
Reaching for a New Sense of Connection? From Truro to Transylvania

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Résumé

Surveys show that unbelievers have a distinctive profile compared to the general population on several indicators related to sociality, collective identity and cultural transmission. For example, they tend to rank family as less important and to identify less with people for whom tradition is important; but more likely to rate friendship as very important. This evidence suggests a distinctive, less (or differently) embedded, sociality, and lower social conformity, compared to believers.

This paper presents early analysis from our Templeton funded Understanding Unbelief project. Reaching for a New Sense of Connection contributes to mapping the diversity of Generation Y (Millennials) unbelief in Northern and Central Europe by using surveys, interviews, and social media across six countries (UK, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Norway, and Romania).

This paper coincides with the end of our fieldwork in Oslo and we will offer early insights into how unbelief varies between rural and urban environments and identify any commonalities and differences in national contexts. Furthermore, we will discuss innovative digital network analysis of social media data (Twitter) to capture network formations and gain insights into unbelievers' cultural production.

The countries in this study offer diverse (non-) religious backgrounds including post-Communist societies, (eastern Germany, Poland, Romania), environments with strong pressures to religious conformity, in strong welfare state environments and in less secure contexts; in mixed Christian heritage environments, and with different majority religious heritages (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox). The sample includes environments which have experienced rapid (Netherlands) and gradual (UK) secularization, in cosmopolitan and parochial environments, and in environments that have high and low levels of unbelief. In analysing our data, we will bring new theoretical perspectives to the study of unbelief, beginning by using Herbert's theory of religious publicisation (2011).

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