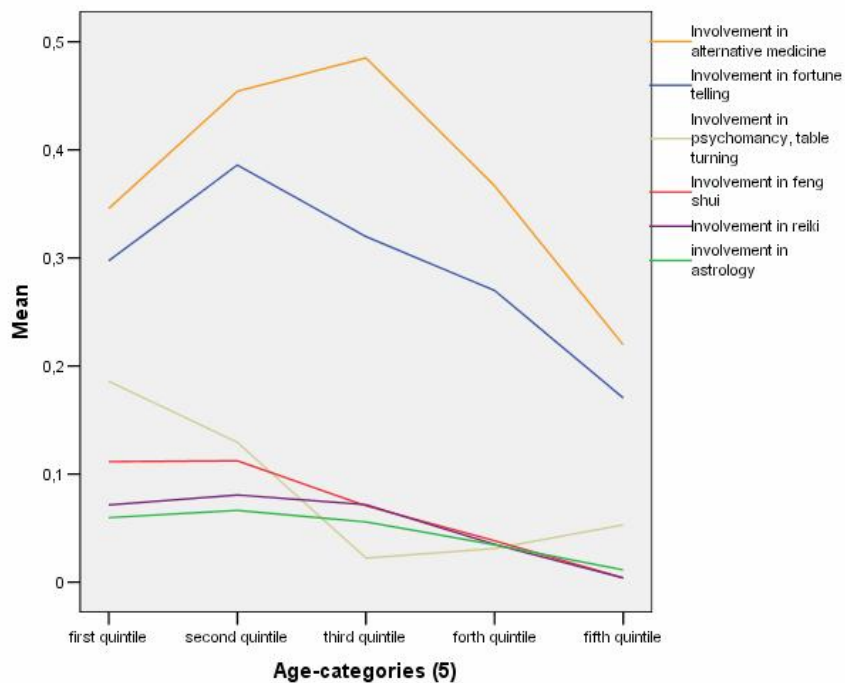
1. Figure: Frequency of age-groups in the holistic milieu – Kendal Project (elaborated by the author)

In analyzing the Szeged Study Dataset I examined the mean of the variables measuring beliefs in spiritual forces and techniques in the five age-quintiles. As it can be seen in Figure 2, these beliefs are harder to find among the elder than among the youth (age percentiles: 1st – 29 and under, 2nd – 29-39, 3rd – 39-52, 4th – 52-62, 5th – 62 and over). Nevertheless the peak for *belief in healing powers* and *belief in telepathy* is in the second and third quintile, respectively, showing that nexus between age and spiritual belief correlation is not straightforward.



2. Figure: Age and spiritual beliefs – Szeged Study 2005 (elaborated by the author)

I also examined variables measuring participation in different spiritual techniques. Involvement was measured by items asking if the subject has ever appealed to a professional of the correspondent technique. The first age-quartile produced higher means than the fifth one in case of each item, nevertheless the highest involvement in fortune telling and alternative medicine is to be found within the second and third quintile, respectively.



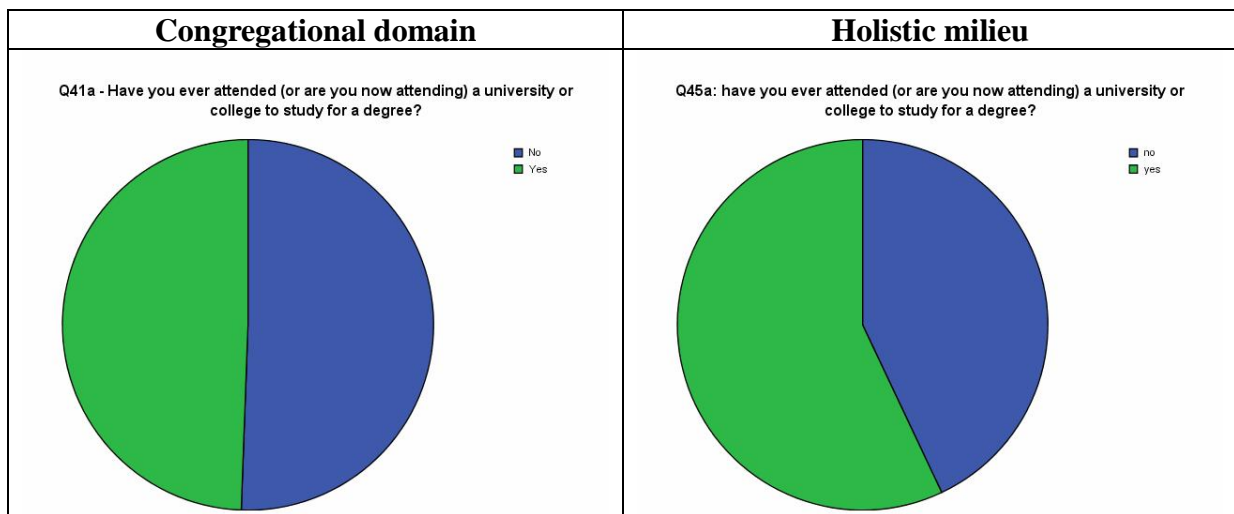
3. Figure: Age and spiritual involvement – Szeged Study 2005 (elaborated by the author)

We can conclude that the Szeged Study shows higher values of spirituality among the youth, supporting our hypothesis that the reception of New Age and esoteric techniques is higher in the younger and middle-age cohorts than among older persons.

Education and the reception of New Age techniques

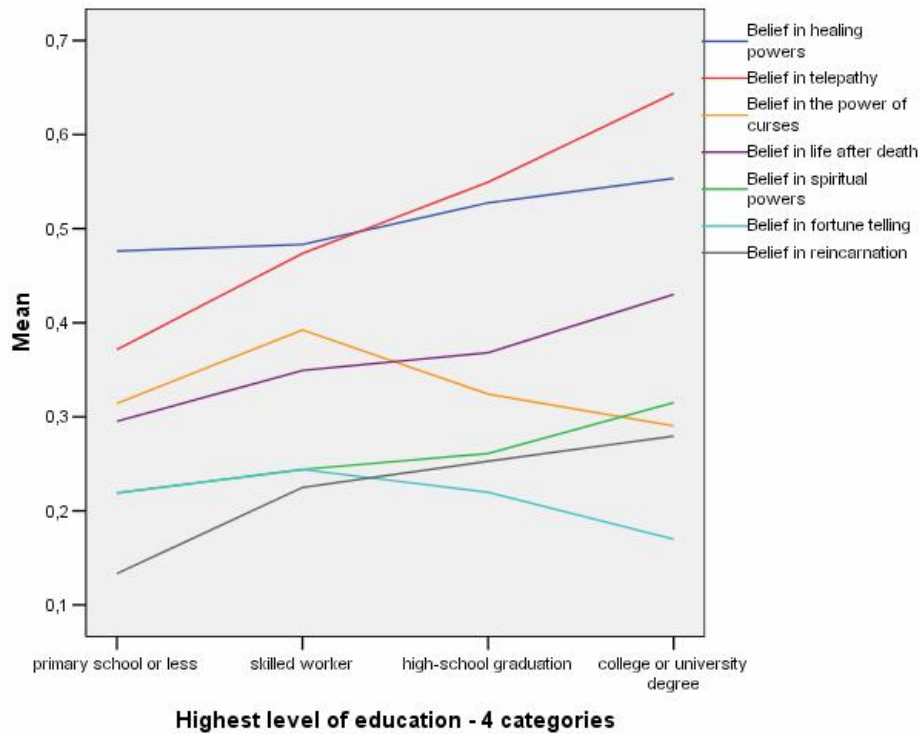
According to Höllinger, the reception of New Age and esoteric techniques is higher in the higher-educated middle classes than among less educated persons. Using the mentioned datasets I make an attempt to test this hypothesis.

The Kendal Project shows that the proportion of those who have ever attended a college or university is higher in the holistic milieu (57,0%) than in the congregational domain (49,4%). Although this fact seems to back our assumption, the lack of complementary information impedes drawing conclusions concerning the hypothesis.

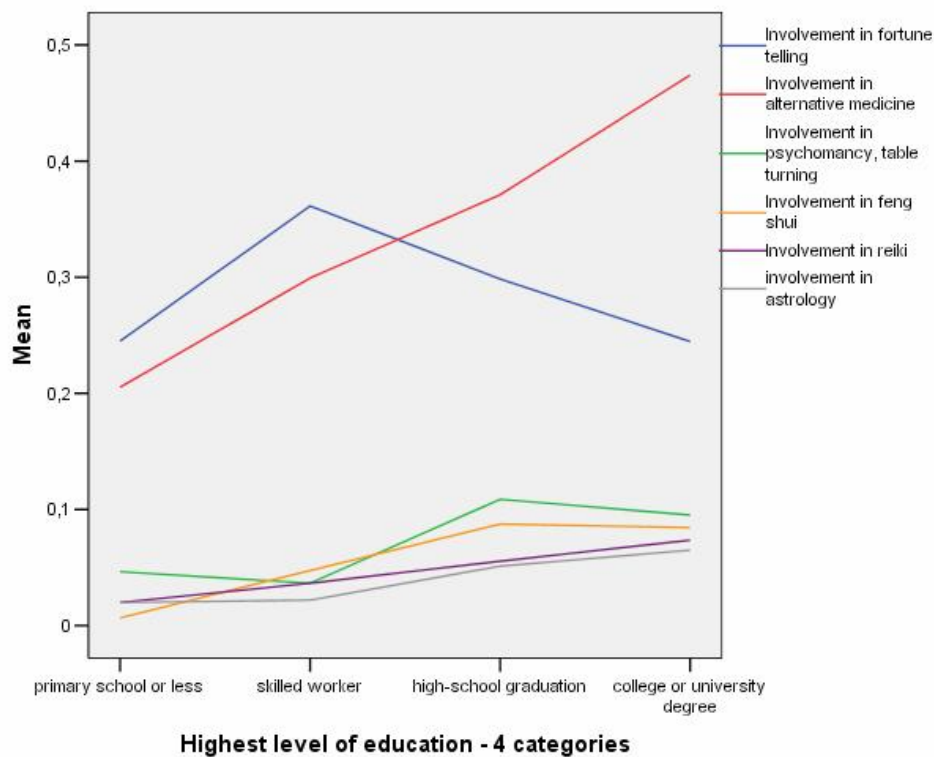


4. Figure: Frequency of those ever attended college or university – Kendal Project (elaborated by the author)

Fortunately, the Szeged Study 2005 constitutes an appropriate instrument to test our hypothesis. Results clearly show that the higher the level of education, the higher the appeal of spirituality (Figure 5 and 6).



5. Figure: Education and spiritual beliefs – Szeged Study 2005 (elaborated by the author)



6. Figure: Education and spiritual involvement – Szeged Study 2005 (elaborated by the author)

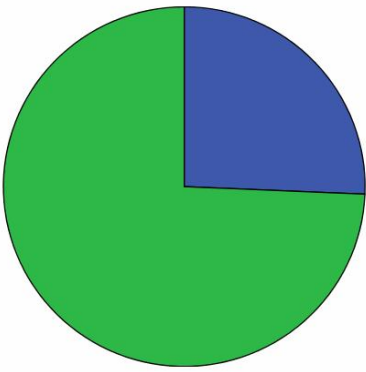
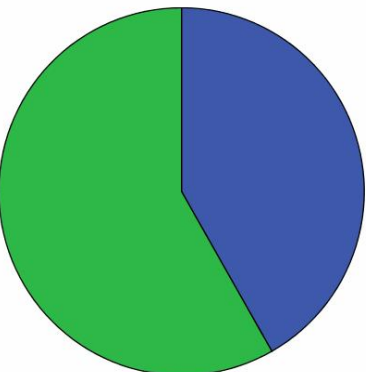
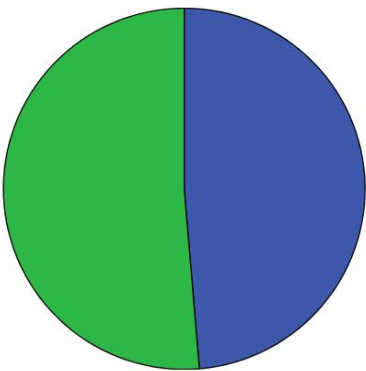
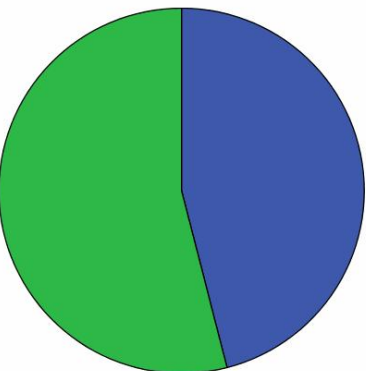
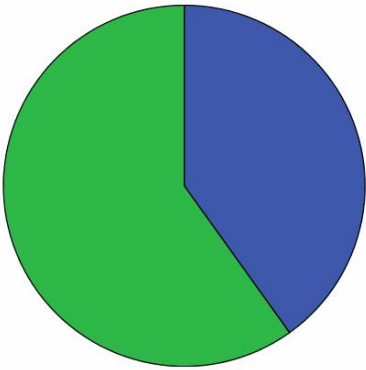
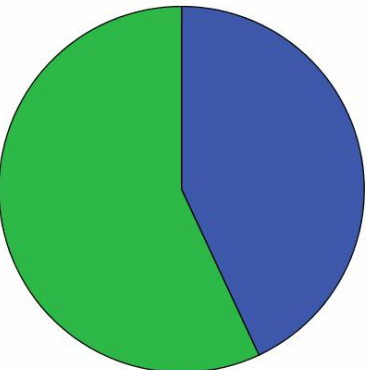
Concerning beliefs (Figure 5), only *the power of curses* and *fortune telling* don't follow this pattern, and in case of involvement (Figure 6) there is only one exception to be found: *fortune telling*. It is plausible to suggest that this can be explained by the popular (folk) religiosity character of curses and fortune telling – making them unattractive to those with a higher level of education.

Final words

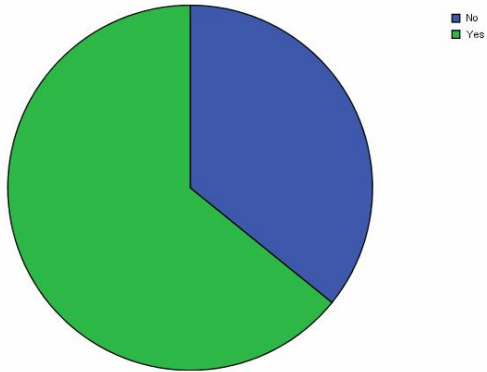
In the previous pages I have shown several results deriving from my participation in the Exchange Programme. I presented several former studies concerning the holistic milieu, and the ways they tried to trace spirituality. Finally I presented the result of the data analysis I carried out using the Kendal Project and the Szeged Study datasets. I hope that these results (even if just to a very small extent) can contribute to the work of the REVACERN.

Appendix

Appendix 1: The effect of religious and spiritual upbringing – results from the Kendal project (charts and layout made by the author)

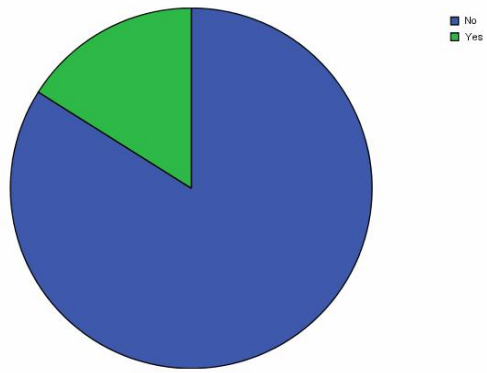
Congregational domain	Holistic milieu
<p>Q25a - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - brought up with a religious faith at home?</p>  <p>■ No ■ Yes</p>	<p>brought up with a religious faith at home</p>  <p>■ not circled ■ circled</p>
<p>Q25b - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - brought up with a religious faith at school?</p>  <p>■ No ■ Yes</p>	<p>brought up with a religious faith at school</p>  <p>■ not circled ■ circled</p>
<p>Q25c - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - brought up with a religious faith at church?</p>  <p>■ No ■ Yes</p>	<p>brought up with a religious faith at church</p>  <p>■ not circled ■ circled</p>

Q25d - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - attended Sunday School?

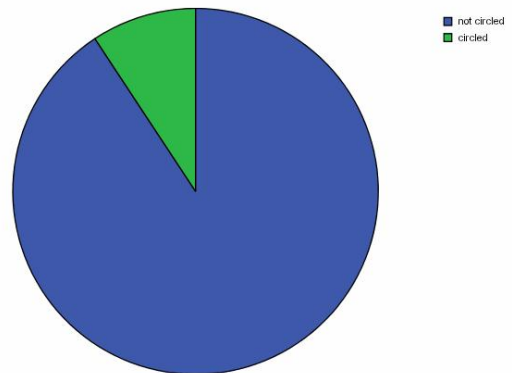


No similar item was included.

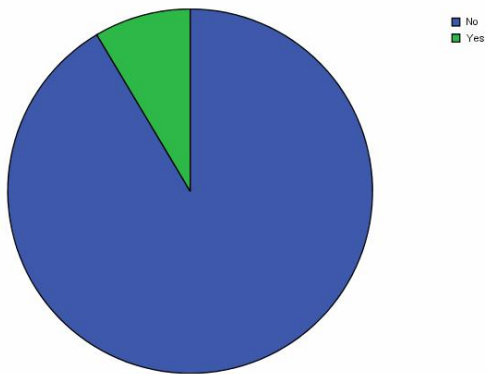
Q25e - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - brought up to be spiritual?



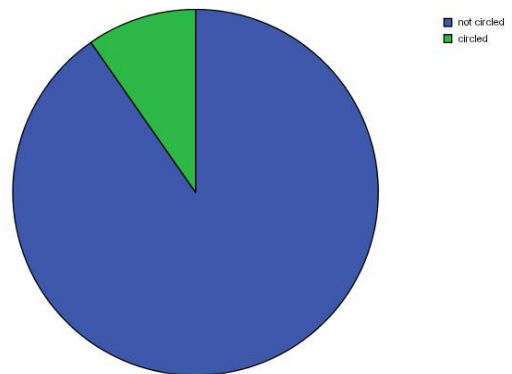
brought up to be spiritual



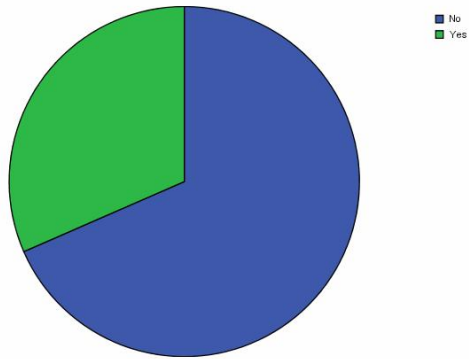
Q25f - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - not brought up to be religious or spiritual?



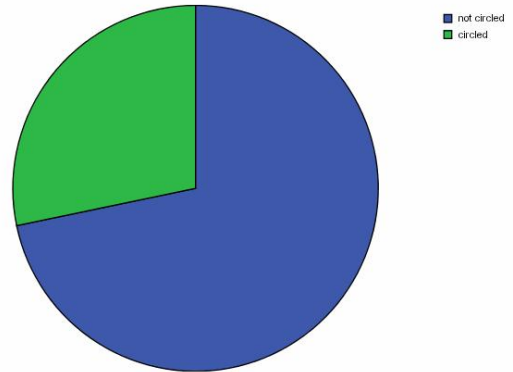
not brought up to be religious or spiritual



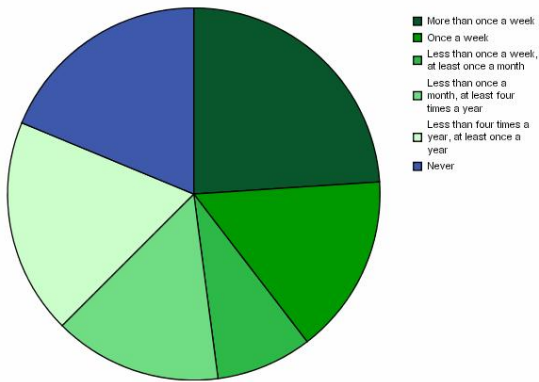
Q25g - What, if any, was your religious or spiritual upbringing - brought up to make up my own mind?



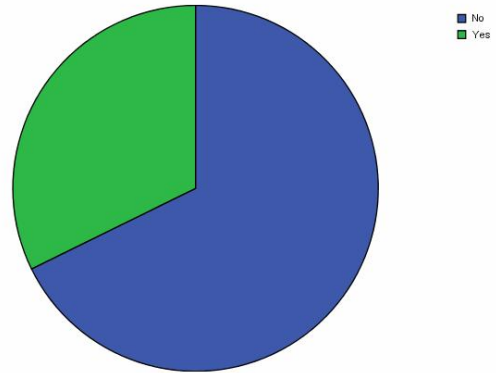
brought up to make up my own mind



Q28 - If you have children over the age of 18, how often do they attend church? Child 1



Q6: is your interest in this activity or therapy shared by any children you have had?



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